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Nelson Bentley (1918–1990), William H. Matchett

Cover from a photo of the Skykomish River, Washington State

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Robert B. Heilman, Stanley Kunitz, Arnold Stein
Robert Fitzgerald, 1910–1985

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DonalD Platt
Three Poems ............................................ 3

Steven Reese
Four Poems ............................................. 10

Patricia Fargnoli
Two Poems .............................................. 16

Erin Malone
Two Poems .............................................. 19

Brian Swann
Two Poems .............................................. 22

Kirk Robinson
Woman, Asleep with Her Head Resting on
The Classics of Western Drama ................. 24

Gary Gildner
Robespierre ........................................... 25

John Allman
The Stone .............................................. 26

Paul Allen
Two Poems .............................................. 28

Linda Greenmun
When the Sun-Filled Bowl Empties ............. 31

Melanie Carter
Two Poems .............................................. 32

Peg Boyers
Ring ..................................................... 34

Frances Richey
Evening in Paris .................................... 35
GOLDEN BODHISATTVA WITH A THOUSAND
AND ONE HANDS

In the room of many buddhas,
one dancing, one with downcast
jade eyes, and the huge, two-story
sandstone one
holding up two fingers in blessing,
it is the small
brass bodhisattva with six arms
that makes me most
want to kneel down, be silent, and not
continue to write
this poem too full of my own
poor living to see
what is before me.
He stretches out
six hands to show us
the two-headed drum
shaped like an hourglass,
curved knife called
in Tibetan gri gug, meaning
"the chopper,"
and there, resting in the palm
above it, the skull cup
from which each of us must one day
drink. Another
hand extends towards us
with palm open
in the compassion
mudra, and here
also a lotus blossom floats
on one middle palm's
lily pad, flower of dreaming
and forgetfulness.
The last hand almost touches
index to thumb
to make an interrupted
circle, twentieth-century
American for "It's
OK."

What
do the rest of the bodhisattva's
thousand and one hands,
with an eye on each palm,
see and hold
fast to? One hand caresses
the G clef
of the small of a woman's back
and buttocks.
Another sorts through a bin
of smooth-skinned
purple-black eggplants, feeling
for the soft spots.

Two of the bodhisattva's other
hands attach electrodes
to the head of the Rwandan detainee's
penis, and then
turn on the current. One index finger
presses mute on the remote
control in an editing room and fast-forwards
through Bosnia, Kuwait,

Eritrea, L.A., Detroit, to cut
and splice the bandaged
footage into sound bites.
One hand cuts out
the tongue of a Muslim blasphemer
and makes him
swallow it in the name
of Allah.

Golden bodhisattva, I can hardly
lift up
my failing eyes to look
into your burnished
face with its half smile,
eyelids nearly
swollen shut, and opal urna
like a third eye,
beauty mark in the middle
of your forehead.
Your die-forged mouth
won't speak.

I see only my retarded brother's
hands fumbling
thin strips of purple, orange
and pink fabric,
learning to weave the mismatched
strands into
placemats. "Pretty thing, pretty
thing?" he kept
repeating. It took him weeks
to finish one,
a rectangle in whose ragged, tangled
warp and woof were woven
pain, patience, and, at the last,
a great marveling
incomprehension of the work
of his own hands.
SMALL PARABLE

My anger is a wasp,  
the mud dauber  
who has built her house  
above the back door so my daughter  
is afraid to go out.

Together we watch her  
patch walls from red clay,  
carry crumbs of dirt  
and mix it with her own spit.  
What patience to construct  
this tedious house that dries  
in the blank stare of the sun  
to stucco hard as stone,  
in which she has tunneled out  
cells the size of herself  
and filled them with spiders  
paralyzed by her kiss  
and then numbed, crushing  
their necks with pincer  
jaws, so she may lay  
her eggs there, seal them in  
with more dirt, and let  
them hatch into larvae  
who will devour the still living  
spiders, grow wings  
and fly out of their mud  
sarcophagi.

My daughter  
shudders at the shadow  
of the thread-waist wasp  
humming near our door  
and won’t go out until  
I’ve knocked the mud house down  
and gotten stung. My arm  
swells with invisible venom  
my body can’t digest,

a dull pulse that will  
not let me sleep.

The next day  
I tell my daughter the mud dauber  
has left the stinger beneath  
my red infected skin;  
she flinches and says she dreamed  
the wasp has laid  
her eggs within my arm,  
that I must be their host  
and they will hatch and eat  
my dead flesh, and when they are  
full-grown, they will bore  
through my skin and swarm out  
from my arm and land upon her  
with a hundred stings.

I hold her and say I’ll never  
raise my arm in anger  
against her again.

MY FATHER CELEBRATES HIS LAST FUNERAL

My father is forgetting things:  
the name of the town he lives in,  
the combination of the safe  
in which he keeps his will,  
my mother whom he left  
at the gas station. She always  
rode in the backseat. Twenty  
miles later, he noticed that she  
wasn’t saying much  
in the conversation they’d  
been having about St. Francis’s  
stigmata, heretics,  
and the Spanish Inquisition.

He spends his day driving
over the state line to shop
at Price Chopper or the Big Y
("the Big Why," he calls it),
hunting for bargains, bringing
home thirty boxes of raisins,
ten pounds of ziti, a case
cornmeal muffin mixes,
whatever's on sale that week,
to my perplexed mother who says
he's got too much money
and doesn't know how
to burn it or what to do
with his time, except feud
with the IRS.

Dad pretends not to hear
when my mother reminds him
of his promise to pay
for my daughter's school
next year. "Steal
a dying man's only
money, will you? What I
set aside for the nursing home,
these crappy golden years,
the doctor's bills?"
My father, childhood's cold
earthshaker, thunders still
and hides the checkbook.

His altar boy in red alb
and lace cotta, I used
to swing the censer
like a pendulum
and walk tick-tock.
He was my metronome.
I genuflected when
he did. I was made
out of stained glass.
His hands, small animals
that lived under stones,

burrowed back into
their dark sleeves.

Now he forgets how
to get to the graveyard
where he's promised to come
out of retirement
and celebrate
the Burial of the Dead
for his old friend,
one hundred and three,
who never lost her mind.
Nine days past his eightieth birthday,
he has to stop to ask
directions every five minutes,
and when he arrives hours later
everyone's gone home.
"I am the resurrection
and the life, saith the Lord,"
he mumbles to his muddy shoes
as if reciting the last
rites for what lies dead
and dying within himself.
He stands on the fresh, scarred,
filled-in earth of the grave
and the trampled gladioli.
Steven Reese

DUST AND SONG, 1980

Some part of us thinks casket,
a guitar case open like this on the sidewalk
in broad day, awkward, intruding, the way death
demands that we give something, a token
of grief at least. Part of us sees the case filling
with ash and dust and someone in a dark suit
closing the lid. Except

joy
has usurped the grieving here,
the players gathered behind the case
like mourners' alter egos, in tee-shirts
and overalls, a straw hat, a bare foot tapped
in time to the wailing
instruments, voices lifting over traffic and chatter.

So the passersby think
no, not today, it won't be today, not
while this music plays,
and they toss coins and browse the silvers
of jewelry and fresh fish and water in sunlight
where the ferry churns through the Sound toward Alaska.
They add their own silver
to the open case, to say with the singers
no, we won't come to ash and dust today,
death is further off than Alaska.
They brighten the black case with coins

since it's easy to think ash and dust just now
in this country, in Seattle, when calamity numbers
the summer's calendar: not twenty-eight days
into July but sixty into drought, the worst
since the Dust Bowl, a thousand are dead.
Ninety-five since the hostage rescue
ended in ash and sand in the deserts of Iran.
And seventy-one

LAST THINGS

The sunlight, too, is slowly rolling up
its patch of carpet. The living room
broadcasts our footsteps like a stairwell.

The idols have come down from their nails
and left the walls to stand there stiff
and functional as butlers.

By the kitchen, where the floorboards would cry
for their food, by the altar of stacked boxes,
you swing the teaball from its chain
as though you'd invoke an old god to preside
over what we're changing into.

Let's at least praise these last things
to go. A globe. A hanger.
Coiled on the landing, a plastic prank dog turd.
Magic eight-ball key ring. Vaporizer.

Let's have a moment for the forced air,
the furnace, the dead bolt, the dry rot,
the pilot light, the bird skull. And the elements, all four: the leaks, the drafts, the dust, the wiring’s fires and misfires—they all wanted to come, too. They’ll make do now with the moans of our ghosts—

though even those old selves, those shed skins, might tag along, might already have nosed out the Ouija board boxed up and taken yesterday.

One night this blustery spring we’ll have just hung the Barnum poster, The Great Aerial Smiths hanging by their toes from the trapeze, arms folded, wholly at ease with a world turned on its head, looking right at us from behind their framed glass, when all at once something will take hold of our windows and shake.

SNAP THE WHIP

Centrifugal, those first places: circles widening away from the house, the yard—the limits you were supposed to have feared left behind in the dust wake of bike wheels.

Your father swings you flat out around him, then slows till you touch down in a leaf pile. At school it’s planets, orbits, tether ball, Apollo’s round-the-moon slingshot for home.

Your big brother spins the ride in the park so fast the world blurs, unless you can reach the slow center; the perimeters teach more dizzy physics than you can stomach.

And it’s there at the heart of snap the whip, too, this same first law of centers, circles, flyaway force, one of whose articles states that you shall be made to lose your grip it arrives at the end, at the whip’s tip. The last two are the first it separates, and they go headlong for the summer grass; then the next two, as the line circles round this new hub; then everyone’s on the ground, content to be gravity’s thralls at last.

And you don’t notice the white train of cloud about to be drawn across the sun’s face, or the cap, ten yards off, like the last trace of someone who’s simply stepped below ground, or even the black slab of open door in the distance, over near the grownups—none of the small signs telling you you’ll glimpse this moment again, years and miles from here, when what you’ve tried to hold has slipped your grip and you’re stretched out in park grass, not quite sure how the force arrived: but less like laughter this time. More than ever like lash, like snap.

A GLASS FOR A FRIEND ABROAD

Well, here’s to the streets of Cork or Spain and the stout-dark waves of night your body’s trim bark is sailing now, orange cigarette glow at the prow and the air an aftermath of rain, windows the warm yellow-gold of toddies.

Here’s to what’s happening to your stride as it learns a new language of turn and slope, syllables of loose stone against your feet; to the deeps, the unknown, there where the next scroll of tide shows you all that’s still left to learn.

And here’s to what you’ve known all along.
to come home and tell us, tell us all, first-hand, and still a bit bewildered as though it were hard to settle your eyes on us, each face a remote horizon with a glimpse of unreachable land, and each voice the cry of a circling bird.

But after talking, after a time, our hearts will drift your way, yours will drift ours, until once when this glass and your glass meet we'll have joined you on that damp street—remembering, when our glasses chime, a church on the coast that kept the hours.

Back here we look too long at vapor trails, whisper to the cat in Spanish, drive to Pittsburgh, the markets, eel on ice, anything to get us looking twice and feeling at sea in the details; to make the brain's rote moorings vanish.

But we're the true voyager's merest shadows; when we get home Argos is still the hyperactive pup whose yipping this morning woke us up and the valley between our pillows filled with shepherds, wildflowers, days to kill.

So we're counting on you to be the real thing for us, unforeseeably delayed by curbside prophets, by the stories of old walls, of alleys and archways, catalogued windfalls of bone mute behind glass or still singing the lovesong to flesh for which they were made, the song they raise full-voiced when two of us embrace. Keep learning to cultivate for us that superb largesse of days not spent, as if the work of being pays and some plastic sack of product is our due, but given like a gift and like the world can't wait, like it needs, as Rilke said, our attentions, praise, devotions—as we need the thought of you to recall us to the task, you on that night street mumbling Catullus or Villon or Aeneas down among the dead; as we'll need you, at last, to cross oceans,
Back from a flat-out day in New York, the museum, the bus squeals into Hartford, drops us on a badly lit dead-end at ten p.m., one block from the ghetto.

Some idiot has locked our cars behind the ten-foot wrought iron fence and padlocked the chain-linked gates. We hang on the chains; no guard anywhere.

We call police; they don’t come. We flag down a firetruck. They say they’ve no right to break in and don’t do a damn thing for us.

Exhausted, thirsty, we lean against the fence in the blue city dark. From a tenement’s second story, a woman belts out an aria of pain:

Fuck you, you liar, you fucking asshole.
Above the cries of a child, above the raped-woman howl of a siren, she belts it.

I know you’re cheating. I can’t take it.
I’m leaving.
Do you hear me? I’m leaving now.

We might be sitting in a theater where the picture’s gone dark, that’s how bigger-than-life, almost mythic, her voice is, pouring through the clouded night, across backyards, across the universe.

She might be singing for all of us, so cold, so numb in our own dead-end, wanting water, wanting to pee.

Then it stops. Restless as streetwalkers in the silence, we pace up and down the fence. Blonde in black leather, diminished, she wobbles on spikes out of haze.

Who knows what spurs on the guy, then, in the wrinkled blue suit who suddenly leaps — condemned man’s last lunge — up ten feet of wrought iron, swings one leg over the top, balances endless seconds above spikes and razor wire, before he flings the other over and jumps down to our furious cheers. And who cares by what right he rifles the cars for tools, and skilled as a cat man, dismantles the lock — or by what right all of us lean our shoulders into the heavy gate, shove it back, leap for our cars, and get the hell out of there.

IN THE BASEMENT OF THE FIRST CHURCH

In the kitchen the woman who carries her clothes in a shopping cart, stirs soup, a rich mahogany broth. It boils in the iron cauldron. I have given her this job which she loves for the way it lifts her into a person.

The people are gathering in the dining room — straying in one by one out of the cold Square, dumping their frayed coats on a long table. The other tables are set; the soup is ready.

But before we can serve, the Director begins a speech about value and popularity.

He stands on a loft above us where he cannot see the people sitting expectantly at the long tables.

There has been a vote to decide who among us
is the most popular; 
gold stars have been awarded. 
He is announcing stars
and he does this very slowly beginning with one star
and working up to ten. The soup
is getting cold. The people are getting hungrier
and hungrier. He doesn't see their hunger.
Not the time, or the cold, or my voice
in his ear — can stop him.

Finally it is too late and the cold useless soup
is removed and the people
whose needs were so great,
file out, hunger filling their stomachs.

The director, who sees none of this, goes on
with his endless words, while the cook —
who has become nothing again —
and the staff people — who are again reminded
they are not worth anything —
gather in the kitchen
and fight like birds at a feeder
over the leftover loaves.

---

**Erin Malone**

**WAVE AND PARTICLE**

*One*

Proof that spirits are working — sun prints
when my eyes shut, orange
firecracker, wild bee.

*Two*

The house is a hotbed
of static. Wave

upon wave, the sheets
dry lightning, doorknobs

urgent underhand...

The iron chandelier

is shocking. I conduct:
my fingers hover

above the digital clock,
stop it cold. Power

suddenly makes sense.
I am made

of energy, I pump it
like a heart, a fist.

*Three*

Your impulse follows me.

*Four*

In olive trees there are little bones hearing out
the wind. In her garden everything is possible,
the yellow moon
locking the cat's eye to bottom the reflecting pool
deep as a bullfrog's chant. We live without mirrors, listen hard as night sounds open a wide place in the earth. My uncle is a ghost. My aunt plays their song, winding back the tape, a foot of light in the doorway.

VIEW FROM A HOLE

By definition, less. I work keeping the field at eye-level.

First I noticed just how I fit in this gap: arms at my sides, skin pulled tight, in my legs the darts and needles of sleep. The ground tasted cold as a spoon. Night after night the same panels filled out the dark, the same four stars squared the moon. I wanted to go home. But I got used to being held. I learned how to rock.

on my toes to see farther, to rest my chin on the bare edge of things.

In winter I live in the freeze and spangle of long grass, in summer I track the small-time vagaries of cows. Whole tribes of ants build here. And now I think this is not less. Not less, just more to fill.
Brian Swann

NIGHTWALKING
Words are also actions,
and actions are a kind of words.
—Emerson

The drowsy star. Surrender
to a window, then a door.
What I saw holds until
I walk into night’s waxing tide
that rises far from anywhere
to seep even into crevices
of a violet’s tincture.
As it settles into unknown expanse.
the ear begins to tune
to sudden lives that now
inhabit it. The corners of
once familiar paths are turned
into a dance of alert beginnings.
Circles lure me aimless into
the slowly discerning dark
until fires once banked into
dimmed harmonics flicker slowly
into parts, sharp echoes that
resurrect apple-green. I walk
through purples of beaten glass,
through wide doors, as rivers mutter up
into the hall of yellow wings.
White waves break where the
pitched boat still drifts off.
Part by part, bright costumes
of wind spread and settle. Time
begins again, ticking away,
faster, becoming variations
on itself, wobbling under its own
weight until it crashes,
a car wreck from which
one only walks away, wide-awake,
alert, prepared again.

Two Poems

ARS AMATORIA: CHORUS FOR ST. VALENTINE’S DAY

Strophe:
Bird tracks I followed from feeder across snow,
across snow from feeder bird tracks
that disappeared into chiasmus then reappeared
from under the book I’d left open as I fell asleep
& hopped into my mind dreaming of time as
an enormous light inside a bear in his cave
seeming to die, but no, the glamour is still on him,
while the great sickle rises over him
in a billion billion volts & night wears on
& great distance & time stops here
where my wife is asleep & naked beside me

Antistrophe:
In the morning I find myself standing
where the bobcat bit a meadow vole in half,
her hind legs sticking out of the snow & not a speck
of blood, as if she is coming out of a bloodless dream
backwards or diving headfirst for figurines
in some wintry wreck. Am I too old for saints?

Strophe:
I am standing again in night up to my waist,
wanting to shout encore to the whole scene
& mean it, my gray whiskers flaring behind
the woods, silver wire pointing to dwarf stars,
bloody lips chomping on the white arm beside me,
on the stumps of unreason swollen the way pebbles
light up underwater to make unthought-of dark flowers

Antistrophe:
The lady lies on clean sheets, eyes scanning the black sea,
until beside her a seal’s face breaks the surface,
opens his mouth, tries to chew sky & spit stars
like words & music, but what makes out are little birds
making a living, making do, making tracks across the blank page
of an implausible sky, tracks she follows
Kirk Robinson

WOMAN, ASLEEP, WITH HER HEAD RESTING ON THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN DRAMA

Something tells me it's not Aeschylus or Oedipus she's dreaming of, or Estragon embattled with a shoe, as she's splayed out on this bench, on this campus, on this day when maybe she's heard all she wants to hear about Mankind's great themes. She knows Willy Loman inside-out; even wrote five pages "On the Function of the Staircase in Brecht and Miller," but what has that got to do with her own bills to pay?

She could have named The Theater of the Absurd all by herself. After all, didn't she want to jump from Genet's humongous Balcony? Hasn't she herself, too often recently, been A Character In Search of an Author, or Paper-topic, an extension to that none-too-metaphysical Due Date? She was smart enough to leave Pinter's Birthday Party before the cake and ice-cream, and you don't need to be the least bit bookish to see her professor as a Rhinoceros.

There's no doubt, the required text for this course is thick enough to serve as a pillow, and maybe that will clinch it, maybe this will be the one she doesn't sell back to the bookstore for far too little. But, what about right now? As she dreams herself into a lovely field of beans, riding along on a green tractor, her tomcat sending her smoke-signals from a windbreak of trees...

What does any of that have to do with Desire Under the Elms, here, on a Tuesday, when there is nothing better to do?

Gary Gildner

ROBESPIERRE

Here's to the rooster Robespierre who is getting ready, who is beside himself admiring and full and not to be denied, who, refused first prize at the Idaho County Fair for a single feather stuck out wayward in his rich, rust-colored tail, is throwing back his head now, is letting go loud and pure enough to raise all manner of lovers, not only farmers constantly moved by morning but angels too, flushed, loosed from conjugal eiderdown wrap and haystack, from sweat-slickened horse tack and rodeo straw tossed in the box of a pickup—crowing, crowing across the Camas prairie and beyond is grand Robespierre, to the Sawtooths, the Seven Devils, Hell's Canyon, and the Gospels catching moose bowing in their first delicious browse, catching young boys shaken and rolled from silky, shimmering dreams into their backbones, catching the whiled turkey blinking above his wattles, catching even the politician cowering, confused by such clear, inspired song—husky, sky-throated Robespierre the unbeatable, complete bird holding his bent, independent feather up high, here's to you and the quickened day, the day uncommon, touched, gloriously breaking.
The Stone

Think of it almost as in the kidney, where failure to pass it stores heat that left to itself could ignite a forest: renewal from blackness in blazing star, bastard toadflax, bluestem grass, but at great cost to the creek suddenly harrowed. How many creatures swim though burning straw?

Grit helps the eye to see. It identifies movement. It makes light out of pain. It marks the shadows that slide out of all things. It defines distances between the edge of an orange and a blade, the moon wincing in the sky, these days you can hardly face yourself.

There is leakage. Mysterious breaks in Arctic pipes beneath permafrost, where a black ribbon sinks toward fragile vegetation like gangrene. But it takes years to get there, the River Pechora a tributary of your industrious thought, flowing south.

We live on the surface of clearness expanding, mountains moving from the sea. A great Attractor warps the perfect round like the long vowels of a song, and there is time within time. Depth without width. A flatness of tone.

There is the sum of notes that will dim the moon. There is this particle of sweetness, a calcium hesitation, a speck of thought that forces all else to swirl around it, a stone in the stream that is your blood and mine rushing along like love.
THE BOOK OF THE RIVER

Look, you don't just roll this life on, do your business, pinch it off your shriveled soul, and sling it out the window down at the boat ramp.

Kid comes along churning rocks, sticks the point of his stick into the rude lip of it, flips it high, to worm out of the sky onto his cousin's shoe.

Flood comes along one day and lifts it like a strip of newsprint, takes it downstream, round the bend into the branches of an uprooted tree.

Water recedes.

We drift.

Our mother's in front. Our father works with the motor. As with every frustration on every trip, his arm and neck swear a sweaty: This is not my fault.

Somebody moves the ice chest. We don't care if he hurts us, mind—steps back on our foot, pinches our finger badly when he moves the rods—it is only important that he doesn't know.

The current delivers us to the tree.

Motor's coughing. Nothing sounds more like two men going at it than a boat getting caught in the upper branches of a dead tree in the water.

Daddy's unhh, what?, unhh when he turns, catches the edge of the boat with his forearm, falls back, and the crack of brittle branches like ribs. Ease, slow, slow and easy, crack, easy into the easy tree.

We all look at Momma, her head beneath her shoulders.

And there is your nasty goddamn life, hanging over our mother's head.

Daddy grabs the paddle, sculls back—back-paddling against the weight of a river so heavy, whole towns use it to name roads and views and law offices.

Now what can a man, even a grown man like Daddy, do against something like that?

All we can do is wait for the tree to finish giving in, and give us back to the river as though saying I think that's enough for now.

Motor starts, and we fly downstream toward the rest of the day, Momma in the high, planing bow. We have a good time.

You don't have to worry about that. We have a good time.

We never mention it, but don't you go thinking for one minute that we have forgotten your little glorious ugly in our lives.

REUNION

When those you've loved or dicked a little or both begin to lie back in their long, last beds, their sweet and sour mouths laced closed, their names come up from the grave.

Tom or Don—you know, dated that ugly girl whose last name rhymed with beige. Those firm boobs or buttocks bob up in your cafe latte.

Remember how you forgot all the world's crap with just one whiff of what's-her-name?

Well, she died.

Mustang Sally travels to the beat of a different drum and her ashes are sitting on the dock of the bay waiting for a bottle of wine, fruit of the vine, to be allowed to breathe under the boardwalk one last time. Fantasticks.

But it's almost late. Almost time for almost all of us to begin cutting back to go home or back to our discounted rooms. (There are some—we know from ourselves—who will go back to the room, change again, hide their cash and go out to stay, maybe the rest of the trip.) But cheers
to the cheerful rest of us—last call for alcohol. Last call for an overhaul; let's all ride up together to the Top of the Town, a nightcap in the revolving bar. The elevator door closes. A surge, electric click-thump for up, which sounds not unlike a possible no in a fogged up VW years ago. We rise. Rise, and the lights on the panel, the bell in the air say at each floor not this, nor this, nor this, nor this, as more get on, those who, back then, got it on— got off on this or that recording, issue, skin, or shirt, come aboard now as in the good old days. You're taking on weight. Ping There was a boy who was a virgin and should have stayed that way; you did what you could. Ping The girl you tried to be tender with and banged your foot on Ted's borrowed bed and she broke up for a week because you looked like such a fool naked, holding your toe. You didn't know it was her first time, so when her first time did come later in the term there was something grand in a magnolia tree, her on a branch in the drizzling rain outside the chapel—she the great V in the tree, and you so well rooted for once.

MAXIMUM LOAD THIS CAR: 2400 LBS.

You begin to suck in. Ping Another. Ping Others. And here's the girl who brings on the extra weight of her dead baby. And those of you who know—that's ever so many more dead babies' weight. Ping The heaviness of the air under the left hip stump of Schnoeflock who should have kept his damn grades up.

Is the army now all volunteer? Does no one get drafted anymore? Ping
A crate of notes from the hometown doctors in scribbling hand—save this white boy's ass; I know his father.
The car's beginning to groan. 2400 What are we up to now? We're getting close. Ping All those guilty prayers in the intervening years: sent up not like incense or billows from a burning lamb—up and forever—but rather like so many blobs in a lava lamp. Ping Someone says: Kind of quiet for a reunion. And someone says: Getting a bit late for me.
And several sigh relief for the piece of truth we can taste.

By the time we get to the top, the cables have had enough.
2400 pounds: Now is that you by yourself pudging up all these years, or is that all of you together as you are? 2400 pounds. How much is that in American money? How much is that in names, or lights, or lies, and yes, a love or two, and baked Alaskas, routine blood work and the accompanying bad news? Groan, strain.... Ping Ping!—everybody out up there; You can't win a door prize without going through the door. Ping Ping Ping Hold the door. We're with you.

All right, everybody, here we go:
Who has the most children?
Who has changed the least?
Who can remember all the verses to our old song?

**Linda Greenmun**

WHEN THE SUN-FILLED BOWL EMPTIES

the absence left calls for aromatic skin, the cut halves releasing a tang on autumn air. Juicing the pulp counters the measure that raps against the windowpane, the cold of mountain rain.

Water, sugar, the slow heat from the stove, three yolks and the boiling pot beds a minor storm of solar flares.

Meringue top, lemon filling in a crimp-edged crust will not bring back the swallowtail, the cabbage, flitting among penstemon, stonecrop, rose.

No. It allows us to weigh the older light in fallen maple leaves, the long hum you raise sleep into, this pull with which we begin again lifting up and up on the wheel of days.
MATISSE, AT BREAKFAST, CONSIDERS THE WOMEN

These, he says, are as fine as harps.
Fluid-boned, gold-scented, luminous,
mine. I am roused every morning
by thighs I think to such
roundness they grow heavier than fruit.
Matisse, they call, if you lie with us,
palm leaves will drape like painters' hands.
Cheese will ripen. Persimmons will mound themselves
in the bowls. I listen to the women.
My clear head draws thick lines
around the bed, the curtains, their lidded eyes.

An old man takes care of them.
He tells me that at night, when they bathe,
their long arms arch into silver
fins and they pur the river bottom
with their cold eyes turned skyward.

He brings the maids to me early, still
cool from the water. He says when they swim
they have stars on their shoulders.
They have cut and dazzling hearts.

AFTER FLORIDA

Lagoon. Aren't you one of the seven wonders
of the Paradise of painters?
—Henri Matisse. Jazz

The water, with a terrible gentleness,
tore me apart.
Moon green, rimmed with a wilderness
of flowers. Round revelations.

The cosmos is a body brimming with hibiscus.
Yellow disk, shower of petals.
The waitress with an orange brought
me a hat. She stood on the balcony.

Held fierce palms. Could I compose
the sea in all its variations? Plum dark,
sand crusted, full as the hips
of those drowsy women who rise like whole notes

from its mouthful of salt. I ate
the bread. I broke the surface of the pool
when the bathers closed their lucient eyes.
Candlefish burned like savage horns.
**Peg Boyers**

**RING**

One swift transaction—a bargain
as delicate as the frieze of rubies
garnishing your hand—and you might have
become something more than a ring, or less:
gold of erasure, extinction, exile,
a mineral ransom of history.
But you, Survivor, escaped the pawnbroker's
corset, and were spared the iniquitous
return to the furnace.

She sewed you into her corset
so she could feel your ore, a lode
at her waist. Each day she would tighten
the belt around her thinning middle,
till the hidden ring pushed against her
at the appropriate place, comforting, round.
Your hard touch at her fingertips:
memories for endurance.
A talisman for the future.

Today the policeman leads me to the
local pawn shop. Rod Steiger
reaches under the glass.
His hand follows my hand
until at last it lands on you.
The rest were melted.
She brought it with the
candlesticks, he says, grabbing
behind him for the menorah.

After Vilno, Vitebsk, Warsaw,
how could you collude
with one so venal?
A babysitter's betrayal—
petty theft to satisfy a habit
of dust and reverie—
and the circle is complete,

**Frances Richey**

**EVENING IN PARIS**

For my mother

Mrs. Ammons gave me this Evening
In Paris. It's just cheap perfume
in a fancy box. There's powder
and lotion too. Her husband gave it to her
the night she asked me
to roll her bed to the other side
of the ward, where midnight drifted
in through a circular window, silvery blue
as the foil covering her
box. She wanted to watch the snow, shining,
as if the moon were behind it quietly falling
to pieces. I was breaking
the rules. She could catch a chill.
But it was Christmas eve, and in the morning
her husband would turn to me, trembling,
with that same box, and say
she wanted me to have it.
Miss Creeson had warned us, when you leave
the hospital, you leave the patients there
or you'll never get through training. I lost
my bib and cap for wheeling Mrs. Ammons,
her dark hair gleaming
wet, under the blue halo,
her eyes brilliant,
as if she could see into the snow
and through it to the breathless
City of Lights.
NEW YEAR'S EVE

I was driving, the kids in back asleep as you nodded beside me.
Fat flakes of snow swirled down out of the greyness and were swished away by the wipers. I couldn't see the river, only feel it out there urgent and black beyond the road, its near edge sealed by a lid of ice. Something bolted through our lights and was gone, the fragment of a living thing, felt, yet barely visible, that lingered at the back of my mind and lunged on fierce through the drifts, beast or its ghost receding, circling.
There is no end to our separateness—what makes us love one another is knowing how frail and lost we are.
At the cabin, each with a child bundled in our arms, we climbed to the loft and those rickety web-strewn cots.
Far in the night I woke to the sound of snow falling, a soft tampering, lovely indescribable. Over each face a dim halo of breath rose in the cold and lingering for a moment was woven with the others, then nothing if not gone.

KECK

Keck says you can hear them yipping back of his place. Says walk until the moan of a generator turns to a hum on the wind and you catch it, a cacophony of barks and whines like the reincarnating cries of the damned blown down on a gust from Electric City. I make it as far as the tackshed, but hear nothing.
Through a window on a table splayed in moonlight lies the hide of a coyote rinsed in a tawny glow.
As I enter, the slits of the eyes make me wonder—what are the dead that they can touch us, a shiver like static as I run my fingers over the satin fur and glancing out the window see old Keck dumping trash he burns in a barrel, his figure aureoled against the snow, hands making a slow rhythmical motion as he tosses something into the flames, the sparks rising from his fingers seen by wild eyes far away, coyotes who just now lift their song.
FIREWEED

I could say his eyes as he looked darkened like fall-ripe berries or that the pods of tall dried weeds were bursting, the slopes flocked with torches, each stem spurring its fluff like smoke. But what would it mean—that desire splits from its parched husk, or a wind scissors the hems of a cloud and scatters the scraps all morning, fall a gospel of ecological proverbs spouting versions of the same theme, to wit—we die in order to be reborn? It doesn't mean a thing, but I know my seven-year-old son is hurt and amazed at the same time, the way his eyes start swimming as a seed-tuft drifts beyond his fingers, when he slips off his pack and like one relieved of body-weight stretches onto his toes and groping catches it, pinches the wisp and crushes tiny nuggets of seed he blows from his hands like ashes.

THUNDER

Every insensate object, drawer-pull, chair leg, butter knife burns just for a moment when the current is just so.

Paper clips aware, pencils awake, spoons alive to the dark cage of the dishwasher. It doesn't linger; awareness never does. The light bulb's filament startled, the carpet's nap stiff, the trousers draped over the chair heavy with static. It is already fading, this sifting phase of whatever moon around whatever distant planet awakens and stills.

Enough that it is over, and being night again that day will stumble into light once more. The sock faithful in its sleep, the ax in its certitude. Everything lasts.
Kevin Stein

HOME ECONOMICS

If not the Betty Crocker commercial,
then the smell of vanilla extract,
an oven timer slicing kitchen quiet:

something to trapdoor a winter afternoon
beneath memory's ornate noose
which is, alas, a noose nonetheless.

To put my neck in, is to feel the clock's tick tock,
the porch knocker clacking,
to be the boy jerking open the oak door

for impeccable Mr. Burke,
tanned above polished loafers topped off with dimes.
He's come for this week's cake,

devil's food with chocolate icing
spritzed to resemble the sailboat
he floats the murky lake in — Lady Luck,

all teak and brilliant brass.

Mother tents an Eisenhower hairnet
over her bouffant —
cleanliness as style and substance.

She bakes other folks' cakes, pies, cookies.
No one says women's work.
No one has to.

This morning, her son poured a proud cloud of flour,
broke the yolk blood streaked through.
He stirred and fidgeted, prayed bleak rain

would crack to sun and endless ball games.
You, oh son oblivious to this necessarily secondary drama
of your youth,

I'd like a word with you.

Boy, what are you thinking
when you tote the tin cake pan
to the car for a lousy nickel's tip.

your peach-fuzz cheek pinched pink?
What don't you see when the crisp five passes
his hand to hers?

She cracks her Ball jar hoard
not for mink or pearls
but day-old bread and Mrs. Paul's Fish Sticks —

the dreck poor Catholics choke down.

Boy with ants in his pants, look me in the eye.
Ask what she thinks
of home economics — her eye rocking

from sink to cheap clock
chiming your father home from work?
How graceful she makes this waltz

with ball and chain, with love.
Boy, sleepily square,
oh son oblivious: Wake up, wake up.
IN THE HOUSE WITHOUT FABLES

In the house without fables
the animals were unhappy.
The dog did nothing but bark.
The cats muttered literal mews.

On their orange plastic wheels,
the hamsters spun and spun
until the terrible times brought
stories not ending with lessons.

Smoke floated nowhere but downwind.
Twilight was always the start
of darkness and the night noises
of sex and hunger, all the wings
flapping in the awful flight
of the domestic turkey.
From the second-story windows
of that house, from our bedrooms,
we watched the nearest neighbors.
Across the darkneses
between us and their rooms,
we imagined the weak lights
of myth. They might have been
televisons flickering through
the evenings, or else we saw
nothing when the youngest died

but the raccoon which clawed
at our curled drainpipe, stuck
just outside our window,
its teeth bared at our sudden light.

HELEN OF SPARTA

Daughter of the chieftain of
Sparta, she grew up amid
whisperings about her remarkable
beauty and about a tale that
her true father was a god.

May we leave the gods out of this?
Those despicable, ridiculous, improbable Greek gods?
Let us give her a human girlhood,
in the wind,
in amethyst beads among the jittery,
the brave-bearded,
the chastising, the bleak.
Did she titter, would you suppose,
the torches flickering in the family hall?
Was she solitary?
Fleet as any sibling?

Yes, yes, of course, this is all surmise.
But history, after all, is one of the muses.

Was she fearful of the hunting dogs?
Impertinent with old wives in the market?
Piqued by mint and sesame,
a black horse, the river,
voices of the street?

Had she an inkling of consequence,
omens rustling in the oak leaves,
signal fires flashing on the mountain peaks?

*
Courted by many, she married
Menelaus, somewhat her senior,
now chieftain of Sparta, bore
him a daughter but no heir.
Rumors of her supernatural
beauty had spread afar.

This is prehistory, you understand,
long before the times of the scribes called Homer.
These were ruthless, quick-witted men
who preferred plunder to trade,
pagans
who knew neither fork nor napkin
and made free with serving girls.

Give her a womanhood, then,
barefoot about her quarters,
sandaled and robed in the villages,
soft-spoken or easily vexed.

Did she hum at her embroidery?
Endow her with habits of hand,
a tilt of shoulders,
empathies, antipathies,
a sunlit sanity or wintry discontent.

Did she brush the child's hair?
Take into account the beekeeper, the smith,
walls hung with weapons,
gorse turning brown in August,
the departure of messengers,
beggars at the outer gates,
drives on the hillsides.

Provide her with conjugal lore
and other information essential to the female.

Give her long thoughts.

Paris, divine favorite in the
myths, son of the ruler of Troy,
ancient rival of the Greeks
for control of the Hellespont,
for spoils and renown, arried
without explanation, claiming
hospitality. Young, resplendent,
he grew attentive to her. During
the absence of Menelaus on a
campaign, they departed together,
bearing treasures from her dowry.

A good story, they say, is about everybody.
Dear person, is this story about you?

Each nightfall, the boats put in at the nearest island.

Lie near her in the tent.
Listen to her breathing.

* The Greek chieftains, loyal to
Menelaus, assembled in due course
and took ship for Troy. A ten-year
war ensued, during which she was
revered by some within the besieged
city for her marvelous presence
and despised by others as the cause
of their hardships, of the carnage
taking place on the plain below,
and of the grief endured by the
families of the fallen. Accounts
reached her of enraged single combat
between Menelaus, Paris, and other
heroes.

Observe how the women fall silent as she passes.

Hear the plaints in the lower town,
the whimpers of hungry children.

Do you wish small absolutions for her,
the clashes, the cries,
the clouds of dust rising from the field?
Or not,
the stench on the twilight mist
of cadavers burning?

Do you wish to comfort her,
the marsh frogs croaking at false dawn,
her mother rubbing sweet verbena in her hair,
traders coming in the spring with bright cloth,
her own daughter a mother, perhaps, by now?

Or not?

Paris proved dishonorable and
was slain. As the Trojans went
down to abject ruin, she made
frantic appeals to her brothers,
married one of them, betrayed
him to the Greeks, and submitted
to the mercy of Menelaus. Despite
his years of fierce condemnation,
he was enthralled again at the
sight of her, and they departed
with her treasure for Sparta.

Those seas are hazardous,
as some of the returning chieftains are to learn.

The bedraggled troops, halved in number,
slouch among the oarsmen on the long black ships.

On what bench in this open air
does she make a privacy?

Give her frames of mind.
About Our Contributors

Donald Platt teaches at the State University of West Georgia. His first book, Fresh Peaches, Fireworks, & Guns, was published by Purdue University Press in 1994.

Steven Reese teaches at Youngstown State University in Ohio. Cleveland State University Press published his Enough Light to Steer By this year.

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Oliver Rice lives in Naples, Florida. He was a team leader in applied linguistics projects in Asia and Africa for the Ford Foundation and the Peace Corps.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1998

MacLeod-Grobe Prize: $500
Molly Tenenbaum for "Ode to the Ugly Colors" (Winter 1997-98)

Bullis-Kizer Prize: $200
Cathleen Calbert for Three Poems (Summer 1997)

Theodore Roethke Prize: $200
Oliver Rice for "The Agent" (Spring 1997)
Four Poems (Autumn 1997)
St. Augustine, July" (Winter 1997-98)

Richard Hugo Prize: $200
Vicki Angel for "This Poem Will Never Be Published" (Spring 1997) and Two Poems (Autumn 1997)