

# CAULDRON



SPRING/1969

Cauldron  
Spring/1969





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To Mrs. Jocelyn Agnew Camp

# Roland Grybauskas

today

today i will gather the pieces  
of bread i had once thrown  
to the pigeons and sparrows  
today i am hungry and  
quite tired  
of trying to keep my dreams  
together with Scotch brand magic  
tape and then seeing

the tape yellow and crumble  
and the edges of my dreams  
flapping;  
an insane window shade of my  
mind.

today i will take back the warm  
woolen shirts i had once given  
to the Salvation Army  
today i am cold and  
quite tired  
of loving every stranger  
who puts a smile in my parking  
meter and then seeing

the time run out and only  
slugs in the meter,  
the time ran out almost  
as fast as the strangers:  
my mind put up a red flag  
that sighed  
VIOLATION.

i was dying and there  
was this circus outside  
my window smiling

i was dying,  
outside my window  
a circus roared and  
laughed through my window  
and ten miles high a  
beautiful trapeze girl  
with snowflake hair swung  
on raindrops from cloud to  
cloud to cloud and she looked  
down at my window, smiled and fell.  
and the circus roared  
and the band was insane  
each man played a diamond  
trombone and one little boy  
with no eyes tapped a drum made  
of thunder and they all smiled as  
they marched past my window into a pit.  
and the circus laughed  
and the clowns held the candles with their silver  
teeth for they had no arms  
and their makeup was ashes and  
gasoline with giant painted tears  
they lit up my window and smiled as  
the candles burned their cellophane clothes.  
and the circus went mad  
and out ran the jugglers  
and the dancers and lay down  
under the singing iron elephants  
and the tightrope-walker walked a mile  
long snake and the ringmaster was my angel  
and they all smiled and inside my window i was  
dying and outside  
my window i was the  
circus.

## a plucked phoenix

into the heavy breath of the moon  
he flapped his arms  
a plucked phoenix but  
so beautiful in that night  
that was a wine for all of us  
he flapped figure eights,  
circles, pears, laughter,  
a plucked phoenix but  
so beautiful when he shouted  
to the sleeping asphalt the  
blinded windows the deaf and the  
dumb  
so beautiful when he shouted  
"I am a flaming asshole."  
he was so much above us  
being on the roof and high  
and we gave a four hour standing  
ovation we being outside  
and there being about zero seats  
and we all felt for his truth  
he spoke from his insides  
from his heart and liver  
and the roof and he flapped  
a plucked phoenix  
on and on he shouted  
draining himself of the truth  
that included not only us  
but all the deaf and  
dumb  
"I am a flaming asshole"  
and it had to be shouted to  
tell every tree every hydrant  
that has ever been pissed on  
and he flapped the night into  
a lazy flowing oatmeal so  
beautiful he should have  
been allowed to fly to  
keep the leaves of the giant oak  
out of his mouth that never  
stopped shouting  
and some time that night  
we began our flow of tears  
and gave a mighty round of  
soggy applause as he  
spoke for each of us so well  
he was our prince  
a plucked phoenix but  
what did we know of love then,  
he showed us, our prince,  
he gave us that much then  
the raisins of his words  
a plucked phoenix  
a flaming asshole.



David Weed

# Linda Schultz

8

She stopped among the shivering wet-glazed pines  
and shook —  
as if she, too, were jewelled with liquid ice.  
She had never said what he thought he had heard —  
She had touched his fingertips in pity  
his lusterless cheek in kindness  
but she had never said —  
Some serpent-minded spider had spun between the green needles  
a shred of mist and silver filigree  
now a swaying cluster of clinging crystals  
— an appealing trap.  
He was wrong, not she,  
and that's what she told him, too  
just before it rained.  
She stood barefoot now.  
Innocent  
in the mud the rain left  
and it oozed between her toes  
and communicated coldness to her soles.  
Her only crime was pity and she had never said  
— never meant to say —  
what he had heard.  
Her hand stretched toward the web  
and, trembling, descended  
without her consent  
on the evergreen eyelashes  
brushing away the rain-tears  
with ravaging tenderness.

# Cynthia Cahn

## Vita Nuova

I came here seeking  
light in darkness, running from the dawn,  
and stumbled on a morning.

— Maxwell Anderson (*Winterset*)

I have known  
one bronze-green blade  
that shaped my mind  
in pearl's cool splendor  
when earth's wings beating  
beneath my step  
would break the air  
to the rhythm of thunder.

Against the spread  
of the sun's desolation  
one soul like a prism  
of brilliant stone

raised a spectrum of joy  
ineradicably  
burned on the sky  
of my inner dawn.

Born of the structured  
ascent of steel  
I join this name  
to the strength of the tower:

and I have sung  
the one affirmation  
who struck my life  
to the peacock's fire.

## Delphi Again

Far from where the world  
will thrust its dragon's teeth  
into my breast

and where shadows will strive  
to bend my gaze toward the black  
ceremonies of granite

I laugh through this golden-emerald  
veil, cloth of the twin  
temples of heaven

and earth, that I wear to worship  
the god who wakes my voice once  
more, my thoughts

as strings stretched on the clean  
bone of my mind and trembling  
to his song

while the sun contains  
my life in a fiery  
shell of pearl.



Kenneth Dixon

# A Letter from Edward Field

The following letter from poet Edward Field was received by the editor this spring. Mr. Field was kind enough to answer a few questions concerning himself and his poetry. The questions directed to Mr. Field were these:

1. During your visit to Kalamazoo you differentiated between sentiment and sentimentality. Would you say something about their distinction.
2. As a poetess Diane Wakoski is particularly fascinated by various technical vocabularies. Do you have a favorite type of language?
3. The poems in your most recent book, *Variety Photoplays*, go to the movies for their plots. Would you comment on your attraction to the cinema.
4. What poets have most influenced your own poetry? Do you have a favorite poet?
5. What are you working on now?-

May 9, 1969

Dear Mark,

Your letter came while I was out west, and I just got back a few days ago. Here are some answers to the questions. If I have not been clear, or you have any more questions, write me again.

1. I don't like the distinction to be made between sentiment and sentimentality. It smacks too much of our Puritan tradition that divides us up into a good part and a bad part (spiritual vs. sexual). The important thing is that we should have all our feelings and not criticize them, but respect them as fully human. I have found a liberation in my poetry and in my life by accepting my feelings as me, and stopping the constant self-criticism using other people's standards as to what is right to feel and what is wrong. Before beginning to criticize we have to open ourselves to all our feelings. The trouble in life and the arts is that people who are afraid of their unacceptable feelings are the critics who want to limit things for everybody. Especially in poetry which needs to be opened up more and more, we must be careful not to apply such critical standards, and especially with young people who need to be developed as fully feeling adults.
2. I feel our language is in a very early stage of development. And I guess Diane Wakoski does too since the technical language is an aspect of the newness of our language, the invented words for new processes. And let's face it, our culture is going to get more and more technological as time goes on, so the language will have to reflect that.

But I'm more interested in finding a language for staying me in, and a language that will express an expanding range of feeling. Unfortunately the English language is a not very expressive instrument, not compared to a language like Greek (for example) which is full of love words and diminutives, ways of being affectionate. We have a language that embodies Puritanism, the tight little island, restraint of feelings, racism. So looking for a way of opening it up, of being Jewish though speaking English, I turn to a kind of childish language of the streets, an intimate family way of speaking. I address my poetry to the living child in us all. The black people will help shape our language a great deal in the future as their warm and earthy way of talking becomes more accepted.

3. Somebody said the other day that the Civil War and Hollywood were the two most important shapers of the American soul. Well, I agree with the Hollywood part anyway. Also slavery, the Indians, the great depression, the open immigration, etc. In the movies (which I feel is the major American art form after advertising) we see emerging the myths of our civilization. There you have the six basic American soul-plots, you might say. The movies takes stories, often old, sometimes new, and shapes them in our image. And we understand these movies very deeply. No one needs to explain them. In my poems on movie themes I have done very little analyzing or interpreting, as one would do, say, with a Greek myth. Just by defining the story, that is the work. I feel this has only been begun. Of course, in my poetry readings I do a little more explaining, like talking about the significance for us of the Frankenstein legend. There is an essay I wrote about this in the magazine *Understanding Poetry*. Anyway, I've always been very much a subject matter poet, although when I started writing seriously (in the late forties) poetry was very much in a formalistic phase. I like poetry to do many other things besides make pretty words. And I don't like the other literary arts to get all the good plots. I believe in taking back into poetry all the material and devices we have relinquished to the novel, story, play, news-story, etc. So I (and many other poets and artists) turn to the healthiest of the arts today, the movies, for ideas.

4. I've been influenced heavily by Auden, Spender, Cavafy, Tu Fu, Sholem Aleichem, J. L. Peretz, Whitman, Frost, Simenon . . . There must be more. I don't turn particularly toward English poetry, which is not my glass of tea on the whole. America has been focused on England much too much in my opinion (England has always represented Culture for us). Our English studies are a remnant

of our colonial status. I feel the greatest modern poet is Cavafy, and the greatest classical poet Tu Fu. They have more to give us than the whole English canon. I like very many of my contemporaries, from Ginsberg to May Swenson. But my favorite poet here and now is Millen Brand, a little-known poet who has been working for twenty years on a book called *Local Lives*, a thousand pages of poems about the people of a little town in Pennsylvania where "people love each other."

5. I'm working now on a few science-fiction poems, one about a race war, an attempt to make an entertainment out of this frightening situation we find ourselves in. Another of these will be coming out in *Kenyon Review* soon. Part of my epic poem, "Sex Stories: A Frieze For A Temple Of

Love," has just come out in an underground newspaper called *The N.Y. Review of Sex*. Other poems will appear soon in *Cafe Solo*, *New American Review*, *Stony Brook* (some Eskimo translations), and *Magazine* (a mimeo magazine). I wrote a children's play this year which I am trying to get done. This summer I hope to finish lots of my half-finished poems and have a new book which I think I'll call *SEX STORIES AND OTHER POEMS*.

Well, that's about it. Let me know if it's all right. I'll be away in Florida next week (my last trip this year) but otherwise I'll be here all through the summer, I think.

Best wishes,  
Edward Field

# An Interview with Diane Wakoski

The following interview with poetess Diane Wakoski took place last May during her visit to Kalamazoo. Miss Wakoski has published three books of poetry: *The George Washington Poems*, *Discrepancies And Apparitions*, and *Inside The Blood Factory*. She is now living in New York City. The interviewers are Jocelyn Agnew, Stephen Elwell, Conrad Hilberry and Mark Severs.

**Hilberry:** There are a lot of things I'd like to hear you talk about if you are willing to; I know you won't if you aren't.

**Wakoski:** You're absolutely right.

**Hilberry:** I'm really fascinated by the way George Washington works, sort of father, lover, and half the time you mean it and half the time you don't in a way. Can you say anything about him?

**Wakoski:** I don't know how I wrote the first George Washington poem, but as soon as I did I realized that I'd found something that could work as a device for me in structuring other poems since I frequently write poems about the various men in my life and my feelings for them, ambivalent and otherwise . . . Since poets are always looking for a means of participating in mythology and various ideas of their culture, it struck me that George Washington is a sort of omnipresent figure that none of us have any terribly personal associations with, but whom all of us know something about and have some associations with; it would be a perfect kind of figure to use, and because he isn't personalized I could view him with any characteristics that I wanted to. I could make him historic, and fit into his historical stereotype, or I could invent a character for him and it would be just as reasonable to people who weren't George Washington scholars, but who all felt some acquaintance with him, and at the same time it wasn't like inventing an entirely new character or having a different person in each poem. There is a sense that the consistency of my presence and my relationship to this person, even though it changed in every poem, gave him kind of a consistency also. I'll probably keep writing George Washington poems; I think that the whole quality of the George Washington mythology for us is partly that it's sometimes so ridiculous that we take it seriously, and at other times so ridiculous that it's ridiculous; and there's something about the whole existential way of looking at the twentieth century that makes us, at times, no matter how serious we are, just have to laugh at how silly everything is, and it's nice again to have a figure that's set up to do that. You can laugh at yourself at the same time you can cry and still be very serious about the world. After all, he **was** the first president and

stands for all of the things we structure our lives around; at the same time he was really an absurd, vain, foolish and somewhat weak man. It lends itself so well to the humanities—that's my fascination with George Washington. He's both the inadequacies and the special things that I look for in the world, and I find that when things are most serious and terrible you have to laugh at them too. I don't really write what I would call funny or comic poetry, but I am amused at how absurd the world is, and I like something serious too . . . maybe because it's so basically serious, you know, like the first president of the country, such a basically serious concept that you can keep laughing at it and it doesn't destroy its seriousness.

**Agnew:** What kind of things are you working on now?

**Wakoski:** Last year I was working on, and still am writing, some of a series of short-lined short poems which are oddities for me, called "Some Poems for the Buddhist Birthday." I like the idea of just trying to work with kind of abstract, short-bodied things as a contrast to the style that I like best, which is long, discursive and very imagistic, imagery based on a narrative. That's the kind of poetry that turns me on the most, and I'm happiest when I write what I feel. I needed just a simple kind of language, some variety for my own sense.

Now I'm putting together another book of poems, some of which I'm working on sort of on the theme of an elaboration of my theme about loss and betrayal. They're called the *Motorcycle Betrayal Poems*. I hope the book will be ready by the end of next June.

I love language from various technical vocabularies. I think that the exciting thing about being alive in the twentieth century is that we are aware of the physical structure of our reality and how everything spiritual, intellectual, emotional comes out of physical reality. I think that's what surrealism is all about. I think that is the materialism of the twentieth century, and that you can't really lead a full life until you accept that material basis. There are so many possible ways of understanding it, and, as I said, one of the things that turns me on is technical vocabulary, not so technical that people can't understand it, but technical vocabulary that becomes a pun on emotional vocabulary. The title of my book, *Inside the Blood Factory*, is a kind of a pun on the idea that the body is a factory for manufacturing blood. Traditionally, poets have talked about the emotions in terms of the heart, and I find that a very contemporary means of expression that most people don't have any trouble un-

derstanding: to use very concrete things, especially parts of the body, to talk about emotions, feelings and ideas, and abstract things that have their roots in this organism that we are; and I love any of the vocabularies that make those transitions. I like the idea that in computer technology the machines are called hardware and the humans are called software, things like that. I'm very turned on by that kind of vocabulary, and the way you can use it to talk about reality on its most literal and mundane level, and at the same time a level that we don't really want to be emotionally.

I love machines. I have no fear of them taking over the world, as I say in a poem. My only regret is that I'm not an efficient enough machine. I do feel that we are mechanical creatures, and if we understand the mechanics of how we work then the simplicities and complexities are really exciting. Machines are there to aid us and are a part of our lives. I thought that the movie *2001* was just a silly movie based on a very strange fear that machines will somehow run us. We are machines; of course they will run us. This whole business of "we are run by our animal natures" means that we are run by this machine in us that we can't control. Our problem is learning to control the machines and deal with their complexities. The idea that they are something alien to us is such a peculiar fantasy. I don't understand it at all.

**Hilberry:** One of the poems where you start to work out the blood factory image is "The House of the Heart," which I like a lot, and am perplexed by in some ways.

**Wakoski:** It's based on very ancient imagery. I'll tell you how I wrote the poem. I was in London and I visited the British Museum. I've been fascinated by Egypt and its history and mythology since I was in the sixth grade when we studied Egypt, partly because it's desert country, and desert is one of those images that runs through my poems a lot. I'm fascinated by the barrenness of the desert, because one of the things I talk about so much is loss: emptiness and loneliness and the difficulties of communication, in the sense of the alienation that we all have in the world, and especially the difficulties that are exemplified when two people try to love each other. And yet at the same time I feel that it's the most important thing in the world. And I suppose I'm fascinated by the idea of the desert because here's a place that seems so barren and so empty, and so severe, and yet look closely and it's so filled with life. Specialized life has learned to survive under these incredible conditions, and I think that reminds me of what our inner lives are all about. That's the challenge: that we all have to know how to function under the most difficult of circumstances, how to be that most delicate, sensi-

tive, funny creature that we are emotionally, and survive and not let it perish. Egypt fascinates me for that, and then, Egyptian mythology is such a beautiful thing. It turns me on very much. But anyhow, I was in the British Museum and just exulting over all these fantastic mummy cases with their carvings, and I discovered that they had a great many of them. They depict various mythological ideas of what the body will be doing when it enters the after-life, and they certainly have a very physical concept of going to an underworld.

One of the things that was consistently pictured was a figure who was supposed to be truth, who had a balancing scale, weighing the heart of the individual. If you'd been a good person, your heart would be light as a feather. Another concept is that it would be heavy from the good deeds that you had done, and consequently the practice of making a replica of the human heart and inscribing prayers on it, so that it would be filled with sacredness. I meant to look this up; sometimes I deal with impressionistic memories instead of fact. There was some sort of scripture or a book of common poetry that was connected with the Egyptian book of the dead, and it kept referring to the "house of the heart," which was obviously some sort of vessel that would hold these replicas of the heart that were inscribed. I loved the idea because again the heart is used traditionally to talk about the feelings, so I tried to gather together my impressions and talk about my feelings.

**Hilberry:** Do you want to say anything about the shoes?

**Wakoski:** Well, I suppose, associationally speaking, a lot of my imagery works on an associational level, which is why I think it is analyzable in the same way that dreams are analyzable. But you must try to analyze it in terms of association. The idea of dying, and for me this whole act of love's a kind of dying, and the Egyptian mythology and a lot of other mythologies with going underground to the underworld and obviously there is an association with the feet which walk on the ground, and since I associate feet with shoes, I'm very interested in containers for things. Shoes are containers you know. I guess I like the idea that there is almost no organic center and everything is covered by something else.

I am also fascinated by the fact that we think about reality both in terms of that which is most exterior and that which is most interior; so in either direction you are trying to go towards reality. The exterior reality and the interior reality oftentimes seem so different, paradoxically different in that there are two ways of trying to approach reality. One is to try to go as deeply inside yourself subconsciously as you can, to get to that core, that

center, that's you. I talk a lot about masks for the same reason, and roles, in the sense that people are looking for the real self, the real you, and at the same time they're playing roles in the world. And the more often they play the roles the more that becomes the real self, and so again there is the sense of exterior and interior, and maybe they're really the same, or two ways of looking at the same thing. They are the reality. I think that's partly what surrealism is all about, trying to see the different surfaces of things both interiorly and exteriorly; and one somehow sees that they are all facets of reality.

**Hilberry:** How about the insistence in that poem on your own shoes? It seems to me that the poem keeps saying that the journey must be taken in the shoes that you've come in, and that if the sun and the moon are going to come into the house of the heart they'll have to take off their shoes.

**Wakoski:** I suppose that's some sort of insistence on my identity. I certainly do that in all of my poems. I'm very concerned about people making commitments to life, and to their own identity, and choosing them and sticking to them, even when it's hard, because I think that all of life is about those commitments. It doesn't really matter what they are, in a funny way. I hate bandwagon personalities. I'd rather talk to a solidly convinced Ku Klux Klanner, I think, who doesn't believe in anything that I believe in but who can tell you why he believes that and is really committed to it and lives his life that way, than someone who goes along with my beliefs but has no idea why he does and would go along with the next beliefs when they're popular and so forth. I really believe that the only rewarding way of life, even if it's very hard, is a life of commitment, and so I'm constantly insisting on that kind of identity, and that kind of arrogance which I think is meaningful in the world, hubris almost. But even if you know its terrible consequences you must live with it because that is the only way to be the fullest self, in that Oedipus would have been less of a man if he hadn't acted out all those things in the way that he did; and of course his wonderful triumph is his realization of his punishment of himself and acting it out again. I so much believe in that kind of committed way of life as you see it even though you can see more expedient ways of doing things.

**Severs:** I notice in your poetry that most of the images, most of your concerns, seem to separate themselves into the masculine and feminine: sun and moon, or Amen-ra and Isis; and most of the men, speaking of commitment, seem to be traveling somewhere in a silver Ferrari, taking off and leaving. I wonder if you could say something about the sexual commitment.

**Wakoski:** Well, first of all, I do see the world in that twentieth century union where everything is sexual. This is actually a very ancient way of looking at the world, which is why I am interested in ancient things like astrology, and so forth. I see all the world and everything including people being made up of the masculine and the feminine, a very oriental idea, the yin-yang. The good world, the good person, the good object is that which balances the two. We live in a culture where it is very hard for a wholeness to exist. It is very hard for the truly masculine to be expressed in certain situations, very hard for the truly feminine to be expressed in certain situations, and exceedingly hard to try to balance them in your lives. Then I carry this even further: we have such a hard time balancing it in our own lives that we have an even harder time trying to make these relationships in the exterior world in terms of a woman relating to a man. I do think that's the only kind of complete life, in that marriage is the most wonderful thing in the world. I don't mean legal marriage; I mean real marriage. I have nothing against legal marriage; it's to back that up, and I see that as the truly fulfilled state, because I don't see any of us as complete without our masculine or feminine counterparts, husband and wife. I've been very unlucky in my life in finding this kind of balance and in spite of my problems I still believe it's the only way, and I continue to look for it and I won't be satisfied until I do find the right man to spend the rest of my life with. I believe in sexual commitment, trying to find that balancing in your life, and once you've found it, of course, it is not easy to maintain, and I believe in trying to maintain it, and still to exist in a society that doesn't very much foster easy traditions for maintaining it at all. I think, in a funny way, in spite of what you might draw from my sort of feminist sounding poems, I see our culture as being much harder on men than on women, which is one of the reasons that I insist on a certain kind of feminine assertion of what they are, what women are, because in a funny way I think that it would be easier for women to deal with the commitments of their sex, and once that kind of civility really were settled it might make it a lot easier for men. For instance, Western culture doesn't allow a man to show any kind of weakness; now anyone who knows anything at all about psychology in the simple sense knows that a person who covers up his weaknesses can never become strong, because all he's doing is protecting the weaknesses and keeping them there to just fill in the hole. He may develop a strong shell, but that can usually be penetrated by some new ICBM missile and underneath there's nothing. And traditionally women had a cultural situation where they're allowed to be weak, and just in being allowed to show their weaknes-

ses they can find out where they are and then build them and turn them into strengths. So traditionally the woman has this kind of interior strength, her hold-on-ness that even shows biologically, because now we acknowledge that women are biologically superior; they are hardier organisms, and so forth.

They probably are psychologically stronger now too, simply because they've culturally been allowed to develop in a healthy way. Now I'm not saying that all men are this way and all women are this way, but I'm saying that the cultural roles that we play make this a greater possibility. I suppose that just in terms of my own life too, if you look at the world being filled with masculine and feminine counterparts, opposites, magnetisms, attractions, the fact that because I am fairly obviously, to most people who meet me, a strong person, I probably attract a very large share of weak people. There's a very big share of that kind of weakness that I've experienced from other people in my own life where I've had to be the strong person. A feeling of anger comes constantly with the strong having to be sacrificed to the weak, which is basically a contradictory idea and yet that's frequently what happens in the culture: the strong person or the strong thing goes out to defend the weak and the weak is protected and the strong one gets killed in the fight. And that's a very funny way to set up a culture but Western civilization is sort of based on that. And I resent often having to play the role of the strong one, because again I think there should be a balancing in the world. You should be able to alternate these roles in your life, and to a certain extent we all do. When it starts overshadowing your life you begin to wonder why.

**Severs:** I was thinking of Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* in that respect.

**Wakoski:** Yes, that's certainly true. There's a psychotic woman who absorbs the whole personality of this strong man and they reverse roles completely.

**Severs:** And he seemed to see exactly the same thing in American culture.

**Wakoski:** I don't know if it's just American culture. I certainly see it because I'm totally immersed in American culture, and I'm willing to express what I know. I have very much deliberately stayed involved in American culture and have no desire to travel other places or learn other languages or read other literature, because I feel that my strength is to be here and in touch with what I live.

**Severs:** I noticed that there was an American flag in "The Ice Eagle." I was wondering if that was a particularly American criticism.

**Wakoski:** Well, it certainly was meant as particularly American criticism; again it may extend further. I don't know; I'm willing to make it as

American criticism, because that's what I see. Basically, a culture that glorifies certain kinds of masculinity turns into a homosexual, man-loving, and therefore not complete culture. Again this is what I see in George Washington: a stereotype of a man who seemingly had no real emotional relationships in his life. You know, whatever latter day scholars have decided about his sex life is probably just the 1960's titillation of the idea that everybody had his secret sex life; he may not have. I'm not totally convinced by all their racy stories about G.W.'s visits to the slave quarters. It is really quite possible that he was the type of man with very little sexual outlet, a man who spent his life with other men, and saw women only socially, and didn't really know how to relate to anything feminine in the culture, and was a deprived, weak person, in human terms, even though he was gloriously the first president of the country in social terms.

**Severs:** So you would view homosexuality as essentially a cop-out.

**Wakoski:** Oh, definitely, that's exactly the word I was thinking of. I have nothing against sexual homosexuals in the sense that I believe that people have to live the way they have to live, but I do have a certain snobbish attitude about them: that they have somehow refused to face one of the most difficult situations in the world. If you constantly have trouble in your relations with the opposite sex, as I certainly do, it would be an easy answer to say, well okay, why should I knock my head against the wall, but I think that's also denying a part of yourself that makes you into a more full and better human being; and again, I believe in the people that will make the struggles instead of living a safe somewhat successful life. And I don't think you can make an argument that homosexuals can't become good artists or good historians. There are plenty of examples to prove otherwise. I wish I could make that argument. I know I'd feel like I had more of an historical strength behind what I'm trying to say. I'm always looking for ways to find weaknesses in homosexual poetry, like one doesn't really talk about the essential things in life, but that's not true. It's just that I see it as a cop-out from the real life, and I've discovered much to my dismay that a good life doesn't necessarily make good art; but I think it is important both to try to make a good life for yourself and be a decent human being, and to try to be a successful one, and that probably both of them are very important, and I don't have any less respect for a good artist who's a rotten human being, on any kind of superficial level, but inside I really do. I keep saying why aren't you a better person; you ought to be. I'm stuck with that old humanist tradition; it's not terribly fashionable now, but I believe in it.

**Severs:** Well, it seems that in a society where everyone is polarizing or assuming roles or masks, it's very hard to eliminate all of them.

**Wakoski:** Yes, and yet it's very important. Again, this is part of a duality that I see as being the nature of reality: the most impossible things are the most important things to strive for, and even if you allow yourself the intellectual realization of it, there's no way it could be accomplished, but if you stop trying to accomplish it you make your life a lot less. Again, I think that's what existentialism is all about: going beyond a point and saying that there are no values here, so I'm going to create my own; but to go to the point and say that there are no values, therefore I'm not going to live with any values, I don't think is, at least for our civilization, very valid, and I don't see any point in departing from that.

**Severs:** I particularly like the humor in many of your poems. It's a way of dealing with nihilism. Saul Bellow does the same thing; he just laughs. Could you say something about the way you use humor?

**Wakoski:** I have to relieve myself from all this sober seriousness. For heaven's sake, if we couldn't laugh at our lives . . . Again, I don't see this as entertainment or a cop-out from life, which I do see certain kinds of humor as, and certain kinds of entertainment as. I see it as seriousness carried to that most extreme point that is illustrated physiologically: when you get so tense you either laugh or cry. It's just a physiological reaction. And maybe you can do both simultaneously.

**Elwell:** If you can react to yourself or the things in society it's a sort of negative power, and you are in an infinitely more superior position if you can reduce them to a laughter. You can deal with them more easily and efficiently.

**Wakoski:** Again, here's one of these dualities that's absolutely necessary. Somehow you have to extract yourself from a situation so that you can keep going and make a progress out of life. I mean that you can't get so dragged down underneath the swamp that you can't get back up and make another step. At the same time you can't allow yourself to be the kind of person who's totally abstracted from things, who never feels them, who's the desensitized human being, because that's just as static a situation as being trapped.

**Elwell:** The laughter to negate your weakness without really dealing with it.

**Wakoski:** Right! it's the process that's important, and the one thing to avoid is somehow that static condition where nothing is possible.

We have a very peculiar society which puts down materialism yet is basically a materialistic culture, and if you understand it I think there are ways of trying to live with it. At

times you'll be usurped by it, but we use our materialism sometimes in the worst possible way, not to really perceive the nature of reality and appreciate and be turned on by it, and to love it, but to insulate ourselves from it. The typical bourgeois surrounds himself with his home and his television set, and his car and everything, in a funny way not to appreciate and enjoy everything that's beautiful, but to insulate himself from all these most powerful reactions that occur in the world. We all have the tendency to do this. I mean, at any point in your life when you're hurt and that's every other minute, you're figuring out some way to insulate yourself from getting hurt again, and it is necessary. It's a part of the progress and the process to be insulated for at least long enough that you don't get demolished when you step out to make the next step to go to the next place. It's like fighting a battle. I mean you have to, you know, be covered up, until you get into the position where you can do the next thing, and I suppose that I see life very much in . . . because I see it as a duality. I see the process of life as a constant process of trying to balance it, of making yourself sensitive enough that you feel things, yet at the same time desensitizing yourself enough that you're not just wiped out by it. It's constantly balancing this in the world, and I don't think that any of us are ever any more than kind of teetering like the clown in the circus.

I went to the circus last week. In some ways the best acrobats in the circus are the clowns whose acts are to walk across the high wire, you know, swaying way off to this side and seeming every minute you know as if they're going to fall, which is the hardest thing to do: to be in control, in that kind of balancing. And I suppose that's the way we try to conduct our lives: sometimes we fall, and sometimes there is no net there. It was interesting that this Ringling Brothers Circus was a three ring circus. They have two of them. The one that I saw had a lot of aerial acts in it, and some of them made no bones about it. They use nets, and they were obviously less experienced than the other acts who did far more daring things and had no nets. There was one act; it was a Mexican act, where they had one extremely fine trapeze artist and several pretty good ones, and they had a woman in the act who was either brand new or else wasn't very good, or she was going through a period when she was nervous. Probably she was new, and she fell in the performance that I saw, but of course she fell onto the net. It was interesting; everyone applauded her. They liked seeing man's humanity, and of course they were wise enough to have a net because they thought she might fall, I guess. But the people who didn't have nets — you never really felt that they were likely to fall.



*Moses Thompson*



Moses Thompson

# Michael Saxby

## The Death of an Old Sailor

"For an instant I stood like the man who,  
pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless  
afternoon long ago in Virginia, by summer  
lightning; at his own warm open window he  
was killed, and remained leaning out there  
upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one  
touched him when he fell."

Melville — *Bartleby*

I. One imagines what he saw  
in those dying days  
three hundred miles from home —  
Everyday he stood there,  
a warm place by the oaken frame,  
smoking an old weather marked  
pipe of many salt years,  
seeing perhaps the grain waving  
capped as the bold thresher  
searching for whales  
cuts and reaps the yellow stemmed fish.  
Or perhaps "timber" sounding  
"Thar she blows" to his crusted ears,  
he saw wooden whales,  
stripped of their blubbery bark,  
blanching white in the saw-cutting sun.

Yes, one imagines what he saw  
in those dying days  
three hundred miles from

tempest nights surrounding  
the prowling smallness of his wooden world.

He had thought on God  
in those remembered days;  
compared the endless blue  
to the eye of a larger mask.  
He had ridden on God's back  
to God's winds  
to capture and kill  
the life God gave him  
in sacrifice for heroic deeds.  
From Cabin-boy to Captain  
he had climbed the oily chain;  
understood why he was alive  
and why he went to sea.

But now three hundred miles from home  
wearing a wind cracked mask,  
a mask that housed another mask  
until his masks were one  
looking upon his son's Virginian farm,  
imagining as one imagines himself  
standing, rolling in his cabined shell,  
eyes stretching always endlessly  
towards the rolling sea.

One imagines he imagined . . .



## Cosmic Crossfire at OK Corral

Fat glistening from wrinkled thighs,  
protruding belly, he slumbers in walk.  
Slowly stepping sandalled feet  
pagoda style, big Buddha is hunting.

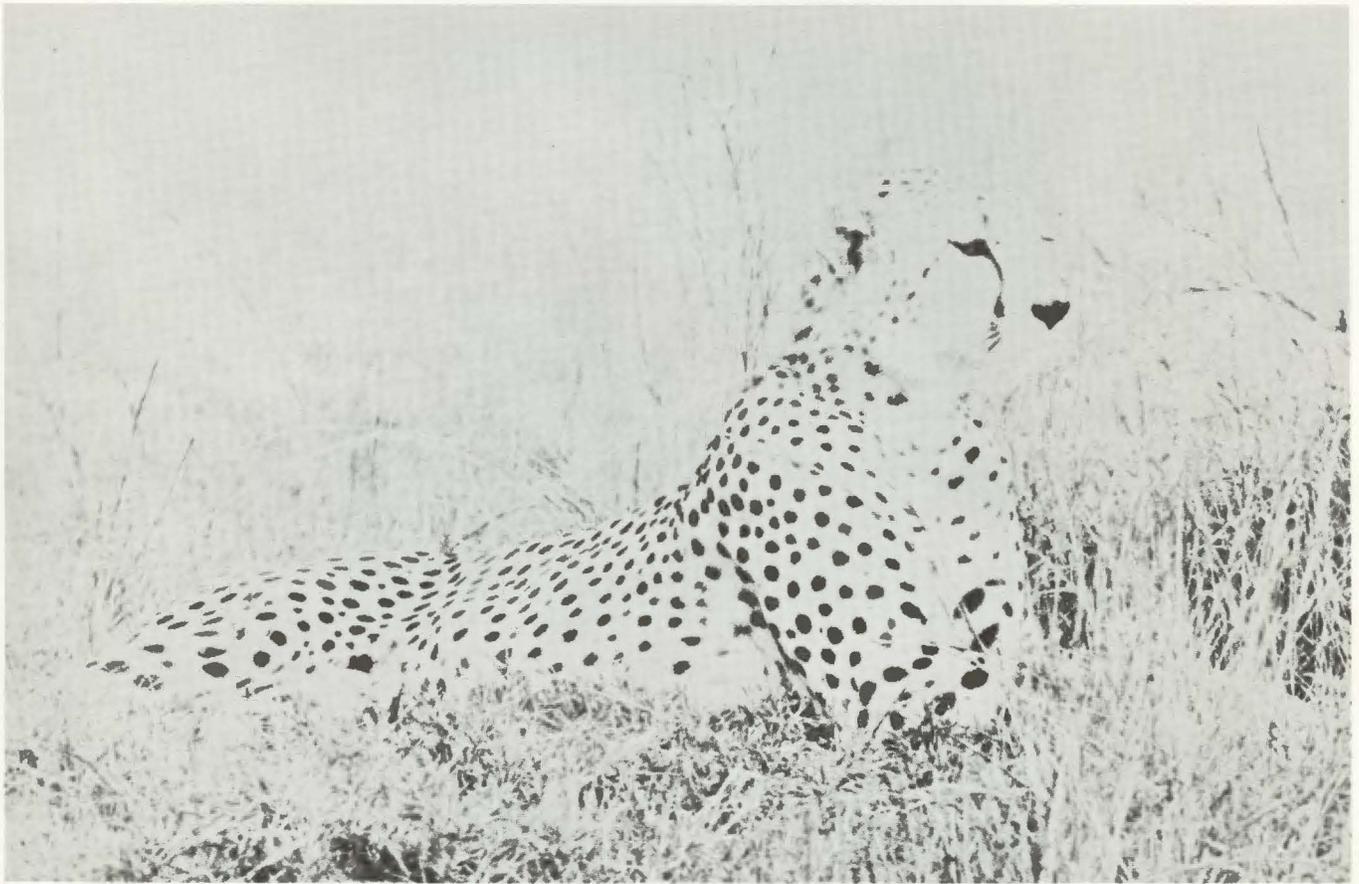
Two metal six guns barely visible  
angrily roll from his hips.  
He lumbers squat low, close  
to the ground — covered with dust  
catching sweat, he grows brown.

“Big Buddha, Big Buddha, you’re hunting for me,”  
a transparent voice thumps Buddha’s belly.

Buddha grunts, smiles, and  
mentally raises his imminent mind.  
Above him high: soft viewless  
vision, smoked man appears.  
Buddha feels the soundless  
laughter grow red on his belly.

“I am God,” it thumps again.

Buddha big belly bubbles  
“banal boogy butt”  
and draws with lightning loquaciousness.  
Ohm-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m  
his polished pistols ring out:  
soundless one, all in one.  
The smoke clears, the thump falls,  
transcendant God just lost his balls.



Moses Thompson

# Jocelyn Agnew

## Until

Winters flicker by now  
like old film  
quick patterns of dark branches  
against white, scenes  
dissolve  
One winter I looked  
at my black boots in the snow  
and was happy  
This winter I dreamed  
my head was severed  
from my body  
and secured again with threads  
I balanced it gingerly  
and sat down  
gently, I  
picked up a hand mirror  
and traced the red line  
I was relieved to see my face  
still the same

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## Sleeping All Afternoon

Mozart's notes  
drop and  
splash  
in the sunlight  
But the tropical fish  
that sometimes swim through my window  
are embarrassed by this  
delicacy;  
they are afraid their colors  
may be too bright.  
You are not here  
but your hand is on my breast  
like a feather.

I was born into the formal gardens of South Carolina  
where camellias bloomed all winter in order to float,  
scentless and elegant,  
in countless drawing rooms.  
In spring, the tops of the pines  
dripped with the light lavender grace of wisteria,  
loveliest of parasites.  
My mother showed me a trellis weighted with roses  
and told me the red strain had killed the white one.  
I was terrified.  
And at Kalmia Gardens, steep paths led down past  
banks of fuschia azaleas and tangled vines  
to a black river, stained by the roots of cypress trees.

# Paul Friedrich

## Paper Puddles

The peeping mini-frogs  
Create a musical buzz,  
Except it was a little cold yesterday  
And the suckers weren't running  
— yet,  
But the river's down,  
Just a little dark —  
Paper puddles  
And soggy cardboard fields  
And porcelain painted creeks —  
While the Daphnia hatch  
And the green Fairy Shrimp carry orange eggs;  
And we on a square log  
In a stuffy clean swamp  
Organizing ripples  
On paper puddles.

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# Ted Spencer

## The Bumper Man

He did? Well I'll be damned!  
I won't believe it till before me I see  
On this God's fair Earth, with salt spray and sand,  
That the bumper man has quit, risen again.  
For eight years he toiled, beneath the chromed  
Alpha and omega of four wheeled death.  
Without passion he introduced steel to steel,  
And (with seventy-five pounds of pressure) made them fast friends.  
But one morning a revelation must have come.  
Life is more than finishing only to begin again,  
And by God's grace, world without end  
Now he makes tail-lights, and drinks bad gin.



Kenneth Dixon

# Leon Raikes

## This Different Mind

I.

Then there are the afternoons of rain.  
I stop as all else moves,  
content  
without a motion of my own.  
Only therein moves.  
The rain in the wind and  
the wind in the rain:  
darkness I can see coming  
out of the south into the valley of dust,  
steaming all about the mountains,  
moving.  
The visible wind  
moving.  
The slanting wind.

II.

Even the air goes green.  
Dust settled and silenced.

I will remember this,  
this moment of birds  
as the clouds break,  
this instant of smell  
when even the sand promises.  
I will remember this  
when I have need of passing here again;  
when as I stop the dust  
tastes bitter in my nose.

I will remember this,  
that even the air goes green.

## It Will Suffice

I.

An open window  
is a revelation of sorts.  
In the small hours  
that walk, the leather-skinned beasts,  
there is the half wind;  
motion through dry grass  
of visible sound.

II.

I too will do that complicated juggling  
of patterns,  
that superimposing of form on form,  
the densing of incredible design.  
I can do no else.  
I am resigned to it.  
Resigned to the noon of seem  
With a tie and a clean shirt.  
I smile in a summer suit  
and am friendly to strangers.

III.

I must all this  
because a platitude  
(to do or die)  
is ceaselessly closed to interpretation.  
But at night  
when I watch into the street  
hearing footsteps climb out of the wind,  
I am this different mind,  
this disciple of the wind,  
this dry and simple poet of the grass.

## The Smile of the Moving

The moon is the memory of the earth,  
the alter-luminescence of the soil,  
the pale imagination of

the midnight water.  
But the moon is red,  
dull and small between the fleshy clouds.

The lavender nausea  
is the axis of the earth,  
the law of the repeating moon.

In the pale green morning  
of cool fogs and greasy movings  
the woman walks as it had never been.

The white moon,  
the moon of the mists,  
will soon be sun.

Blue water  
the soapy music,  
the violet anticipation.

The sun comes  
everywhere into every corner,  
a frothing rinse.

The body smile,  
the heat of black soil  
among the stones

and the simple thing  
of thinking green.  
He brings the seed.

The moment of soil  
and sun.  
The vermillion smile.

# Conrad Hillberry

## Artisans

One puts together  
A face  
Working it up out of scraps  
Of bark or bone, pitch, cornhusks,  
Even the rind of walnuts  
Or a knot of weeds.  
The lucky ones find a bit  
Of clay or limestone.

Often it comes out well —  
A remarkable likeness.

The making sometimes takes years.  
Quick hands are a help  
And a sense of symmetry.  
The trade is passed on  
In families and countries,  
But training is not everything.  
I know a woman  
Who, on the first try,  
Equalled the work  
Of fifth-generation journeymen.

## I Live in the Detroit Metropolitan Airport

Public eyes, circular, look out  
With indiscriminate radiance  
From the sound-proofed ceiling.  
A squad of chairs present themselves,  
Heads back, elbows linked. A Toronado  
Revolves suggestively  
But the open doors reveal  
Nothing, front or back,  
But vinyl and the usual apparatus.

This is where I live now, and the place  
Inhabits me, like an ambitious tenant installing  
Dishwasher, bar, stainless sink,  
Panelling the walls, laying plush

Carpet under my feet. I study the strange spaces  
Wondering where the bathroom went, the cupboard.  
Where can I touch myself in the hard  
Glaze of this skin? I straighten my vest

And follow a bodiless voice — oracle? meter maid?  
Chicken Little? Which of us conceived  
This labyrinth? Was it evening or morning when I left  
My home? A stranger, why am I not afraid?

"Trans-World-Airlines Jet Stream Service for Los Angeles  
now boarding at Gate 36. All aboard, please." The female  
voice easing up and down as if it were administering artificial  
insemination.

Then, inexplicably, shoots break from below —  
A clutch of grass springing where the floor is ajar,  
Ivy snaking in at the window,  
Moss greening the north side of pillars.

That is to say, a fat young priest in green  
Glasses and a grey suit, poses with his pipe,  
Clerical — then, weakening, slips a dime in a machine  
And peels Mr. Goodbar out of his wrap.

Dandelions, tendrils of morning glory.  
Even the tapered overcoat that talks  
Conglomerate is crowned by a hat so natty  
It smirks like the sunflower on top of the National Bank.

Outside the window, prodigious jets snake along the runway,  
raise their heads to a pricking angle, and ease into the sky.

Narrow trousers and thin briefcases clutched  
As though they held maps to these blind arms and alleys.  
But, still, blooms of nine-bark, sparrows, towhees.  
Coming in, a soldier hugged

By his father, a huge man, smiling in  
His flesh. Beaver's teeth in the rhododendron.  
A man in a jacket opens a cigarette machine  
And stoops to reload — a small Italian

With a thermos of coffee, he counts packs  
Of Kools in a tunnel of Muzak.  
Cheered, I scratch on the terrazzo with my stick  
Writing JUMP in invisible letters. I slump and watch.