

Kalamazoo College

CAULDRON

Spring 1977

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Editors: **Andy Angelo**
Diane Seuss

Prohibition

The dry air strikes up from the ground like a wall
We have survived twenty wineless days
The children sit, scraps in the shade, voiceless with thirst
Their tears dry like raisins in the heat
Old people wait, listless flags in the desert
Listen, Moses is born
But he is laid away among the rushes
One day he will crack open his white childhood,
Crack through to you sinners in Ohio
But you will be underground,
Sand curved around you like a dead mother,
The dust devils will whirl over this your grave,
Spit burns at your survivors
My mother bends into the oven,
She lingers near the edge
We have nothing to eat but sand,
The desert consumes us
Father digs through the dunes
Men are valiant, mother says
The river has left not even a ghost
To terrorize the town
Next door the Jews chatter in an alien tongue
As familiar as our own
When the rains come we will cry and dance,
Populate the schools, the gardens and churches,
Catch it through the necks of our wine-flasks
Let it settle down our throats like grace
This we whisper under the porch, out of the sun
As the dogs lie in the yard, swollen tongued,
As Moses wails in the rushes.

by Louise Bacon

Ockham's Razor

In the bottom of my father's toolbox,
In faded, flattened oblong frames,
The recorded war bleeds from the half of a head,
Sliding off the photograph into obscurity
That was a minor Nazi operation,
That camp perched like a pigeon feather on the map of Poland
Fifty human souls and some buckets of wire
Ockham's ancient rule
Burns it down to the simplest equation,
Plucks out the hairs of the victims
One by one
Plucks off men and swallows them like berries
Till only one remains,
The metaphor for all,
The empty half of the empty whole.
This is the end of all weeds, all wars,
The yellow heads mown off.
Through that black box the death is funneled;
Uninverted as the eye would do,
It is a silent constellation.

by Louise Bacon

The wooden Buddha
laughs,
and is cracked from
head to lotus feet--
but not broken.

In early Japan
light came from bamboo lanterns.
Yo gave blind man one
so others could see his way.
Bumped into, his light was out.

by Jim Ketelaar

Acts As A Go Between

It does indeed.
But is never found under the lights
Nor in the program.
A stage hand has the major role,
An awkward inarticulate
Who stumbles
Into the fragile script.
The go between
Serves to save a little theme
In the midst of all this plot.
It spreads its Garden arms,
The overflowing cup in sight.
It addresses the director,
Christ-like, for the drunken cast.
It is intimate
With the audience.
It knows the playwright well.

by Eva Fernandez

The spiral turns in space and has no state.
It lifts the sun, then twirls us into night.
We occupy ourselves. We quickly wait.

We all are sprung from Eve. The fruit she ate
Must shout its horrid wisdom, force our sight.
The spiral turns in space and has no state.

As fish we love this hook. We are the bait.
Seductively we dangle in the light.
And occupy ourselves. We quickly wait.

We tell ourselves the mad hallucinate.
But their transcendent spin is whole and tight,
The spiral turns in space. It has no state.

We run the wheel and pray we won't be late.
And this diurnal running is a fight
To occupy ourselves, to quickly wait.

The dual face of spinning is our fate.
We circling fish are black and yet are white.
The spiral turns in space and has no state.
We occupy ourselves. We quickly wait.

by Eva Fernandez

Freetown

swollen mothers, swollen babes
this fertile land
that cannot feed itself
what is the life-line
that keeps your
dark eyes alive

the Harmattan wind sweeps
up the mountain's midnight daze
of a dead town
waiting for markets
to slide into streets
when the wanting comes;
they wait for us
whose skin speaks money
they wait
with crooked limbs;
a gnarled hand grasps
my petty coin
and by the waterpump
another umbilical cord
is pulled too hard
and cut, leaving the long
rubber-like protrusion,
another mouth
open as a wet wound,
and i am nullified by

silver which pours out of my
nostrils and ears and mouths
and into their mouths, their
One Mouth

these streets are their lives,
stretched before them,
the bed by the gutter, the gutter
their latrine, the waterpump
to bathe and drink from.
At night, the city is empty
except for these, whose homes are
made in front of the Fullah shops.
A babe nestles its head by the
orange rinds, his father
curls up behind a crate, his mother
sings to herself and her babe on her back,
and to the last coin's candle which
burns swiftly in the Harmattan
she always lives in fear
of the last flame blowing out,
but there is always light behind the
dark opaque bowls of her eyes
that memorize the cracks in the streets
and each coin i should have given

by Mary Ellen Geist

Night's Voyage

That night I came back
from Mackinac Island
on the deck of a slow freight.
Westbound for the mainland.

Sitting on cold porcelain,
the running water rubs
my wrinkling thighs.
Bathing me.
I am still
so as not to disturb
currents rushing round
islands of breasts chin knuc'
'kles knees,
tips of an iceberg;
my body will not float.

Rushing, running through
the sheets of water.
I wanted to swim the rest of the voyage.
The water is clean and warm.
I catch on one of the empty barges
following the mother boat.
I am tired.

As the waters deaden,
I slip out
in a red swirl in and
around the distant, wavering
outline. Red blood
like my mother before me,
and hers before her;
the red of wounds
and invisible cuts given me.
Hurt, I cry to my hands to
help me,
but they do not struggle.

The barge fins and cracks
to the side of mother boat.
Only boat is whale
expansive as water
And I am on one of the tail bones.
The water melts to lapping.

Slowly the islands sink.
They are being swallowed by
a Red Sea whose smooth arms
cradle me down
down to a still bottom.

Carry me Carry me
home on the bone barge.

by Abi Chou

After the room had ceased
in its mad shuffle to undo
After the avocado plants had completed
the dance of their jungle fathers
After the spinning refuse died about
the standing figure and the room
returned to its slow heaving
I cried 'Shaww Shaww'
to every traipsing dustball
in deserted corners
'Shaww Shaww'
and they heard.
'Shaww Shaww'

by Abi Chou

In Attics' Wastelands

sit still and taunt, white fur,
your taxidermist is deceased.
sit still stretched across a wooden frame
and watch your hair fall out.

You must sit still
even when the pigeons mock you;
your paws are bound,
dangling from a spider's noose.
armed, the four winds run as one
of a wild herd
over the earth's white face.
They are blind fingers who search
for fissures
where earth separates from earth,
constantly restitching the aging mask.
when a baby seal loses its mother,
when it calls with a sound that is small
its then when the winds
laugh their harshest
and chant in redundant round,
'dust to flesh, flesh to dust;
you belong with us',
soon to rock the babe asleep.
though its pale soul sings,
it should remember it sleeps
in the earth's attic
where skins are preserved.

by Abi Chou

Maria Odium

Seeing you again
Your glittering coolness
Masking the undertow of currents
You are as I always knew you were
I know the phantom hunters
That haunt your depths
The silent wings of manta
And shiny eel's eye
I've glided there blindly
Knowing only the pulse of your heaving
The warm rush like breath on my flanks
Indifferent to your traps and lairs
The bodies you cast up each day
To dry and stench along your shores
(Even then you try to hide them,
pulling them back into vagueness,
sucking them into the sand to rot)
Yet I have returned
Plunged head-first into your grey stillness
Feeling your fingers close over me
Lull me to calmness, numbness
Until I feel the movements
As though they were my own
I have given up the earth, the sky
For your clouds of fish
And caves of sand
I have denied the sun
For the cool phases of the moon.

by Suzanne Jones

Outside, against the pane
rain drops gather quietly.
There is no thunder.
Likeness draws them and they merge and fall.
Regarding their passage she stands
elbow deep in lukewarm water
then wrings the cloth,
her hands greyed and wrinkled at the tips.
She considers a canvas on the wall,
signed with her maiden name,
a painting of fishing nets
drying in open air
catching the sun before the sea.
It lies beyond, vast, unbroken.
Now, a baby wails, her seventh child,
the seventh angel trumpeting the end.
She bends to him.
He is wet.

by Ann Hobart

The Butterfly Dance

Imagine if you will, the young son
Tall and shining as a church spire
he stands above others with his school books
and flashing eyes, that seem to warn: 'Children Go Slow'
And then perhaps you can see, you'll have to look hard,
The sister behind him, brown as an immigrant,
faded in the shadows.
She is barefoot and willful as a dandelion
She would leave go her conventional wisdom to go to the wilds
if she didn't have to give him up with it.

And he, standing to cry down to her,
tries to save and protect her:
For she eats the rotted apples dirty from the ground
and chases the wasps from Black-Eyed Susan
to Queen Anne's lace
She can be heard crying over her shoulder:
"My fortunes are in the wild asparagus"
Tumbling and rolling through the hills she stops to
stare back at his lone figure.

Later you will see them walk to dinner, shoulder to shoulder
He lures her there
with his butterfly in a glass bottle.
She is docile as the setting sun,
and will sleep all through the bedtime story.

by Elizabeth Huetteman

New Poems
by
Conrad Hilberry

The Goat

The goat hungers. Everything that lies
in his way, he devours. He crams
into himself a universe of grass,
shrubs, debris, and yesterday's goats.
Yet everything remains. Coming over
the shoulder of the hill, you see
the uncut grass, the sumac, discarded shirts
and cereal boxes, just as they were,
and, tethered in place, the goat--
innumerable goats, all chewing.

*Previously appeared in **Field**

The Happy Man

The grass comes green with less astonishment
this year, tomatoes ripen to a less
convincing red. He wonders why. The leeks
still shoot their wide tails in the air
and carrots swell to the moist loam.
The soup must be the same. But somehow it
has gone to sleep on his tongue.

He used to believe
that happiness must lie in the perfection
of a few choice goods. But now perfection pales.
Does Nature like an envious governor
lay a surtax on the happy man
diminishing his pleasure year by year?
He feels his satisfaction growing tired
even as he admires his favorites,
the bronze chrysanthemums along the walk
that bloom as solid as the heads of nails.

* Previously appeared in
Three Rivers Poetry Review

A Christmas Poem

I

No one here is old enough. The father
if that's what he is, stands awkward as a stork.
The mother does not know whether to smile
or cry, her face beautiful but ill-defined
as faces of the young are. Even the ass
is a yearling and the sheep mutter like children.
To whom shall I hand this myrrh that has trailed
a bitter breath after it over the desert?

I am tired of mothers and their milky ways,
of babies, sticky as figs. I have left a kingdom
of them. There must be some truth beyond
this sucking and growing and wasting away.
A star should lead an old man, you would think,
to some geometry, some right triangle
whose legs never slip or warp or aspire
to become the hypotenuse. Instead, this star
wandering out of the ecliptic has led us
to dry straw, a stable, oil burning in
a lamp, a mother nursing another mouth.

II

Creation is the only axiom
and it declines to spell itself across
the sky in Roman letters. Some events
are worth a journey, but there are no
abstract fires or vague births. Each fire
gnaws its own sticks, and the welter of what is
conspires in this, a creation you can hold
in your hands, a child. Yet a definite baby
squalls into life, skids from between the legs
of a definite woman, bedded in straw on the longest
night of the year. And a certain star burns.

Apprehension

"Even the dim apprehension of some great principle
is apt to clothe itself with tremendous emotional forces."

--Alfred North Whitehead

Clark Kent slips into a telephone booth.
By the next frame, everything the past gave--
the job, the name, the coat and tie--
is transformed. Out of those shucks and shells
leaps the cape, the great S, the bullets bouncing
back on the crooks. Silly and false, this flash
of red yellow and blue--pernicious, even.

Nonetheless, we may be changed. Surprise
sleeps in the interstices of things.
Pushed by an apprehension, a thousand boys
leap from garage roofs, and I myself
sidle up to a phone booth, fingering my tie.

* Previously appeared in *Poetry Northwest*

Storm Window

At the top of the ladder, a gust catches the glass
and he is falling. He and the window topple
backwards like a piece of deception slowly
coming undone. After the instant of terror,
he feels easy, as though he were a boy
falling back on his own bed. For years
he had clamped his hands to railings, balanced
against the pitch of balconies and cliffs
and fire towers. For years, he has feared falling.
At last, he falls. Still holding the frame,
he sees the sky and trees come clear
in the wavering glass. In another second
the pane will shatter over his whole length,
but now, he lies back on the air, falling.

* Previously appeared in *Maine Edition*

Love Poem

When the bell rang, we straggled into the gym
tripping each other and banging lockers. Girls
sat in folding chairs, holding their elbows in,
and we laughed like grackles at the backs of their heads.

Then the artist ran in from the lockerroom
in his silk sleeves and open collar. We stomped
and whistled. He called a boy from the second row
up to the stage and told him to scribble on
the big, blank paper. The boy hesitated,
then jerked and looped a ragged line
all over the page. The artist looked a minute
at the pointless tangle, darkened a few lines,
added a stroke, a wavering curve. Like magic,
the scribble turned to shoulder, elbows, hair,
and a half smile. It came up so clear everyone
saw it at once--a man and a woman talking
over a bowl of soup! Even the steam
was there, rising to their faces. We clapped
until the artist gave us four deep bows--
as this poem claps for you, my love, my artist.

Toys

children
you come home
expecting the toys
jumbled in the cardboard carton
that i stored in the basement
with all the other things
too good to be thrown away
waiting to be dusted off
and enjoyed again
like the easter basket
we bring out each year

brought to the church
and blessed by a priest
holy water raining
down on us
blessing hitting
our mouths and eyes

the pious old women
having done their penance
pull back pure white linen
exposing gaudy eggs
salt is carefully wrapped
vinegar that was offered
to him while he hung
dying on the cross
is in its crystal cruet
round loaves of bread
made to fit the basket
butter lamb with clove eye
always in the wrong place

children
your toys are gone
i gave them away
the store is closed
i cannot replace them
the owner has moved
i think he said
too many robberies

by Marge Vinolus

Old Slippers

My father says
I build the fire too high
And wild
And hot.
But he lets me stay up,
And watch it burn
While the rest of them sleep.
And after I have come upstairs,
He goes out
In his old slippers,
And banks it.

by Diane Dupuis

Seed and Fruit

In the first bite is bitterness
And bitterness runs in juice from our eyes
And down our faces; uplifted in the heat
Our expressions run together--hands red with paint
We raise them to the lord
There is no answer;
And the bitterness runs down our chest
and the hollows of our legs
Onto the ground.

In the second bite we find fullness
And gathered by fear we find it
Currents strangle us, we are sucked down through an undertow
And are spit up on the beach:
We search through our dead together, in this, our second bite.
Pulp sucked dry and swallowed, only seeds are left to us
Ridged, like parallel paths on a hillside, they encase
A new span of hands and measured days;
Seeds in my palm have known whole fruit . . .
They fall from our flesh on the furrowed earth table.

by Matthew Reingold

What the Three-Breasted Women Saw

It was the girl's birthday.
She descended to the basement of the museum,
To the room whose walls were covered with horrible
Cubist paintings (modern man is fractured, disjointed, they say).
And there she saw him,
On a couch in the center of the room,
Lounging lazily like he owned the place.
As she approached, he grinned up at her,
Boyishly,
Knowingly, (as if alluding to some secret they shared)
Like a sultan enthroned,
Exulting at the appearance of some harem girl,
Come to peel his grapes.
She turned twenty that day.

by Mary Beth Wilczak

True Rebel Hero

The true rebel hero
got the blues for Brando
as he gazed through his window-
across oceanic rooftops
watching a seed blown
from its flower pot
sink
to the center
of the earth.
Only gravity can pull him through
by satisfying an instinct
that identifies with sidewalk sinners:
shadows who remind him
of his father
a noble fool
who wore coats
laced with dust,
had an ankle chained to yesterday
and collected habits for a hobby.
He leveled with the mirror:
I carry his failures
on my back.
We are exiled
from each other
but I can't escape him.
There are no flowers
between us,
just narcotics, dreary stares,
bankrupt questions, charitable winters,

a generation of inevitables
forcing our hand.
He faced the anonymity
before him,
gnashing his teeth silently
no comment,
not a breath to redeem him.
He dangled a sandal
chosen for its thread
then let it slip to the floor.
Remembering her words--
"You act like you're never too bored
to ignore the watercolors
at the other end of the bar,
and one day you'll regret it."
But he was being honest
because he was too young
to be authentic: even if his car
might be double parked somewhere
on easy street.
Born a worn-out sax player,
split-lipped before he blew
a single note, he's a practicing fugitive
now.
In a state
within the State
of America.
He wants to emigrate one day:
He knows he's no hero at all.

by Kevin Goldfarb

Passwords

Passwords

Facesigns

In the cha-cha-cha of traffic
Traces of an acquaintance
Though no name fit the forehead
A thoughtless stroke of your arm
Brushing loose hair from your eyes
Recalled an address

Was it Venice?

The night my cassette recorder took-off
Into the shadows of the colonade?
I didn't think you'd betray me
I always trusted the Dutch
And every winter since
I was left pursuing a hunch
That morning when I woke up
And heard you'd gone on to Asia
Sincodes

Flowerboxes

Encourage sexual harmonics
Apocalyptic as an airraid
But afterhours spent reading
Your contour have relaxed me
Overturning the excess logic
Balancing one thought with another
Riveting this sea-sickening drift
That had me casting for another
Loving me out of my coma.

by Kevin Goldfarb

I see the bone crack open,
revealing the first shade,
Yellow,
a heavy drape to raise,
too easily discolored
it drizzles out slowly,
soiling me,
ashamed as I look at it.
The next velvet fold revealed
is blue,
Bitter cold,
it must be chipped away,
ice from a frozen fish,
thawed,
beautiful in its silvered skin.
The final curtain begins to part,
red and green,
showing itself lush and heady,
like red poppies in tall grass.
Behind the folds,
lies blackness,
a deep cavern
that must have curtains.

by Kristen Westman

The Burning of a Moth

As a child I'd often watch a lunar moth
Dance with a bright death on a summer night,
Tapping the pane of glass around the flame
Of the storm lantern we used for light

Whenever we went camping. I didn't blame
The thing for wanting entrance: the nights seemed colder
Beneath the mountain's bulk, as if the air
Descending cooled on its high ice. Moths made bolder

Or duller by frost risked the unspoken dare.
They found the small match-hole by accident,
Trusting their heads against the lantern's Frame;
But the rush to find blind heat was pure intent,

And purer still, the gift of dust to flame.
There was no stopping wills like these, although
I tried. Attractive forces were at play:
Water flows downhill; the Fall is apropos

To Summer; night with dirty hands pulls day
Like a clean sheet from out of its storage cupboard.
Insistent wings persuaded me at last
To listen closely: ashes sifting upward--

An earth-sown snow for heaven--sing the past
More carefully than any fossil record.

In the lamplight's cupped hands, I sensed a sort of truth.
Because it was their wish, I helped them upward--

by Kim Chapman

We all wanted it: the burning of a moth.

Perhaps you were born crying in the closet
behind your mother's high heels
before your father pulled out you and your toy dog.
You were silent.
He could cut out both your tongues.
You were the middle child
and always aware of the thinness of your hands,
the veins located carelessly, too near the surface.
You asked for nothing save your mother's kiss.
Her good-night voice was whiskey flavored, medicinal.
On the evening of their anniversary, your father went out
leaving fourteen yellow roses
and enough milk for breakfast.
That evening was long and silent but you had your toys,
and mother slumped in the chair, poor dolly.
Before bed, you went out to the kitchen
and begged for a cookie and clean sheets from your older sister.
She wore her sorrow like a dirty hair ribbon.
There was no kiss that night and you slept badly.
You woke up, hungry, in the chocolate hours,
afraid to get up because the room was full of tongues.
No, no, that is not true.
The room is silent
and you wanted milk.
The room was empty except for your mother's old stockings,
balled up and thrown under the bed,
and you knew that he was back
because the bed upstairs bumped and scraped
like a naughty child.

by Holly Hughes

Heritage

I would have earth babies
firm and chocolate-eyed
tree trunk babies
with evolving limbs
children grown in my
deepest valley, sprung
from the communion of mountain
and river
they would emerge
like clods of loam
breaking free from roots
black, damp and strong
but I'm bound for snow
babies, pea-eyed peach babies
white and frail as
slivered almonds.

by Janet Moore

An Open Half-Door

I feel the windmill
faceless
beat against the
rain-swollen clouds,
the grey ache of them
rolling in a smoky
wind;
I see that wind pulsing
in canvas windmill arms
I see the canvas flap and I only
see it
for there is no sound
though the joints must creak
as they twist
Even the rain falls like
a fisherman's net--
a slow, silent scatter.

by Janet Moore

Myrtle Came Twice to Breakfast Sunday

Leaning over cups of coffee,
Myrtle calls the girls by name
the usual
"I come here everyday"
paying tourist prices in her own hometown
she spreads her butter thick and
stirs her coffee brown
drinks
her lonesome
down
pays the bill
leaving her eyes for the
tip.

by Amie Campbell

Your life is paler
than a yellow carving
in the dust,
I mean of this dust
in the rough wood
out of which I had
hacked the poem
as the singing moon
hacks the soul with its
liquid scythes and spirits;
older and rougher now
so to romanticize the
smooth sailing of the cumulus--
like years,
Yet this wood still so recently made
sentient by our watchers' eyes,
Become something out of the
crushed dust of a million
years and glimpses,
So to hide something from us
til I washed it with
my carvings of desperate beauty.
And it is past, and now it is you.
Billy Jones, crystallizing
your star's darkness
because you cannot speak
from the cold distance
of your profound pain,
only the energy of sunken lead
which speaks fuck you
to some delicate
brush.
And good Lord! my own
life is getting brighter
nowadays
dawn star waves running up the beach
like ancient children

by Russ Schneider

The Couch in Edwardsburg

by Diane Seuss

The blood in the uterus
builds into a maroon velvet couch.

It is where she lay when she was three
listening to ragtime piano on the hi-fi
and the porch swing bumping empty
against the hot stucco.

Chuck knocks on the door
with his buck teeth sticking out.
He is one of the pall bearers
because they feel sorry for him.
He and his crew shove the body
under the couch while the macaroni boils.
She lies still and feels the profile of the face
push up through the cushions below her.

Next door the preacher's baby
is strangling between the crib bars.
Old Hazel, with lamp black on her face,
cracks against the window,
orange wreaths in her hands,
like a blind oriole.
Hazel yells for a boat
to take her across the swamp
where the dead soldier,
the dead mother and father
throw stones in the water
to get her attention.

The storm that will come
makes the air heavy-handed and mean.
The couch can become a gray chevrolet.
She can fall out of it
and her hair will be caught in the rolling wheel.
She will be scalped, so she must lie still.
Her grandmothers whisper this.

Church bells and locomotives shake the house
as wasps ram against the sheets on the clothesline.

Where is there to go?
The attic is only an oven
where old beds and trapped animals
roast and roast.
Under the couch it is that man
dressed in a flag
with bats in his hands.
And down the street, what is there?
The dentist,
The barber with his blades,
The cracks in the sidewalk
which punish her mother,
The garden,
where hot peppers uncurl into snakes.
She does not wait to be saved.
She saves herself as the milkweed does
when it empties itself of the pent up seeds.
She digs the couch out
as a rotten tooth which refuses to loosen
and out the window it falls
into the cow pasture and thunder.

The hot rain is snuffed out.
The baby stops its struggling
and lets its head drop.
Hazel disappears into the swamp.
Her mother carries the body to its proper grave
and does not return.
The grandmothers heave their weight into the attic
and lie back onto the beds.
This happens once a month.
There is nothing she can do about it.

Woman Love

by Diane Seuss

I kinda liked
hey
the way your boobs looked
at Pleasant lake
baby
wearing that pink silk bikini
the sweat beading real pretty
above your dark upper lip
like a rhinestone mustache
oh
and you eating that watermelon
going down into it
like uh
the circus leopard into her morning steak
ooh you's more glorious
than Mr. Gray's whole set up--
better than his pigeons
hemming and hawing in their shed,
better than the hot carrot patch,

better than his dead wife's butterfly collection,
his big face looks like a fucking buffalo
he puts olive oil in his hair
nope
nothing doing
cause i choose you
the hair trailing down your belly
like a streak of fast minnows
that place not burned on your butt
white as cream cheese
well
when we did meet in the water
the dead perch flashing long as a snake
and sucking up and down with the current
when we did meet and you fed watermelon
onto my thirsty tongue
nothing had ever been so good
your fingers got in there too
i wanted you
your black seeds
I ain't never gonna feed his roosters at all
New Orleans lady wearing loops of church beads
You and your soft boobs
This is woman love.