

# Poetry

NORTHWEST



VOLUME XLI • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 2000 • \$5.00

Editor  
David Wagoner

Cover from a photo of a  
gray jay, also known as  
camp robber or Whiskey Jack

*Photo by Robin Seyfried*

---

POETRY NORTHWEST    SPRING 2000    VOLUME XLI, NUMBER 1

Published quarterly by the University of Washington, A101 Padelford, Box 354330, Seattle, WA 98195-4330. Subscriptions and manuscripts should be sent to *Poetry Northwest*, Department of English, Box 354330, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-4330. 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.).

Periodicals postage paid at Seattle, Washington.  
POSTMASTER: *Send address changes to* Poetry Northwest,  
*Box 354330, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-4330*  
Published by the University of Washington  
ISSN: 0032-2113

# POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME FORTY-ONE

NUMBER ONE

---

SPRING 2000

---

CATHLEEN CALBERT Two Poems .....	3
STEPHEN THOMAS Two Poems .....	7
KEITH RATZLAFF The Big Circus .....	9
KRISTA HALVERSON Four Poems .....	11
RON HOUCHIN Girl Asleep at the Beach .....	15
LEN ROBERTS Three Poems .....	17
JIM PETERSON Two Poems .....	20
DONALD PLATT Sound Machine .....	22
GARY GILDNER Measuring .....	24
DEREK SHEFFIELD The Good Book .....	25
JULIE LARIOS Two Poems .....	26
GARY FINCKE The Brain Shelter .....	29
ANNE MARIE MACARI Vermont Trees .....	30

ROY JACOBSTEIN Free Hermit Crab .....	31
DOLSY SMITH Four Poems .....	33
JAY NEBEL My Best Friend's Body .....	37
JANE BAILEY Two Poems .....	38
FLOYD SKLOOT A Hand of Casino, 1954 .....	40
OLIVER RICE The Animal of Mind .....	41
DIANE SEUSS Two Poems .....	42
DEANNA PICKARD Three Poems .....	44
JENNIFER KRONOVET For Your Birthday: A Saint .....	47

#### Are You Moving?

If you wish to continue receiving your subscription copies of POETRY NORTHWEST, be sure to notify this office in advance. Send both your old address and new—and the ZIP Code numbers.

# POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 2000

## *Cathleen Calbert*

Two Poems

### LIKE

When that fallen leaf of a girl,  
 my milkmaid,  
     banana-pan-cake,  
             Listerine, little tickle,  
     honey muffin, desperado,  
 Mystic, Connecticut,  
 difficult situation,  
     forever amber waves of loving debate,  
     her eyes like dying doves,  
             like my own desire,  
     her milky/dewy/cloudy neck  
     a chrysanthemum of hopefulness,  
 her hair burning like a hay fire,  
     like a gas jet,  
             like a matchstick,  
                     the czarina's hot jewels,  
             an act of forgiveness,  
     a misunderstanding,  
 burning, I tell you, just like fire,  
     her breasts like the snowcones of my youth,  
     like macaroons, a fine flan,  
             strawberry PopTarts  
             (with powdered sugar and water icing),  
     yet, truth be told, really more  
 like the mammary glands of cute, young monkeys,  
 her belly a valley of despair



for travelers from third world  
     (that is, developing) countries,  
 her thighs a memory ... of something,  
 her feet like Peppermint candy,  
 like a clam's treasure offered up nightly  
 at the sandy fish shacks  
     along Little Compton, RI  
     (the best-kept secret of our ocean state,  
     the smallest one in the union  
 and yet not any less  
 beautiful for all that),  
 finally spoke to me, her lips  
     like diamonds, like sapphires,  
     like the best canned spaghetti,  
 I listened like a chimpanzee,  
 like a defrocked priest,  
 like the last dying fish  
 in an unclean fishbowl  
     atop a dead woman's antique bureau,  
     to her words as if  
 I had a red ribbon tied around my neck  
 a coughdrop lodged in my larynx,  
 hairball in my idiotic kitty-licking throat,  
 like I was the cat falling  
     sixty floors from a luxury building  
     and who knows goddamned well  
     that it's not going to land  
 on its famous feet this time, jack,  
 no matter how many ambulances are waiting,  
 their cherries circling like helicopter blades,  
     their white doors as open as Thanksgiving,  
     spewing forth neatly groomed ambulance men,  
     with their asphalt-black hair slicked back,  
 like a duck's happy ass in a bucolic setting  
 of wild bunnies  
 and fearless, full-grown fawns,  
     where like-minded lovers  
     can hold each other's hands  
     like lovers holding each other's hands  
 on a bright winter morning

when the new snow  
     has made everyone as happy  
     as the first day of spring  
     when it feels like—  
     "I don't love you,"  
 she said, just like that,  
 and, brother, let me tell you ,  
     that I felt like,  
     I felt like,  
     I felt

#### STEPMOTHER

She is the woman with a spiked apple  
 waiting in the lining of her pocket,

who demands that you alone clean up  
 a thousand lentils strewn in the cinders,

who lets loose three fat ravens  
 to swallow all of the breadcrumbs

you tearfully drop on your way  
 into the fearsome, wolf-lined forest.

Child, hurry! I fear for your safety!  
 What is that witch doing at home

while you are falling to your knees  
 with loneliness and discouragement?

She is sleeping with your father  
 in a bed as soft as roses and as high.

*She is the woman who sleeps with your father.  
 She is the woman who is not your mother.*

For your mother, dear child, has died.  
 She is a ray of sunshine, a cloudburst,

the talking river, bird song at dawn.  
Platonic and perfect. You miss her.

But your father buries his horse-face  
between his wife's hard breasts and sighs.

He dips into the darkness of her womb.  
He plows her fresh, new fields, singing

while you wait at the table, frowning  
into your cold porridge, sad darling,

or beat the pigs with a stick or tease  
the goats into tumbling down cliffs

or weaken your child-eyes with embroidery:  
"Beloved Mother, Always in Our Memory."

*She is the woman who is not your mother.  
She is the woman who sleeps with your father.*

You must wait for divine retribution,  
for your mother to return from heaven

as three white doves who will eat  
the insides of your stepsister's pretty eyes

and finally ignite hell's fires beneath  
your stepmother's high-flying boots.

## *Stephen Thomas*

Two Poems

### NARCISSUS

The boy had gone but his image  
stayed in the pool. The green eye and bizarre  
couture attracting chimeras and basilisks.

The boy returned to find it stuck there  
on the membrane of the pool, thinner  
than a photograph, as thin as beaten gold.

He tried to lift it with his breath,  
as though to gild the frame he kept ideas in,  
but it would not be lofted. There

it stayed and trembled with desire.  
It went on aging, as he aged, and changing,  
as he changed, a miracle of parallel

inconstancy. It coupled there  
with everything that came: a hundred times  
with Argus, thrice with Cerberus.  
The Sphinx and every Niebelungen gnome  
had known it carnally, when he returned  
to see it flecked and fouled.

All his sex had been anonymous,  
until he let his last resistance flee  
and fell entirely for this.

It swallowed

all the gift, the giver  
and the act of giving,  
everything

before it closed,  
grew still  
and baited itself once more  
with empty blue.

## FRAGMENT

Today we take for our text  
this from the Codex Archilochus  
...n...

Here the poet reminds us  
of the architect's ultimate question:  
what kind of ruin will this construction become?

It is all a matter of becoming.  
How much nothing can something absorb  
and remain either some or a thing?

How many angels can dance  
in the human mind  
before it dissolves in the light?

and what then becomes of its shadows?  
How many ellipses can an oeuvre absorb,  
maintaining its length of appeal?

n...wrote the poet, meaning,  
perhaps, *the shape your lips thus, press  
your tongue to your palate and breathe*

*through your nose*, unless this was  
silent, terminal ...n, signing  
*Get lost!* which we are

and it is.  
Without at least some sense  
of border, there in the field of erosion,

we have lost our orientation.  
So let us join to the text  
...n... our own little fragment,

this ...i... of our own.  
It gives us the negative particle  
or the locative preposition,

which leads to today's conclusion:  
I can't spin it out of myself  
without more; without more

there is no out of myself.

## *Keith Ratzlaff*

### THE BIG CIRCUS

The only circus ever  
in my small town  
Pitched its tent  
in our one park  
beside the tennis court,  
beside the top of the slide  
my brother fell from that day.  
He'd run away from home,  
to the park, to the slide  
that was as much circus  
as he could imagine  
in a small town,  
our faces written in the dirt  
generation after one after another.  
He took a girl with him—  
on the lam—he was five.  
Later that summer  
they would climb the step ladder,  
fold out the little platform  
that said "This is not a step"  
and kill a new-born kitten—  
that little tight rope walker  
working without a rope—  
by lifting it there  
over and over, the cat head first  
off and off until you know already.  
The big top. He was gone  
so early. But the circus:

We were all umbrellas  
twirling into the tent  
which was breathing its way  
open and up and then flags.  
One flag, really. And my brother  
later that summer, dropping  
matches in the fuel oil tank.  
We were so lucky.  
I won a black glass hand  
in the shape of an ashtray.  
He couldn't read the warning.  
It only seemed our houses were in flames.  
The circus was one wagon  
one tent, one bear—nothing  
high enough to fall from.  
And he bit his tongue  
nearly through for all  
it taught him. It was an omen  
that told our fortunes: "This  
is not a step," the step said.  
And we were all still alive then  
but planning how not to be.

**Krista Halverson**

Four Poems

MATRIARCH

This summer Aunt Claire takes me driving  
from Prineville  
to the Columbia; we can see Washington from its  
bank. I use the rest-stop Ladies'  
after her, see the Preamble

in her languid scroll on the door of the stall. *We the Women  
of the United States...*

Riverside, our buttocks leave prints like ripe  
avocados on cold mud. We talk well, and later,  
in her car, I sit on a towel but she

takes her pants off, drives past the station  
and waves at the ranger in her panties.  
I ask her why she never had children. She says,  
We don't any of us know our own bodies.  
I throw my pants in the back seat. In the motel we fall asleep

to the Discovery Channel. She says it has that effect  
on her. I wake up to hysterical laughing— 2 a.m. animal laughter  
that sounds like retching. The narrator's sterile voice:  
*With hyenas, it is females*

*that preside. The birth of daughters  
is an event, and twins—when such a thing occurs—come slick  
with strong, dense limbs.  
Awash in testosterone, they literally  
come out fighting.*

Claire is gaping in her sleep. Her mouth is soft red-rimmed.  
The sounds she makes are what have awoken me  
after all. Well, then, she would say, The wilderness  
may be in our blood.  
Claire is the oldest of her sisters,

thirty-nine and unmarried. The scarves she ties



on her neck wrestle in myriad  
bright knots. Her gait is giving men  
something to talk about. Those who have known her say  
she is barren, or selfish. Claire says

my grandmother, her speckled eyes  
bright as salmon backs, bore her daughters early,  
and that she was lucky. The next morning she brings me  
the continental  
breakfast: M&Ms from the vending machine. We are gone  
before the wake-up call.

#### LISTENING TO AUNT COY TALK INSTEAD OF MUSIC

Aunt Coy says if she'd got the job  
there'd have been 4 to 6 minutes between  
the tour bus and the backstage door,  
exactly 4 to 6  
judging his stride as just wider than hers,  
which is the way she figured it.  
Neil Diamond, she says. Just his name,

then a sigh because I still can't understand the rules  
of pinochle. She deals an arc of cards,  
shuffles them back into her hand  
like a gift to herself. This game is all hers,  
she says, all hers. It hadn't worked out  
for Coy—something about not lifting  
one hundred pounds. Doesn't take that much  
to match two shoes, she says,  
or powder a nose—even Neil's nose, which is  
no small thing. What a jewel

of a summer job. All of a sudden she drops her cards,  
throws up her arms like she's looking  
for a tattoo. She's held a lot  
with them, she says, a thousand pounds of babies, for  
one thing. Maybe they look weak next to her  
broad hips—like sprouts from a bulb.  
But they're strong as screwdrivers.

This night Coy dreams it  
all over. Neil's teeth gleam in one welded  
white arc, like an oracle. And her dead husband sings  
back-up. In her mind Scott is  
exactly like he looked at the Diamond concert  
when they went together in '78. Coy could see Scott perfectly,  
down to the way his lips spread around a grin  
that showed his own ridge of teeth  
like a cantaloupe rind.

She is up at two this morning. I hear  
her turn over Neil's record several times. Long enough  
to hear every scratch on every ballad  
through the wall.

#### WHAT MOTHER WAS THINKING

A car may come through this window. I feel  
engines swell in my ears. I understand only glass  
and reason work to keep peace.

Only days ago I was at home,  
my ankles softening in water, waiting for the tub  
to fill. What roamed that house,  
the rooms I had emptied,  
was the sound of winter heat.  
I dried by the open vent  
in spite of my cloud-colored robe.

Leaving home is how everything begins  
and how it ends. My hands,  
bound-up reeds, turn colors underwater,  
make shapes they have memorized.

Around my daughter's face  
they fit by heart. She'll remember  
me saying, *How are you, love?*  
*Eat breakfast,*  
her chin lifting to my lips.



## THE MOOD THIS AFTERNOON

At the door is an oven mitt  
attached to a Sister whose face is red  
in the steam of soup.  
She doesn't say *Honey, let me in, let out  
the girls*, but I obey her.

Perfumes slosh in all the bottles she dusts  
around. She's very good  
at cleaning me up and the traces of me.  
I would like to go out

with a squirt on each wrist, my best  
clothes heavy and wet with scent.  
Until I can't smell anything but me.

I should have a dozen more pictures  
of myself, in frames. There are babies floating  
on all the walls of this house.

Here is what else I want, in writing, so you can't  
forget: my daughters to sit in piles  
of my clothes. My sons to stumble  
on my pearls, clicking  
on the bottom of the drawer. Someone  
who looks like me  
to bring the youngest home from school.

And one more thing,  
I look like a witch, and someone  
ought to tell me.

## *Ron Houchin*

### GIRL ASLEEP AT THE BEACH

Here where the earth dives  
below the ocean, kids scream,  
jumping backwards into waves,  
adults sit serene as cats  
watching clouds, she seems  
to sleep, or to try to.  
Thin as a sea oat stem,  
in shorts and halter top,  
she rests on her towel,  
arm pillowing her head.

I wonder if she dreams  
of the cool, blue embrace  
to come or just waits  
for her friends to return  
on surf boards. She sleeps  
as if curled around a mystery  
about the rest of her life,  
one even she can't know.  
A flotilla of aubergine clouds  
threatens-by, at the very tip of vision.

The lifeguard pulls in his flag  
and climbs down the ladder,  
his day nearly ending.  
She rouses and hugs herself. Kids  
have not stopped screaming  
for what they want to see.  
She gathers the three big towels,  
squints out at the horizon,  
and kicks the silver ends of waves  
down the sand toward the life to come.

HANGING TINSEL

The two of us in that dark room  
where the only lights were blinking bulbs  
with liquid that boiled to the tops  
and settled down  
all night long while my father set  
single silver thread after thread  
until the needled branch glittered  
and he moved on,  
left me beside the three reindeer  
tugging the five-inch plywood  
slat-sled,  
my father not yet reeling  
from the quarts of beer  
or my mother's absence  
as he doled out the silver strings,  
his slender fingers lifting and setting  
each separate, glittering strand  
until there were waves of silver  
wafting  
whenever one of us shifted or bent,  
whole walls of shimmerings  
that reflected us back in thin strips,  
his ringed hand, my left shoulder,  
his nose, my eyebrow, shreds  
of us hung on those branches  
sagged  
with candycanes and red-eyed,  
scraggly-feathered, white birds,  
with snow-painted pinwheels  
that whirled in his slightest whisper,  
his white sweatshirt there, a sliver  
of his khaki pants,  
the right side of my mouth, my ear,  
there in the hush of our held breaths  
as we stretched out to hang yet  
another, and another, and another  
silver thread.

MY MOTHER AND I AT THE TABLE

My mother sits across the table,  
reading Oneida on the silverware  
she holds to the sun filtering  
through her window,  
just four feet away yet so distant,  
I know I can't reach her no matter  
what I say,  
all of the names gone into the  
battered toast and blue cups  
of coffee,  
all of the screams in that other  
kitchen  
silent here where my mother fingers  
the buttons on her bathrobe,  
tells me she really ought to go home,  
her too-red lips in that perpetual pout  
even now at seventy-eight,  
both breasts gone, most of her uterus,  
the night she high-heeled  
off our front porch without one look back,  
my mother innocent  
again in St. John's Alley, rising for work  
in Cohoes Textile,  
scattering the muskrats that crawl from the  
canal  
into the cold rooms, kneeling on linoleum  
with a quick sign of the cross  
as she had us do back in that unholy rowhouse,  
doing it here, in Troy, New York,  
to list the venial sins she'd committed during  
the week,  
asking me, her confessor, her son, to forgive  
the bad thought,  
the silence when her uncle kissed her cheek,  
my mother what? ten? eleven? down on her  
arthritic knees  
on the fourth floor of this Home for the Elderly  
where I have come for my annual visit  
to sulk and remind her I am the last of three

beautiful sons,  
to flash pictures of my house and wife and own  
children  
before her pudgy face and whisper See, See what  
I've done,  
let her know our Thanksgiving dinner table was  
full with relatives and friends  
while she sat at the far end of the blue dining  
room  
no longer waiting for anyone to come, lifting  
the one glass of milk  
she still limits herself to each day because  
she can't break the habit,  
sucking the meat from the bones, cleaning  
her plate  
with a slice of bread till it gleams back  
like it does today,  
my mother staring at the crust in mine,  
the leftover egg,  
not sure to tell whoever I am that it's  
not right to waste,  
her eyes looking for words I hope she  
never finds.

## THE COPPER FROG

My wife wants a copper frog  
that squirts a long stream of water  
from its mouth,  
and she wants it set right there,  
at the edge of the pond,  
which means I need to ditch-witch  
at least a foot-deep line to run  
the water tubing more than sixty  
feet,  
with a switch-off for when it turns  
cold, and suddenly I'm seeing again  
my first backyard,  
where my mother's painting stones  
white  
and rolling them over the grass,  
for *Effect*, she said,  
green slime smeared all over so  
the stones would blend in but still  
define her garden,  
me shaking my head, even at ten,  
unable to comprehend why  
we could not wait for the paint  
to dry,  
rolling them end on end till  
they formed just the right design,  
which is what my wife's after,  
I think, as I put my cold beer  
down on the patio table and  
walk beside her to the pond's  
edge  
where she sees the copper frog  
squinting his stream of water,  
her finger sure as she points  
to the small hollow beside the boat,  
whispering all the while that he  
could go absolutely nowhere else.



WHY YOU MUST HAVE A MOTORCYCLE

Say you cannot unwind the sheets from your legs,  
or ancient trees have fallen across your lawn  
and require the chainsaw which you refuse to own,  
or five select chairs lined up in a row  
cannot make you comfortable, or the street  
black and glazed with rainwater is as empty  
as you would have it, or yes, the players  
come off the field and they are too real,  
they are boys or men who wish nothing more  
than to spend their lives playing this game  
while somewhere there is a fist filling up with rage—

say there is money involved and you must get up  
or today there are single words frying on the pan  
of your brain and allowing any one of them to rise  
into your body into the warm hum of your throat  
to pass through your tongue and lips...is to weep,  
or maybe yesterday's socks are still fresh enough  
and what you know about this day is that it is  
happening somewhere else, right? in some street  
full of smoke and waiting, in some ditch, in some  
alley, in some room grown small with voice  
where the body grows small, the heart, the face—

still you will stare at the walls on which you  
have placed the photographs of your mother  
and father, your wife and children saying cheese,  
your dog standing in a field of flowers gazing  
at mountains, or your cats curled together  
in the rocking chair, of yourself victorious  
on the cliff's precipice next to one large raven  
who held his place on a sandstone rock where you  
wanted to stand, of the Harley-Davidson  
you once owned and drove without a helmet  
and sold in a fit of reason, and now wish to own again.

IN BED

The man did not choose this dream,  
this road tumbling over hills,  
wheel thrumming in his palms.  
The navigator snaps her map

and squints into red and black lines.  
In the back seat a small boy reads aloud  
from the book of conjured artifacts.  
"Petroglyph," he says. "Arrowhead."

The radio grows songless as an old tire.  
The navigator chants the names of towns  
and historical sites. "Pompey's Pillar,"  
she says. "Butte." The boy traces

an elk that stands on its hind legs  
holding an ornate shield. The landscape  
warps, a rumpled bedspread snapped  
into flatness. "Get dressed," she laughs,

"the day is a slippery dancer."  
The man watches her hands smooth  
away those last lines, every direction  
that could be made or unmade.

**Donald Platt**

SOUND MACHINE

Poetry is  
the sound machine  
to which my daughter  
must listen at night  
to fall asleep,  
to shut out  
the dark around  
her. Her sleep  
is sound. Push  
the button and  
a summer night  
comes on, surge  
and susurrus of crickets,  
the bull frogs'  
pizzicato, slow  
glissando of wind's  
fingers across  
the shimmery strings  
of a silver  
birch, black velvet  
silence. Touch  
another button  
and it's ocean  
waves, flex  
and reflux of the waters'  
muscle, endless  
rhythm of our  
desire, my body  
breaking again  
against your eroding  
shore, dune swell  
and coarse beach grass  
where an Ipswich sparrow  
repeats its one  
ecstatic sentence

tsit-tsit-tsit

tseeeee-tsaay

over and over.

But what my daughter  
loves best of all  
is the heartbeat,  
the blood's shush  
and backwash, iambic  
piledriver's simple  
declarative statement,  
I am, I am,  
that brings my daughter  
back home to the womb,  
to her mother's  
heartbeat and slumbering  
breasts, the milk  
her mouth once filled and  
spilled over with,  
our first poem  
from which all other  
poems come,  
midnight's slow ooze  
and gush, a rhythm  
made flesh,  
the sound she will not  
be weaned from,  
until death.

**Gary Gildner**

MEASURING

Margaret finds me in my father's garden  
out behind the house—a field, now,  
of weeds and grasses that are beautiful to her.  
She is five and takes her time choosing  
this one, this one, making up their names—  
Charlotte, Henry Fox, Elizabeth. Oh, and *this* one  
is the prize.

    The prize? Yes, the flower  
we don't really have a name for.  
I think to say she's picked a stalk of timothy  
but I stop myself. Nor do I say that thirty  
years ago my father, turning up the dirt, right here,  
fell, and did not stand again.

    I say he built  
that house, an apple tree he planted brushed  
the windows where I slept. I say he kept  
a pencil underneath his cap, or halfway underneath,  
to measure with.

    Measure what? Oh, lots of things,  
even kids. For example, like I measure you.  
All this pleases her. She reminds me how,  
for example, she herself can almost reach  
the apple tree outside *her* room at home.  
And how, for example, she just needs to  
get away sometimes—and grow.

    She takes my hand.  
We're a hair rich and half poor—that's how  
lucky we are! She turns, alive  
with happiness, and whirling  
lets me go.

**Derek Sheffield**

THE GOOD BOOK

He swings from branch to vine, the swift passage of his mighty  
frame leaving no trace. His keen, gray eyes read a spoor that  
urges him onward.

    Just as the birds fall strangely quiet, the ape-man  
suddenly flies from the edge of the jungle to a terrible sight —  
Jane trapped. In mid-air he draws his knife, plunging to a  
blond back crouched in the grass, one steel-thewed arm locked  
around a savage throat, the other stabbing the beast's furry  
side. Jane screams —

    sermon over, the boy unfolds his book  
from his Bible, marks it, and follows  
his family out of the hard-backed pews.  
The organ blows slow tones  
as they pass through  
a wash of gold and red stained light.

    Back home, in his room,  
the walls peer with eagles, listen  
with elephants and linger with snakes.  
Every night, under the green slope of his blanket,  
as the familiar plot of whoops and cries  
goes on beyond the bright lines of his door,  
he prays for the lion.



ODE TO MY DIXON TICONDEROGA 1388 NO. 2

The first pleasure  
is the deep pleasure of delay:

the plain form waiting  
straight and yellow, lying  
perpendicular to the edge  
of my cleared desk. I sit  
listening to its Quaker moment,  
its old soul not set to any purpose.

Just how long should I wait  
to take it in my hand  
for the second pleasure which is  
the pleasure of its sharpening?  
That cedar shaft, dried  
at a white-hot heat,  
forced by my dome  
sharpener to make a fine point  
under pressure –

yielding to the third pleasure,  
the strange joy of exposing  
its resin-fused core,  
that stick used to carbonize  
the brains of poets and  
the manifesto of the common man  
who mines the graphite  
near Los Pozos, Guanajuato.

The fourth pleasure, the physical  
word, like Jehovah's name,  
is not to be written.

So right to the fifth  
and final pleasure, the one allowing

for my hand's unplanned errors:  
the most amazing pink eraser  
sitting firmly crowned, crimped  
into the green and gold ferule.  
This pink eraser – oh God has never  
made anything more pure.

BUILDING A MAN

THE FIRST DAY

My first task is separation:  
light from dark, land from air, the white stork  
from the whale. Then, him.  
I'll place light in his right hand, dark  
in his left. When those hands come together  
even I will tremble. And land will be there  
in his shoulders, and air in his eyelids,  
the white stork migrating from heart to head,  
in his skull the speaking whale.

THE SECOND DAY

The smooth surface of his skin will be tattooed  
with the word "*revelation*." It will hurt,  
he'll keep his eyelids closed, his lips  
closed tight. When the day is done, he'll open  
his right hand and find in its design  
"*someday*." In the left – "*never*."  
When he shakes the left hand, poetry  
will fall, freezing everything. When he shakes  
the right, he'll hear a river.

THE THIRD DAY

For each hair on his body, a different shading  
of shame: derision, awe, humiliation.  
This is a flawed plan from a mean mind —  
I myself am ashamed.

#### THE FOURTH DAY

I'll teach him to build a model  
of the white stork flying. I'll teach him  
about the bones of its wings – the elongated humerus,  
the radius and ulna – all corresponding  
to the bones of his own arms, so that the arc  
from heart to head might be more than a fluttering,  
might be understood. I won't teach him how  
to consider the danger. When he jumps  
from great heights, he'll fly by faith  
and by the great beauty of skeletons.

#### THE FIFTH DAY

I'll put a pen into each hand, the dark hand  
and the light – he'll teach each hand  
to draw, he'll fill worlds trying to see me.

#### THE SIXTH DAY

He learns this day about excess  
and the drawing of blood, vinegar-soaked stalks  
lifted to the lips, the engineering of ropes  
meant to pull machinery up from the dirt.  
The whale will fill with dry grasses this day  
and will thicken, so the stork can turn  
back to the nest again, back to the heart.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY

This is the day of pleasure.  
I'll give him a canopy, many pillows, I'll summon angels  
around him, I'll become the air over his eyelids,  
I'll let him dream so I don't have to speak.  
I'll create the *bosem* — mint, dill, gabanum, spikenard, cassia –  
and I'll finish this man.  
Then I'll imagine spices into being,  
toss the Pleiades into the sky. All these  
will be part of him: the stars, the scent of gingergrass  
and cinnamon, the cypress harp played gladly,  
the timbrel played with both hands at the feast.

### Gary Fincke

#### THE BRAIN SHELTER

Almost always, in the saved-brain movies,  
Someone smart or evil needs a body.  
They have heads; we recognize their faces;  
The surgeons search for the young and pretty.  
But those brains without a skull, what of them?  
Only when the sauce they're kept in bubbles  
Do we know they're thinking hard about odds,  
Angry, aroused, or in despair over  
The difficulties of disembodied faith.

In England, inside an old bomb shelter,  
Eight thousand brains float in formaldehyde,  
And we know, touring the display so near  
A psychiatric hospital, past wards  
Of patients are arranged here, their brains bought  
For candy or a shopping spree for toys.  
Alzheimers, we read, schizophrenia,  
Parkinsons, Pick's disease, repetitive  
Concussions from padded fists. Look, we hear,  
This brain is shriveled, this one is compressed,  
Two of the thousand shapes for the mind gone wrong.

It's enough to spark the old words for loss:  
Moron, dufus, imbecile, we begin;  
Idiot and loony, fuckup, goofball,  
Nut case, shell shocked, or the complexity  
Of gradual loss, my friend describing  
The dark spots on his MRI, places  
Where nothing will return to remind him  
Of the small, automatic ways to move,  
Where he stared and stared, expecting something  
In the night sky of his brain, if only  
The conditions were right as he squinted  
While the doctor declared, "See? There?" as if  
Those words were double-entendre for repair.

**Anne Marie Macari**

VERMONT TREES

Below birds crossing the lake of the sky  
and purple martins on power lines, down  
to the trees and one thing my brother said  
that stays with me from Long Island to Vermont,  
something about trees being conductors  
of spirit, such bloody light they draw  
toward themselves, toward us, into fields  
and planted rows, like the old oak that looks  
exhausted and smells of fire twisting through  
its trunk and into its skirt of roots.  
What it holds up, what it does for us,  
we'll never know. Not while trucks speed past  
white houses and a man biting a cigar  
shoves suitcases into his trunk, never  
looking up at the ropes in the sky,  
never noticing who is drowning in air.  
Who can fathom the steadfastness of trees,  
or see them for what they are in their ethereal  
robes, or get past our unspoken envy  
for the pure light that changes them till  
they're speaking, the wind coming up from below  
to loosen their tongues, each tree swaying:  
honey locusts, willow, apple, the clefts  
in their backs bearing up against rot,  
their leaves deep green. Would anyone guess  
that in these woods there were once trees  
three people could link themselves around?  
Old as that, so I feel, I'm sure I feel,  
something missing when we hike across the farm  
and into the forest. Some gaping loss singing sweetly,  
too sweet, all around us while we climb,  
out of breath and dizzy, some hole at my back  
when we stop to catch the view—Vermont  
to New York, we're that high—  
mountain ranges stained violet and receding  
into the horizon, and still there's no reconciling

that I'm an epidemic, scavenger, death threat,  
even though I leave the apples on their branches  
and try to step around the moss into this air heavy  
with summer: late August when wind and blood  
change direction and we head for  
the final adornments, pine cones like bells,  
whole mountainsides of them ringing  
from their tall green steeples.

**Roy Jacobstein**

FREE HERMIT CRAB

—or light, the relic of farewells...  
—Wallace Stevens

Under the left half  
of the moon, fish-smell  
comes in on the sea,  
in on long green ribbons  
like a childhood hour.

You want to blend in  
with the men dangling  
lines on the pier,  
but everywhere the signs  
shout *difference*:

undulating anchors  
on blue-collar biceps,  
tough white guys  
singing black blues  
beneath the ratty palms,

QWIK MART—no,  
KWIK, Say YES  
To JESUS, Pleasure  
Island Plaza, Jubilee  
Amusement Park



(each night a clown,  
orange hair igniting the sky,  
gives every child under ten  
a free hermit crab).  
Soon the sun will hover

like a Sunday wafer  
before a pious mouth.  
Maybe you'll try  
the grits, grit  
your teeth, a sort of

*risor sardonicus*, mimicking  
the black-faced gulls  
squawking overhead,  
or better yet, find yourself  
some clean spit of sand

where an empty shell  
or pack of Luckies  
might shelter  
your two pincers,  
your other bony legs.

## **Dolsy Smith**

Four Poems

DEAR \_\_\_\_\_,

Spring is here, and waxy. It drips  
from sidewalk planters, like purple  
and white paraffin. It collects in my  
eyes and ears, under my nails.

Our street is only as steep as you  
remember. The new houses have not  
yet tipped it over.

Every day I read the weather page  
in the paper. It is sunny where you  
are, always. But I forecast storms  
in the maps of my fingertips.

Tomorrow is Monday. I must brunch  
at the Natural History Museum,  
with the Cro-Magnons in their dark  
papier-mache cave.

Have the nuns from the convent  
changed into swallows?  
Their inquisition clouds the fields.

I rearrange the vowels in your old  
letter, like paleontology. You'd be  
surprised at how many species  
of you I have discovered. I still  
wear the Queen Elizabeth air-mail  
stamp as my tattoo.

I will mail this tomorrow. Evening  
already leavens the distance  
down the roads.

## ENNUI OF THE PLEISTOCENE

A glacier has moved in with us,  
crushing the black forest of dining room  
furniture, no doubt watermarking  
the Persian rug beyond repair. And where  
is the cat? Our friends all commend our  
decorator, as they shave off fresh rime  
for their cocktails. We cannot tell them  
the truth.

We cannot keep the thermostat high  
enough. Nights encamped under blankets  
we wake by turns to whines, a crackling  
like a roomful of circus freaks eating  
glass. By morning the moraine  
in our hall is bigger. I told you so,  
you chide, the glacier grows like  
a child.

Your mother drops by to read  
your tea leaves. Her head bobbing  
like a puffin, perhaps she tells you  
I have cheated. Our old friends stop  
visiting; too many coats and umbrellas  
vanished into crevasses. But new guests  
crowd in, geologists—one of them  
an ex of yours. The place dangles  
with gauges like spiny Christmas  
ornaments.

Your steps are agile now  
among the till, your laugh splinters  
an avalanche onto my head  
while I work. Sunset drops through it,  
stoking fire behind this slow engine  
of needles and bone. Can I carve space  
enough in time? Our new house  
should soon be ready. Fluted ceilings,  
furniture from a glassworks, rooms  
and rooms of glare.

## OCTOBER

The trees flare and burn  
with change. Bright red has

spread through this one's edge  
overnight as arson. These smolder

a wispy melon-yellow, dropping  
tiny curled leaves at our feet. No,

I do not know their names.

Everywhere the silkworms have laid  
a sticky scaffolding. We brush off

our mouths and eyes. You say you can  
smell leaves burning in the air; maybe

you're just testing me again. But what

is the wind building in the pilot-light  
sky, in our clothes, between

our hands? You look away. I've found  
this splotchy maple leaf, big

as a burned-up bird, an old map  
of the cold. You turn back,

rubbing goose-pimpled arms.  
I walk on into dusk, waiting

for my right hand to catch blue fire.

I remember: in a field someone stumbles  
upon a half-rotten squash in the weeds

like a fat stash of gold.

## TOUR

Lost. All we have is half a map  
of the moon. We're on our way  
to the Museum of Famous  
Last Words, big dark barn  
somewhere in these white woods.

Our tour guide, the acclaimed  
Hungarian somnambulist, was caught  
peeking. They took him away.

A fat businessman from Georgia  
boasts that he can find his own  
way. His head pink as a match,  
he bobs off into cobwebbed leaves.

The rest of us demur.  
After all, we are but guests  
of the landscape.

Madame H. has brought a life-raft.  
Hardly enough mouthfuls  
of yellow rubber to go round.

Some of us are for walking  
in circles; others suggest  
that we huddle together  
and cry. But are we  
permitted to be homesick?

Beware the man in cold boots!  
His red handle-bar mustache  
like drooping wings. He steals  
through the deepening woods,  
a pale needle. You  
do not hear his coming.

How many of us  
are having this nightmare?  
Let us persecute them.

## Jay Nebel

### MY BEST FRIEND'S BODY

I remember how the street was alive  
After dark, and how swiftly the lights rose  
Into the sky, hot and blazing above us;  
How I held my hands against the small  
Of her back. The ambulance meanwhile  
That rode through the neighborhood,  
Cradled my best friend, whether I heard it,  
Held its lonely melody, I cannot remember.  
Forgive me. I knew nothing about love.

Her skin, in the shadows, untouched,  
Virginal: how my friend's body must have felt  
To the paramedic moving his hands  
Like wings. This too, an act  
Of love. But I was not aware of this.  
Only her cries as I moved above her  
In the dark, the occasional rustle of leaves.

How beautiful we must have looked  
Together, moving into one another and apart,  
Perfectly timed, in unison; how my friend's body  
Rose to meet the medic's hands. Victims,  
Or so we say, of circumstance—  
How we wanted it, and after, how I offered  
My shirt and kissed her forehead; even this,  
I would later learn, a signal of leaving; how she lay  
There as my friend must have, trembling, uncertain,  
And awake beneath the thin covers and the light.



THE EASTER EGG

Six months later we dislodged it  
from under the piano. Irregular as a heart  
on wheels, it radiated no air of resurrection.  
In fact, it resembled a golf ball come undone,

a rubbery core of tar and twine  
that smelled of something slightly burned.  
Who knows which child dipped the egg for how long  
into colored water? Did we think about God

or life and death? Someone hid it, that much we know,  
and someone else poked the broom, and there  
it was—no painted shell—black as a note  
escaping music. It wobbled under the broken

pedal and skittered across the hardwood floor.  
We might have easily mistaken it for a hairball  
or a dead mouse. Two cat-eye marbles  
rolled out behind, disciples looking for a sign.

RESEARCH

Whether the rats are sleeping or eating  
or pissing onto the arts  
and leisure section of the *New York Times*,  
our job is to tickle them. Seven times

a day we stick our piano fingers through  
the bars and play rodent jazz  
on their backs, jiggle Mingus  
into their armpits, riffle the white hairs

under their chins with Miles.  
Mostly, we're undergrads and  
the rats seem to know it. They tolerate  
our bumbling notes, but I think they sense

we're distracted. We're always sweating  
mid-term deadlines, writing papers in our heads.  
They twitter and chortle loudest for the old  
woman who works Sundays. Her final

coda was eighth grade, but they seem to prefer her  
hands callused and chapped from scrubbing  
the toilets of our professor's home,  
the way she lowers herself

to the cages and gazes into  
their eyes, singing hymns  
while we amplify and collect  
the sound rats make when they laugh.

## **Floyd Skloot**

### A HAND OF CASINO, 1954

My grandfather studies the cards.  
His jaw juts and he begins to shift  
the pink plate of his false teeth,  
tonguing it out and in, mouth  
widening till his grin has flipped  
upside-down between the gums.  
He slams a deuce onto the table.

Even at seven I know he is losing  
on purpose. He mumbles deep  
in his throat, a gargle of sounds  
like someone choking on stones.  
I think he would make sense  
if his teeth were put in right.

At seven I also know that bodies  
crumble but new parts can come  
gleaming from dark hiding places.  
I have seen, buried at the back  
of his top drawer, my father's spare  
glass eye in a navy velvet box.  
My mother has three heads  
of stiff hair inside her closet,  
just in case, and a secret pack  
of fingernails in her chiffonier.

My grandfather strings phrases  
of Polish and Yiddish around words  
in French to hold his broken  
English together. I understand  
nothing he says but everything  
that is in his eyes. He tells me  
he is *a man from the world*.  
That must be where he learned  
that losing is winning as a frown

is a smile and a curse is a kiss.  
When I lay down the good  
deuce, he smacks his furrowed  
brow and curses high heaven.

## **Oliver Rice**

### THE ANIMAL OF MIND

strays  
    out of the badlands,  
down a coulee to the creek bed,  
  
naming  
    the sand willow, the plover,  
the spider web, the prairie gentian,

    and itself,  
    oblique,  
    discontent,

listening  
    to the locusts, the sedge,  
the silence that is not silent,

    intimations  
    of syllogism,  
    of metaphor,

watching  
    the bitterroot, the snails,  
the stillness that is not still.

I'LL MARRY

I'll marry again, no doubt—  
marry doubt, marry heartache.  
I'll marry shipwreck, and the dragging  
hook, and the weeds they pull up  
instead of the drowned.  
I'll marry divorce, and the paper  
on which it's decreed, and the judge  
with his watery eyes wishing us both  
well; I'll marry heartbreak, that peculiar  
affliction, cousin to papercut, cousin  
to open lips, to spread legs, to jasmine  
and jazz. I'll marry time and time again,  
no doubt—marry Christ, and the last  
breath of Christ, and the waning ghost  
of Christ; marry the ebbing tide, my son  
in a small boat rowing away from shore,  
this thin back, his straight spine, the light  
that blesses his journey, the black  
cloud spreading its wings to engulf  
him; I'll marry beauty and the disease  
that kills it, need and what fills it,  
and what hollows it, and the shallows,  
and what runs aground there—love,  
with its curved prow, its rusted bell.

HUNGRY AGAIN

I once taught a girl how to be hungry  
again—she'd forgotten; having effaced  
her hunger for so long by tricking herself  
out of the trick of desire. She'd become  
a collection of long bones in a calfskin sack,  
mouth like a lamprey with its circle of sharp  
teeth, hair on her cheeks and back like moss  
muffling a tree stump. Being a bone-person,  
she was nearly mean—no cordiality, as grace  
is flesh-born. I don't remember how I taught  
her to reach into desirelessness to find desire—  
like plunging one's hand into black water  
and pulling out a fish with a wedding ring  
in its mouth. What I can recall is sitting together  
on the floor of the dining room eating dried sugared  
pineapple with our hands. A bit of rice squeezed  
into a sticky ball. Praying over the food; keeping  
our eyes shut as we chewed and tasted; her tears  
as she swallowed. When I was a teenager, the white mare  
next door was starved by her master. Her soft black lips  
dripped foam but she would not take the apple  
I held out to her in the flat of my hand. We called  
the authorities, but sometimes it's too late. So many  
years later, having given up those two dangerous occupations—  
teaching the skeletal, I mean, and courting desire—I find myself  
mean, impolite, starving. It takes all that's left of me to bury  
my lips in your hand, to taste the sugar there.

ANOTHER MYSTERY

She begins to screen the sun out.  
Windows allowed to dust over—  
become murky like reflections on a pond.

She paints the doors stuck.  
Her only friend, a crazy mutt  
whose stuttered howls come out in odd noises  
like a dog's misery over a master's death.

On circled days, a kind man delivers charity  
in a bag of mysteries. Pages, places  
she opens and breathes in. A turn and she is

a bathtub victim, hair fan-like in a magenta pool.  
Around the paragraphs, her mind puzzles on "d's"  
detective-door-death, decembers lost  
between dust jackets. A few daisies remain

in the backyard like a fragrance in the folds  
of an old pocketbook. She's color blind by now  
and always hungry. But once in awhile,

when the moon wears mother-of-pearl  
bracelets and wind rattles branches  
code-like on the roof, eyes tired, neck kinked  
from ten-thousand pages, she sorts through the past

like a young girl in a ribbon drawer...  
waves powdered with sundust, delicious sea air rising  
and tangling her hair, the cottonwoods fanning

the man in the shade. And she, brown and restless  
as a gypsy, rubs oil on his burnt, freckled shoulders.  
His head tilts back as she bends over  
to brush his forehead with a momentary kiss.

And life, never better, more real.

AFTER MENTIONING A NURSING HOME

It doesn't matter why or how  
it was said, only what  
I saw in her eyes.

I worry it step by step  
like a child waiting  
to be rescued from a lie.

There is the couch she sat on,  
the yellow walls, the stained dress she wore,  
the trust, the sour air.

What was I thinking?  
I remember once reading of an island  
where criminals were sent

after love had twisted,  
coiled back, and bit the heart.  
The incident lasted no longer

than the time it takes to slap  
the nuisance of a fly,  
or clear the throat

before swearing a solemn promise,  
but the words spilled that day  
like a threat in a small room

of the family home. Words not meant  
to wound an old woman, who by now  
has moved slowly to the edge of the stairway.



## FINDING THE ENDING

She began dying on my birthday.  
When her eyes opened, they were blank,  
yoke-like and spoiled. Nurses bathed her  
as she stared, immodest, out the window.

*Two men in a tree are watching*, she whispered.  
Once I read that the dead come for the dying.  
I fought back, told her I would make them leave.

She shook her head as if they might turn to me.  
For three weeks, I banged my head against reason  
and tried to pull her back. Her chest heaved,

worked too hard and I thought of summers at the lake  
when caught fish were thrown on the dock  
and how they suffered the air. It took thirty years  
before I would taste fish. Is that how memory works?

•

In time I knew she was leaving. I imaged the soul  
leaving the body like the picture I pasted by her bed:  
a flurry of fireworks, sparks shooting green and red,

fizzling slivers of color into an avenue of planets.  
It was then I lied, told her dying was like that, as if  
wishes were solid as stones and I could arrange them.

Relatives and nurses stopped and studied the magazine ad.  
A bottle of gin shooting fireworks into a bluing,  
star-flooded sky. The profile of the moon's face lit,

familiar as a distant cousin. The earthened trees  
beneath, dark, significant as ink blots.  
A red explosion rising in the shape of a perfect aster,

an atom splitting, or the core of a soul. Even now  
when I feel abandoned, I stare at the picture  
and imagine her there, waiting to be reborn.

## *Jennifer Kronovet*

### FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY: A SAINT

You'll find him holding  
a small house – death  
as it collapsed his ribs  
around his heart. Sworn to  
the indoors – the light  
on specks of dust as they  
pass the window, a change  
in weather unsensed until  
it beats on the roof: inside,  
he could live inside his body.

He was young. The chair,  
the bed, the pen marks,  
the lamp. To keep a life  
within a house – breathing  
thresholds, pulse of stairs –  
he imagined movement within  
the walls, xylem and phloem  
to circulate his thoughts  
of clouds into the care it takes  
to put everything away, to save  
dead moths in a box, fold  
shirts, necks against backs.

In leaving was the death  
he dreaded, not, as ceiling  
and floor met, the windows  
unhinging, landing whole  
outside, framing  
the ground, and sky.

## About Our Contributors

CATHLEEN CALBERT teaches at Rhode Island College. Sarabande Books published her *Bad Judgment* in 1999.

STEPHEN THOMAS is an English graduate student at the University of Washington.

KEITH RATZLAFF teaches at Central College in Pella, Iowa.

KRISTA HALVERSON is a student at Brigham Young University.

RON HOUCHIN teaches in southern Ohio and does not put his name or address on his poems. Salmon Poetry of Ireland published his *Death and the River* in 1997.

LEN ROBERTS lives in Hellertown, Pennsylvania. His most recent book is *The Trouble-Making Finch* (University of Illinois Press, 1998).

JIM PETERSON lives in Lynchburg, Virginia. His third book, *The Owning Stone*, has just won the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award and will be published by Red Hen Press this year.

DONALD PLATT teaches at the State University of West Georgia. Purdue University Press published his *Fresh Peaches, Fireworks, & Guns* in 1994. The Center for Book Arts in New York City has just published his chapbook *Leap Second at the Turn of the Millennium*.

GARY GILDNER lives in Grangeville, Idaho. His latest collection is *The Birthday Party* (Limberlost Press, 2000).

DEREK SHEFFIELD teaches at Wenatchee Valley College in Wenatchee, Washington. His chapbook *A Mouthpiece of Thumbs* will be published by Blue Begonia Press.

JULIE LARIOS is a graduate student in the Creative Writing MFA Program at the University of Washington.

GARY FINCKE lives in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. BkMk Press will publish his *The Almanac for Desire* in June.

ANNE MARIE MACARI has just won The American Poetry Review/Honickman First Book Prize for her first book, *The Ivory Cradle*, which will appear in September.

ROY JACOBSTEIN lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

DOLSY SMITH is a student at Oberlin College in Ohio.

JAY NEBEL lives in Portland, Oregon.

JANE BAILEY is a registered nurse living in Salem, Oregon.

FLOYD SKLOOT lives in Amity, Oregon. His *The Evening Light* will be published by Story Line Press this fall.

OLIVER RICE is a former program planner for the Peace Corps and the Ford Foundation. He lives in Naples, Florida.

DIANE SEUSS teaches at Kalamazoo College. Her *It Blows You Hollow* was published in 1998 by New Issues Press.

DEANNA PICKARD lives in Dayton, Ohio.

JENNIFER KRONOVET is a student in the Creative Writing MFA Program at Washington University in St. Louis.

## Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 2000

MACLEOD-GROBE PRIZE: \$500

John Bensko for Two Poems (Spring 1999)  
and Three Poems (Winter 1999-2000)

BULLIS-KIZER PRIZE: \$200

Tina Kelley for Two Poems (Spring 1999)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$200

John Bargowski for Four Poems (Autumn 1999)

RICHARD HUGO PRIZE: \$200

Jane Bailey for Four Poems (Spring 1999)

