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To Harbors Lockjawed

Herbert Gottfried

*The University of Montana*

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TO HARBORS LOCKJAWED

By

Herbert Wilson Gottfried
B.A. Colby College, 1963

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved by:

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Chairman, Board of Examiners

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Dean, Graduate School

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Poetry Northwest for "Cadwalder Park" and "Red Clay Woman"

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ONE FLOWER

From the morning now in silver,
you have been given one flower.
One small form from the font of tides
clamped in sea smoke. Below the gull-
swirls sea wive deposit
more refuge of lonely men.

Yes, the morning brought a flower,
a dead one curried with the weed.
The stem is limp and black;
its former form embarasses.
How easily your hand wracks
the pistil pointed sex. Salt flows
across your finger. Perhaps,
this flower was plucked
from the seeds of a crying girl,
a decorated dream, a funeral.
Once a flower was crushed
by sentiment between six hundred
pages of encyclopedic dictum.
It doesn't matter.
Wear this flower as you wear
your color. Carry it
like the sacrificial lamb
to your lover’s legs. You
can’t take back the time.
You threw the sea that life.
Wear this flower beneath
the rocks where no crack-caught
fish will wallow,
no bare-foot boy will peek
and puzzle over death.
RED CLAY WOMAN

She is like the old men starched by dry air,
swept in the vagueness of age,
a skin abstraction. The locust peeling
past her window stirs the dust.
She once loved and cut with the cotton,
is tired in the town. A woman born
in the heat; milked of her jasmine clay.

This woman, mother of nine long weaned
and firm, bathes in the drift-wind.
All are settled but the last,
that dancing-eyed boy bright as the morning
sun and gone. He never settled, lost
to East and North where no South boy belongs.
A soft tongue taught his body
to love the women in his wine.
She prayed he was good.
Saved his clean-faced smiles,
those old laughs tasteless as hay
that country girls live on or dream.

The boy, a flashing wisp of her mind,
once brought a woman bright as a jay.
The air was hard for mother was unpainted.
A quick stop, five-ten minute dollars,
a smile waft in a wave.
Still she sits silently rocking,
humming through her eye. As flowers
turn their season, her thumbs twist time,
trace the scar-laced fields
of strawberry hair and clay.
But the drift-wind son is gone,
lost to the East and shadow of her dress.
CADWALDER PARK

On Sundays man becomes bear.
He shifts in second, eases the tight city
from cobble to green, for here
the park is cave, the grave the poet's ear.
This is the court of Sunday, attended
by the maple loop. The ragged poor, the dandy
leatherettes from sad blocks, flock to the bush
not for nesting, but fun in dead novelty.
The bear lies open,
tortured like the formal rose in heat.

Narrow little girls know the bear.
He's their father, the ass. How embarrassing
to discover one pair in the throws of clover,
or the monkey hurling berries through the bars.
Mothers can never explain those organs.
Hurry! Hurry! To the bears! Those beasts, too carnal
in their concrete, protected by a screen.
You don't have to feed the bear. He eats the park;
Sweats through the confusion of tomato pie,
hot dogs, leashed dogs, kids pissing on trees.
There, beyond the rock, the sensitive
Mott Street boy, his tongue in an ear.
The girl, over-developed from tacky Roman blood,
is too young to have her skirt around her breasts.
Her laughter frightens birds.

From five to six the treadle-worn track
over the green to grey. There is sadness
in the odor of their breath. Mrs. Kowalsky
ate a fat sausage and burped a balloon
full of gas. The great hacks of the East,
each as soft as a winter-killed flower, go home.
The bear goes for yesterday's bread. The park
is for sweeps of Monday, and the monkey on his mate.
And you, you know who Cadwalder was, that plagued
hero with a vision, now dead as granite but glad.
OUT OF THE YADKIN

The Yadkin turns the cotton white,
and in the heat of powdered summer
the river curls like the cured leaf,
slow as a dog in August. Water in clay,
and heat, the mud-red bricks
that stack these houses outside Salisbury.
Power for piece work--collars and cuffs
stitched to the cotton-back of Carolinas.
Sweat pours on the sewing rhythm
of a weaver's shuttle and loom.
Water, the morning fat-back grease
in gravy twists for the farms, and the twins
bought mules and long pants from the sale
of cabbage. Catfish-whiskered women cut
to half-life nursing the river's babies,
the squealing red of the turning.
One river, clotted in Uncle Ott's blood.
The cottonmouth smells the sun and breeds.

Over the bridge, Catawba, up past the house
at 1621 North Lee, the watered soul
of this female town bends to the shunting needle. Streets of red folded cloth unfold, ripple like an eddy backing silt. Honey-suckle breaks the chalk-still banks and the big porch. The blood of the river spurts from a flopping chicken and the rats the blacksnake caught in the hollow moist root of the cellar. Dogs tear at a garbage man. A cross-eyed girl stares through wisteria at Yankee fishermen. Her eyes big as beans. Her brother has no shoes.

Everything moves with the Yadkin.
The wrinkles of the old are red like the linings of an actress—
dust from the playing wind works its way home. In the mills mothers sew rainbow shirts that clash with the window-shards of sun and fade to the river. Red and turning, mud-water flows in these simple-streeted backs; rolls with the gait of a silent tall gray man, grandfather politely pushing black boys to the side; rises in the spring push of bottom land, in procession, into your eyes.
WINTER CITY BIRDS

Over the croaking well of streets
some north-running crystaline wing
cracks the drawn morning.

In the well of winter
men are rags and hide, birds--
in their cries black words carry.

Round and round this ravened
winter-call of morning,
red-eyed pigeons peck at string.

Here in the park
an idle jay broods by the bell
of a blue-whipped carousel.

There on my corner, brazed
like any high-toned gull,
daughters of cheek won't even sell.

She palms her coins
like a child in the arcade,
then crimps in cat-poised wait.
A starling cheats the sun.
A sparrow in this window
pipes aboard a shadow.

These are jewels
bright as lonely wind.
All pick at their winter skin.

I see no gesture that's decent--
a tern on a building, a woman
who jibes your hunger and disappears.
CRAZY FRANK AND POP

I fed a dog the city couldn't afford,
Sun shadowed twelve feet of yard,
trapped the climbing cucumbers
on the fire house wall.
What Frank said to mother, I don't remember,
something like December streets.
Two doors banged, the dog howled
and circled a rose of Sharon.
My sister ran to me.
You broke the fence, white picket
once built for privacy shattered by your fist.
Scared, my arms locked the apple tree.
Tom the trucker leaped his fence
to stop your pounding. You beat Frank on brick.
He got away. You smashed his kitchen door.
Cops came late. One, Hungarian.
The alley was too loud, a joke with an old friend.
You stopped to see my smile, your face and hands
all red. You have hair on your hands.
I don't. Big hands,
like the time you hit that drunk
in the diner, with a container full
of sugar, right between the eyes.
KENNEDY WHEELING

Someone closed the screaming
I could not explain, for three days
I wore my public eye.

A horse in that eye prances,
one stirrup and horn out of key
with the rest. Dredging the neap
of big cities, people mold a heart
as the muffled rolls play
the ribs of that satin horse.

Cadance, the rhythm of a bowsprit beating
in the wind, jars the bones
of those who shiver in the sun.
The black dawns, and faces without a light
drift over moist rocks. Sentiment
in cold streets wakes the awkward
noise of the wagon and an old inhibited salute.

A man wheels in a nameless train,
too late to calm the eye; a train
binds fear to the running track
of blood in your arm. There is no voice
for the blood. The heart is lost
in its own public, and its heavy dancer
shuffles on the crackling stone of the soul.

The child needs no explanation.
He rides death closer to the bone
the way the young raven, black as any horse,
falls in arcs over snow, sliding
his satin hackle and marrow into the sun.

The horse in the train, the child in the bird
scream in the mutual delight of their flying,
and I turn back out of the eye
to the problems of Sophomores
who need some words, some conch
from their already sophisticated sea.
When I cut
through Colburn Park,
pigeons say I'm hungry.
One bronze soldier
owns this field,
it's fallen angels,
the mitten on his bayonet.
No super-human body's
got the right
to land here
during battle.
Descending,
with the grace
of seven year wine,
swan-armed kids
mark the snow--
crypt-stiff and plain
as frozen Canada.
Plump-dumb,
the ball-of-fat keeper
leers, lollipops
sticking in his ears.
He leans north,
one eye to the wind,
shields his winter garden
despite the neighbor's dog.
School girl clean,
seraphim dive
like autumn flowers.
No women today.
The old Syrian
smokes away the season.
Night breaks in.
Elm intern these muted wings.
I go on, briefcase full
of spelling tests,
flapping my way
through the traffic.
PRINCIPLED OCTOBER

A falling leaf tapped
on my hard head
like the McIntosh
of Newton, and I discovered
the principle of October.
On Heron's northern shore, 
thunder-holes pound the slabs 
of cliff. Spray splits to bead barnacles 
grown solid with the rock. Beyond 
the beach, weed and dwarf-bush 
cling tightly to guano dirt. 
The coast is empty save the sun 
that runs a stone. In a trap 
below the kelp, a lobster 
claws a perch and can't get out. 
Here only the birds aren't deserters 
from the land. Out of reach 
of the cove's lip on a gonging bell, 
the drape-wing Cormorant is drying. 
Above, gulls follow the fresh catch 
to harbors lockjawed by the gut. 
Night, colder than the sea, pivots 
on empty towns. Dried moss knits 
the granite, pitted graves of men 
who ran with runs.
Old shadows hang on pine pitched
in steepled rows tolling
for the mists that sweep the shoal.
Night takes back the rock,
and the sea and shore are one.
LIES FOR A GREEK

Someone with a hole in his smooth word
sold this Greek a flag. She rants, rolls
her belly forward as she serves my honey-nut dessert.
She spreads mountains in my lap,
runs her fingers through the rich.
Behind her almond eyes, a blackman
spooks a fire.
Listen Greek, these streets can't be Hellenic.
You're not the only one who's fat
from the grease of lamb, lonely
with the strange. My father is Hungarian.
Your dreams are home, windows
for some blue-green sea. Forget the dreams.
Think of some real cousin,
some tagged baby drooling on the rails.
GARNET AND EMPTY HILLS

Don't hide the graves old man.  
Your muttering tilts old boards,  
mocks the giant hawk.  
Dry gulches scream for absent ore.  
Your hard-rock cousin grins. His words  
when cut run gold from older time.  
Who carved this pit, that shack?

The rush of men was bigger than  
their love. Where now I find an envelope  
from '42, carts whose frames were cast  
back east, or a broken shell from Spring,  
red bodies once drove men jack-hammering  
to rocks. Polyphonic curses gilt a ridge.

West, a school house, graves  
and small Coloma. West again,  
Cascades go north past Issaquia  
where doves fall in pockets of sun.  
And west again, there are no birds.  
And now I understand you know a man  
in California who has pictures.
CRIPPLE IN THE SNOW

I've watched you drag your right foot.
It's leathered rhythms bruise the snow.
The pain in that hand
must stretch from the foot to your fingers.
You catch flakes more uniform than you.

Why do you smile girl?
I wouldn't bend your twisted leg
around my waist, sing while you laugh.
You're a blonde, a riddle, but I run.
I dance. Go on, shake that straight
shagged hair. Look up and know a moon.
I stalk the slush, beat the track
your swollen foot pushes home.
FATHERS AT WINNECOOK

1.
The doors of my city open.
From within, ripples, like impressions
on a Sunday pond, break the sun.
I gesture to the boy
spinning hot flat rocks
from a ring of weeds on shore.
What does a father say
when gone?
Pickaninnies peeking
through a slot
make this me so small.
Closets are dark.
Dogs are bite.
Where I live is now.
Who's the man?
He's a canoe
that floats the mud.
You're a little red car.
Here's a bird
in sun.
Change my name.
I don't care. I'll
never leave this room.

I kick the man
she says is now my own.
He's big. His father small.
My new old Papa limps.
I'll wash his feet
with salt-boric.
He's a Hussar, sings
in a garden of roses--
girls with bright blue eyes.
You were in the Navy.
They showed me where
to circle you in blue
among five hundred.

Songs are cannon balls
of birds soaring
to flowers bursting sun.
When old Papa died
I inherited one father
in his portrait, one hymn-
like king who rode
with St. Stephen around his neck,
Franz Josef on his back.
I own that drummer boy,
the piper in a factory
full of friends.

From his portrait
Vienna's ornate mornings
lure lovers
to a far-off Balkan sea.
Women whirl Hungarian cliffs,
fall and bend as reeds
to falling ships, ships
too far to sea
that reef good sail
with violence.

My adopted blood, in harmony
with the beach, lights the wind
of my new father--circling
his dance upon the wave.
Lie down, I'll take your hand.
Cities live in love.
In my trembling age
I hold an edge to chill-blood north.
I am my father's worm.
I go to freeze his circled face.

2.
The Atlantic Coast more east
than north, sculpts chaotic rock.
Winter's froth and stagger grate
the skin. In violence, Cronus
broke a god-head, hurled beds
unslept as gifts from sister fates.

From the comfort of my shack
I watch fishermen in the comfort
of their ritual. Ropes and boats
pit their dance to port the parody
of moths who love my window.

Bent thick bones at peace, all wait.
Their silence, black as sea tongues,
rings in nuns who peel the wake
of tides. Scratched into evening runs,
two scull a double-ender.

Their nets drop for unborn sons.
Boats rime with the sea.

Inland, I drink good beer
with a Syrian whose father
clamped the rail that fed
my father's blood. In the rain
of youth, I speak no language,
but run with hands posing
for fathered wisdom, to those sweeter
than my books. Behind a frozen elm,
in the hall of that cheap house,
I kiss your hair.

I run in diced October
like a season at fading sun.
All is song though unsung, all catholic,
yet these stamping feet are never really mine.
The hills too close, the sea too far,
and still I take your hand.
Your thighs and face are never better sanity.
Look, I move again, for no blood
curls your breast; on your mounted flesh
I find no man followed. New winds attract
and feed like headwaters in the west.
I, in darkness, strike for foreign sounds.

3.
(for Don Pfrimmer and Fred Logan)
Hills stagger in the roll of trilling tongues.
Their breaks are drift for bench and butte.
Basins cleft a slope in drainage
for higher rock. The turn of earth bites air
as fire in the wheel burns fog from river's morning.
Silver is dust of frosted trees. Gray the fade
of goshawks pantomiming gods of flight.

See autumn sing its cornach
to any who'll stand. Leaves wing in the draw.
Need is the whirl of teal up from quiet water.
While birds fly mated to my south, these cliffs
are home. Those stones of Pilot's Knob are casks
of mystery—druids dancing 'round a dolmen moulded moor. Their ritual moves men
to better gesture, to imitate thick notes
of sun-struck birds. Birds that hunt no idea
but these flowers that violate mountains in design. I'd take you here, but would you see your face
in snow-melt streams. Would you kill deer and birds bedded in the bush of hollow-snap red willow.
Following trails, this rifle tightens my hand.

The shocks of lead
hammer out blood-spotted meat with the power of a wind.
I left you in the road where other fathers camped,
struck their space and numbered all their lives.
In the blood I move. From the smell of death
ticks scatter on the hides of deer. We dressed
and washed them by the Musselshell at Winnecook.

Walking out of bottom land, I hold to red sky
just beyond the hill, where native streams print
in shale ritual older than the steps my father held
for home. The dance lets blood.
If I were an older man, not stiff
in the image of my youth, I'd drink
the blood and pour it to the earth.
I'd smear my body-heavy thighs with the musk
of a rutting buck. Here I'd dance with a velvet horn,
there fling the gut, stomp blood and worms
in the face my frantic feet define.

I leave you here among the shaking reeds
of evening. I'm going home.
In the wisdom of your laugh, one moon shatters
in my head. We have no distance. You,
the old man never caught, stand in this green.
SKOOKUM BUTTE AND BILL

Skookum Butte points for snags and pole
where gyppos cut the hills, and the old man
trapped cat or martin for a meal.
Bill Woodman fished the creek, watered horses
bound for rivers to the south.
His family town is now a ranch
with silo, well and haycock caught
in narrow School House Gulch.

Trappers die like elm. Once children sang
of a long haired white man--his buck and fringe
out wind with the spring of lynx. Older gods
would sing that golden havelock hung
in defiance of the winterkill.
Mines and game settle like a hammered sluice.
A hummingbird limbs the delicate air
where obsidian arrows sliced a jet drum.

Mountains no longer keep men in irony.
Snows of summer drift on smaller track.
Elk in rut thread pine with the vengeance
of a hero. Where is the hunter? Bugles jam
harmonic basins bordering isolation.

Wheels of skinners' carts crossed
a creek twenty times to make a pass. Packers
always had a squaw for winter. Skookum means good,
good like the spring-born washed in snow.
Now, as then, birds are drunk. Magpies
peck a lamb. East of this rock the swans go home.
BUTTE AND GALLOWS FOR A BUILDING

Mine-gallows hang Butte's slag shaped houses in frames of lacquered steel.
A double-cellar caught in carbon-whiskey kills four brothers. Here bootleggers worked the mines where whores,
one leg in the drift, cried like wooden lagging.

Big Ed talks of catwalks leaning on a two block building with cribs of numbered brass—A Friday kiss for Finns without a pocket.
Neon on a discotheque cuts that older glaze.
Tailing ponds settle every flat to gray.
Rock-crazed hills stunt juniper all the way to timber. The pit, that laughing mouth of copper, ate two towns and only left galena on the rim.

I stand in the middle of an alley, watch a crane jaw at brick.
A miner's grandson guides the boom and building down. He said it was fire-proof—steel shutters stop an angry man.
The tractor rakes four stories. In the rubble, 
one map, uranium reports, 
a mayor's plan for defense in '42.

Butte lets nothing up. 
When men are empty the gallows 
won't come down. Black cables stretch 
these people, once Murphy, now Gonzales. 
This building is too high. 
Mines are never deep enough. The only pole 
this ground permits impales the air-- 
the smelter stack, all phosphate grit and flame.
GOOD FRIDAY, ST. IGNATIUS
(for Tom Madden and Victor Charlo)

North of Missoula mountains call us white.
The church is Indian--
logs and mortar smell of musk.
This Friday mass is long. New liturgy, he says.

When English prayers are over,
the tired go. We are here for Indians,
We want to hear the wail, black Friday spilling
from a swollen belly some priest once jammed.
Through the stations my ears vent the clack
of fourteen agonies in wooden sound.
So few know them. One brave reads to a spirit.
Who’ll turn the rock, bear the sheet-draped pall?
Everyone is awkward as the tribes divorce
original mystery. In procession, four squaws
and a buck mock the ring of fire and stone.
The blood of the fire is Christ. Fire is the sun.
A mother turns from the wall.
"These are hymns. I am Latin. Carry Him.
Take His body, give sweet Jesus to the dark horn
of the moon. Make His grave a mountain of snow,
For He is a ritual of wind."

Cars spin in the road. It's over for a year.
The long-hair snaps his orange jacket.
His fire—a cigarette, a match broken
by the cracked spool of his western heel.
TOWARD ISSAQUA AND GULLS

Where the tarred road bends west, native trout roil in the Lochsa. Snow run-off brightens the run of early spring. Small towns float the rills of farmland.

On the final pass doves bring rain. Cascades break violent. No sun names their pitch and ledge today. Through the fog, green pockets fall heavy with their color. Fresh winds point to sea.

Seattle's fresh like an open market. Women with rings in their ears, Italian bells for tongues, hustle kale. Trawlers on Puget groove like divers. The mist splits once for sun-tipped birds. From the market over water, bars hang like caves--neon duller than the filagree of nations. Soon I am a schooner with no sail.

These houses are singular, hidden
by the swelling north-coast green and flowers
that run like salmon, wild and colored
by accidental gardeners.
The city serves up hills, rolling songs
from the oriental Sound. Chinese trim the water.
A city is what's left once you go away.
I only visit, glad to breathe the salt.
I cross a city lake where a barber catches perch;
drive four lanes back to thin air,
lighter green and rocks too high-toned grey for sea.