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THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW



#57

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THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

Issue No. 57

Fall, 1994 - Winter, 1995

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Editorial

The winnowing of twenty-four hundred or so poems submitted by some five hundred poets has been for this editor an individual and intimate experience of each of them. The reading has been rigorous and rewarding, the ultimate selection difficult. It was a fulsome yield.

When the final choices were assembled and the first printout delivered, precious and shining, each poem became vivid in my mind again. Other fine poems reluctantly returned were revisited in memory.

The collection itself is a very human document, revealing and reflecting a wide landscape of behavior and experience and belief. Many of these poems remind us how vulnerable and fleeting or how staunch and enduring the perception and projection of beauty or joy or wisdom or loss can be. Or fear or courage.

The poems touch down all over the psycho-social map, the behavioral mosaic of evolution, as in the following sampling from this work:

The several experiences of

- visiting the cosmos through Wyeth's Helga and Yeats' Maude, as well as through twentieth century space technology,
- raising Darwinian issues, "as if wing flap were wisdom" and of "frogs leaping with best intentions,"
- entering alone the isolation and the wilderness environment of Cameron Lake,
- exploring the interior landscape of memory and dreams in one's childhood home, or
- "... thinking of Wallace Stevens";

the observed phenomena of

- flames and smoke rising from self-immolation of the Buddhist priest in Vietnam,
 - the non-swimmer learning of "holy unconcern,"
 - the white rooster monitoring the poetry recital,
 - the little swallow and her surreal flight through Chinese mountains;
- and the immediacy of
- the penetrating image in the stark narrative of "Encounter,"
 - the masterful fantasy of "On the Left Bank" in Shore's Stew and Que,

- the brisk imagery and utter musicality, the ironic tragedy of “Frogs in a Dry Zone,”
- the closeup cinema-like account of the dying leviathan;
- the wistful, “Do I look pretty?”

The above references have been lifted randomly from the poems, examples of the varied but accomplished styles and the often stunning language of the work. But now, these poems are on their way to you, our readers and contributors, and you will have your own experience of them.

William D. Hoskin

Special thanks to Bird White Minnick of Fairport, New York for abundant editorial assistance.

WDH

Simplicities

If you had been here tonight
I would have cooked
for you—making puns
on thyme as chicken
turned saffron, rice
simmered, and wine-scented
sauce puffed from the open pot.

I think of the actress
arriving in Ireland,
asked if she knew
George Bernard, and
of her answer I did not
understand when love
was more complex,
seasoned with Shelley and Plato.

“If I talk with a man,
eat with him, sleep with him—
yes, I think I know Shaw,”
she said. I hear her tonight,
musing on simplicities,
thyme-scented, thickening with time.

Shirley Aichel

Wyeth's Helga

Images of Wyeth's Helga flash like
falling stars to a darkened world—
Helga as opulent odalisque
whose lineal curve of hip and thigh
an artist might follow forever.
Helga as Botticelli's Venus,
thin red tendrils tumbling
over her shoulders. Helga
with white blossoms in her
hair—is it hawthorn? Helga
as Isolt, Yeats' regal Maud.

Scientists have only taken us
to the restless edge of the sun's
family, giving us vigilant
photographs of Jupiter, Saturn
and Mars. Wyeth pursuing Helga
thrusts us to the wind-blown
threshold of the heart's galaxy.

Shirley Aichel

To Be a Hand

To be a hand—
plain, knuckled—
ringed of ridges,
faint lines,
fringed with tones
of red and white
like ambergris
or hard wax,
silly putty
fingers move
to play
slender spine
of wrist—
this sleight—
is always callous.

Always says
but never says,
resting on legs
tautly crossed,
palms open, asking
but saying nothing,
clenched, never giving,
curling afraid
by index, pointing
north, so cold.
If hand in hand
could be taut,
soft flesh

curling around
rings of fingers,
hands could talk
like doors
opening and closing.
Their silence
could speak
a day of wind.

Michael Alter

In Lock-flight

Today, winter birds swarm
the sycamore, so many weighting
its branches, they cover
like black leaves.

Boughs tremble back as all lift,
the birds pouring in a dark
cloud to the ground, then as if blown
engage a tree farther north.

Our city: thousands of empty trees,
invitation on every branch.

Why do these birds, with so much
wild air, hurl off together?

As if wing-flap were wisdom.

As if one, alone,
made no worthy song.

June Frankland Baker

For One Now Living Somewhere Else

*I think of Lincoln I see him in
the different rooms and in the halls.*

—Theodore Roosevelt

Friend, in a dream I introduced you
to my childhood home, long sold
to strangers, and away
from where I now live,
this town you've moved from.
In my upstairs room
I pointed out each well-used comfort—
the old desk handed down,
that rich-grained chest for quilts,
at the south window white curtains
filled by a distant sun.
You understood my returning,
and how, for no one else, pines
at the west sill could distribute
such a filtered light,
how those near or expanded views
occupy such a place.
That room remains, appears
even when I do not know I need it.
Friend, I send my thanks—
last night you journeyed far.

June Frankland Baker

Watching the Doves, Day Before the New Year

As the flurry of birds searches
for hidden seeds on our roof, a north
wind flings up their long, thin tails,
buffets their gray feathers.
Inside, I can not hear the distinguishing
sound of their wings when they fly,
or any mournful call,
know only how they bend down
to the shingled rows holding through storm.

Two daughters, women now, still sleep—
home for this brief stay
after years, the journey back
braving the unknown blizzards of distance.
For a moment again in their girlhood
beds, they lie dreaming.
Beneath this shelter of birds, we glean
hours like seed, move together
against the bristling cold of winter.

June Frankland Baker

The Red Bird

A red bird flies
at my window
from the small tree,
pecks against the pane,
and returns to his branch.

From the branch to the pane,
back to the branch again,
the bird flies and pecks, expects
to find order in resolve,
exercising his territorial imperative.

No matter that
the red bird sees only
another red bird,
his double, his foe
reflected on the thin glass.

From inside my room
I look out,
past the illusion,
and in the interval of a moment
I see only the tree, the branch, the bird:

I see but my eyes
cannot reflect their authority.
So I consider nature's order,
curving back, back towards
its feathered side,
where confusion is unthinkable.

James Cacos

Flat Tire

My father never fixed things.
He cursed whenever the world's physics
posed apparently insoluble problems.
One day when I was twelve and he was fifty
we found the family car, a 1957 Ford Custom
sitting in the driveway with one tire flat.

“What's he doing?”
This never happened before:
He jacked the car up, grunting,
unloosened the lug nuts with a mighty sigh,
heaved the flat tire to one side, perspiring,
mounted the spare, heaving his arms,
fitted the lug nuts, tightened them,
and lowered the Ford back to the ground
as I stood my ground and watched my father stand.
He did it.

After his labors,
I cannot remember
the look in his eyes when
they met mine.
But I felt relief, then pride—
(Kept both sentiments to myself).

Today, my father is an old man,
shuffling out to the kitchen, mornings, for his cocoa.
I should remember
that he was kingly once
in that realm of matter and consequence,
the jack and the lug wrench
his new-found scepters.

James Cacos

rumi is like the message in a bottle
uncorked after a thousand years.
he offers himself the way
an old man remembers his life
in the circus,
the way a sweet wine courts lips
with the lift of things flying.

when he reaches the open air
he ignites into wildness,
roars like the fire of autumn,
like the mad dervish-wishes that children,
disembodied in a dream,
release from a string and fly with.

his breath explodes into matter,
into the fierce beauty of prickly pears
and the hot sands of desert nights
walked on by messiahs.

Victor Campbell

it is opposite the blues,
this ecstasy mates with color, breeds bright lights,
that from a foamy under-beneath
throws up flagrant objections to the obvious.
alighting on sky-harps and cardboard cut-ups
of stop-action godzillas and the hair of samsons
made far-fetched by the sandals of hot desert feet.
it thunders out fine works in a white heat,
cracks earth plates, chews stars like tobacco,
and, in a high choral glory that brings beauty to its knees,
sings praise for the raw-heroic.

Victor Campbell

the faces of old indians stare at me out of dreams
not in accusation, not in blame, but in forgiveness.
they speak to me of the stampeding of buffalo
and the wild fury of plains storms
and the wrath of life
worked up into a vision of fire and thunder.
in the not so far-off future of the world
a place is made for the wrinkles of wisdom
that died with the indian,
of the cry of the animals he wore,
of the earth he struck
and of the heavens he made a pact to the death with.
it is not a somber place but has the
thanks of a fire in old age
and the devotion of curseless wives
and children grown to contribute to the hunt
and to a silent thanking of the beasts,
their hot blood steaming up out of the kill
to free the mirth and love of a benevolence
that wanders among the elms of spirit places.

Victor Campbell

Samantha

Samantha has come to stay with us awhile,
Refugee from generic paternal abuse,
The benign threat and ridicule kind,
The say please and cower
And no smile from master
Until you do what I say
Jump higher run faster
It's for your own good
Kind
That eats up the soul,
Stitches scars through memory,
And plays out predictably over the years
In compulsion, mistrust, quirky fears,
And finger biting in the dark.
Such a common tale:
Manipulation by humiliation,
Control wired to a cold eye.
And where did daddy learn to be a freak,
Doktor Frankenstein zu seine tochter?
Ah! He, too, had a father.

Jeffrey L. Dye

Strange

**Rain through sunlight
This is not strange
That half a state
Should flood
And children wash away
Survivors with faces like torn rags
Is not strange
That I am
This dust in a bone container
Engorged and throbbing
Singing repetitions
Of the pain around me
This is truly
Deeply strange**

George Eklund

Two a. m.

Silence splinters with a baby's wail
the cracked calm as constant

as no sound

time's pitch climbing
the same shrill scale
as the outcry
of neglect.

Blinds startle wide
down gaping alleys
where buildings cringe
like gray madonnas
praying
to restore
the hush.

A light snaps white
a coarse voice shouts
again
a silence
like bone.

Martin Jude Farawell

Platitudes

In my teens, I had contempt,
knew no day would come
I'd make use of them.
I wanted so hard to be smart.
I knew all about gravity
and the slow roll of the earth,
knew it would never gather speed
to cast me off.

But the planet has gained momentum since then.
And when the coffin sank,
as if under the weight
of the last tossed flower,
and she said, "He isn't really
dead, but alive
in all of us."
I was grateful
for the word yes.

Martin Jude Farawell

Andante for Four Chairs and Two Lovers

So we decided to have an affair,
forget the duty, the measured strain
of quiet, planned flirtation.
We had coffee for months:
intercepted misdirection,
tasted rushed restraint.

The truth is, I fell in love, invented
new pertinence, watched vulnerability
open like a sharp lapse of clouds,
and traced the close, irretrievable
smiles I could not name.

There are laughing continents, I'm sure,
far closer than we two tonight.
Halved, my heart beats and frets,
not regretting the silence
or how absence rests between us,
dividing our unsprung love into
a flat chill, a minor affair.

Erika Feigenbaum

Grandma's Still Life

Time's renegade
trapped in plaster,
chipping,
peeling,
succulent,
fizzy skinned peaches
drip yellow,
as the brown ones tumble
from their basket,
like lost moments
from a different day,
when she brought it home,
a five and dime masterpiece
gracing a farmhouse staircase.
Eyes feast
the calm splendor
then as now
as it sits before me
the odd, constant fugitive
on my apartment wall.

Cynthia Gerard-Moore

The Antithesis

One is turbulent;
waves beat
craggy rocks
in passions violent
then foams fade
rolling shoreward
when quiet acquiescence
turns to silence.

One is serene;
tarnished lamplight
in glory through dust,
glows when stroked gently,
strength glistening warm
and robust.

And her heart is the axis
in prayer for centrifuge,
yet parting either
renders souls ignited,
then bruised.

She is emptiness;
hollow wells
exist for constant rain,
and she shall let them fill her,
barren of consequence,
senseless
of pain.

Cynthia Gerard-Moore

The Star Chamber

Silent blackbirds, even in the dead
we all know isn't. All the little sad
things that don't amount to a hill
roll over one another in the dark, whispering,
desperate for purchase, alibis, and something
more of currency than they have now.

The judges are lined up on the caged lightning.
Out of the fields and working their part
time jobs to make the ends of the earth
meet.

And now the sad things quicken, closer
to the close and separating, rolling
off down the alley, out into some light,
no matter how little—*some*—and on
to their metamorphoses. Invisible
moonlight washes the border clean.

There, where no one important is taking note,
the blackbirds rise as one and pass
the night sky like a hood blown off to offer
some impossible reprieve.

Paul Grant

General Boot

“General Boot Failure.”
Computer Message

“But nobody did come, because nobody does.”
Jude the Obscure

He rises from his cot
inside the collapsing canvas.
He’s bloodshot, unshaven, unwashed,
his tunic unbuttoned, sword bent
where he’s slept on it.
He raises the flap and squints
at the nearly noon sun, the empty camp,
the smoldering fires, and curses,
begins to weep, to drink again.
He knows that somewhere they’re waiting
for the charge he’s supposed to lead.
He sinks back onto his cot,
the bourbon haze almost gunsmoke,
the red of flags and blood
burning through like a dawn.

William Greenway

I-90 East, Exit 120

Even the ironworkers who
built Bud's Wholesale Barn have gone
running their bored fevers up
over a hundred in bars
or staring back at their wives.
Knots of shoppers now clog aisles
shelved with deals we'll never own.

Didn't we come awfully cheap?
Our lust waits across the lot,
under lights, Atlastan Inn.
Guilt fires atop the heart but
heals though we know it burns: It's
trouble at a bargain rate.
You risk nothing playing safe.

Jack Heflin

Wind River Canyon

All the poems I've begun for you
I never wanted to write,
not the ones that brought you into my arms
or even your crying over the red tulips
in the windowsill fourteen years ago.
But I have no photograph of this
and my memory blurs like the wind
bending the notes of a lark over acres of prairie.
In the photo in front of me,
you're partnered with the Wind River Canyon.
Two miles behind you
the river falls upon your shoulder.
It's no wider than your arm, though boulders
big as Winnebagos tumble in its bed.
The wind is blowing east toward the sun
and appears to be pulling you
out of the picture, as if even then
you knew of your absence years later.
In your eyes there is doubt,
something you want to tell me, and it is all right
if it too is left in the wind,
for even now I would not want to hear it.

Jack Heflin

First Grade Physics

Your new wings itching like sunburn,
it could just have been blue air
into which you leapt, but it was only water,
the blue city pool, and you fell paddling
through its lovely, familiar element
to find no bottom. What angel finally
lifted your feather-forgotten arms to touch
again the earth, albeit paved with aggregate rock
that pawed your chest when you heaved out
to hear its holy unconcern?
How you hungered at its knees,
then puked your coughing lovesong to appall.

Jack Heflin

Border Crossing

(Cameron Lake, Alberta, Canada)

I row two miles through clouds.
A soft drizzle soaks through my sweater.
Signs along the shore warn of bears.
My hands grow red from peeling paint.
The sound of oars is the only clock.
Below, a graveyard of stones looms.
A golden eagle eyes me, searches for salmon.

A hundred yards left, I row hard.
Arms burn to the bone, shoulders grow numb,
teeth draw blood from lower lip.
The boat scrapes dirt, grinds still.
In sandals I scramble across ice
from an avalanche, stand on Montana,
rub my cheek against damp
rock that will never die.

B. T. Henry

Days of Horses, Dreams of Horses

moving warm wind in the mane squeak of saddle
bit and crop feel and hear the muffled thud of hooves

listen to them neigh and call bright coats shining
watch how they gallop to the pond to drink deeply

snort and wheel and race away again they leave me behind
even the youngest foal faster than my imagination

galloping across pages and pages of drawings
as I try to portray this perfection try to tell you

look the favorite gift from Allah a dancing Arab mare
great brown eyes more noble than any others

I draw the small curved ears again and again
I sketch the colt learning to run in the Southern sun

if only I could look at the world from horseback seeing
if only I could see the horizon from those eyes knowing

Mary K. Herbert

The Names I Can't Remember

for Bob

. . . And this is how the dead
rise to us, transformed: wet and singing,
the tide of voices pearling in our hands.

Lynda Hull
(Tide of Voices)

Images shift on the projector,
a boy herding a pig along the muddy river,
the fisherman in a cone hat, the gleam
of a silver twisting fish, the camera
caught the net in its final turn in the air.
For ten months I photographed small villages,
terraced fields of rice, seasons changed,
rain flooded my tent, then dust clung to my clothes.

I have pictures of Saigon where I lived five months
pretending to be a civilian engineer, painted my jeep
pink, ate steak on Sundays, sipped bourbon
with reporters, joked about watching the war
from the hotel roof. In 1967, there were still
a few French villas, elegant with tiled roofs hidden
behind high walls, wide avenues lined with trees.
I read last week that the trees in Saigon are dead,
killed by pollution. They've been cut down.
I can't imagine the city in any other way.
My slides have begun to fade. I tell my friends,
the trees were greener, colors brighter.

Like any tourist, I strolled to open market,
lens focused on a sea of straw hats or I would ask
in my slow Vietnamese to take pictures
of lovely women, so many, long white dresses, white
slacks. How I loved their dark hair, long, dark hair.
I couldn't tell from their expressions how they

felt about this foreign man, camera strapped
around his neck.

I wanted to marry a gold-skinned Metise but she died.
She carried my child. And tonight, as I flip
through these slides, I can't remember her name
but I remember the smell of her skin, how she
hated her small breasts, how I taught her to kiss
but I'll never know if she learned
to like kisses. So much I'll never know.
I don't remember my dreams. My wife
tells me sometimes I cry out in my sleep.

I wonder if in my sleep old emotions unwind:
my horror when I realized the Buddhist priest
was preparing to immolate himself
for reasons I couldn't begin
to understand. He was so young,
stinging smoke, orange flames washed
around him drawing him up. I swore I wouldn't allow
it to happen again but not knowing
how to stop such fierce need. I was
in a landscape I could only photograph
so far from a Methodist church
where people who knew me all my life
prayed for me every day.

That night I counted bodies,
I hummed *we are climbing*
Jacob's ladder, we are climbing . . .
over and over, wishing I could talk
to the Buddhist priest
about songs, about flowered hats on the
white-haired church women, or how the minister
preached about a heaven with streets of pure gold.
I remember bare wood floors that squeaked,
cow bells I heard sometimes
in summer, windows open,
sun pouring across rows of people.

Sometimes I'm sure I dream of the airstrip,
count bodies again, write down names.
Perhaps I'm twenty-nine,
thinking how young, how many,
all night long, neat rows of them
slid into body bags, going home.
Perhaps my dreams are peopled
with my dead whose names I can't
remember. At night, do they talk,
recount histories as their blood splashes
on my clothes, my hands?
Do I ask what happened?
Or why they come to me?

Rebecca Hippert

Performance Poet

She was a performance poet. She carried a white rooster on her left shoulder and recited the Gettysburg Address from large cue cards held just off stage. The rooster would tighten its grip ever so slightly to let the poet know when she was through, then the rooster would flap down onto the floor. The rooster would leave grip-marks on the poet's left shoulder.

Wayne Hogan

Voice of the River

The voice of the river
Is the child's
Voice
Who never forgot
But grew
Into fine reed
Patient
Toward wind and water
Though
Prone to difference

The voice of the river
Is the wind over
Water,
A flowing through reeds,
Is the child's voice
Resonant
In a woman's
And a man's words
Reflected up
Through the dapple gray
Stones.

WTK

Of Little Swallow

(for Siu Yin)

Some nights the mind
fills up with ghosts,
pale, vague,
until they are almost transparent
like faint, Chinese water-colors.

In mine there is a small swallow
which swoops
in furls of pastel light
winding downward
through the water-color air.

I fear she may be lost,
her swirling swallow
body becoming weightless
against the multi-colored
panels, her own mountains

Sweeping underneath
her flight.
But she is not lost.
These mountains were brushed
in her own small swallow's hand,

And her weightless flight,
just like the mountain distance
lost in pale haze,
is revered,
dear swallow, dear water-color ghost.

WTK

Litany

Do I look pretty? my daughter asks
as she dries her hair sunlit
curls tumble between the green
blades of her shoulders
slide
down
the slender fall
of her spine

and upward
the light of her—
luminous and golden.

Shyly, she drinks in my praise
a half furl'd smile
opens
slowly
delicately
as a new leaf.

Magnolias bloom in her eyes.

Annette LeBox

Encounter

The wizened little stooped back lady
with a shriveled face
glared at me.

Tom Lumsden, Jr.

On the Left Bank

Right in the heart
of Baldwin, Georgia
he's sitting in Shore's Stew and Que
watching the locals
at lunch eating pit barbecue,
fried chicken and hamburgers
for their noontime repast
fantasying he's a Bohemian
in a cafe on the Left Bank
playing chess way over his head
against an international Master.
He moves. The Master replies,
saying abruptly, "Checkmate."
Snapped out of his reverie
he sips on his coke
and waves at a car passing by,
thinking,
"Should have moved my queen."

Tom Lumsden, Jr.

Frogs in a Dry Zone

Every good rain, hogs grunt
and grovel in the mud,
nothing that good for months.
They rub bare bellies in mud
and piglets root for muddy teats
like truffles. Dormant in cracks
and sun of summer, frogs leap
with best intentions, hopping happily
into the paths of cars, popping
like bugs, like bubbles, drying
flatter than sows' ears
after the sun pops out.

Walter McDonald

A Random Encounter with Wallace Stevens

In this bookstore poetry abuts tropical fish.
One cannot help thinking of fidgety
neon tetras flickering among the lines
of Wallace Stevens, catching a cat
gone green at dusk out of the dull
unblinking corners of their walleyes.

One cannot help thinking of plump
opulent guppies among the tink and tank
and tunk-a-tunk-tunk of a fine
upstanding Episcopalian churchwoman
grooving for the first time in her banal
sojourn on the old black man's banjo.
What in the name of hullabaloo is she
doing here in Key West among the guppies
and gays, the yellowtail, red snapper,
the sailor's choice, the tiger shark?

One cannot help thinking of Wallace Stevens
decking Hemingway with a roundhouse right
straight from the black tuxedo swordtail,
a sucker punch, or maybe it was the other way
around, and, it's the poet pounds the floor
of Sloppy Joe's, his glass jaw throbbing.
Luckily he's covered, the Hartford of course.

One cannot help thinking of awkward
evenings in New Haven, a pair of angelfish
fluent in francais, effete vowels
weaving in and out among the shagged
consonants, trees of coral, fiddler crabs,
explosions on a blue guitar, exotic fish,
the stuff of which a poem could be made.

Ron McFarland

Sewing the Whale's Mouth Shut

So that it might not devour the man in the water
who has left his boat, who in the still October air
off Cape Flattery has chosen to enter

the whale's medium, so it does not devour the boat
he sews with a sharpened bit of iron
salvaged from a passing European ship.

A long Ozette needle tied with gut and worked
with a spinner's wide arc as water churns
and the tail listlessly marks the note of a tired heart.

This close to the eye, this angle of the dance
before the end, a trailing in behind the oars
cutting the water, the sewer clings to the unctious skin

and works alone, hands and eyes hard to the task
but alert to his movements, watched by one who dies
with others, at the edge of a neighboring, alien world.

George B. Moore

Los Angeles: 1965, 1992

How old was I then,
seventeen or perhaps
eighteen, leaning on the brick fence
in my backyard and watching
smoke bloom in a sky
clear and bright as hate.

When I was even younger
I balanced on that fence
and walked it, arms outstretched.
One foot, next foot, on and on,
I tightroped back and forth.

Today I walk that fence again.
Hesitant, the sure step falters,
the rope sways, a brick comes loose.
Falling faster now,
much faster than expected.

Charles D. Moskus

Doppelganger

Just the two of us
stand naked at the mirror.
A cold reflection of days
never lived alone, always
the two hands hold
the razor, one moves
with light strokes, one
clenched, tests the fear
of flesh against the edge.

My brother in our body
behind our eyes staring out.
We know this too well, we
are empty of surprises.
Even the puzzled looks
from friends no longer
something to unite us.
Years of sharing a face,
this rubber mask we pull
and push into distorted
shapes has lost its shape,
slack and void of interest
as to who will dress today.

Charles D. Moskus

Stop

Time is not of the essence
though we let it drag us,
impose an order on our days.
The tyranny of hours willingly
believed, we place trust,
design our days around
thieving movements of a clock.
We know when to live
and when the time to stop
is circling around us.
It haunts our wrists,
a constant *memento mori*.

Sitting in a chair
or staring blankly out a window
you hear a voice that asks,
what are you thinking of?
Truth will make them angry,
think you selfish, so you lie
to fill the vacant space
suspending time, with words
and actions signifying life
grinding towards a destination.
To do and think of nothing,
the only revolutionary act.

Charles D. Moskus

House of My Serial Dreams

the blackened chimney
 lightning struck
chimes of the mantel clock
 swelling through the farmhouse attic
gabled closets left behind
 returned to and searched through
the kitchen and sliding glass doors
 of my marriage
a king-size bed then
 the narrow stairwell
again hung with old wools
 a shriveled bridle
now lit rooms sprawl
 I do not recognize
not in the future exactly
 but something I've missed
places that would have soothed me once
 had I found them

asleep in my bed
 I see faces come to my door
looking at me
 can't waken can't move
with wooden lips know
 they think I am dead
as they walk away I cry
 the flue of silence
for whatever can trigger movement
 back into these limbs

lies in some dream
other than this
fear that when I waken
I will know my life
has already been lived
the hands of the clock
knocking
my children playing
in those rooms
I had not found

Dixie Partridge

That Day at the County Fair

Like overnight fairy rings: hummingbirds
appeared in a quivering of light,
a blurred organdy of wings
even my grandmother from Sweden
had never seen before.

Our eyes couldn't follow such flight,
but looked to the color of blossoms
where they hovered, exotic as origami
shown us at the booth of the *artiste*
who'd never cut her hair,
and whose ripe red lips spoke
of floating gardens as though someday
we might grow them.

Trumpet vines blared in tongues
of red-orange all the way up a light pole,
where the whirl of wings
untamed the day,

and as suddenly as they'd come,
on some whim they left us believing
that we could live plentifully
on the collapsing layers of puffed
Swedish pastry, the pink smoke
of cotton candy.

Dixie Partridge

Loss

This morning rain washes
at the edges of things—trees,
faces of hikers returned early to cabins,
the watermark of the lake dissolving
so easily to a blur of rain.

Our night dreams take us
where we have to go—
beyond children's faces, beyond rain,
into that dim weather of struggle
we sleep to leave behind:
pale swaths unwind like bandages
down to the blanched sight of eyes
pink and aching.

No sudden
shock at waking, remembering,
only that clarity
cut of heavy light.

Longing lingers with the scent
of orange peels on my hands.

The sun
enters the lake bringing back
every surface: needlepoint
pines, wildflowers vibrant with yellow.
And it is as though the last glacial age
had this purpose only: to carve
down the mountainside toward this eastern sun,
to sculpt a smooth bowl
for the lake to receive it.

Dixie Partridge

Le Jardin des Plantes

Wind comes up in the afternoon.
Huge cherry trees, weighted with blossom, stir.
Children dart under branches
that touch the earth.

This morning, in another neighborhood, the
beggar pushed his cup in my face,
forced out words I couldn't understand,
jerked, grimaced.
I found the cold, empty, chapel of stone
where Joan of Arc prayed,
lit a candle before her image in stone,
bound in the fire,
and sat, miserable,
in the front row.

Shaken by the beggar,
this foreign city, my life,
I crouched or knelt against what I must remember,
what I would walk out into,
who I am.

What darkness held her
in that terrible clarity?

I took a bus past four railway stations,
paths of iron to the north, the east, the west, the south.
I crossed the river
to this green place,

and wander now
in uncertain light
of cherry blossoms.

Gerrye Payne

Making to Westward the Caravel

Making to westward
the caravel kept to herself
on a stiff wind.

Permission to speak freely,
Sir.

He went softly as we slept,
falsifying the distances to deceive us
in the wisdom of his ways.

And we might have killed him
and heaved his body into the sea.

Thanks be to God,
says the Admiral,
the air is very soft
like the April at Seville;
and it is a pleasure to be here,
so balmy are the breezes.

The Indians greeted us warmly
on the assumption we were descended
from Heaven.

We have grown old

supporting the weight
of this responsibility.
Our shoulders ache

beneath the massive burden
of their gifts.

David Rock

Storm Warnings

The siren startled us with its high pitched fear
late summer afternoons
or in the middle of the night,
the tornado
sending us into the basement,
the southwest corner,
the safest place.

I ran for my pillow and teddy bear,
then crouched among bald dolls,
their eyes wide with fear and longing.

But my mother refused to stay down,
made endless trips for photo albums and fine china,
good silver and baptismal records—
things she would not die without,

then stood at the top of the stairs,
looked out the back door at the swing
set, which must have been twisting
in the wind, and at the sky, green
and swirling like the sea,

until it became suddenly calm,
as if waiting
for the right moment,

and the only sounds were my cries for her,
the weatherman on tv warning us
to take cover now.

Mary Ann Samyn

Gulls

You think about it most after an earthquake,
the dust settling around you
there in your little kitchen, still half-
finished, the way he left it,
the cupboards sanded, smooth like your hands
used to be before you sat up nights
doing dishes and waiting
for his return.

And you know I'll want to go with him,
will have had enough of you,
trying so hard.

We'll want each other,
father and daughter, and we'll leave you
in your dark house, where the earth drops
into the ocean, where the waves slap
the sand and the gulls sweep over the water,
searching, their eyes like his,
intent on you.

And now on me, wanting
that best piece of you. So we'll go
together, drive away over these cracks in the earth,
leave you with these waves spilling towards you,
splitting open at your feet.

Mary Ann Samyn

Driving

I look at my father driving,
his hands on the wheel, guiding it
gently, the way he taught me
when I first learned to drive, practicing
every night in parking lots. We are

looking for his father's house.
It has been years and we have only
an imagined address and a half-
remembered pink brick wall to go on,
and my father doubts we will find

this house which he wishes he had visited
more. But we search for a detail,
the right kind of tree, a circular driveway,
that will bring back the memory of a house
and a father my father misses now.

And I wonder, seeing my father
coaxing the car along this road,
if his father drove this way too,
the way my father taught me, his hands
low on the wheel, the road before him.

Mary Ann Samyn

Winter Memory

Last night the plumbing choked.
Now the driveway's ice, lacquered
Black. A clump of doves breaks
From the telephone pole, a hushed
Cross raised over the road.
I see the holes where snow's
Collapsed, my father's eyes,
the year my brother left.

David James Smith

A Platform Before The Castle

It's simple,
really:
place a character on a platform;
say it's a rampart
high above a castle
at midnight

Give the character some lines to speak;
but first, he could look down
upon some rooks whirling in sable circles
and beneath the rooks,
some cormorants
gliding among rocks,
and glimmering white specks of waves
reaching up from the sea

Then, the character could say something,
like, "To be, or not to be . . .";
there might be strange, atmospheric effects;
torchlight wavering through passage ways
vague shadows,
sliding along stairways, inside;
and perhaps a ghost—
although, of course, all that
would be immaterial

But it's rather easy,
actually,
to be a character
in a play;
when all one really has to do
is just refuse

to compromise

For the rest of us,
the cock will crow, again;
day will break, clear and sensibly;
someone will have to haul the trash
beyond the castle walls;
someone will have to load the dungcarts
which someone will drive to the fields;
and someone will, at length, discover
that the cook has run away

Jack Smith

Dozens of green frogs flip away from my feet

as I take my first step into the lake.
I breast stroke out into the tannic water and,
once deep,
a black and white bird swims so close
we are nearly eye to red eye.

The loons always find me.

This one takes a sudden dive
and is up again yards away.
An eagle shouts over me. I call
that I am not food, and it flies smaller and smaller
to the west shore white pines
where I saw deer, where a bear crosses the road.

The sky is the lake is
the lake
the sky?
The eagle swims, the loon flies.
I can stretch these flimsy wings
and dive.

The sound of this lake lapping is just heaven
found a hollow between hills to pool in
near where I have pitched my tent.

I am rising out of the water.
I am sinking deep
into the sky.

We will have stars tonight.

Bob Vance

Penelope in the Garden

What is an aging woman's heart
youth cannot satisfy?
It is this garden plot I visit, weary
with boredom from the little princess.
I think of my husband now,
the tops of his palms all callused
from the rigging, the gray in his beard
like the crest of a wave.

This is where I sent the messenger
with our tale of the agathon's madness,
this is where he found him plowing
with a single ox, sowing the long row
with salt. The man's wit
undid us. He sent for Telemachos, laid him down
before the polished till and its rich wake
of earth, and three times
my great husband swerved the plow,
his first scheme, and failure.

His footsteps lead from where I stand
to the crumbled walls
of smoking Troy, and after,
who knows where? For nineteen seasons
in the middle of this garden nothing
grows; all around tall oats crowd
and bloom, the same newness, waiting
to be cut down. It is youth
an older woman can't abide,

the imperfect knowing. I will give the crags
of Ithaka that break the waves
their patience. For he is out there,
my consort. The wine-dark sea sustains
his savage power, and no captor
or eternal goddess will change him.
He is of me, and he is out there, striving
toward his barrenness and age.

Scott Ward

Modern Diplomacy

Three men sitting around a table:
one blind man speaks, trying
to explain color to another man,
equally blind, and who, moreover, speaks
a different language.

Between them sits an interpreter, deaf,
who relays their observations
in sign.

Derek Wyckoff

Reviews and so FORTH

Patti Tana, *Wetlands*. Papier-Mache Press, Watsonville, CA, 1993. Paper, 118 pp. \$8.00.

Patti Tana first came to my awareness with her delightful poem “Post Humus” in the Papier-Mache best seller *When I’m an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*. She is now on the editorial board of Hiram Poetry Review, and is in fact a Hiram College alumna—so no doubt this reviewer’s perspective may be somewhat biased.

Her book *Wetlands* is a collection of poems following the author-persona from her abusive childhood, through romance and motherhood into the concerns of aging. Connecting all of these is sensual experiencing of the environment, as if the drumming of the rain on the tin roof was integrated with “angry echoes” of her parents’ troubled marriage, as if the plastic “attack flamingos” and the broken fence mended with rusty nails actually protected the geraniums—made them untouchable for passing children. Her strongest writing, I believe, comes in these concrete, uncomfortable images, which remain in the mind after the explanations have been forgotten. A good example comes from the poem “Torn Pictures” which is built on graphic images of her father—

... Thick hairs
poked from his nostrils
[I remember] only his angry
stare and spit through clenched teeth
as he struck me

When I looked through my mother’s
yellowed photographs, I found only
torn pictures . . .

Ragged edges where he should have been.

Much of her intimate poetry seems very personal and private, as if the reader were really an intruder and might, therefore, be somewhat embarrassed by happening on the scene. Perhaps that slightly awkward feeling in the reader gives the poems some of their power. For example, in “I

Have Touched” caressing and tongue licking and thigh pressing make up the whole experience of touching, as if that were enough or complete in itself. The poem “No” expresses a refusal to talk

No, I will not speak
When I would rather touch.

It’s as if Patti Tana wanted to write a poem about replacing verbal language with body language. I find myself squirming a little and looking for other subjects.

And I find them. My favorite piece in the collection is not a poem at all, but one of the several prose pieces that might be described as a mixture of diary and essay. “Yard Sale” is a terrific description of her mother, deciding at 80 that she was going to get rid of much accumulated stuff, china and figurines and bottles, while the daughter hesitates and says, “You’re not dying yet. You have years to enjoy living with your things.” But her mother doesn’t want “scavengers rummaging though them when I die.” The daughter sees these familiar treasures, for the first time, as if they belonged in someone else’s yard sale. The mother tells each buyer the history of whatever is sold. One touching moment after another in this little essay is reassuring to all of us who will be going through the same experience with our parents or with our children, taking the glass owls and cranberry vases with their sentimental and complicated histories and putting them out on card tables in the front yard for strangers to come sample. At the end of this “yard sale,” mother and daughter go out for dinner with the profits.

Also on the subject of the end of life but without the warmth and companionship of “Yard Sale” is a stark, tight poem “Touched by Zero.”

No matter how many
march along the rim of the hill
zero follows like a hungry shadow

Patient steadfast absolute
it collects the bill
charged at birth

One brother then two
One two three fathers
A child in my small round womb

Any one touched by zero
equals zero
in time.

That poem has a sense of touch very different from the lovers' sensuality in other poems. Here that zero is chilling and absolute, as indifferent to human emotion as a mathematical equation.

Another poem that treats death, but with some whimsy and a sense of passing on something to the next generations, is "Passing Around the Skull." Here the narrative voice thinks that it's a waste to be cremated; one ought to give one's body to science so that

students learn
to read my bones
and wiggle teeth still rooted in my jaw.

I should like a girl to poke
her finger in the sockets
where my eyes were, wondering

what I had seen and what she
will see before her flesh is gone.

This celebration of life, of the human family, has a quality of wisdom to it—a maturity and an interest in others that goes beyond the personal. That quality marks her strongest work.

Carol Donley

Vikram Seth, *All You Who Sleep Tonight*. Vintage International, Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York, 1991. 67 pp. \$7.00.

Vikram Seth's book showed up recently among publishers' submissions and requests for reviews. This engaging collection of poems by the young Indian writer reflects a comfortable urbanity and a sly but gentle contemporary wit—tempered by ancient mystical and philosophical assumptions and the pestering influence of colonialism.

A native of India, Seth has lived in England, California, China, and the United States. He has written four volumes of verse including *The Golden Gate* (a novel in verse), and a sketchbook of travels in Sinkiang and Tibet. Many of the sixty-two poems in this book are set in particular situations gathered under five headings: "Romantic Residues," "In Other Voices," "In Other Places," "Quatrains," and "Meditations of the Heart."

"Romantic Residues" includes nine short love poems. All are wistful, tender, but move toward dissolution and reflection. All are eloquent in their pure and intimate language, their compression.

"In Other Voices" treats of existential and evil tragedies of our time, such as: cultural and political repression and exploitation of individuals and whole populations, nuclear weapons and Hiroshima, failure of political will, and profound problems of ethical priorities. And there are other voices, powerful themes, and settings: of exile in China, of rape in Nazi-occupied Lithuania, of a patriotic Nazi guard and his family at Auschwitz, of an aged, severely disabled Indian veteran of mutiny against the British occupation, of a Japanese doctor's survival of the Hiroshima bomb explosion. Perhaps the most moving in its quiet innocence is a wistful love poem titled "Soon," a reverie reflecting on the treachery of the immune system and the naivete of our sexual behavior in the face of the new pandemic of HIV virus and its lethal syndrome, AIDS.

Seth's versatility is impressive. The grouping of ten poems "In Other Places" includes the haiku-like "Night in Jiangning," a poem of eight lines of iambic trimeter and end rhyming: a, b, c, b, d, e, f, e. The language is simple, the imagery vivid and elegant.

A glass of tea; the moon;
The frogs croak in the weeds.
A bat wriggles down across
Gold disk to silver reeds.
The distant light of lamps.
The whirr of winnowing grain.
The peace of loneliness.
The scent of imminent rain.

Quite different in voice, mood, and content is "On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge," an epic poem that relates the personal visions, conflicts, and determination of the planners and builders of this magnificent connection. At issue, of course, were the futures of San

Francisco and Marin County. The twenty-eight verses are of four lines each, with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and dimeter that give a saga-like sense of heroic and oral tradition, fitting to the historic occasion.

Of the twenty "Quatrains," the first two are exemplary of the group, that is, of the lyrical end-rhyming and strict iambic tetrameter, but also of the ironic resolutions.

TELEPHONE

I see you smile across the phone
And feel the moisture of your hair
And smell the musk of your cologne . . .
Hello? Is any body there?

GOD'S LOVE

God loves us all, I'm pleased to say—
Or those who love him anyway—
Or those who love him and are good.
Or so they say. Or so he should.

Of this poet and his work, X.J. Kennedy has said, "Clear as a glacial pool, often as deep, Vikram Seth's new poems shine with unfashionable virtues. Seth gives joy by writing brilliantly well, unafraid to feel and to start us feeling." My own response is to revisit them, to study further the craft and the wisdom of this writing that comes out of the Indian experience and the insights of this contemporary eastern wise man.

William D. Hoskin

CONTRIBUTORS

Shirley Aichel lives in Brockport, New York.

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Holder of a B.A. in French Literature from Yale and an M.A. in English from Middlebury, **James Cacos** teaches English at Landmark College in Putney, Vermont. His work has appeared in THE HOLLINS CRITIC.

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Jeffrey L. Dye grew up in Illinois and was educated at the University of California at Berkeley and at Harvard Law School. He has worked as a forest fire firefighter, truck driver, airlines passenger agent and ramp crewman, baker, and teacher; he served two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon, West Africa and currently practices law in Portland, Oregon.

With poems in such journals as POETRY NORTHWEST, NEGATIVE CAPABILITY, ZONE 3, NEW YORK QUARTERLY, WILLOW SPRINGS, POET & CRITIC, SYCAMORE REVIEW, and CINCINNATI POETRY REVIEW, **George Eklund** lives in Morehead, Kentucky.

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Father Dreams, the second chapbook by **William Greenway**, won the State Street Press Chapbook Competition for 1993, and his third collection, *How the Dead Bury the Dead*, is forthcoming from the University of Akron Poetry Series. He was named Georgia Poet of the Year for 1994 and is a Professor of English at Youngstown State University.

Jack Heflin's first collection of poetry, *The Map of Leaving*, won the Montana First Book Award, and his poems have also appeared in *POETRY NORTHWEST*, *THE MISSOURI REVIEW*, and *THE ANTIOCH REVIEW*. Recently awarded a fellowship from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, he lives in Monroe, Louisiana, where he teaches creative writing and literature at Northeast Louisiana University.

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Following a long career in book publishing, **Mary K. Herbert** is now a writing instructor and tutor at two colleges in Brooklyn, New York. She

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Rebecca Hippert lives in Cleveland with her husband and five cats. She is an information specialist for IBM, and received an MFA in writing from Vermont College in 1991. Her poems have appeared in TAR RIVER, POETRY MISCELLANY, GREEN MOUNTAINS REVIEW, and OXFORD REVIEW.

Wayne Hogan's work appears in such pages as those of THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, THE QUARTERLY, and LIGHT. His first book of cartoons is being published by Knopf. Hogan lives with his wife, Susan, in Cookeville, Tennessee.

William D. Hoskin, guest editor for this issue, is a Hiram College alumnus and a retired physician. Bill is active on the poetry scene around Rochester, New York, publishes poetry widely, and has served for several years on the HPR editorial board.

WTK lives and works in Albany, New York. He has recent work in KANSAS QUARTERLY, BLACK RIVER REVIEW, and MANNA.

A poet and fiction writer from Maple Ridge, B. C., Canada, **Annette LeBox** has published in GRAIN, MATRIX, WHETSTONE, and numerous other journals. She is author of the children's books *Mrs. Rafferty's Rainbow Socks* (HarperCollins) and *Dance of the Night* (Borealis).

Tom Lumsden, Jr., a native of northeast Georgia, lives with his wife, Frances, in Baldwin, Georgia, a small town in the foothills of the southern Appalachians. He works as a nursing assistant in a nursing home. He "loves his wife, old people, writing, and living."

The latest book by **Walter McDonald** is *Counting Survivors* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995). Three of his books won Western Heritage Awards from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. He is Paul Whitfield

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George B. Moore has recent poetry in *POETRY*, *THE MINNESOTA REVIEW*, and *INTERNATIONAL POETRY REVIEW*. His first collection of poems, *The Long Way Around*, was published by Wyndham Hall Press in 1992.

Currently living in Phoenix, **Charles D. Moskus** grew up in the Los Angeles area. He has a B.A. in English from California State University, Fullerton and has done graduate work at Arizona State University. New poems appear in *BELLOWING ARK*, *SHIP OF FOOLS*, and *MISNOMER*.

Dixie Partridge grew up in Wyoming and writes from Richland, Washington. Her second book, *Watermark*, won the Eileen W. Barnes Award (Saturday Press, 1991). *Deer in the Haystacks* (Ahsahta Press, 1984) was her first book.

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Mary Ann Samyn has a new chapbook, *Rooms by the Sea*, from Kent State University Press. She is a graduate of the masters program in English/creative writing at Ohio University and is in the MFA program at the University of Virginia.

A new poetry collection by **David James Smith** has recently been published by Ahsahta Press. He holds M.A. degrees in Counseling and Creative Writing from C. S. U., Fresno.

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Guest Editor

William D. Hoskin

Selects

NEW POETRY

from

33 POETS

Hiram Poetry Review seeks to **DISCOVER** America's poets. All poems in this magazine are selected from manuscripts submitted without specific invitation.