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**The**

**Hiram**

**Poetry**

**Review**

**# 61**



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## HIRAM POETRY REVIEW 61

1998

### THE POETRY TEXTS

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#### David J. Adams

##### August, Walking on Frye Mountain

The sun above the logging road  
these lovers walk upon  
has breached the canopies of oak and fir  
to yield the branch, the flash of wing  
that was a nuthatch and then another,  
as the illusion of a leaf in wind.

They climb to seek a vista,  
for they dream that what they see  
portends the life they paint in wishes.  
Yet the scrub and stunted trees  
have settled long ago each path they try  
and steer them to a stone wall long abandoned  
to the nature it had meant to turn.

Therefore, a wind has risen in a whisper  
all these boughs would recognize  
and guides the failing light into her eyes  
and to the embers in her curls.

She pulls his hand to her lips  
and folds it like a bird.

##### A Love Scene

Gently, so as not to seem to interrupt,  
she lifts herself beside him,  
her left arm braced against his thigh.  
To become each other's lover  
they have waited imponderable years,  
and now she wishes, she wishes  
everything to be what someday is recalled.  
The color of the air, the music,  
which irregularities upon each wall bear witness.

Through the shades a glint of dull sun  
reflected in an upstairs window  
like a face turning away, the branch a jay has left.

He watches what she notices,  
as her shoulder leads her breast to him.  
He has seen roses in marble  
in a particular light of an afternoon  
and therefore can speak of this.  
She slides beneath him  
with her fingers at his ear.

#### Michael Atkinson

##### The Secret Highway

The new night over Levittown was the color of raspberry tea  
when Mr. McAllister came home from Iwo Jima eleven years  
too late, his brow knit, standing at his doorstep in  
full dress uniform, shaking his wife's new husband's wooden hand.

The houses were all the same except for the shrubbery—  
could he have made a mistake? Andy, who was 6, told me

they gave him the attic bedroom, where he sits at night  
retracing his steps from the Pacific to Long Island, dozing off

somewhere in between. The dogs knew every car by its rumble.  
I woke at night terrified that someone was stealing the fireflies, and  
someone already had. After that everything changed.  
In the street the lightning rod salesman shook his head,

looking at his watch, wondering why we wouldn't listen. He knew about  
storms

the way I knew about the thief of fireflies.  
Mr. Murphy, Andy's great granddad, who claimed to be 210  
and to remember Ben Franklin's full head of auburn hair,

said something will happen, a dark and ravishing thing, and  
if we wanted to see we should find the secret highway  
in the forest and follow it to its end, where  
the bear Aiken Drum lives when he isn't prowling Mayflower Street

making sure all children are sleeping. Into the woods,  
he said, and follow the road east until east means nothing.  
Andy went alone, and never came back. I saw only a rock  
at the woods' edge with a locked door in its side, large

enough for a cat. My mother began leaving saucers of cream  
on the back doorstep, so the yard brownies wouldn't  
trample the hyacinths or break into the kitchen looking for sugar.  
The street throbbed under my feet like a racehorse at the gate.

"You'll never find the firefly thief," Mr. Murphy told me  
as we waited for Andy at dusk drinking orangeade. "At night  
it's a secret government, and fireflies are what it reads by.  
They'll find him alright." Who? "The lost toys, the owls,

the ghosts of trains." That July Diana Kepinski began to swell  
with a baby boy, and told her parents the father had brown eyes,  
brown fur and weighed 900 pounds. That July I felt like  
a worm lost on concrete after rainfall. Finally, drunk on July,

Jimmy Dougherty and I stepped past the rock with the doorway  
and into the darkness whose Indian name still struggled  
with the suburban avenues and sumps, we walked for a day  
before we found the highway, running through the trees

as a sled track runs through new snow, silent, smooth,  
the weeds weasling their way through its ashy surface  
and threatening to turn it to dust some 100 years from right then.  
We walked east for a week, when it widened into a plain

lined with hangars, the rusting bombers poised in the shadows  
like forgotten hunting dogs, small bears painted on their bellies.  
We found Andy sleeping in a cockpit, and brought him home.  
My mother made me pudding out of my own pride that night,

she loved the neighborhood that much. The next day,  
the streetcleaner stormed down the curbsides, a thunderstorm  
on wheels. That night, awake worrying the fireflies,  
I saw Aiken Drum sniffing at Mr. Murphy's trashcans,

his fur thick and rippling like an ocean of oil pitched by wind.  
I didn't think he loved Diana Kepinski, I think he was wild.  
I showed Mr. Murphy the bear scat in the morning. "See,  
he's a king, that much you can see with your own eyes.

He'll find your fireflies, boy, he'll make that world  
right again. Isn't this paradise? In the cities, horses are eaten  
when they get too old to work. In the farmlands, men marry goats.  
Here, you can bury the shit of a bear king in your garden, and  
see what grows."

## Margaret Alder Brunyansky

### IN THE GARDEN

(1)

The cat,  
fur warm in the mid-morning sun,  
weaves a lazy reel through new-set rows.  
Garden dirt is moist with last year's leaves;  
it cakes the shallow furrows of my hands.  
The boy lies near me in the grass,  
holds quiet conversation with his dog;  
his shirt glows there in the shade,  
as richly red as winter apples.  
I have stolen this day; it is sweet  
with small guilts,  
and summer, and  
my son's smile.

(2)

Snow drifts in a graying cloud  
to lighten December dark,  
bare bones of lilac lean  
over ground not yet hard,  
and the stone figure of cat sleeps on  
in the sleeping garden.  
In the unheated garage,  
my grown son, the sculptor,  
bends long to his craft.  
He calls; together  
we caress the fine plane of pine,  
still warm.  
We moun, he and I,  
a small dog that suffered in cold.  
Building a box,  
my boy says his goodbye.  
I watch, taking comfort in the songs of saw, of sander,  
in old sorrows,  
other lives,  
other seasons.

## Robert M. Chute

### LAMENT FOR A HAPPY CHILDHOOD

Hearing a homely radio show  
on growing up in a neighborhood  
how relationships ebbed and flowed  
coalesced  
to familiarity and friendship

I recognized in contrast  
my own country childhood  
realized  
what I knew then  
was isolation

with no house in sight  
the nearest boy my age  
two miles away  
with only that relative proximity  
to recommend him.

If I'd only known  
I could have been  
so lonely  
but it's too late now.



## Charles Edward Eaton

### THE HAIRBRUSH

Turned over, stuffed with hair, it could remind  
You of a clogged sink that grew too ambitious,  
Tried to swallow a head—a bad day that!—  
But something ripples in the room and rights  
The oval, the handle—Could it have started life  
Looking like a tadpole, also ambitious,  
Overweening, scuttling along the sand?—  
A bristled creature with a carapace,

A handsome silver horseshoe crab at last.  
A jogger on the beach might pick it up,  
Ruminate and ruminate the silver  
As he saw it on his lover's dresser,  
Remembering the inveigled hairs like strings  
Of a harp, the strangled, hidden music,  
How a fetish lives in a single word,  
And will accost you again and again.

It can be a hair-raising experience  
To let go altogether and feel the edges  
Of the known world tremble and long to be  
Volcanic, the brush like a burning ghost:  
The silence and the petrified object.  
Your house and mine are full of them, the things  
That nothing but the mind can animate,  
The secret scuttling along the sea bed.

One could go on and on—the protruding  
Pedal of the piano, modest, lowly,  
But lyric to the large body of sound.  
I do not wish to harangue Harlequin  
To come, let down his hair in moonlight:  
The long lustrous sheen hostile to crewcuts,  
Stubbled deserts—that is for another time—  
I pluck a single hair and play our song.

## Terry Hermsen

### TO EAKINS

"The Gross Clinic" (1875)

Now at the other edge of history  
it would not be so odd to place  
this doubly-sliced and twisted  
poor man's thigh before us, gray sock  
nearly the same color as his skin,

draw down the ivory light from  
the good doctor's cranium to reflect  
in the sterile cloth below  
and the gauze-cloud above the patient's  
hidden head. A minor tragedy really,

demonstration at the poverty hospital  
for the troops of medical students,  
white-cuffed and glum, hardly visible  
in their tiered amphitheater  
but for one, leaning casual in the corridor

and the pen of another, red  
as the doctor's stained fingers  
as he pauses, gaze bound elsewhere, as if probing  
the right words. But there are no words,  
it's just the withered mother does not want

to see, her hands before her face tangled  
at what you show us (and she knows):  
that the pain comes twice, and no amount of ceremony,  
aides in suits like bankers who kneel to apply  
the ether curtain, can hide from us what's to come.

### WATCHING ISA PITCH

Her name fans out around the diamond  
and into the shaggy outfield grass,  
so common now—as brushing beads of sweat  
away, she hears and does not hear it,

bears down on the next three and two count.  
The motion comes steady, placing her spiked  
right foot nearly vertical into the groove she's worn  
below the mound, the left tilted back as if

she were on a roof and knows that on her stance  
balances more than her own fall. Parents too  
drone in, "Pitch it pretty, Isa," "Wing it,"  
"Lean on them, lean." The words particular,

meaningless as swallows that skirt the distant  
cropped hayfield. Only her coach is quiet,  
watchful, the lessons already taught,  
to be reinforced later. Hand cupped

against the seams, legs low but without that dip,  
back like a pole under the arch of sky,  
but mostly this—an arch inside, steady weight  
and re-beginning, whatever this, whatever the next pitch.

### Albert Huffstickler

#### CIRCA 1890

To see a face you know  
gazing at you calmly from  
a photograph a hundred years old  
puts everything to question.  
It's as though she'd stepped  
around the corner for a minute  
and now was back, regarding you  
head slightly tilted  
as though asking, "What is it?  
What's the matter?  
Did you think I was gone forever?"  
The scent of her moves toward you  
across the air. You breathe her.  
She's there. But of course  
she's not. She's a mass of shadows  
on a piece of paper and you  
are someone in another time  
gazing at a picture, listening  
for a voice . . .

Mar. 19, 1993

#### HERON LAKE, N.M.

We were camped on a hill by the lake.  
It started on rain.  
I climbed into the car and fell asleep.  
I dreamed the car rolled down the hill into the lake.  
The water was coming in.  
I pushed at the door. It wouldn't budge.  
I tried the window. It stuck.  
A minnow swam by. "That's it," he said.  
"But I'm not finished," I told him.  
"Somebody else will have to finish."  
"No one else can," I said.  
"I may not be the best in the world  
but there's nobody else like me.  
Nobody else can finish *my* thing."  
"Then you'd better wake up,"  
said the minnow (who was God).  
So I did.

Aug. 23, 1982

## **Evelyn James**

### **LETTER TO BLASKI ON MASCATINE AVENUE**

Dear Steven: One of the few ways I manage to keep my killer asleep is to find those places where we merge so perfectly not even God can find the seams between his soul and mine. I know of four other ways.

First, the waking must be slow. I rise to a poem the way I rise to a lover of many years—with caution and dedication, careful not to steal his sleep or the dreams that have always waited

between us. If that doesn't work, I let the poem have its way with me. I do its bidding no matter how long it takes to make the thing come. Sometimes I stand up to it—sometimes I roll over.

My third secret is much more taxing. I accept its mystery and take the poem as is. I teach myself to understand its beauty, the youth and vigor that lies underneath wrinkled skin.

These poems I like best and seem most human. They remind me that even perfection contains flaws. I try to love them with even my toes until they find ways to stand on their own feet.

But it is the fourth way that scares the hell out of me. Those are the times I must coax and woo the thing until it reveals its secrets to me. Sometimes these are veils I'd rather not lift.

Still, I do. It's not companionship that draws me from sleep. It's the poem that matters. It accepts my failings, the limits to which my eyes can see and my hands write. Trust me. Love, Evelyn.

## **Gordon Massman**

228

And when I pulled out a ribbon fish from the deep—  
my God, it looked like a lethal umbilicus—  
my father shrieked, "look out, a shitsky!"  
and he ripped the rod from my wrist so I would not get  
sliced up in its teeth. It shimmied and flicked,  
brilliant snake, like a piece of razor wire,  
flinging blood and silvery waterdrops everywhere.  
But the pliers came, needle nosed, and down went  
the foot over its flattened length, and my father  
ripped out its guts with the treble hook and flung  
it back into the blue-green deep. Stunning beast,  
primeval, head full of teeth, instinctively darted  
down like a sunbeam, before dying. On the deck  
its blue-red throat, slime, clots of gore, a slash mark  
was all that was left. The boat rocked in the sloughs  
like a cradle and a pelican stared indifferent as a rock  
as the clouds sailed by. And then later under the hammer  
sky, I shrimped my hook, waited, my lips parched and  
unCoked (we drank them dry), my baseball cap shielding  
my Jew eyes, I pulled up a dogfish, spiny, dangerous,  
useless, tough; it bloated, croaked, dared me to touch  
its urchin spikes. He came again, this time gloved,  
ripped the pole from my hands and grabbing the line  
three feet above the fish, like a sling with a stone  
tied to the end, bashed it against the side of the boat.  
Swung and bashed, swung and bashed, the dark weight  
hooked in the throat bones hanging on to this hellish  
ride. But soon its tail began to explode like plastic  
strips, flying apart, pieces spiraling through  
the air, gray and pink, sticking in its own black  
blood to the prow, and then its sides frayed and  
split, spikes and needles spewing outward like a glass bomb

its body slammed into a pulp, until finally it slid off  
its hook into the grave of its birthplace. All that  
remained of this Shylock fish: blast marks, black spots,  
whip burns, where it hit and hit the side of our  
ship. I stood like a Roman king in his stadium  
and watched. Sea wind parted my locks,  
sea gulls swooped, and little pools of water soaked  
my feet. It's not profound to say the great ocean  
swallowed up its dead like a mother, sealing over  
the wounds they made sliding in. After the pink and blue  
ripple, the violence, the splatter of guts, a mirror  
closed over the wound and the back-sloughs shone,  
quiet as glitter. There is a craft skimming over  
cold water, an Evinrude, pieces of raw flesh and  
cutbait, an aerator sparse with shrimp bits, tackle  
boxes, rods, reels, bloody hands, gaff and fish net,  
boatsides nicked and cut curved up like swan wings,  
and a boy and his dad gliding over radiance toward home.

### Georgette Perry

#### Perseids

Deep black, between midnight  
and dawn, when the trees  
stand and walk in their tall country,  
the chords of crickets are deep  
as sleep, a bed in wet grass,  
and I dream *Perseids*, O quick—  
strokes of fire singing *night*,  
*now, the stars*. The music  
is voyage, a planet's prow  
breasting the sky, the rush  
of journey, the splash  
of strange lights,  
the Great Square  
over me, sail catching the wind.

#### The Chief's Wife

Soon, from the south, the Great Ones return.  
My husband, in the prow of the canoe will lead the hunt.  
I follow him to a cold stream, young moon low in the west.  
He turns away from my eyes  
and I cringe, scooping icy water over my body.  
Let the water numb me, wash away all longing.  
Night after night the ritual:  
The man beside me is a hillside cedar, a boulder of the cliff.  
The moon swells, a whale rising.  
Her breath showers me, fountain on a great tide.

The rowers pull away, stealthy, from a village of women,  
and I lie down. My thrashing must not roil the sea.  
No one comes near me.  
The furs of my bed billow, a patch of night in windy day.  
I sound in blackness, flukes driving down—  
Fireflies of the sea, shine for me,  
your tiny lights brushing my great darkness.

Deep and still, I feel above me  
small as reeds the canoes of men.  
They are so frail. One lash of my flukes  
would scatter, drown them like seal-pups in storm.  
Parting the flood I slide peaceful toward my breath.

The messenger's shout! The thud of a lance!  
It quivers in the wall by my bed  
as I open my eyes, whale, woman  
rocking in blood-waters, ivory in my heart.  
The oarsmen chant, pulling hard, drawing shoreward my body.  
Spirit of the sea, bless me—  
bewildered, dividing like soul leaving flesh.  
I am not this dark mound  
tangled in ropes and floats, its sinews slashed—  
Honor is yours, Mother who dies to feed your children.



Heavy, I try to stand.  
Women's hands draw me upright, wrap close my finest cloak.  
I will walk to the house where fires burn for feasting.  
I will lift my eyes to my husband's desire.

### **M. Rebecca Ransom**

#### **Laundromat**

For a dollar, everything comes clean.  
Once a week you can forget it all,  
get lost among the basic shapes:  
cubes of washing machines,  
yellow squares for folding tables,  
rectangular driers lining the walls,  
tossing clothes in colored circles.

Even the black and white tiles,  
repeating in rows across the floor,  
reassure you: there is order,  
logic. Everywhere, people you might  
otherwise fear—  
men with long black beards, missing teeth;  
women with barbed wire tattooed  
around their wrists—are making squares,  
folding fresh laundry  
into soft geometric shapes.

A large man with dirt-heavy boots,  
stubble, a fishing cap,  
carefully folds cream-colored  
sheets printed with tiny roses,  
while a woman with beaded, braided hair  
makes neat rows of paired-off socks,  
both quiet, absorbed as preschool children  
cutting shapes with fat scissors  
from construction paper.

There is some feeling you could start over  
here, that it may have been true  
when they told you you could be  
anything you wanted;  
they just forgot to mention  
that others won't necessarily  
be what you wanted,

that faces will smudge  
with unjust anger, and even people  
you love can grasp your neck  
in certain kinds of strangleholds,  
trying to wring out words you won't say.  
That your life can resemble a rumpled bed  
no matter how hard you try.

Here you can sit with the sweet smells  
of detergent and fabric softener,  
listening to the clicks of quarters,  
the churning of machines,  
and imagine everyone  
being rinsed until glistening,  
left sheer, damp and flat  
like sheets snapping on a line.

### **M. A. Schaffner**

#### **The Mandarin in His Garden**

Po Chu-i regards the intricate ways  
official letters nullify his days.  
How good officials tour their province often,  
though after once or twice their interest strays.  
And varied suits from each unique appellant  
are resolved by a standard issue phrase.

One's life speeds past on its course to nowhere,  
with each bright thought a dead end in a maze.

Internal fires lift rockets and careers  
but somewhere short of heaven both turn cold,  
while birth's a gift to fools as well as sages,  
and death's as fond of cowards as the bold.  
Still, a courtyard much the same as any  
has individual pictures to unfold,  
and songs by which the birds arrange each sunset,  
though never changed, have never yet grown old.

### **Frederick Zydek**

#### **BEAR BECOMES A MAN**

When no one is watching,  
bear becomes a man.  
He walks the sacred river  
until only hawks and jays  
know where to find him.

He contemplates the mountain  
and the moon, clouds sifting  
above the trees, tries to catch  
their images as they dance  
past him on the rushing water.

Soon he is dancing for them,  
swaying his enormous head  
to the mystery of the music  
the forest makes when left alone.  
The river catches his every step.

How like a man he dances.  
He is light as a leaf falling  
on a windless day, willowy  
as the voice of water, magnificent  
as an elk posing for the moon.

Those who know the ways of the woods  
understand this dance. Those who  
perform it are given the right to die  
to the beast that waits inside them  
like a bear out for the kill.

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**THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW**

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**THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE NEW  
COMPUTER MULTIMEDIA *HIRAM POETRY*  
*REVIEW***

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