

Fall 1976

## Poem Written at Dawn for Frank Paluka

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### Recommended Citation

Dubie, Norman (1976) "Poem Written at Dawn for Frank Paluka," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 7 , Article 15.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss7/15>

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**POEM WRITTEN AT DAWN FOR FRANK PALUKA**

A desk before a window.

A prism sits in its willow frame. Beside it  
Are two yellowed postcards, a pencil and stick-matches.  
Light passes through the prism, breaking down  
Into colors that are steady: there's green,  
Violet and yellow. Outside everything is thawing,  
And deep in the woods crocus and skunk cabbage  
Are growing from the center of actual slabs  
Of color:  
The open, black and indigo sides of deer, breaking down,  
A cadaver of deer everywhere!  
(Much of two herds starved in the last snow.)

But there are the two postcards on the desk.  
One is filled with  
The bright conical flowers of a painting by Redon.  
The other, much older, I have  
Looked at since I was a boy: it shows

Five bathers beside the river Neva, they are old men  
And large with mottled stomachs that droop  
Like the blonde nests of Osprey-hens.  
These men are out at daybreak, all around them  
Russia is waking; with axes they have chopped  
Through the ice and three of them are entering  
The river for their swim, the other two just  
Now are stepping from the water, and it's  
These two who are  
Amazing: they are chilled, transparent,  
With here and there a swirl of blue, they are like  
Crystals of amethyst which a light  
Is passing through, the light falling broadly  
Into reds and dark yellows all along  
The snow on the riverbank, colors like in that corner

Of the room with flowers that Redon painted, tropical  
And new. But these bathers,

These nude figures, three stepping down,  
The other two ascending like in a judgement, they don't  
Belong to Redon's painting. But to a dark mural  
That is cruel and medieval. Things change!

Light passes through this prism in its willow frame.  
There are stick-matches. A pencil.  
Winter insists on detail. Things change.