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Cut Bank 25

featuring:

The Stone that will not Break

a sampler of Native America
CutBank

where the big fish lie

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CUTBANK 25
Fall/Winter 1986

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Contents

CutBank 25

Fiction
Gordon Lish  History, or the Four Pictures of Vludka  7
Daniel Wallace  I'm Still Here  9

Poetry
Hillel Schwartz  Dance for the End of Hunger  13
Quinton Duval  in the Ballroom of the El Cortez Hotel  13
Cleopatra Mathis  Rare  14
Robert Wrigley  Mayflies  15
Sam Hamill  Runner in March Rain  16
Jeannine Savard  Steelhead  17
Michael Rattee  Black Marsh Eclogue  18
Ann Douglas  How She Got Her Real Name  19
Mary Ann Farrell  The History of Someone Else  20
Kevin Cantwell  Rousseau's Virgin Forest with Panther  21
Anne C. Bromley  Place of the Tiger  22
W. Bishop  Late Night Replay at Buddy's Exxon  24
Kenneth Schexnayder  There are Ripe Moments that Sing  26
Jeff Worley  El Radio  27
Barry Silesky  For the First Time  28
Michael Arvey  Distinctions  29
Shannon Nelson  Cornucopia  30
Hans Ostrom  Castling  31
Don Welch  Note  32
David Graham  Artaud, Don't Let It Snow  33
Mercedes Lawry  Deep Water, Wide River  34
Jack Driscoll  Tornado in the Pennsylvania Hills  36
Louis Forster  Steel-Worker  37
Rochelle Nameroff  The Valley Where We Live  38
G. St. George  Wrestling  39
Martha Wickelhaus  Look Park: Florence, Massachusetts, 1958  40
Lydia Vizcaya  The Young Doctor and I  41
                  The Sky So Much Closer  42
                  zero, once again  44
                  Women at a Sphygmomanometer  45
                  Powder Sugar Donut  46
### Contents

#### The Stone that will not Break: a sampler of Native America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy Harjo</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of Rituals, Horses &amp; Muses</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an interview with an introduction by Pamela Uschuk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Welch</td>
<td>Fools Crow</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an excerpt from his forthcoming novel, Fools Crow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet Homer</td>
<td>looking for the circle</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Tafoya</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Glancy</td>
<td>Evolution of the Sacred Dog</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clothes Horse</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Weasel Head</td>
<td>Coyote Tries Again</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Yellow Robe</td>
<td>When Baby Comes Home</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critic</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bette Thiebes</td>
<td>on Patricia Goedicke</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Martin</td>
<td>on Ken Gerner</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronwyn Pughe</td>
<td>on Jim Heynen</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Farr</td>
<td>Three Blackfeet Warriors</td>
<td>cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Cheyenne</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. New Breast and Sam</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wolf Plume</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woman Pitching a Tepee</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flathead Indians</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dog Gun</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### CutBank 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Books & Magazines Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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History, or the Four Pictures of Vludka

He said that he had been considering the convention of the Polish girl, and I said, "In literature—you mean in literature," and he said, "Yes, of course," how else would he mean? touching eyeglasses, beard, lip while noting that he was feeling himself compelled to take up the pose of the poet in eucharistic recollection of etc., etc., etc.—as literary necessity, that is.

He said, "So can you help, do you think?"
I said, "From memory, you mean."
"That's it," he said. "Any Polish girl you ever had a thing with."
I can tell you what the trouble with me was—no beard anywhere on me, no eyeglasses either, meat of real consequence to neither of my lips—nothing, at least, to speak of, nothing to give me a good grab of anything, nothing on my face for anyone to hang on to, nothing to offer even me a good grip.
He said, "Whatever comes to mind, I think."
Here was the thing with me—I did not know what to do with my hands.
"Whatever pops into your head," he said, off and at it again, fingering eyeglasses, beard, lip.
The oaf was all feelies, I tell you—the moron was ledges from top to bottom.
"So," he said, "anything you might want to conjure up for me, then? I mean, just the barest sketching, of course, no need for names, as it were, and addresses."

But I had never had one. I mean, I hadn't had a Polish girl. What I had had back before that inquiry came to me was a great wanting to pass myself off as a fellow who had had whatever could be gotten.
"Vludka," I said, "her name was Vludka."
"Perfect," he said. He said, "Name's Vludka, you say."
"Yes," I said, "and very, for that matter, like it, too."
"I see her," he said. "Stolid Vludka."
"In the extreme," I said. "In manner and in body."
"Yes, the nakedness," he said. "A certain massiveness, I imagine—wide at the waist, for instance, the effect of flesh built up in slabs."
I said, "Vludka's, yes. And hard it was, too. Oh, she was tougher and rougher than I was, of course—morally and physically the bigger, better party."
"But smallish here," he said, showing.
I said, "Even said she was sorry about it for the way they were before she took her clothes off, and then when she had them off, saw that she should have been warning me about how big everything else was."
He said, "Could tell you'd be lost inside her, awash in stolid Vludka, mouse proposing monkey business to elephant."
I said, "There I was, a punk in spirit, a puniness in fiber."
He said, "It was impossible."
"I said to her, 'Vludka, this is impossible.'"
He said, "She was too Polish for you, much too Polish."
"So I said to her, 'Do something, Vludka. Manage this for us.'"
He said, "She was pliant, compliant—Polish. You said to her, 'You handle it, Vludka, and I'll watch,' and she did," he said, "didn't she?".
"Because she was pliant," I said. "Compliant," I said. "Polish," I said.
He said, "It took her eleven minutes."
I said, "I sort of knew it would."
He said, "That's how stolid she was."
I said, "It was endless. My arm was exhausted for her. I timed her on my watch. Even for a Polish girl, it was incredible. I tell you, she used a blunt fingertip, a thumb even."
"It was thunderous," he said. "Ponderous," he said. "You thinly watching, you meagerly urging. 'For pity's sake, come, Vludka, come,' " he said.

#

What I didn't tell him is that what I was really watching were the four pictures on Vludka's bedroom wall instead. These are what they were of—of Vludka at the railing of a big wooden-looking boat, of a runabout with the door open and Vludka sitting in it with her hands up on the wheel, of Vludka and her father on a blanket in a forest, of a road sign that when Vludka finished doing it to herself she said, "Majdanek, you know what's there?"

#

He said, "Well?"
I said, "Well what?"
He said, "What you were thinking—the road sign—Majdanek—what was it that was there?"
I said, "You read my mind."
He said, "No, just books about the camps."

#

All my life I have never known what to do with my hands.
I'm Still Here

My window frames the view of a long brown field of grass. Nothing like a skyline, I told her; this is the country. This is a field of grass. In the morning I watch the cows graze there and a man on a tractor in the distance plowing; my binoculars bring him to me, and I can almost read his hat. This is my perspective: Linda used to look through the other end of these glasses, and that was hers. There's an old barn close by, used for nothing now, gray and deeply weathered; it leans to one side, the very picture of decay. Each morning it surprises me by still being there. I like to think that one slim crutch of a plank keeps the whole thing standing; could be. I don't know. This is just what the barn looks like to me, like any day now it won't be there anymore.

There's a two-lane county road between my house and the field, just a strip of soft, black asphalt. By noon everyday now the heat begins to rise in sheets from the road, and looking through it, through the heat, I mean, the cows and the barn and the little man out there plowing shift and ripple, like a mirage. There's a car every so often but you could count the number, this road is so poorly traveled. It doesn't go anywhere, that's the problem. It goes nowhere for the longest time, twisting through hills and trees for the most part. There'll be an occasional mailbox set back from it and an old, gutted-out mobile home, and then, as if by accident, a town appears—Bingham—with its low brick buildings, stores and parking meters, the one red light. Then the road disappears into trees again.

I have been to Bingham once, with Linda, to shop for the fruit we heard was especially good there; Bingham is famous for its peaches. We bought a basket, and ate a few. The town is small, of course, and almost twenty miles away, but at night I can see it glowing over the hills like something on fire, and it is beautiful—but nothing like a skyline. I like it still, and imagine—because it's that time of night when I don't have anything better to do—I imagine coming upon Bingham through the dark woods as a man who has been away somewhere for a very long time, and who has never seen a city or a town like that before, with its stores and parking meters, people living that way together, seeing those lights and the wonder of it for the first time. I sit at the edge of the woods looking down on Bingham until I understand it. Then I turn around and head back in the direction I came. This must have really happened once, a long time ago: somebody decided not to live in Bingham, the fruit it is famous for notwithstanding.

This is as I have done, in my own fashion. I have my view. I am a figure in the landscape. Every night, though, I give myself a chance to live in Bingham; I make my decision, as if for the first time, every night. This is only fair. It's never settled with me, every day brings the same choice with it. But for the moment I know
where I am, and for the moment I do not live in Bingham. I live, quietly, someplace else.

And believe me, it is nothing if not quiet. Everything that happens here happens quietly, the living and the dying both. There have been two in the past year, two quiet deaths, and that barn is still standing. It was Mr. and Mrs. Jemison, my next door neighbors, and good people, too easy to miss. Miss Jemison used to bring us flowers. A bunch of them would be on the porch in the morning—roses, daisies, sunflowers—like offerings, but they weren't that at all. I'll try to make it simple for myself: she had flowers, so she gave them to us. She taught Linda how to can vegetables and quilt; they would spend hours together, just talking: about me, I used to think, when Linda came back with her cheeks flushed. But now I'm sure my name was as far from their minds as the rest of the world was: they had their own there, for a time, and then Linda left, and Mrs. Jemison died.

Mr. Jemison was retired, but from what I never knew. He had been retired for so long that nothing seemed to precede it, nothing but a war and the way things used to be. He enjoyed telling me about what I didn't know, which was everything from cows to the weather, and I enjoyed learning. His honest innocence, though, was the quality I most admired in him. Linda used to scream at the pitch of her coming at night, a long, terrible, lovely scream, and the next day if Mr. Jemison and I happened to meet at the mailbox he would ask me, quietly, "Everything okay up at the house?" He thought I was beating her, I think, and when she left me here he was most likely confirmed in that, but he never mentioned it, not even after his wife died. That Linda was actually gone was a fact they never accepted, though. For a long time they kept asking me, "How's Linda? What's she been doing with herself?" That sort of thing. For them she too had become part of the view, and by the time her absence from it became apparent Mrs. Jemison died, and Mr. Jemison went a little crazy, and Linda was not talked about much after that.

I put it all in my letters, the whole business, all the dying.

What happened was this: Mrs. Jemison died and then Mr. Jemison went crazy. But it wasn't her dying so much that did it, I don't think that was everything, the whole story: it was the book she was reading when she died. The book in her lap with her hands, that's how her husband found her, just sitting, as if death hadn't budged her at all. Those were his words, by the way, a turn of phrase he was fond of: as if death hadn't budged her at all.

Well, there was a funeral, and then all of us went home, Mr. Jemison to his impossible empty one, and me to mine. I had him over for dinner, a game of cards or the tv, which he seemed to stare at more than watch, his mind on other things. And then, a couple of weeks later, he went crazy.

He read that book is what happened, the book she died with. I'd never known him to read much before, nothing but the paper, but that book he must have read one hundred times. He always had it with him, and whenever we got together he showed it to me. He had certain passages in the book, the novel, underlined in red ink, whole paragraphs bracketed. What he would do is show me something on a page, and then he'd ask me to read it. "You've got book smarts," he said. "What do you think?" His eyes would narrow, waiting for my judgements. "Fine,"
"It sounds fine to me."
"What do you mean 'fine'?" he said to me once. 
"Fine. What's that mean?" Because this wasn't the kind of answer he was after at all, and it took me a long time to understand just what it was he was after, too long. What he was reading for was the part that killed her, the words that made her heart stop. He told me, finally. It was the book that did it, he was certain. The book had killed his wife. Oh, it was safe for us to read, he said; you and me are made of stronger stuff. But not Mrs. Jemison. It was not a book for her. She hurt to see a moth die, he said, and Linda should've known that. Then he would look as though he'd just remembered who I was. Where is Linda, anyway? he'd say. Then he would go off and read some more. By the time he died, which was only a little while ago now, the book was almost entirely red with his markings. He died in his sleep, the book on his bedside table.

Something else he said: Death follows death. He said this not long after his wife died. He knew this, and I imagine Linda did too, in her own way, a long time ago. I put all this in my letters and she wrote back to me, I wish you'd left out that part about the book.

And I wrote back, Linda, I know that.

My window frames the view of a long brown field of grass. In the morning I watch the cows graze there, and a man on a tractor in the distance plowing. And the barn. The mailman walks into this picture limping; one leg is shorter than the other, he will be the first to tell you. He waves at me from the road, waves at me, sometimes, holding a letter. I am long past pretending the mail means nothing to me, and we have become something like friends since the Jemisons died, when his route was almost cut in half. Mrs. Jemison used to bring him iced tea on the hot days, a service I think he expects of me now.

I walk out to meet him, watching him eye the envelope, touching it all over with his fingers. I say hello, but still he doesn't give it to me. He's reading the postmark; he's waiting for me to reach for it. The letter, please. Finally he hands it over, and we look at it together for a minute.

"Never been there," he says. "Imagine."

Then he and I talk about the weather, or something else I know nothing about.

Inside I read it. Twice, three times, reading for a code, for something the words aren't saying. Then I read the others in the order they came to me, like chapters. Her life now is as large as the world—she is everywhere. As the postmark changes so does the way she signs her letters. Linda. Linda Josephine. Linda Josephine Lawrence. Your pal, Linda. Lovely Linda. Jo. Joe. Linda Joe. Love. Linda. Sincerely. Yours. Thinking of you. Wish you were here. Linda, Linda, Linda.

My window frames the view of a long brown field of grass and that barn, still standing. I'm thinking of what isn't, of all of us. Mr. Jemison told me some things. I learned a lot from him. Cows have two stomachs, for instance, and a bull is the one without teats. All of them, he said, are as dumb as wood. Before a storm comes they like to fornicate; all of the animals act strange. Notice, before a storm comes there's nary a bird on the telephone wires, and the squirrels move real fast. These
are some of the signs that a storm is coming, and then, if something in him kicked
he knew it was going to be a big one. Now Mrs. Jemison said she could smell
one coming two days away, but Mr. Jemison said not to believe her; no one can
smell a storm two days away he said. Still, there are things you can smell in the
wind. And this, one of the last things: he told me that the most quiet time of the
day happens at five forty-five in the morning. He was sure of it. I know, he said,
because I listen, and I couldn’t dispute that.

All of this I put in my letters to Linda, all of it simply to ask her, What are your
skylines to this? You call that a view! Cows have two stomachs, Linda, and know,
please, know what they do in the rain. The cows, Linda, the cows! Listen, Linda:
what is there to listen to where you are? What is it you’re listening to? Where I
am, here, I can hear the sound the dead make sleeping, and a twig snap thirty
miles away.

This is one way to live a life, Linda, just one. In all fairness, though, let me tell
you: last night I stood for a long time looking at Bingham, and the rest of the world.
I felt like something on fire. I was thinking about the time you and I took the new
quilt and a bottle of white wine into that barn with us, trespassing and whispering
so softly, knowing, the both of us, that the sound of our own voices were enough
to bring it down on top of us. But that’s why we were there. We used our clothes
for pillows and we drank, until you wanted me. “But careful,” you said. “One false
move and we’re goners.” There were no false moves. We came out of the barn
alive, and surprised to be that way, too. Alive, I mean. Living. Which is the other
way to pass a life, living, to scream at the pitch of it all as you did, and as you
still do, somewhere else now, as if it mattered where you did it. As if that were
the point, Linda.

Me? I’m still here. For the moment I do not live in Bingham, with its low brick
buildings, peaches and parking meters. I’m nowhere you’ve ever heard of, reading
Linda’s letters, reading for the part that kills me, the words to make my heart stop,
quietly dying.
Dance For The End Of Hunger
In The Ballroom Of The El Cortez Hotel

So much the body knows
it knows by extension.
Waivoka danced for ghosts
to save the plains.
The Guarani dance still
night & day to find themselves
so light they will fly
out of the Amazon
to the Land Without Evil.
& we on conquistador tiles
dance against famine, thin faces
blown up & hung from walls.
Mamba fox-trot pogo bunnyhop,
one animal after another,
dancing. Dancing. Dancing.

The Shakers danced to be separate.
Nijinski danced not to be alone.
Astaire danced with a hat-rack.
& we dance in the company of shades,
women hardly there, men crouching
like coyotes beneath their own bones.
Rare

The white ranuncula
contains the small green
seeds of aphids in a certain
stage, you tell me.
Pale azaleas float
in the celadon bowl
and the water inside
is the only water
the long brown cat will drink.
The wet red smile
in the dog's leg is rare
too, cut by the curved tooth
in proportion, as it is.
Pigment in flowers,
able, able.
Blood spot on concrete,
a small piece of change
a heart big as a rose
pumps out a little
at a time. When all this
turns away, turns to light,
it will drift over water
and sky in the bowl and ripple
the smooth line between.
Mayflies

In a thick purple twilight
mayflies rise from the floor of the lake.
Born in mud, they live a dark life
until a message is delivered by something
we still don't understand. A tapping
Perhaps, a slight heart squeeze
something such as home can give.
Their lives on the wing are small,
and by the second sloughing of chitin
their ecstacy begins to die
like the sun behind our mountain.
Walking back through the dark
we see them swirl about the porch light
snow blind in the work of a quieter world.
By their very slightness these small things endure
and drift in triumph against our door.
Runner In March Rain

I think now I must earn the land,
earn star and snow and sleep. And wide awake,
earn it past sorry. So when it's too cold
I rise and crack the ice and blow
smoke against the wood and become the one
who runs face-up in sleet
for the needle in the breath of it,
proof in the rasping. I run until the dark
recedes. And make myself
repeat the hill
until the trees take shape,
until the word I run with
fixes this place in time.

What I owe
is the feed-me, the shudder of asking.
I owe my weight, what other
price for the personal:
water no longer water
but the ghostly forms it represents, the past
clotted or released in the road and ditch and air.
Silence is what I owe.
And I can't define it—no more than hilltop,
no more than another mile
will cure the head's black ache,
hatless in the cold,
dumb for the hammer.

I run in a glass house, I beat
this house of wish and doubt
until it crashes, until it shatters.
Here's empty, here's necessary
in the crucial rain-blind panting, the trick
to be still and keep my panic
from the deer in the green-cracked field.
They own the earth rights
to the season breaking.
Steelhead

in memoriam: R.H.

Salt-dazed in fresh water, he eats
nothing but the miles upstream, lame
ladders over dams and the silty back-
waters behind them, slack, brackish, and dull.

Some believe in the hatchery, some
in the river, but each believes in the code
for home. He makes his way shimmering,
all iridescence and muscle, a fog-bound apple
in an uphill world. His convex eye
beholds us, our emissaries of feather and steel,
and he strikes—no reason but the hell
of distance, the cantankerous, tiresome way.

If we are lucky, we love enough
to let him go. Unhooked, lightly held
near the surface of a pool, he'll sway
and pulse, drift and flex.

And in our numb fingers we'll feel him
come alive, the coil and re-coil
of heart and hard flesh, and slick shot snaked
toward oblivion, that pure dream of home.
Black Marsh Eclogue

Although it is midsummer, the great blue heron holds the darkest winter in his hunched shoulders, those blue-turning-gray clouds rising over him like a storm from the Pacific.

His stands in the black marsh more monument than bird, a wizened prophet returned from a vanished mythology. He watches the hearts of things and does not move or speak. But when at last he flies, his great wings cover the darkening sky, and slowly, as though praying, he lifts, almost motionless as he pushes the world away.
How She Got Her Real Name

A woman too old for jury duty
Waits outside the courtroom
For her sister. She throws
Her handkerchief down the stairwell,
Watching the initial A swirl like one arm
Shooting off a child's star—a stamp
For the first tree
Drawn well. The branches are firm
And will hold the overgrown raven
With its beak layed over with a garter snake.
The bird is wearing a plug hat
Like her father's on an evening out.
Her mother is pinned to a clothesline
Inside her wedding gown. In the sky
Between sheet lightning,
Is a bible, a gavel, her father,
The judge, naming her—Avis,
Daughter of the blackbird of Newmarket.
The women who loved him
recall his face as the sound
of a few certain words
his hands as a shaking
inside their purses
they think of him as forever
forgetting names and addresses
forever leaving his shoes
outside their doors
pointing towards the street
filling with either dust or rain
each of them
remembers him the same
though the words differ
the shaking either larger or smaller
still they would recognize him
sitting in a nursing home
holding an old purse
convinced that his memories
are the history of someone else
he knows there were women
who helped contain him
streets that kept changing
beneath his ruined shoes
but has forgotten the words
he used to say for love
the amount he would take
to regain his senses
Rousseau's Virgin Forest

with Panther

Pink hat-sized waterlilies
steam open through the ferns,
a brief distraction
like the flowering cacti
from the very human

shadow beneath the spotted claws.
The beast has taken to his hindlegs
—arrested there—
the pale, exposed guess
of his underbelly turned away.
How taut the clove of his head is,
tipped back to sense
what passes.

His shadow pauses with him.
And all of Paradise
stirs in a breeze pungent now with sweat.
Perhaps they see what's coming—

the moon
wreathed in pliant branches,
one blood-red round
burning in the pale blue sky,

a moon so full
that like love
it has never been able
to fail, turn
brown, or heal-over.
Place Of The Tiger

He stands outside the open door, shoulders as grand as those who cut the hot cane. Some pesticide has caused his smooth marble flesh to crack, giving him time away from the acres of rows, loose, cool time. Noon's blasting sun reflects off his upper arms without the aid of sweat. He darts into a bar, hearing about Guy's lottery.

How unbending, the powerful spine of the bars' flat roofs. They make the eye dive before muscular fronts of tan, reddish brown, and tan. The handprinted signs hide so well it is only in light's quickness that they can be read. Yet one hears no pant from them, does not feel the heart's scream from a chase. So sleepy now, it must be safe in the day: the years of brown skins, black skins here with their rented wants for a nickel bag, a black American woman, beer, the fast rush of money won.

Back outside, he leans against another wall, eyeing a black stick in the garbage dropped between two buildings. A clean shiny stick, he picks it up to clap his hand, swings its shine into high-polishing air. Just a man with a piece of wood,
a man safe with his time who doesn't see
the cop pull over and yank it away
so quickly his we don't want you
to get into trouble is already lost.

Two men ask, what's going on,
Koman-ou-ye,
but he cannot answer, still not believing
the speed of it all,
anger freely stinging his cheeks.
Three men, four,
and the pack around him gathers,
ready to shoulder him as one of their own.
Late Night Replay At Buddy’s Exxon

Everything visible
drained to white
so that his brain went
blind & an iced
runnel of nerve
prickle jumped electric
through his spine
& he jelled in mid-
reach for a carton
of Camels, the whole
animal of his heart,
cramped & twisted
like an arm between
his shoulder blades,
turned to what it scented,
tuned to any movement,
as if its movement
would send impulse
spinning
through its hairpin
curves, would touch off
the firing pin
submerged in the action:
the dicy nerves
of the Luger, which
quivered and sniffed
and nuzzled his nape
like a doberman’s nose.

Alone in the slump
& churn of adrenaline’s
soup, he shut down
the pumps, cut
the lights, the cash
drawer agape
like a broken jaw.
Half-way home: how he couldn't remember. Under the streetlight—the chrome glitter of waxed leaves: the reflection of toy guns in sunlight: the kid from around the block of his past, denying the outcome of a battle: Screaming that he was alive, not dead, alive. . . .
There Are Ripe Moments That Sing

Deus, and no fruit is eaten, only rain falls over an arid plain

and women open screen doors to touch the wet to their faces
and men gather in a circle
to dance a story that is just beginning; it is the solstice, the sun
is in the south corner of time
before the slow siege of snow on the distant mountain
as near as ants beneath a house.

The snow is worn as mantillas or yamulkas are worn by the devout

as they journey through prayer— slow climb on an Everest of uncertainty.

Rain would make it all so clear—

They are impressed by the emphasis of snow when they wake to find it unpredictably there.

Silent. A temple of crystals. Solitude built upon cold and colder air Clashing.
I wake to his voice.

In a dream I was told
El Radio is God here
And I believe it.

Where jungle eats at foothills
and birds drop to flames at sunset,
El Radio rules a willing world.
In empty squares at midnight,
he backs young men
yearning for the knife fight.
He fills the village houses,
visiting his people,
promising them a life
they will never know.

He lightens women
and they dance for him
beside the river.

Men take him up volcanoes,
burn resin, search for
the hidden message of their days
lost in his voice,

in his improvident voice.
For The First Time

Cockatoos gnaw the heart from papaya, leaving only yellow streaked skins. On the reef at morning, blue starfish abandoned by the tide. Take these events as signifiers, not for the grief of loss we fear our children will know, forests gone, the sea a carrier of pestilence, but for design, the way men or women lift their eyes after a mistake, seize some inner knot of strength and using both hands tie a stronger one.

It is the moment of clarity that matters: the slow warmth of satisfaction felt when for the first time I saw in humus fertility and not death. Like in the letter I wrote to my friend, trying to explain my leaving, that the ocean between us is not simply abrasive waves, a stripping away. It has more to do with how the gravel reassembles as each wave dies. The continual reorganization. The sharp red as a lory darts from a coconut palm. Children who sketch patterns in the dirt after the midday sun. Daily I walk down to the stream to bathe, sit with the water to my neck. Then fallen leaves appear to move against the flow, and the salt from the sea, upward from the mouth.
Distinctions

At a window I long for my future, 
that it pull heavily at my cheeks and neck 
like the relaxing twilight. 
I long for its face to look back 
with pendant skin and the assurance 
that it is right to stand apart. 
I think of my friend who grew 
cold and afraid and took his life, 
who thought that scars always heal in sunlight. 
But still I wonder if his hand clutched 
at the shifting light on the carpet. 
And I am afraid, afraid each time 
the phone rings and I let it continue 
until it's relentless as his voice 
calling. I question the dead, 
their escape or release, 
and know there is a distinction. 
When I close my eyes, a woman in a country 
at war rebuilds her shop and trades 
with anyone. In a few days she'll fall 
against her child, against her counters, 
to finally stare into the sun. 
I open my eyes to the glass 
of scotch on the sill, the shadows 
on my face from too little sleep, 
the streetlight that grows suddenly bright. 
But one night does not reflect another. 
I no longer drive for hours 
to forget the disappointment, 
or the anger at having been abandoned. 
Over and over, 
the face that I draw 
in my breath on the window means nothing.
Cornucopia

In Asia powdered rhino horn is believed to be an aphrodisiac.—National Geographic

You’ve wandered since late afternoon through thorn scrub, elephant grass, forests of mahogany—hooked lip stripping flowers from the acacia, fruit from the baobab, circling back to the wallows where you rolled all morning, baking belly-up, body drying to a fine white dust.

Now, you sense the horizon of sound closing around you in the Crater, men moving, blurring into the elements of near distance.

A sudden upwind blizzard explodes through a crosshatch of branches and slows you to your knees, a long breath of dust rising in your fall. Your blood heavy with sleep.

Machine guns bedded in the truck, they surround your huge silence and take what they’ve come for. A white quarter moon rising above them.
So whose story is it anyway? Which one holds the glass of whiskey while someone else dreams another night, twists a damp hankie and a withered leaf of wandering jew stares back at the next blank morning?

I want to erase the part that stuck in the middle, the unnamed animal escaped from the zoo whose invidious breath seeped into dinner, and suddenly I didn’t understand how we got here and the city’s lights blinked off one by one like secret weapons in someone else’s hands. Now I just want to start over, without any memory of those greasy clots mining the kitchen.

Here, let’s take a walk in the bright afternoon, really, I like your story, that elegant gesture of hand, the way you touch something I can’t explain and won’t leave me alone . . . but it’s bitter cold, sun glaring down the razored air, and both of us frozen with what we can’t take back. Still, I told you once, I don’t give up easily; it costs too much to get here— castling, you called it, this trading back and forth, hands, places, all right, I’m still playing . . .
Loons at the edge of this town
translate my voice—nothing lost.
In the scrunched acmeism of this room,
in the cold, dark arc
of the fireplace: syllabic
ash, a piano’s
insistent fortissimo, whiff
of kvass souring in jugs, paper
prohibitions, black snow. Again,
Osip tours the cemeteries,
fusses over lack
of sleep, and I the empty
synagogues, honey
I buy hard, scarce
kopecks, molded loaves. So many
bricks, matches struck
against them, blue spurts—
Efron’s skin now
a last shovelful of dirt
thrown over him,
Irina given away like a shrivelled goat,
Alya dew on a Gulag boot.
My mouth a noose
swings across my face, another zero
lined up, added to zeros, August here
long as Octobers.
Who holds my work, holds my body.
This note, my echo.
From Yelabuga, Yelabuga.
Artaud, Don’t Let It Snow

I kiss your plague of lips, Artaud,
As your hands, swallows, flit over you,
And mouth, pinched as a bat’s, blips
Your breath chops at the air
I begin flicking pocketknives at every tree
Lash myself spluttering to highest branches during storms
Lift the pinholed cardboard of my face
To the eclipse swelling around me
Zigzag down sidewalks, kneel
And psalmodize to cracks
Hear strains of Castilian light
Slip from the blue crevasse
Is Synovia still alive?
I take inventory of all my absences
Pry the windows of asylums
Walk on my hands, bones tumbling out of pockets
From the cold sun and grip of your stare Artaud
My tongue wrinkles, closes its eyes like a lizard waning
My testicles tighten for this winter
Deep Water, Wide River

Hillbillies from Tennessee, all twelve strummed on the big front porch which sagged like a beer belly, music twining through the creepers, dusk licking its tongue of light around my summer bed. I floated on their twanging boat wondering where Jordan was.

The other neighbors latched their screens, turning up Milton Berle, something in the way that family "howled" they called it, that string of harmony winding up the street like a dog, tail tucked-under, the moon a locked-in bitch in season.

But I loved the old instruments, frets worn from the oil of many fingers, the scratched upright slightly out of tune, ivories bruised as aging flesh. Roped to the heaped truck like a cow, I watched them lower it, along with banjos, guitars, mandolins, "barnyard heaven" the neighbors called it.

One of the girls taught me notes, her thick rug-colored braids tickling my nose as she bent over me, humming like running water, Ah-ah-ma-zi-i-ing- See? I ached for music or God as I lay in bed, listening to them sing their mother across.
Her coffin sat on the porch for three days, the neighbors about to call the police, the *noise*, they complained, the *stench* of those roses— I wanted to cross the street, sing with them from the lap of their porch. On the opposite shore, the moon rose pale and gold as the notes we held.
On the morning afterwards, I could not find the driveway, and East was gone. I tried to reinvent direction. Where the north woods stood now there was sky, a blasted space our barn had entered.

Now out of hardship, we make board feet. The loggers call to bid on damage. Lithe trees stiffen, ooze sap through splinters. They'll go for suburban studs, veneer, chips, paper for the memoranda at the Bureau of Natural Disasters.

The twisters took my words for terror when it went back to sky. In place of them I give our friends bland facts: It sounded like a train. It was 6 miles wide and 12 miles long. We don't know how we're alive.

Now out of harm my wife and daughter make tunes. Their simplest songs help us trust the calm again. After tornado, the farm's afraid to make a noise. After tornado, our unassuming love seems loud.
Steel-Worker

There was nothing eloquent about his fatigue. The great biceps of his arms sagged, the hernia was a fist of pain in his scrotum.

Beside him another man worked in a dream, or seemed to stand rather, in a place of white grass where the sky was cool.

And as he watched, he seemed to see the man kneel, placing his hands in the grass, then stand up. But somehow, without reason, it was not enough,

until one by one he saw them, too, other men slipping out of their clothes, their scars, their shoes.
The Valley Where We Live

A doe stands in the garden, nibbling lettuce
we don't care to pick. OK, we say to the sun.
Between the deer's legs rabbits walk their awkward way.
The valley where we live is steep but not cloistered.
Anything mild may enter: rain showers,
balloons, snails, dictionaries, timothy, milk.
Any born violence soon rises of its own energy
and spins off the rim of our horizon.
We make up gentle nicknames to their memory:
dust devil, hooligan, zigzag, roughhouse.
Potatoes turn earth itself sweet, we say,
burying our mild dead where we must.
We like poplar trees, how they take the quaking wind
and calm it with slender semaphore.
Sometimes, though, wandering the upper paths,
we hear from beyond our valley muffled shouts,
insistent chant of engines run uphill.
Then the poplars shudder without wind.
Then we pace our sheep-cropped lawns meaning to do
whatever we have forgotten. Like children
standing the first time at a cliff's windy edge
we wonder what it is keeps us from leaping.
Wrestling

My arms are thin, wrists weak.
I have never tried to win.
With only a mild breeze,
I could rise and whistle
through the forest, in and out
of pines, behind rocks.
A shadow, I could hide
close to the ground
like those small red berries.

Instead I am confronted
with a tall stranger. He wants
to wrestle. No chance, I laugh
and hold out my stick arms.
He doesn't seem to care, throws
me down, pins my chest.
I lie still, eyes half closed
against his blaze.
Nothing hurts.
I push back,
twist and turn and soon
we are locked as one writhing serpent.

When it is over and he
has disappeared, I listen
to quick breaths
fly out of my mouth
like sparrows.
To my blood, thick
with beating wings.
Look Park: Florence, Massachusetts, 1958

Each day after swimming
how I loved the hot massage of the shower,
the nozzle wide open on the back of my neck.

But one Sunday I was the last one out of the pool
and the women from the asylum
were already under the showers when I walked in,
a mix-up in hours.
They all wore bathing suits except the youngest one
who would not leave when a whistle shrieked
from the locker room.
I stood sunburned and shivering,
stared through the sting of chlorine
at the first naked woman I had ever seen.
I was scared when she turned towards me.

I was only thirteen,
that age when love hovers around the flesh
of magazine nudes unfolding
all summer behind a friend’s garage.
“What I would do,” I boasted then,
meant nothing when she moved steaming to touch me,
and I knew growing up I would remember my fear
of her wet lips parting
and the way she kissed me with her eyes wide open,
her skin clean and glistening in a way that was never insane.
We sat with old coffee in the doctor's lounge after she'd delivered with me a baby born too soon

and had seen eyes dull and rolling as dolls, a head flopping like it floated in syrup,

had suctioned a throat and breathed her breath between the lips, dancing

the limp blue limbs on her fingers, her hand cramping within the glove,

feeling how one feels death with new parents. She'd learned

before by rote and, high on caffeine, babysat books enough. She'd wanted

real life. We sat. She asked those questions little children ask.
The Sky So Much Closer

I now know the steadiness beneath my footprints as the body sees the world enough on trust,

and trust is the curvature of track through the tunnel and the tunnel is no cradle forever.

I will keep my eyes open, not counting this time, as my destination speeds toward me.

It is a clean room that will await me with the sun awake at each window.

It is a room cleared of shadows which I put there in my loneliness.

I know about shadows. They greet you with threadbare arms for your patching,

a halo of damage around their mouths. Shadows keep warm from desire without desire.

This is a story about shadows and this is a wish to be done with them,

for I used to seek the dark without question or I dreamt about the dark. In there

I often seemed an outline made of shadow which the sun might heat if it wished, and the people—

they could look through me as through a telescope. Farther back, beyond the container the eye seeks,

is the sun, the upthrusting grass, and their generous meeting in this world.

So I will clear this place like a pioneer, finding the sun through my face-hiding fingers,
and finding my face at last to belong to.
Even tonight, with the sky so much closer

I see layers of blue light lining the dark
and think I could live now inside the body.
zero, once again

this so perfectly
stuck up
Montana girl
eyes herself in shop windows
yes the world is your apple
if you know the ropes in Wolf Point
and so I say
honey, you can stick it
where the sun don't shine
but I don't count and she don't listen
eyeing some ape in a pickup instead
and it's for me to go
which, by the way,
is the opposite of come
Woman At A Sphygmomanometer

Here she is again
drawn like a Reno gambler,
a desperate
and beautiful woman
pulling quarter after quarter
from her purse, waiting
for the numbers to turn.
She's afraid this life
is killing her. Once more
the risk she's taken for love
and a little satisfaction
is murder on her
rocketing pulse rate. How long
can the numbers rage
before she's seen enough,
slept the last time
with blood thumping in her ears
while a man beside her
snoozes like a cat.
She's the bait,
the bird caught in a bush
praying her railing heart
doesn't give out. The cuff
squeezes her arm
like the grasp of an angel
angry she won't come peacefully.
She's wired up, her desperation
gone digital, lit up
like the oddsboard at a race.
Powder Sugar Donut

My grandmother made a man
back down one day
Right there on the sidewalk
outside the bakery
Downtown
Feet spread she held me
My face pressed into her belly
against her clean white warm
cool I make flour tortillas apron

She shook her fist at that man
Her voice cried
He had no choice before her

Grabbing my face she brought
her face close told me
never to listen to such words
Some people are mean and mean
no good
They are stupid and can't see
that
I am her grandchild

Always remember you are mine
Hold your head high
Do not listen to such people
They tell lies

I was spinning in the heat
An old man in a straw hat
passed by knowing and smiled
My grandma is brave

I was little
My grandma was big
Without her I have
no Mexican shadow
to cool the heat
Here come in girl
It's hot and hard
out there
Have a cookie
You want a powder sugar donut
Your grandmother loves you

Stay here and eat your donut
Here it is cool and
there's powder sugar
all over the place

Powder sugar walls
Powder sugar linoleum
Powder sugar cookies
Powder sugar dusted donuts
soften my heart
My grandmother is crying
in the bakery back room
My donut turns hard
Sticks in my throat
I push it down with a
swallow it lands
lying in a lump

A sadness with no name
finds me in the bakery
It settles on me
sucking out the coolness
taking the air right
out of the heat
“Northern Cheyenne”

from the collection of William Farr, reprinted with permission of the University of Montana Library.
The Stone that will not Break
The Stone that will not Break:

Joy Harjo
James Welch
Janet Homer
Terry Tafoya
Diane Glancy
Linda Weasel Head
William Yellow Robe

James Welch's "Fools Crow" will be included, in a slightly altered form, in his forthcoming novel of the same name.

"Mrs. New Breast & Sam" (pg. 49), from the collection of William Farr, courtesy of Don Magee.
Meeting

I am fragile, a piece of pottery smoked from fire
made of dung,
the design drawn from nightmares.
I am an arrow painted with lightning seeking the way to the name
of the enemy.
But the arrow has now created its own language.
It is the language of lizards and storms
and we have begun to hold conversations long into the night.
I quit eating. I don't work.
My children are hungry and the animals who live in the backyard
are starving.
I begin to draw maps of stars.
The spirits of old and new ancestors perch on my shoulders.
I make prayers of clear stones, of feathers from birds
who live closest to the gods.
The voice of the stone is flute
born of a meeting of yellow birds
circling the ashes of a smoldering volcano.
The feathers sweep the prayers
up and away.
I, too, try to fly but get caught in the crossfire of television signals
and my spirit drops back down to earth.
I am lost.
I am looking for you, muse, who can help me walk this thin line
between the breathing and the dead.
You are the curled serpent in the pottery of nightmares.
You are the dreaming animal who paces back and forth in my head.

We must call a meeting. Give me back my language and build a
house inside it.
A house of madness,
a house for the dead who are not dead.
And the spiral of the sky above it.
And the sun
and the moon.
And the stars to guide us called promise.
of Rituals, Horses, & Muses

an interview with Joy Harjo
with an introduction by Pamela Uschuk

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1951, Joy Harjo is of the Creek Tribe. Upon leaving Oklahoma, she attended high school at the Institute of American Indian Arts. Later, she received her B.A. from the University of New Mexico, and her M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers Workshop. Since then she's taught Creative Writing and Native American Literature at various schools and universities across the U.S., including Arizona State University, the Institute of American Indian Arts and the University of Montana, where she held the first Richard Hugo Memorial Visiting Writer Chair in 1985. Ms. Harjo has also been active in the Poets-In-Schools Program in various states in addition to giving numerous readings and workshops nationwide. Currently, she teaches full-time at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

A woman of tremendous energy, Ms. Harjo serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association of Third World Writers and has been on the Policy Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts. This year she will read in Nicaragua as a member of Poets For Peace sponsored by the Nicaraguan government. In February 1986, the Public Broadcasting Service will air an American Indian Artists Series in which Ms. Harjo reads her poems. Besides her numerous magazine and anthology publications, she has three full-length collections of poetry, The Last Song, What Moon Drove Me To This, and She Had Some Horses. Living in Denver, Ms. Harjo is presently working on a new collection of poems and a screenplay series.

Joy Harjo is in the vanguard of fine contemporary Native American writers. She writes from the center of her American Indian heritage, from her power as a woman and with respect for land and all the creatures — spirit, animal and human—who inhabit it, blending these influences and bringing their stories into the
contemporary world. Meridel Le Suer has said of Ms. Harjo and her work: "If you want to remember what you never listened to & what you didn’t know you knew, or wanted to know, open this sound & forget to fear. A woman is appearing in the horizon light."

#

Noni Daylight is a voice you use in several of your poems. Who is she, and what is her function?

HARJO: I haven’t thought of Noni Daylight for a long time, nor have I seen her. The last time I saw her was in Kansas City. She was thinking crazy thoughts, watching the trains, making plans. She left to become part of one of Barney Bush’s poems, and I haven’t heard from her since.

That was the Noni Daylight she became.

Originally, I came up with the name to use in an old, old poem in place of the name of someone I was speaking about who could have sued me for talking of her. I was not making her look good. It was a true portrait, event. But Noni quickly pulled away from that identity. It wasn’t truly her and she soon let me know that, had her own personality, and soon took part as her own self in other poems. When I think of her evolvement I am reminded of novelist friends of mine who tell me their characters take over the stories, and begin to tell the story, will not allow the writer to write them “out of character,” so to speak. She became a good friend, a Shawnee Indian, a little wild but with a hard streak of practicality. A survivor. She was there at the takeover of the BIA in Washington, started towards Wounded Knee but her car broke down and she didn’t have enough chewing gum to fix it. If you see her, tell her to get in touch with me, let me know how she is; it’s been awhile.

Horses are the dominant imagery in much of your work. I know they are traditionally important and encompass a wide range of emotions and ideas. In your poems, they seem to be spirits that guide the narrator of the poem through initiations. Would you care to comment on this?

HARJO: Yes, that could be one way of explaining them, if initiation is seen as the path of living in this mad and amazing world.
For Lorca the single most important ingredient in poetry was "duende," or black spirit, for Robert Graves, it was "baraca," the living soul-spirit accrued by common things with long-term everyday use. What is the single most important ingredient a poem must have for you? Will you elaborate?

HARJO: I believe Lorca and Graves were probably speaking about the same ingredient, but each called it different names. The face of it, the shape, the smell can shift and change according to the poem, but it is magic, a particular kind of magic. Its structure is the same as that which makes the connections between our body cells, something like gravity, like electricity, spirit. It transforms a word carcass, gives it dimension, will make a poem stunning, make it live.

What are your feelings about the poet as visionary?

HARJO: Of course, a poet has to have some connection with what is called "vision" or it just doesn’t work. It would be a little presumptuous to call oneself that. . . . I can recall the strange reactions when I have listed my occupation as "poet," on some form or the other. I can imagine the reactions "visionary" would invite.

But in other terms, a poet does have a responsibility to keep some kind of hard vision, the kind of vision I mean when I said, "And I was born with eyes that can never close." Our collective role in society is visionary. And I don’t see that as occurring in some ephemeral head place, but as a real and natural role. The "real" world is also the "spiritual" world. It is the same thing.

Some tribal elders have expressed consternation over Native American writers revealing sacred knowledge or rituals to the public through their work. I know this is a controversial issue. What is your position concerning this?

HARJO: I understand their concern. Writing has been used as a tool of rip-off against Indian people, Indian cultures since the first Europeans walked on this land. They have a right to be suspicious of it. The nature of writing itself invites suspicion to a tribal culture in which the spoken word is the way of communicating everything, history, stories, everything. Written words are without the eyes of the speaker. They can lie.

I totally agree with their stand against revealing sacred knowledge or rituals to a public audience. Those rituals, ways of knowledge, have power. Their secrecy, except to a few, is vitally necessary to keep some fool, either malicious or more likely ignorant of everything involved, from destroying the world.
Now I know of a few times when elders within certain tribes have advised some young poets to stop writing. I don't know of all the circumstances surrounding the advice, but I have noticed that it is usually women, not men who are advised so! Within my own tribal elders, it is looked upon as a distraction, as something we don’t need, because it isn’t traditional. But I have my own feelings about what constitutes “traditional,” which I don’t want to get into right now.

Do your commitments to women’s rights and to Native American rights ever run head-on? Do you see any conflict or is the conflict simply paranoia from the offended party?

HARJO: Yes, even though both overlap they each involve similar and different worlds. I don't see myself as a politically active person in the sense of someone going to meetings every week, or belonging actively to organizations who promote women’s rights or Native American rights, even though I give support in many ways, of which the most important, I believe, is with my work. It is what I do best, and can make the most significant contribution through doing what I am meant to do. Ultimately women’s rights and Native American rights have congruent goals. The problem comes when “women’s rights” appear to mean white women’s rights. That world can be out of context in terms of what Indian women need.

Do you feel Native American Literature is distributed and read as widely in the East as in the West? Is it adequately recognized by the East Coast Literary scene?

HARJO: Probably not. The West seen through the eyes of the East is still the “Wild West.” Often I have gotten the feeling from Eastern audiences that for Indian people to write they have to be an anomaly. It makes them “not Indian” because “real” Indians wouldn't know how to use pens and paper, and of course not typewriters or word processors. The “noble savage” is very alive in the East. Cooper never died. But that's not being fair to our audience there, because there are people in the East who are committed to Native American literature. My publisher, who also publishes Simon Ortiz and Barney Bush, is in New York City. And there is an audience there, some support.

You have been learning to play jazz saxophone for some time now. Has this changed your poetry? What influences do you think it's had?

HARJO: I have very recently begun playing saxophone, for only a year. But I am learning quickly because I have an excellent teacher in Laura Newman. I am studying both classical and jazz. Classical for the tone, the technique, and jazz because of the possibilities of inner travel it affords. I am sure that it has changed my writing,
but I couldn't say exactly how at this point. I don't think it will as directly, as in the fine poetry of Michael Harper, but in other ways.

You also write screenplays. Are you currently working on any? What are your main concerns in making films?

HARJO: Right now I am working on poems, but I have a short story series in mind in which I would take four contemporary short stories, some by Indian writers, and some not, and translate them into screenplays first, and ultimately film. But I want to finish the collection of poems first. I already have some of the permissions for the stories.

I am interested in innovation, but innovation that will enrich vision, and that is vision with heart. I think there can be an inbetween of traditional and avant-garde. A new vision that isn't all mind-play. Maybe it's being of two different cultures that makes me believe I can ultimately create something like that.

Now that you are teaching full-time in Boulder, does this affect your writing? Do you feel university teaching is detrimental or beneficial to a poet's writing? Why?

HARJO: The most direct way it has affected me is in terms of time. I spend much time in class preparation, and other kinds of duties like committees, meeting with students, etc. I believe that you get out of something what you put into it. That holds for teaching, too, at any level. I consciously go into each classroom with that thought, knowing that each moment has the potential to be useful. I tend to get inspiration from teaching. It can take much time, patience dealing with students but to see a student's work blossom, leap, makes it worth it.

What advice would you give young writers?

HARJO: Most of writing is sweat and belief. It takes tons of it. Listen to your own voice, cultivate it from the place you are from, your family stories, myths . . . recognize all people within yourself.

This interview was conducted by mail and by telephone between Joy Harjo and Pamela Uschuk.
Summer Night

The moon is nearly full, the humid air sweet like melon.
Flowers that have cupped the sun all day dream of iridescent wings
under the long dark sleep.
Childrens' invisible voices call out in the glimmering moonlight.
Their parents play wornout records
of the cumbia. Behind the screendoor their soft laughter swells
into the rhythm of a smooth guitar.
I watch the world shimmer
inside this globe of a summer night, listen to the wobble of her
spin and dive. It happens all the time, waiting for you
to come home.
There is an ache that begins in the sound of an old blues song.
It becomes a house where all the lights have gone out but one.
And it burns and burns until there is only the blue smoke of dawn
and everyone is sleeping in someone's arms even the flowers
even the sound of a thousand silences.
And the arms of night in the arms of day.
Everyone except me.
But then the smell of damp honeysuckle twisted on the vine.
And the turn of the shoulder of the ordinary spirit who keeps watch
over this ordinary street.
And there you are, the secret of your own flower of light blooming in the miraculous dark.
“Wolf Plume”

from the negatives of Joyce Turvey held in the collection of William Farr.
It was a sunny, windless day and the seven children pulling their buffalo rib sleds to a steep hill beyond the horse herds talked and teased each other. The two girls, at twelve winters, were the oldest. They had been sent to keep an eye on the younger ones, but they were not happy, for the five boys made jokes about the size of their breasts and the skinnyness of their legs. One Spot, in particular, was cruel to them. He liked these times when he didn’t have to follow his older brother around, and so he bullied the younger boys and made the girls chase him. He boasted of his hunting skill and tried to rub snow in another boy’s face. When one of the girls hit him with a small skin of pemmican, it stung his cheek but he didn’t cry. He called the girl Skinny Weasel and he liked her, although she was a year older than he was. She liked One Spot’s brother, Good Young Man, but he was more interested in hunting than girls. He was off hunting the bighorns with Fools Crow now in the foothills of the Backbone. They would be gone for two or three sleeps. One Spot had been jealous of Good Young Man’s fortune, but Fools Crow had promised him a set of horns. He picked up a handful of snow and threw it at Skinny Weasel. His cheek stung but he liked her.

None of them noticed the wolf that had emerged from behind a clump of drifted-over greasewood until he was fifty paces to the side of them. He was large and gray and his eyes were golden in the brilliant sun. Snow clung to one side of him as though he had been lying down. As he walked, his tail drooped and dragged on the deep snow and a sound, somewhere between a growl and a grunt, came up from his chest.

It was this sound that Skinny Weasel’s girlfriend heard, and when she looked over she saw the animal’s gait was shakey and listed to one side. He had his head down, but she noticed his tongue hanging almost to the snow. Then she saw the whiteness around his mouth and she thought he had been eating snow. Her first impulse was to turn and run, but then the big mouth began to veer away from them. She watched him out of the corner of her eye as the wolf circled behind them. Then she said something to Skinny Weasel in a low voice and the girls stopped and turned. It was at this point that one of the boys let out a cry of fear, for he had just seen the wolf.

The wolf looked up at them and coughed and bared his fangs, making chewing motions as though he were trying to rid himself of a bone or hairball. He watched listlessly as the children ran, all but One Spot, who stood in the deep snow with his hands on his hips. He taunted the bigmouth with a war song that he had learned from Fools Crow.

The other children stopped near the base of the big hill and turned to watch. The wolf covered the thirty paces with such speed that they didn’t have a chance
to cry out a warning. By the time One Spot had turned to run, the wolf was upon him, knocking him face-down in the snow, standing over him, growling, the hair on his back standing up and shining in the sunlight. The children screamed as they watched the wolf attack the bundled-up child as he tried to crawl away. He struck repeatedly at the blanket, his low growl now a roar of fury. At last he found One Spot's head and sank his fangs into the exposed skin behind the ear. The child screamed in pain and turned over, only to feel a fang knock against his cheek bone, opening it up. Then the fangs were twisting and pulling at the cheek, gnashing into the soft flesh. One Spot felt the wetness and the hot breath. He saw for one brief instant the yellow eye and the laid-back ear—then he sank into the red darkness and deep snow.

Skinny Weasel was crying as she watched the wolf stagger away. In his charge and attack he had used up the last of his energy. Now his throat was swollen shut and the saliva hung in long strands from his mouth. He began a wide circle, always veering to his right, his eyes now seeing nothing, his breath coming in harsh barks, his tongue and tail once again hanging and dragging on the snow. Skinny Weasel watched him disappear behind a stand of willows near the river; then she ran to the limp, ragged form in the snow field. When she rolled him over, she bit her lips to keep from screaming. A flap of ragged skin lay back over One Spot's eye, exposing the clean white bone of his cheek. One ear lobe hung from a thin piece of skin and there was a large mat of blood in the hair. She thought she heard a rattle deep in the boy's throat. With a shudder, she placed the flap of skin down over the cheek bone. Then she and the others managed to lift him onto his sled. Skinny Weasel's girlfriend covered him up with her own blanket. Then the two girls pulled the sled through the deep snow back toward camp. The sun was still high and the sweat was cool on the girls' bodies.

By the time Fools Crow and Good Young Man got back from their hunting trip, four days later, One Spot was able to sit up and take some meat. But most of the time he lay in his robes and thought of the yellow eye and the laid-back ear, the harsh breath and the snapping teeth. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw the bounding wolf and he cried out in his weakness and pain. Heavy Shield Woman had slept little, despite the fact that Killdeer and another woman had attempted to take over the nursing of her son. Now she sat in a listless trance and thought of the many things that had happened to her family. She didn't really think, but images of White Quiver and Killdeer and Good Young Man entered her head and they all seemed far away, as though she had lost them all. Even when she looked down at One Spot, in one of his rare moments of peace, she saw the black pitchy substance that held his cheek in place and she thought that he had gone away from her too. Only Killdeer was there to talk with, but Heavy Shield Woman didn't talk. She answered questions without elaboration and she didn't volunteer any conversation. In some ways, she felt a lingering guilt (she had felt it for some time) about her role as medicine woman at the Sun Dance ceremonies. She thought she could not be a virtuous woman, for she felt no happiness or peace since her husband was returned to her. Her virtue (if that was what it was) resulted from a drab emptiness in her life, a day-to-day barrenness of spirit relieved only by moments.
of pleasure at the antics of her sons and Killdeer's swelling belly. But these moments were short-lived and only increased her over-all sadness, as she thought of their futures, her own future. She knew she would never see White Quiver again and that thought almost gave her relief; but then she would think of the happiness they had shared, the times they had lain together, the pride in his eyes each time she delivered him a son, and she would become consumed with a restless fury. Many times she thought of going to Three Bears and telling him what was in her heart and renouncing her role as medicine woman. In her mind she had already done so. Now when the girls looked to her for guidance, she averted her eyes and said nothing. She began to avoid them, for she was sure they would see in her eyes what she felt in her heart.

But Fools Crow and Good Young Man did not know any of this as they rode into camp with the carcasses of two bighorns. True to his word Fools Crow had a set of horns tied to the frame of one of the pack horses. He rode first to his own lodge and dumped one of the bighorns in the snow beside the entrance. Then he led the other pack horse to Heavy Shield Woman's lodge, kicking a black dog in the ribs when he became too curious. As he loosened the rawhide strings that held the animal down, Killdeer emerged from her mother's lodge. She came forward and squeezed his upper arm and smiled. She called to her brother, Good Young Man, who sat exhausted on his horse, ready to drive the pack horses back to the herd. Wearily, he rolled onto his belly and slid off the horse. He had planned to return to the camp in triumph because he had shot one of the bighorns with Fools Crow's rifle, but now he felt the stiffness in his legs and wanted only to lie down and sleep.

But Killdeer motioned him close, and then she told them about One Spot's encounter with the wolf. Even as she explained that he was all right, her voice shook and she looked at the snow at Fools Crow's feet. Good Young Man listened to his sister, first with fear, and then relief. He had forgotten about being tired, and when his sister paused, he ducked into the lodge.

Killdeer looked into her husband's eyes. "The children he was with think the wolf might have the whitemouth. They say he was acting funny, walking sideways in a big circle, his tail dragging in the snow. They think he had the foam on the mouth, but they couldn't tell if it was that, or if he was eating snow."

"Did he breathe different?"
"Skinny Weasel said it was like a harsh bark in his throat."
"Maybe it was a bone caught."
"Maybe," said Killdeer, but her voice was doubtful.
"Is your mother in the lodge?"
"She is out gathering firewood."

Fools Crow entered the lodge, with Killdeer right behind him. Good Young Man knelt beside his brother, holding his hand. One Spot looked at Fools Crow; then he grinned.

"I sang my war song," he said.
"But did you have your weapons?" Fools Crow got down on his knees and ruffled the boy's hair.
"No," the boy said sheepishly.
"Hai-ya! What warrior goes out empty-handed?"
"He would kill this wolf with his bare hands. He would be a great warrior," said Good Young Man with a smile.

"If I had my knife—"

"If he had his knife! Listen to him talk!" Fools Crow laughed. "And now you have your first battle wounds. Let me see." Fools Crow leaned over the boy's face. The patch of skin held by the black pitch looked a pale purple and was slightly swollen. He almost lost his whole cheek, thought Fools Crow. As it is, it will always be swollen and discolored, but it will at least be there. The earlobe was completely bitten off and would cause no trouble. But behind the ear, in a patch of cut-off hair, there were several puncture wounds. The whole area was an angry red, except for the small white circles around each fang mark. These were draining, but the area was swollen and tender-looking. It scared Fools Crow to look at these wounds, but he didn't say anything.

"He has nightmares," said Killdeer. "He gets very little sleep because of them."

"Sleep-bringer will visit soon. All warriors have bad dreams after battle—they will pass." Fools Crow looked down at One Spot. "You must not think of this wolf as your enemy. He did only what wolves will do. The big-mouth is a sacred power-animal, and if he visits you in your dreams, it is only because he wishes to help you. Someday, he will become your secret helper."

"When I am old enough for my vision?"

"Yes. Then he will come to you and give you some of his secret medicine. But for now, you must think of him as your brother and treat him with great respect. Do you understand that?"

"But why did he attack me?"

"This one was—sick. I think he didn't know what he was doing. But wolves are unpredictable. It is best to leave them alone, even if they are our brothers—like the real-bear."

"Will I have a scar forever?"

"Do you remember the story of Poia—Scarface?"

"Yes. He came from Sun Chief and instructed our people in the Sun Dance. Afterward, Sun Chief made him a star in the sky, just like his father, Morning Star."

"But before all that, he was a boy just like you, with a scar on his face—"

"But the people laughed at him and scorned him!"

"In those days, the people were not wise. Now we honor Poia. Of all the Above Ones, he is most like us, and so you must think of your scar as a mark of honor. You will wear it proudly and the people will be proud of you. And they will think highly of you because you did not kill your brother, the wolf." Fools Crow laughed. "We will tell them you took pity on this big-mouth."

One Spot thought for a moment, his dark eyes narrowed and staring up at the point where the lodge-poles came together. He heard some children run by but he didn't envy them. Finally he said, "Yes, I took pity on my brother. But if I had my weapons, I surely would have killed him."

One spot did not get over his dreams, but now instead of attacking him, the wolf turned away or stopped, sometimes lifting his lip to growl, other times simply staring at the boy through golden eyes. But he always kept his distance and One
Spot, in spite of his fear, began to look forward to the wolf’s visits, for he was memorizing every aspect of the animal, from his silver-tipped fur to the way his long ears flickered when One Spot shouted at him. For seven sleeps he dreamed of the big-mouth and on the eighth day, he was well enough to walk down to the river to throw rocks. Good Young Man stayed with him, never leaving the lodge to play with friends or even to visit Killdeer and Fools Crow. Together, he and his mother had skinned and quartered the bighorn. The meat was strong but good and would last a long time. Heavy Shield Woman also seemed to be improving. For the first time in many sleeps she went to visit a friend who lived on the other side of camp. The friend was very glad to see her for she had been concerned about Heavy Shield Woman. They ate and talked until well after dark and the friend noticed that Heavy Shield Woman smiled and laughed more than she had in some time and talked less about her bad fortune. When the friend’s husband came home, with a fat blackhorn cow he had killed on the Cutbank, Heavy Shield Woman remembered that she had not fed One Spot and Good Young Man. She looked up at the stars as she hurried along the icy path to her lodge and the cold air was fresh in her chest.

When she entered the lodge, Good Young Man looked up anxiously. He was kneeling by his brother’s side. “One Spot seems to be sick again. He seems to have difficulty swallowing. He moves his jaws and is thirsty all the time but he can’t drink.”

Heavy Shield woman ran to One Spot and sank to her knees. His forehead glinted in the firelight and his throat seemed to jump and quiver on its own. He looked up at her and his eyes were wide with fear. He tried to speak but the effort made him swallow and he cried out in pain. In panic he began to thrash around under the buffalo robe. Heavy Shield Woman held him and spoke soothing words to him, but he didn’t seem to hear or know her.

“Good Young Man, put on the water to heat—build up the fire first—then run for, for Fools Crow and Killdeer. Run fast.”

One Spot had quieted down a little, but when Heavy Shield Woman looked down at him, she saw the saliva bubbling around his mouth. His eyes were dark and unseeing.

When Good Young Man returned with Fools Crow and Killdeer, Heavy Shield Woman was mopping the sick boy’s face with a cloth dampened in the warm water. Suddenly One Spot began to tremble violently and make noises in his throat. He tried to kick the robe off, but Fools Crow held his legs.

“It is the whitemouth,” he said. “The wolf has infected him.”

“Oh, I feared it. I knew it would happen. I saw it once as a girl. But we must do something!” Heavy Shield Woman moaned as she remembered how her girlfriend had died of a kit-fox bite. She had never forgotten it, and now she was seeing it again.

“Killdeer! Hold his legs while I get Mik-api.” But before he left, he glanced at One Spot’s face and he shuddered.

Fools Crow was gone for a long time. Killdeer helped her mother hold down the struggling boy. He did not recognize either of them, but the strange noise in his throat seemed a cry for help. Killdeer sank back on her heels once when her brother suddenly stopped and held himself rigid. She wiped the sweat from her
forehead, and only then did she realize that she had been crying.

At last, Fools Crow entered the lodge. His chest was heaving and his face was crimson.

"Where's Mik-api?" Killdeer held her breath.

"I searched the camp—but he was not to be found."

He looked down and Heavy Shield woman was looking up at him with a blankness in her eyes. He suddenly thought that he had not looked at her this way since he had married Killdeer—nor had she looked at him. But now this taboo did not matter.

"We need a green hide," he said. "Mik-api once told me how to do this."

Heavy Shield Woman looked down at her son who was beginning to stir again. A trickle of blood from the crescent scab on his cheek ran down his neck. She wiped the saliva from his mouth. "Morning Eagle has just returned from his hunt. He brought back a blackhorn."

Fools Crow ran across a small icy field to Morning Eagle's lodge. He told the hunter what he needed and the two men began to skin the blackhorn. They worked quickly, not caring if they punctured the skin or left too much meat on it.

When they finished, Fools Crow draped the skin over his shoulder and began to trot back to Heavy Shield Woman's lodge. He was surprised to see so many people standing around. They had been talking among themselves, but he hadn't heard a word.

Back in the lodge the two women undressed the violent boy while Fools Crow spread the green hide, skin side up, on the other side of the fire. Good Young Man helped him clear away the spot. Fools Crow clapped him on the shoulder and squeezed. Then he helped the women carry One Spot over to the hide. He was taken aback by the strength in the small body and he understood how much effort it had taken the women to hold him down. But they managed to lay him on the smooth cool skin, with his arms pinned to his sides, and roll him up. Only his head stuck out of the furry bundle. Killdeer looked down and could not believe that the contorted face, the white foamy mouth which uttered such strange harsh sounds, belonged to her younger brother. But she knew that when a bad spirit entered one's body, the body no longer belonged to the person but became the embodiment of that spirit. And so, as she looked at the face, she grew calm, for she felt that now the spirit had been trapped, her husband would drive it away with the medicine he learned from Mik-api. She helped her mother to the far side of the fire and squatted to watch.

Fools Crow, who had stopped by his lodge for his parfleche of medicines, took out a small bundle of sweetgrass and threw some into the fire. Then he lit braids and purified both the out-of-his-mind boy and himself. He began to chant in a steady rhythm that matched his own heartbeat. As he chanted he passed his hands over the boy. His eyes were closed and the steady rhythm of his voice seemed to place the boy under a spell. One Spot had stopped struggling and the noise in his throat became less a cry of fear and pain. Then Fools Crow removed a burning stick from the fire and touched it against the furry hide. There was a hiss and the lodge was suddenly filled with the stink of burning hair. Heavy Shield Woman started, but Killdeer held her close. Still chanting, Fools Crow burned off more of the curly hair. He did this several times until the hair was black and crinkly, then he turned the boy over, and the movement made One Spot cry out. But now Fools Crow
began to pass the burning stick over the green robe, lighting long strips of hair and the smell made Killdeer feel faint. She looked beyond her mother to Good Young Man, but he was watching intently, mesmerized by the moving stick of fire. Again Fools Crow turned the boy over until he was lying on his stomach. The boy made no sound and Killdeer became frightened. But when she saw his eyes flicker, she let out a deep breath.

Once Fools Crow stopped to wipe One Spot’s sweat-drenched head. He looked into the boy’s eyes, but they were opaque and without recognition. Then he turned him again and burned off the last of the hair.

When he finished, Fools Crow threw a bundle of sage onto the fire to purify the air. As he did this he said a prayer to the Above Ones and to the Medicine Wolf to take pity on the boy and to restore him to health. Then he instructed the women to unwrap him and bathe him with warm water. While they did this, he took some sticky-root and tastes-dry and ground it up into a paste.

The women placed the small limp body on a robe and Fools Crow swabbed the paste on the boy’s throat. They covered him with another robe.

Fools Crow sent the two women back to his own lodge, there to prepare some broth and meat. He said he would send Good Young Man to fetch them when they were needed. Heavy Shield Woman was reluctant to leave, but Killdeer talked her out of the lodge. The sudden draft of cold air swirled through the lodge and dried the sweat on Fools Crow’s face. The lodge smelled of burnt hair and sage and sticky-root.

Good Young Man built up the fire and gave Fools Crow a drink of water. He dipped another cupful and looked questioningly at his younger brother, but the medicine man shook his head and motioned the youth to sit on the other side of the fire.

For the rest of that night Fools Crow beat on his small drum, which was nothing more than a piece of tough neck hide stretched over a willow frame. His stick was made of ash, rounded at one end and feathered at the other. He accompanied the slow beat with a monotonous song, and in spite of his fascination, Good Young Man eventually fell asleep. Four times before dawn he was awakened by a shrill whistle—short, furious blasts—and started to his feet to see Fools Crow crouching, blowing his eagle-bone pipe over the length of the still form of One Spot. Then he would watch for a while before drifting off again.

Sometime after first light, he awoke and it was quiet. He threw back the robe and sat up. Fools Crow still knelt beside his brother, but now he was hunched over, his head down. Good Young Man watched his broad back move up and down with his breathing. Then he slid from beneath the robe and tended to the fire. It was nearly out, but he coaxed a flame out of some dry twigs. When he had the fire crackling, he crept around and looked down at the face of his younger brother. In the half-light of dawn, the face looked pale and shiny, like the back-fat of a blackhorn. Only the skin on the cheek that had been torn away had some color. It was a dull purple, fading to bright pink along the scar. Good Young Man got down on all fours and looked closer. He looked at the chest beneath the robe. Nothing moved. He became frightened and in his fear, he blew on the face. The eyes seemed to move beneath the lids. He blew again, and this time the eyes opened and the brows came down in irritation.
“Woman Pitching A Teepee”

looking for the circle

last night I dreamed
of the Indian storytellers

in a potter's window in Taos
I studied the tan clay figures
speaking to smaller dustier audiences
who are dancing, joyful, orange-banded
or crouching in fear and awe,
brown and black

I dreamed I crept to the fire
listening for voices—
after shuffling miles in the moonlight
through dry brown leaves
to the storyteller's circle—
hushed figures in the firelight
Grandmother

You died.
eighty-seven
it's understandable
12 years past your husband
15 years past your son
my child nights often
burned with your pleas
to join them.
Your ice fingers
look carved
a snow queen,
lips slashed in a red
you'd never wear in life.
You gripped fire in times before,
witch fingers twitched
like twigs,
raw with energy.
The spirits danced
at your beckoning
old woman,
the wind breaking branches
and singeing the moon
was a truer funeral dirge
than organed hymns.
In the end not even you
could beat down death
no whispered words
or sharp toned songs
could turn him away.
He claimed his price
and left your cold thin husk
for me.
A thousand lives ago
you tempted innocence,
bled boys into men
this life you hid
in grey hair and print dresses,
denying prophecy and reverence
a goddess in a laundromat
palming yourself off as human,
masquerading as a grandmother
you never fooled me
not for a moment
your eyes were traitors,
whispered antiquities
of buried races, tracings of lovers
sucked dry and covered by centuries
as you strode towards the future
with pained determination
garbed in blood and bone.
Christmas

Four years
or is it five?
distances greater than miles
are our separations,
our link is a postage stamp
my flesh
is a christmas card,
the softness of my eyes
is now cold black ink
on slick colored paper.
My hollied memory
now lines your china case
carelessly decorating two weeks
of your busy life
crammed next to others
who, in their annual ritual
send paper smeared
with santas, birds, and evergreens.
I loved you
I watch you,
scotch-taped as I am,
displayed to the world to view,
like the Ojibwa basket
I gave you some forgotten christmas.
Brown hands bent fragile bark,
piercing with the sharpness
of red-stained quills
to shape stars
and a single flower.
Ringed in sweetgrass
it holds its fragrance now
as tightly as I hold you,
you who are a
christmas card.
You only sent your name
this year
I know
your name
I thought I knew
you better.
Evolution of the Sacred Dog

Our fathers called the horse
sacred dog
tied crow feathers to his mane
four trunks of legs
our fathers rode.

Now
Afraid-to-fly
in grandfather clouds
our eyes shrivel
to walnuts
we tie crow feathers to our seat
tell ourselves
the plane is sacred horse.
Clothes Horse

Heifer brown in her buckskin dress
Horse in corral
with sun across its mane brown

Falling leaf brown when she walks

Closest bush to the road brown
fry bread smell in the grease brown

Horses graze as needles stitching the grass
She covers herself with porcupine quills,
raccoon stripes, feathers of the mottled hens
& skunk grass

Not awake yet brown in the head
of her buckskin dress
lonesome red of the plucked rooster comb

The metallic strip of silo
reminds her of a beading needle

Not muzzled with buttons
her bosom waddles under the duststorm
of her buckskin dress
somewhere
the prickly pear of her nipple flesh

She is the only squaw with a closet in her teepee

The first morning light
through the flat trees brown

Silver scissored as the river
she cuts through fields & hunting grounds
her brown buckskin dress fringed with elk teeth

She is on her way to the yard goods store
mouth stained red as winterberry
Gourd rattle brown, buckbrush brown, 
wild turkey, wood duck brown, 
running dog into the hills brown

Her brave hunts all season for pelts & hides 
while she sits warm as campfire 
like a yellow veined leaf

Leggins, sashes, belts, turtle shells, blankets, 
shawls, combs, bags, hornet nest hats—

It takes a two-horse travois to get her 
to winter camp.
"Flathead Indians"

from the collection of William Farr, donated by the Bitterroot Valley Historical Society.
Coyote Tries Again

Coyote was waiting
He was patient
Coyote was looking around
What should he do next?

Another day.
She sat up stiffly. Rubbing her neck, she looked around at the mess. Bottles and cans everywhere. Her only plant, the one with small, pink flowers was splattered on the rug, her new K-mart gold and green rug. One leafy tendril clung to the soil, blossom erect. Petals, leaves, stems, edged in morning after.

Using a coffee table for support, she got off the sagging couch. Movement was painful. She frowned, causing deep lines to appear around her mouth and forehead. She clenched her teeth. "Damn those guys," she said, limping into the bathroom.

Alma, friend and roommate, was sleeping in the bathtub. Her long hair flowed in a tangled dark mass across her shoulders and breasts. "Alma, get up. What are you doing?"

Alma pulled her hair back, gripped the edges of the tub, and sat up. "Geez, Agnes. Where'd you drag those guys in from?"

Agnes stared at her own image in the mirror. She tried to finger-comb her short straight hair. "I look like a damn porcupine." A bruise darkened the left cheekbone, seemed to give her an unbalanced look. Agnes could still taste the blood salt in her mouth.

"Well?" Alma said.
"Well, what?" Agnes jerked the medicine cabinet open. "Christ, who stole the aspirin?"
"Hangover city, hey?"
"Don't start."
"Trying to brighten the day. Anyway, those so-called friends you picked up. . ."
"Shut up."
"Sure, sure. Get pissed at me. The innocent one."
"Alma? Innocent? Ha."
"Yeah, well. . . Who were you scrapping with?"
"Don't really remember," Agnes turned toward Alma. "You know?"
Alma shook her head, "Hope, I locked myself in here."
"Shit. Some friend." Agnes slammed out, headed for the kitchen.
"Don't blame me." Alma yelled after her.
Looking for a glass, Agnes rummaged among the flood of aluminum cans, caus-
ing them to topple, to spill onto the floor. She turned on the water, letting it run, hoping it would get cold. Cold, like the creek below Ya-Ya's house.

The cold creek used to freeze their legs and Ya-Ya would make them wear old shoes so their feet wouldn't get cut by the rocks and they'd take turns hauling water in a big silver bucket and in the summer it would sweat cold drops on the outside of the bucket and she'd place her hot cheeks and forehead against the coldness, and along the path from the house stickers towered over her and thornberries would tower over them both and sometimes they'd make themselves small, waiting to ambush someone with darts collected from foxtails that grew in the fields; and in winter Uncle would chop wood, they'd all get stacked with an armload for the wood-box to feed the stove where pots of stew and fry bread were cooking and tea was warming and the table was really three tables covered in vinyl and cloth, everyone had a place to sit, and the meal prayer was a rising and falling, like wind blowing, softly lifting, and the language, the Salish words, marred by English, were tones of scolding or laughter, bringing gossip from across the way, and tales of Coyote and his brother Fox reminded you, guided you; and in spring apple blossoms filtered into the upstairs window where they all slept under a roof that housed birds who had built nests and they would waken her with their song, floating from behind the grey boards, and she felt safe, even when Ya-Ya scolded Grandpa about the nests; then the rains turned the road to slick white mud and everyone had to push the old brown pickup out, and Grandpa would curse the clay, making a new road through the field; in fall they'd camp out in the woods, drying meat, and hunters would have deer, sometimes elk, hanging from the trees, ready; the prayers were mixed with the roots and berries and canned goods in a feast that filled the air with wood smoke, at night the coldness of the creek would sneak up and she had to bury under quilts, falling asleep to the heartbeat of the drum and the voices that carried to caves and dens of bears and mountain lions. Then they were sent to school at the Ursulines, punished for speaking the words of Salish, some ran away, some got hands smacked with rulers, and she was always hungry, even with three meals a day and when she was assigned to clean the choir she would play unholy songs on the organ. Sent to bed. Ho supper. She laughed at the little boy, swinging his rosary saying, "Wanna go for a ride Jesus?" Sacreligious. Sent to bed. Ho supper. She found that no red-faced nun could stop her thoughts and she'd play the confession game, making up sins to see how many Our Father's and Hail Mary's the priest would give her and when he came into the sixth grade and lectured in an unsteady voice, with menacing overtones, about "petting" she thought he was talking about something else.

"Remember that Agnes?" Alma was laughing at her and winking at Aaron, all in the same moment. They had both decided to head to town to "Check out the scene," as Alma said. They walked the quarter mile from "Injun town" to Arlee. Alma's boy friend was in the Log Cabin Bar and Cafe, playing pool. Agnes glared at Alma, shifting her weight from one foot to the other.

"At least I didn't get caught stealing spuds. Remember, we all waited for you. I had the salt and What's-Her-Name, that girl from Elmo, stole a knife from the
lunch room. We were hungry and you let us down," Agnes turned her back on Alma. "Give me an Oly."

"Listen to Miss Indian America. Miss Pisses-in-her-pants."

"At least I don't let my friends down."

"Whoa, hey, hey. No fighting." Aaron held up his hands. "When you two get started it gets dangerous, you know?" He had stepped between them. "You and you can forget yesterday. Let's get drunk or..." pointing at Agnes, "you can get stoned. Whatever you want. Here." He shoved a fifty-cent piece at Agnes. "Play some good beer drinking music."

"You guys never want any trouble, do you, until you start it!" Agnes grabbed the silver, walked over to the juke box, put it in the slot. She began pushing buttons at random.

"Burned out bums playing burned out tunes for burned out bums." Waylon and Willie jumped on the turntable.

"To the water," Agnes said to the Olympia "Eternal" waterfall cascading into nothingness.

Their Sweat House was by the Creek. When the door was opened and she came out of the heat, her body and spirit were opened to the wind. The plunge into the cold water fired the senses, disturbing the sleeping center, pulling it awake. She was startled. Cedar and Pine whispered; she could touch their roughness, smell their needles, feel their roots reaching deep into the Earth, feeding the Earth, being fed by the Earth. Water, the water tasted more than sweet, more than cold. Woodpecker, Magpie, and Crow singing and drumming. The song reaching her, telling her, reminding her. You are Whole. You are Part. You are Us. We are You. Return. Live.

Alma and Aaron were playing pool, bumping into each other, fooling around. Agnes, slouched over the bar, half on and half off a stool, was listening to an old man. He was drunk, his short white hair sticking out from a greasy green cap.

"We went over there... got our... our asses shot off." His eyes, moist, bleary, surrounded by wrinkles, darted here and there, like he was talking to a bunch of people. "Still got my uniform..." His lower lip hung slightly, a thin layer of white spit formed at the corners of his mouth, reminding Agnes of a rabid dog. "Almost got married..." His hand shook, holding his glass of whiskey, trying not to spill any. "They respected us Indians then... Those white bastards... beneath us." Agnes wondered if that was all he knew—World War II. He licked his lips, downed the drink, made a smacking noise. "Hey, girlie, got a dollar?" His voice rasped, seemed to hang in the air.

"Hey old-timer," Aaron said, "forget the war. Today is where the action's at."

"What do you know, you dope-addict." He waved his arms around. "We went over there."

"That's all you know. Still fighting those Germans, huh? See any Germans here?" He grabbed the old man by the shoulders and started to spin him around. "Grab your rifle, they might be under the table. Look over there."
The old man tried to take a swing, but Aaron stepped back, the old man lost his balance, his cap fell to the floor. "You should be thanking me... Thanking me." He stumbled into a bar stool. Agnes steadied him.

"Leave him alone, let him remember," she said.

The old man started speaking in Salish; rapidly gesturing, pointing at Aaron. "Buy him a drink," Agnes said.

"I'm not his personal banker. Buy it yourself."

Agnes stepped closer to Aaron. "Do it. Or I'll remember about a certain girl from Yakima."

Aaron quickly glanced at Alma, but she had turned her attention back to the pool table, concentrating on her shot.

"Shit, give the old fucker a drink, no harm to me." He threw a ten dollar bill on the bar and turned away.

"Took on seven Marine Bastards, whipped them all," the old man said. "All those Germans... took off, ran. I had power then..." His head was getting nearer to the bar, he was ready to lay on his arms. "I knew the songs then." Agnes watched him, heard him whisper, "The songs knew me." He closed his eyes, head on his arms.

"Hey." The bartender yelled at Agnes. "Don't let him pass out in here. I don't want any of you drunk Indians passing out in here."

"Shit, Harry," Agnes got off her stool. "Who the fuck buys those shiny shirts you always wear, huh?"

Aaron said, "Don't be starting no trouble, Agnes."

"And who," Agnes felt her hands clenching, "keeps your fat assed wife in food?"

"Cool off," Harry said, grabbing the billy club from under the bar. "Cool her off," he told Aaron. "Just take that old wino out of here, there won't be no trouble."

The old man jerked up, looked at the bartender, pointed at him. "We got our butts shot off for you... Fought Hitler... a wino fought Hitler for your stinking homes. You fucking white ass-hole."

Harry had the club on his shoulder. He took a step toward the old man. As soon as Harry was in range, the old man spit on him. White liquid ran down his red shiny shirt.

Harry, the bartender, changed. His eyes narrowed into slits, his nostrils flared slightly, his lips taut against yellowed teeth. He raised the club into the air.

"You get out." His voice was low, almost a growl. "Get out."

Alma pulled Agnes back, "Come on Agnes, it's pointless." She tried to push Agnes to the door.

"We're going man," Aaron said, keeping the pool table between him and Harry.

The old man kept pointing at Harry; some of his words were in English, some in Salish. "My sumesh is strong. I can still use medicine."

He started to work up another spit. Harry faked a hit toward him, he dodged, got off balance. He tried to grab the bar edge, knocked over a can of Oly. His fingers slipped in the beer, he grabbed for the stool, knocking it over. Fingers clawed the air uselessly, he fell back, hitting his head on the chrome rung that still held bits of white mud from people's feet. He slumped to the floor.
Agnes’ slim body was trembling, “You white bastard.” She’d picked up the old man’s shot glass, intending to throw it at Harry. He hit her first, not hard, but hard enough to knock her to the floor, hard enough for her nose to start bleeding.

Alma picked up a pool cue and hit Harry across the forehead. Blood poured from the gash, blinding him. He began hollering, “Damn it, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ.”

Aaron was already dragging the old man out the door; Alma helped Agnes to her feet, they both stumbled to the door. Alma took a glance over her shoulder and saw one of the guys cutting the telephone wire, he waved her out the door.

Aaron was behind the wheel, the car running. The old man leaned against the door window in the front seat. Alma shoved her friend into the back seat, climbed in beside her.

“Get going,” she yelled.

Agnes lay against the seat, felt the coolness of the seat against her cheek, felt her tears, tasted the blood.

Sweat House was showing her, leading her... Try. Live. Just before they opened the door she was overwhelmed by the smell of Juniper; she could taste it, felt it getting under her skin through her pores. It swirled her around, found her center. The smell of Juniper penetrated her soul. Darkness pulled her through to herself.

“Why’d he do that?” Agnes was holding a kleenex to her nose. Aaron was driving north on 93. The old man was still, leaning against the window.

“Who can figure those Suyapi’s out,” Alma said, handing her more tissues.

“Alma, something happened back there, something...”

“I stuck my neck out for you, that’s what happened.”

“That too. Geez, you really hit him.”

“Shit, you spoiled a good party,” Aaron said. “You okay?”

“She’s okay,” Alma said.

Agnes could feel the hollowness inside her starting to shift, to move, making her uncomfortable. She wanted to cry, to make huge sobbing sounds, but couldn’t. The motion of the car seemed to sweep under her.

“Stop, let me out,” she said.

Aaron pulled off the highway. Agnes got out, holding the side of the car. She began shivering; the beer and whiskey left her in a rush of vomit. Alma was beside her, holding her as another acid stream of puke left her body. Agnes pressed her forehead against the car. “So cool, so cool,” she said. “I just want to go to sleep.”

Inside the car the old man moaned, blinked his eyes for a few seconds. “Valley Creek,” he said, “take me to Valley Creek.”

“Not tonight,” Aaron said. “The party’s not over yet.”

Agnes was getting back into the car. “Take him.”

“What. This is my car. We’re heading for Mission. To the Silver Dollar.”

“Do it.”
Sweat House was calling, singing.

When she first went in, she was afraid, didn’t know if she could take the heat. The door closed, darkness surrounded her. She could hear the water being poured on hot rocks. The hissing was followed by a wave of steam that swirled around her nakedness; she breathed the moistness, drawing in deep breaths, releasing the waste a piece at a time.

She heard the start of the song; it seemed to hang like Hummingbird before a flower. She joined in, imagining the song flying like Butterfly—dipping, landing, lifting—powdery wings beating in time with her heart.

Floating, far above the domed, womb-like darkness, she thought, “I’m dancing.”

The car was traveling along a gravel road, trailing dust behind it. He was talking about the Sweat House, how it came to be given to the People, how Coyote liked to fool you if you weren’t careful. “I still have a song,” the old man said.

“This old man is really out of it tonight,” Aaron said.

“No,” Agnes said. “That’s what happened.”

“Ah, just stories to tell little kids,” Aaron said.

“Over here. That road.” The old man pointed to an old road overgrown with grass. They came to the creek; Sweat House was standing, its ribs exposed. Willows were bent to form a dome shape, tied with sinew; planted firmly in the earth, some of the twigs were forming leaves—the living Sweat House. The fire pit was empty, waiting.

Agnes got out of the car. The water seemed to be whispering. She could hear rocks being rolled around, scraping against each other.

The old man was out too. “My house,” he said.

Agnes looked at him. He seemed to be younger. It must be the darkness, she thought.

“I still have the song.” His voice carried across the creek, seemed to lift him, making him stand taller.

She knew the song. It was one she had sung with her Grandmother. With all the Grandmothers. She joined him, feeling the power of it.

“They’re both crazy drunk,” Aaron said.

“I don’t know,” Alma said.

Sweat House waited. The Creek was telling the round rocks: Get ready; Prepare. Somewhere wood was being gathered, cut. Blankets folded. The People were singing a preparing Song, their footsteps rustling through the woods, getting closer. Dawn brushed the Mountain snow, the tops touched by swirling pink light. Another day.

Coyote wasn’t laughing
He heard the song
He was mad
Coyote began singing his own song
He was patient
He began looking around
What should he do next?
A man on crutches is walking toward a cabin. He stops at the bottom of a banked road. The road stands in front of the cabin like a scar. He looks down at the bank's bottom and the head on his long shadow nearly touches the top of the road. His eyes roam the blanket of snow for a starting path. Finding the path, he begins an upward climb by jabbing one of the crutches into the snow. Then he lifts his bad leg and plants it into the snow and the other crutch and foot follow. He does this repeatedly and climbs halfway up to the top. Beads of sweat run down his forehead and the watery trails of each head gleam. The sweat beads go into his blood-shot eyes which have spots and streaks of red near the pupils. Then one of the crutches slides; his body turns and he falls.

The man lies in silence. Slowly he gets up into a sitting position and swears at each crutch. With difficult blasts of breath he blows the snow from the hands. To warm his finger tips he places them two at a time into the mouth. He takes a deep breath and then hurls himself into the air like a pheasant. Once he is off the snow he quickly braces himself with both arms and the good leg. He slowly reaches out and one at a time he plucks his crutches from the snow and is now standing.

His fingers gently work the crutches' handle grips and then squeeze and turn the grips making the handles squeak. The man grunts and sucks the cool morning air through his nostrils causing snorting sounds. He starts the journey.

He smiles on reaching the top of the road and takes his time walking across it. He stops at the other side of the road and looks down at the bank. His eyes search for a possible route.

"To hell with it," says the man. He eases himself down into a sitting position and slides down the side of the banked road. At the bottom of the bank he waits to make sure the sliding is finished. He gets to his feet and goes on.

The cabin door opens several inches and stays opened for a moment. Then it closes. The morning sunlight makes a reflection of the man and yard on the cabin's only window.

When the man enters the yard he plants his feet deeper into the snow. He stops for a moment and looks at the yard to examine it.

The footprints of the man are now in a straighter line than they were. He goes to the door and pounds on it. Sweat and melted snow are running from the man's hair and stocking cap. Liquid mucus from the nose runs out and down to the upper lip. He uses his tongue to wipe up the mucus.

He raps on the door and stops. The man leans forward, listens, back up from the door and pounds again.

"Opal," calls the man and he wipes the sweat from his forehead. "Opal. Opal, open the door." He rests on the crutches. Then he eases his left arm off the crutch
and rubs his arm pit. The man moves his head near to the arm pit and takes a sniff. He puts the arm back on the crutch and lifts the right arm for a moment and then sets it back on the crutch. He rubs his hand. On the sore hand is a large tattooed rose.

The noise of metal scraping wood causes the man to smile and he softly pushes the door but the door doesn’t give. Then the door’s bolt is pulled completely back and the door is creaked open.

“Rosy,” says a woman’s voice. “Rosy. Are you drinking?”

“No,” says Rosy and he leans his head closer to the crack of the door and cabin. “I’m cold,” he whispers.

The door is opened wider. A woman, Opal, quietly steps into the doorway. She wears bedroom slippers that are lined with sheepskin and have “Russlers” stamped on the tips of the toes. Her hair is cut short and she pulls it back over her ears and allows it to rest behind the ears.

“You were drinking,” says Opal. “And now you’ve come back again.”

“But not anymore. It’s legal now—you know.” The tips of his crutches enter the cabin, but he doesn’t. “Hey—move. Come on. I want to come inside.”

“All right. But be quiet. You’ll wake the kids.” She takes one step back and watches him as he enters the cabin. Then she shuts the door without looking at it.

“I know. Don’t tell me what to do—hey—woman.” He bites on his lower lip as he hobbles across the wooden floor.

“Where were you?” And she goes to a wooden cupboard and opens one of the drawers and takes out a small hunting knife. “What happened to your leg?”

“Broke it.” Rosy plops into an old chair near the table and the chair cracks and squeaks. He breathes deep and waits for a moment. “Get me something to eat—hey.”

She takes potatoes from a sack and fills her dress pockets with them. Then she begins to peel one and lets the peels fall into a paper sack of swept dirt, cans, and packaging paper. “How did you break it?”

“I was walking around town two days ago,” says Rosy. He uses his hands to re-enact the accident on the table. She looks over at him while he tells the story, and she continues peeling potatoes. “I was going to cross the street, and here, this big green Ford, a real nice looking one, pulled out of nowhere and smacked into me.”

“Oh. No. He was a Canadian. He even took me to the hospital at the agency. Kept on telling me how sorry he was, and about how shocked he was that the hospital here in town wouldn’t take Indians.”

She looks at him and then sets the peeled potato on the cupboard and begins work on another.

“Anyway. They put a cast on me and let me go. He was still upset—that’s what he said, and here, he went and gave me money,” says Rosy and he smiles.

“So you have any money left? We owe Clark for this food,” says Opal.

“Christ! Is that all you’re worried about? I damned near got killed—hey!”

Opal doesn’t respond and sets the last peeled potato on the cupboard. She quietly
walks over to the stove and, using a potholder, she opens the stove's door. The air going into the stove causes the flames to jump higher and the gray ash to swirl around. She feeds small pieces of wood into the fire and waits a moment and then adds a larger piece of wood.

She takes an iron skillet from a shelf on the wall and sets it on the stove, and then goes to the cupboard and removes a can of shortening that has "US Government Approved" written on it. She reaches down to the stove's door and closes it. Then she removes the plastic lid from the can and uses her finger to take out a white glob. She wipes it off on the edge of the skillet. In a few moments the glob slowly melts into a clear liquid.

"I wish you'd hurry up—hey—Opal," says Rosy. "I'm hungry."

In another room of the cabin two children sleep on the floor side by side. They lie on and are wrapped in faded star and patch quilts. In their sleep, the two boys fight for space on the large star pillow where they rest their heads, tugging on the corner of the pillow, and pulling on the quilts.

The grandparents have the other half of the room. They have an old paint-peeled dresser. On top of it lie two braids of sweet grass, burnt on one end. Next to the dresser is a bed made of two mattresses. The grandparents lie on the bed, covered with one JC Penney blanket, two star quilts, and two used gray wool Army blankets. The grandfather blinks his eyes. He eases his hand from underneath the blankets and scratches his ear and listens.

"I don't even know why we let them kids stay—hey. I don't. How come? We should send them off to school," says Rosy. He reaches his hands into his coat sleeves and tries to remove his coat, pulling and tearing at the sleeves.

"No. They can go to school here," says Opal. "They're my boys."

"Are the old ones up?" Rosy waits for a response. "Huh?" He still receives no response. "Hey—they up?"

"No. Be quiet." She slices up the potatoes and puts them into a bowl.

"Damn it. Don't tell me to shut up woman. Hey! You. You getting mouthy—huh?" Rosy removes his coat and as it rises over his shoulder a pint bottle slithers out of one of the pockets and bounces on the floor and comes to rest in the light from the window. The sunlight makes the brown liquid glow and sparkle.

The grandfather slowly eases the blankets off with one hand. He slides his legs off the mattresses, and he reaches over to the dresser and gently opens one of the bottom drawers. His hand eases into the corner of the drawer near him and comes out with a .22 cal. pistol. The pistol's hand grips are worn and on one side there is a small chip missing. The grandfather stops for a moment to listen. Then he pulls the blankets forward as if to tuck in the grandmother. "Nuah," says the grandmother and she grabs his hand and doesn't let go.

Rosy grunts and wheezes as he tries to stretch and get the bottle. Opal stops slicing the potatoes and drops them into the bowl. She sets the knife on the cupboard. Slowly she walks over, picks up the bottle from the floor, and takes two steps back from Rosy. Rosy's face is covered in sweat.

"I thought you said you weren't drinking! Huh! You weren't drinking?"

"I'm not—hey—Opal," says Rosy and he holds out his hand for the bottle.
“Honey—I’m saving that. I need that so I can taper it off.”

“No. Not in this house.” Opal walks to the door, opens it, and throws the bottle out the door.

“Hey! Why did you do that—huh?” He blinks his eyes as beads of sweat slide into them. Without looking he tries to snatch his crutches that are resting against the table, but only knocks them to the floor. “Help me—hey.”

She walks over near Rosy and picks the crutches up and is careful to stay out of his way. Opal walks back to the opened door and tosses out the crutches.

“Hey! Why’d you do that—huh?” Rosy tries to sit up straighter in the chair.

“Get out.” Opal advances on Rosy.


“Get out now—Rosy.”

“You’re a big woman,” says Rosy and he turns his head away. “You think you can find another man? Who would want you?” He sneaks a look at her. “You’re not tough.” He turns away from her and watches the cabin wall.

Rosy doesn’t see the two large hands that come down and dig into his shoulders. He puts his hands on the table and pushes off of it. His body twists, but he can’t turn around.

Opal drags him off the chair. He grips the table tightly as she pulls him off the chair.

Rosy pumps his good leg up and down as he tries to stand up and get his balance. But Opal uses this and it makes it easier for her to get him off the chair, and to drag him across the floor and pull him toward the door.

Near the door Opal uses Rosy’s up and down motion and shakes him side to side like a dog playing with a sock. Rosy releases the table. While pulling on him she works her way behind him and starts to push with her knees. Outside the cabin she lets him drop. While pulling on him she works her way behind him and starts to push with her knees. Outside the cabin she lets him drop. While pulling on him she works her way behind him and starts to push with her knees. Outside the cabin she lets him drop. While pulling on him she works her way behind him and starts to push with her knees.

The sound of the bolt being pulled back is heard. The wooden door creaks open.

The grandfather stands three feet from the door. The sun’s light catches the gray hairs woven in the braids. The white streaks of his faded jeans stand out. The hands have deep worn lines in them and don’t shake as they both steady a cocked pistol.

“Hello, Rosy,” says the grandfather. “I told you not to come here if you’re drinking. My daughter doesn’t want you. I don’t want you. You’re no good. You’d better leave before I shoot you.”
Rosy looks over the grandfather's shoulder. Opal is standing a few feet behind the old man. Her two sons are clutching their mother's legs and Opal holds a large piece of wood. The grandmother stands in the bedroom doorway leaning on a diamond willow cane for balance. "Nuah," she says and tears stream from her. She taps the cane on the floor.

"Better get going," says the grandfather.

Rosy licks his lips and slowly turns his back to the old man. Then he quickly spins and throws a fist at the grandfather's face.

The pistol gives out a crack. The door is slammed shut. Opal's screams drown out the sons' screams.

"It's all right, my girl," says the grandfather. "It's all right."

The two boys are hanging from Opal's legs, and tears cover their faces.

The grandfather walks over to Opal and the pistol's barrel is pointed downward as a small wisp of smoke escapes from the barrel.

"Come on you kids, come with me," says the grandfather.

Opal flings the piece of wood to the floor and makes the two boys jump. She kisses each of them and rubs their backs. She passes the two boys to the grandfather and the grandfather doesn't break stride as they reach out with their arms and clutch his pant legs. He walks back to the bedroom. The old woman grabs the small group as they pass by her. Her arms nearly engulf the three. She tries to ease herself and her two grandsons. Opal waits for them to leave the room and quietly walks over to the window to check on Rosy.

Rosy lies outside of the cabin. His hands cup his ears and slowly he removes his hands. He looks both ways and rolls on his back. Rosy sits up and begins to examine his body. After a moment he gets his crutches. One of the crutches is busted. He tosses the broken crutch at the cabin. Rosy tries to get up with the one good crutch. On his feet he takes a moment to re-examine his body. Satisfied, he begins to limp away from the cabin. When he is near the banked road he stops and looks for the bottle. He looks back at the cabin. "You never did know how to cook. Old woman! Bitch! And you could never satisfy me!"

He limps to the banked road. When he gets to it he makes no attempt to climb it, but limps alongside of it.
“Dog Gun”

from the collection of William Farr, courtesy of Don Magee.
Patricia Goedicke, *The Wind of Our Going*; Copper Canyon Press; Port Townsend, WA; $8.00

*Eternity is in love with the productions of time.* William Blake

Patricia Goedicke's new book, *The Wind of Our Going*, begins with a poem-prelude entitled "For All the Sad Rain." It is a warning to all who would proceed:

Do you think I haven't been stepped on by giants?
Do you think my teachers didn't stand me in a corner
For breathing, do you think my own father didn't burn me
With the wrath of a blast furnace for wanting to sit on his knee?

To speak threatens the fixed order and defies chaos. To act is to suffer and heal. Care must be taken in listening or the right to be heard is jeopardized.

The *Wind of Our Going* is divided into three remaining sections: I. "The Real Story," II. "This Moment," and III. "Entering the Garden." The central poem, "The Structures We Love," reflects in its own divisions those of the book. The first section of this poem asks the question

*Must all projects founder
In the Dark?*

In the second section, "The Journey into the Fire," we hear

Don't do it, says the sofa
Stay put, says your childhood,

Whatever it is, dullness
Is at least the absence of pain...

But worms are gouging out your heart,
They are about to eat it
Unless you take action
At once
You will stay here forever, smothering
In the overstuffed pillows of a past
That is banked ashes already, . . .
But to stay would be to forfeit everything.

“Everything” is the only life we have: action that is the condition of remembrance. After defying the Dark and agreeing to share in the transitory nature of the world a healing is made possible:

Sunning yourself on the surface, baptized
By pain out of hibernation, drenched
In the sopping wet feathers of luck,
Even in the midst of sorrow
You embrace everything, in the loose
and watery cathedral of the world

The loose and watery cathedral of the world is opposed to the cathedral of an earlier poem where it is the fiction that time can be stopped and perfectly known. In “Big Top,” the cathedral is a patriarchal institution which is decaying grotesquely. The butterflies on the walls provide a metaphor for our real possibilities:

Like tiny trapeze artists, brave athletes, unknowing,
They have pushed their small selves high up
Perhaps for warmth, perhaps for a quick look at the sun
But then, exhausted, they flatten themselves to the walls

And cling there, trembling, velvet children folded,
Pinned to the gray sides of the church
Like strange beautiful emblems, a lost corps de ballet

Just as in “Big Top” the cathedral is termed “he,” so also is the primal terror of chaos depicted as the male principle. In “The Bus at Midnight” the nightmare vision concludes:

But still questing everywhere, a boa constrictor
Even though it is clearly mistaken,
Stupid as a stuffed codpiece
It keeps right on coming,
Pushing and pulling at the house

More powerfully than Zeus's swan
Implacably it appears to me, transfixed...

All we can do is wait:
If this be a Messenger I pray

This bus like a wild boar,
This bus like the end of the world,

This bus like a blind phallus
Is knocking at the wrong door.

Yet there is more that we can do than wait. The dilemma is resolved by the lives of particular men who struggle as the poet does between the poles of negation. In the exquisite poem, "The Odor of Sanctity," we meet such a man:

But living out there by himself, keeping the sharp sting
Of his solitary labors hidden, constantly studying

Mostly he is alone, in the secret amber of the hive
Droning mysteriously, in tongues

Except that sometimes he will speak to us like a child
Simply, in his dark man's voice
Suddenly he will be crying out WHY?...

Far back in his eyes there will come a light,
The fragrance of candles, especially when he comes to call

With the slim envelope of his soul flapping
Over his head, the first clumsy biplane bumbling

In great friendly gusts, rich winey bucketfuls of hot tar
All the old cracked roads in the country heal themselves

Under the weather of his influence, like red apples in root cellars,
Cool rainwater on dry bricks
Among the dampening leaves at long last laying the dust.

The rewards that come with daring to participate are as fleeting and momentous as the visitation by egrets:
The giant castle walls of their wings
Lift themselves over our heads

Into such beautiful plumed gardens

We can't help it, on tiptoe
Something is happening to us, not feathers exactly,

But balanced on the palm of an updraft
The spirit straightens itself, soaring

Until we are able to see them
As we are meant to:

With the smoke of sunrise in our eyes

Fifteen white candles,
Fifteen white exclamation marks standing

Against the dawn sky.

("The Arrival of the Egrets")

In the last section of "The Structures We Love" entitled "The Journey into the Air," the poet confronts that final mocking darkness with the words, "Whatever is dispersed gathers." The gathering is our present task. If we are to share the fate of butterflies, decent men and the unannounced flight of egrets we must dare the furnace with our breath.

This is Ms. Goedicke's vision. The Wind of Our Going displays mature technical ability and musical sophistication in service to that vision. She pulls us forward without release until she finds it herself and deftly plays every key in the modern rhyme-repertoire. With this book she comes to terms, in technique and insight, with the fact that

In the present that is always leaving us
Suddenly everything becomes clear

("Across the Water").

—Bette Thiebes
Ken Gerner, *Throwing Shadows*; Copper Canyon Press; Port Townsend, WA; $8.00

There is a certain pomposity to much contemporary poetry. Often we find ourselves wading through books full of trivialities passed off as important insights, only to drown under imagery so deliberately obscure that it seems even the poet must have been confused as to the actual nature of its object. In the midst of this deluge, a poet like Ken Gerner must be considered much more than a breath of fresh air; his work is an island where we can rest, catch our breath, and even find time for healing.

In *Throwing Shadows*, his second major collection from Copper Canyon Press (following the 1978 release, *The Red Dreams*), Gerner reaches a calm sense of clarity that can only result from a genuine desire to be understood. While many poets ask the reader to be dazzled by cleverness or overwhelmed by the strangeness of an event’s rendering, Gerner’s work is, in a positive sense, much more humble. “Listen carefully,” these poems seem to say, “and you will be rewarded again and again.”

For example, notice the lucidity, the earnestness and simplicity, of these lines from “Once in Passing”:

One knows that one is nothing, that what one knows is nothing, that only the pain of the passing convinces us it is real, once, and once only, and teaches us care. We are left in the cold air of solitude from which we embrace and sing through the pain to each other, man to man, each father, brother, son.

In this beautifully rendered poem, Gerner observes the changes his childhood home in the Bitterroot mountains has gone through, (how “the banker builds his ranch-house on the hill that was an alfalfa field,” “how the sick green of sewer moss fills the streams,” “how coal mines and cities/ steal their children”), and we learn what is the fundamental message of his work: that it is exactly this impermanence, this “passing” of all that we love, that teaches us attention, that teaches us “care.”

It is precisely this sense of attention and care that gives Gerner’s poems their power. The book is filled with remarkably precise visual details (“A match is struck./ Everything we see/ in the room has/ a shadow.”), proving that this poet has indeed taken care with his language, and paid particular attention to the Chinese poets he so obviously admires.

Regular readers of *CutBank* will surely remember Gerner as the author/translator of *The Moon Year*, a highlight of volume 24. This memorable sequence, based on the work of Li Ho (791-817), chronicles the seasons of the solitary heart,
with the natural world serving as crystalline mirror for the inner state of the poet. An ostensibly simple line like "nights will now grow longer" yields a profound communicative effect when read in the context of the sequence as a whole, indicating both a very literal statement of natural process as well as a plaintive assessment of the speaker's loneliness.

While Gerner's sense of image is relatively simple and uncluttered, it never becomes prosaic or dull. The language is kept alive through abundant in-rhymes and subtle assonance, and when he chooses to startle us, it is most often done with imagery that spans the gap between inner and outer worlds, while still managing to remain firmly grounded in the observable. Consider these lines from "Tenth Moon":

Stars spill  
from the crystal cup  
of moon. In the cold dark  
before dawn, snowflakes drift  
down the valley's clear sky.

By never allowing his imagery to stray too far from the world of phenomena, Gerner creates a transparency of voice that allows the inner world to shine through. His poems have the clarity, precision, and emotional depth associated with the greatest of the Chinese masters, and the humility of a man who has realized that in order to be heard, he must let the things he cares about speak for themselves. Reading his *Throwing Shadows*, one can hardly doubt that this kind of humility will indeed be exalted.

—Joseph Martin

Jim Heynen, *You Know What is Right*; North Point Press; Berkeley, CA; $13.50

In the over eighty stories of *You Know What is Right*, Jim Heynen creates an image of rural America which is timeless. The characters, their interpretation of events, platitudes, scatalogical remarks, and morals he describes present problems and not so likely solutions found in this rural life. Often the solutions are really justifications or rationalizations by the well-practiced citizens.

The first section of the book sets the colloquial thinking patterns and morality of the place through its children. They are of diverse ages. The younger question the older (including the men), obey them, hang on their every word until they
can devise reasons of their own. In "Bat Wings," a story about casting for bats, a man asks, "If they have such good radar, . . . why don't they catch the fly in their mouths?"

Maybe their wing is just like a hand and they have to catch the fly first, said the littlest boy.

No one paid attention to the youngest boy, because his idea sounded so silly, but many years later—at thousands and thousands of dollars expense—somebody in a laboratory, using infrared cameras, found out that bats really do catch their food in their wings, using them like hands to feed themselves.

You write the moral to this story:

(from "Bat Wings")

The children reflect the manner of the adults, as they will in any society, but also lend a fresh understanding of nature and of child development. Through them, Heynen gives us a sense of the group, of community and a sense of a very male world. Females are not excluded, per se, but they appear as aberrations.

There was a lady who kept one hand in her pocket . . .

The boys laid out the string one day, but when the lady passed by, they weren't able to pull it and trip her. They got too scared thinking that if they saw what the lady had hidden, she might give it to them.

(from "Who Kept One Hand in Her Pocket")

Nature has more to do with the way things are than the mothering influence, though no sense of neglect is ever felt. Animals and countryside, as they are observed by the children, provide the framework for these country fables.

In the second section of You Know What is Right, Heynen draws us into an evolution of character and thinking. "The boys" reappear older and the old man who tells stories is introduced. The spiral of this evolution is inward, from an innocent agreement on the state of their world and a necessity of peer duplication to a growth into hazy questions of right and wrong in the face of disillusionment. This section contains the title story of the book, a humorous tale involving the repetition of the boys asking "But was that right?", bullying, and learning the rituals of public urinals.

Heynen introduces Uncle Jack, the family and town fool, in the third section of the collection. He has more wisdom to offer, more suggestions towards solutions through images and riddles, than those caught up in their everyday lives. He is a medieval court jester whose comic relief is welcome, whose seriousness can almost be ignored, and whose entertaining presence and wisdom are anticipated.
He looked more like a bear standing upright than a human being. Do you know what can go out in the rain without a cap on and not get its head wet? he shouted up to them.

... Wrong, little one. Not everything can be a duck. You have guessed too quickly this time, said Uncle Jack. Now you'll have to listen to all the clues.

(from "Uncle Jack's Riddle")

Part four throws us into the cycle of life where the elders who know things are amplified to the point of caricature. They resemble the "youngest boy" in their simplistic solutions, yet are unnerving in their unbending belief of them. These people have returned to choose a particular idiosyncrasy which colors all their present actions and what they know is right. It is a particularly poignant juxtaposition to the court jester offered in the previous section, even in its titles: "The Good Hider," "The Man with Smart Hands," "Who Always Came Early," and "The Meddler," to name a few.

You Know What is Right is a book of astute observation. Few but telling details are offered allowing for Heynen's uniquely concise but always complete stories. This newest collection is an enjoyable read and worth a careful look at his question, do "You Know What is Right?"

—Bronwyn G. Pughe
MICHAEL ARVEY's poems have appeared in numerous periodicals. He's currently finishing an M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

W. BISHOP is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Her work has appeared in *Western Humanities Review, The Yale Review* and *College English*. She has work forthcoming in *The Literary Review* and *Tar River Poetry*.


KEVIN CANTWELL is in the M.A. program in English at the University of Utah, where he also edits poetry for *Quarterly West*.

ANN DOUGLAS lives and writes poems in Seattle, Washington.

JACK DRISCOLL is the author of two collections of poetry, the latest of which is *Fishing The Backwater*. He teaches at Interlochen Arts Academy in Interlochen, Michigan. His poems appear in many magazines and anthologies, and he is the recipient of an NEA Creative Writing Fellowship as well as a PEN Syndicated Fiction Award.

QUINTON DUVAL received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana and now teaches at California State University, Sacramento. Last year saw the release of his first full-length collection of poems, *Dinner Music*, from Lost Roads Press.

MARY ANN FARRELL spent ten years working as a reporter in North Carolina and Florida. Among her press rewards is one for consumer investigation given by the National Press Club. Now a graduate student in English/Creative Writing at Florida State University, her poems have appeared in magazines such as *Pembroke Magazine* and *Tar River Poetry*.

LOUIS FORESTER is an M.D. in Salina, Kansas. His poems have appeared in *Kansas Quarterly, Sun Dog, Colorado-North Review, Swallow's Tale* and other magazines.

DIANE GLANCY is Artist-In-Residence for the State Arts Council of Oklahoma and Arkansas. She is widely published in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod*, *Calyx, New Letters, Trestle Creek Review* and others. Her second collection of poems, *The Offering*, is forthcoming from Holy Cow Press. Ms. Glancy is of Cherokee heritage.

DAVID GRAHAM teaches English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. His first collection of poems, *Magic Shows*, is due in the spring from Cleveland State University Press.

SAM HAMIL runs Copper Canyon Press with his wife Tree Swenson. He is the author of numerous book of poems and has appeared in many magazines and anthologies.

JOY HARJO's most recent book of poems is *She Had Some Horses* from Thunder Mouth Press. She teaches creative writing and Native American Literature at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

JANET HOMER teaches at Eastern Wyoming College. Her poems appear in numerous journals. Lately, she says, she's been spending a lot of time looking at maps.

MERCEDES LA WRY lives in Seattle, Washington. Some of her previous publications include *Indiana Review, Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Poet Lore*.
GORDON LISH is the author of the novel, Dear Mr. Capote, and of the collection of stories, What I Know So Far. Dutton has just brought out of his new novel, Peru. Mr. Lish had a Guggenheim in 1984 and is a professor at Columbia and New York Universities.

CLEOPATRA MATHIS's last book, The Bottom Land, was published in 1983 by Sheep Meadow Press. She directs the Creative Writing Program at Dartmouth College. Most recently, she has received a Lavin Award from the Academy of American Poets and an N.E.A. Grant.

ROCHELLE NAMEROFF teaches at Emerson College in Boston. Her poems appeared or are forthcoming in Antioch Review, Tendril, Telescope, Intro 16 and others.

SHANNON NELSON is working on an M.F.A. at the University of Iowa's Writers Workshop. She has poems forthcoming in Seattle Review, Poetry Seattle and Willows Springs Magazine.

HANS OSTMÖM's poems have been seen in South Dakota Review, Cumberland Poetry Review, New Delta Review and others. Currently, he teaches literature and writing at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

MICHAEL RATTEE lives in Tucson, Arizona and was the recipient of a N.E.A. Grant in 1984. His poems appear in a number of journals. This year, Cleveland State University Press will release his first full-length collection of poems.

JEANNINE SAVARD's poems have appeared in Antioch Review, The American Poetry Review, Telescope and others. She teaches at Arizona State University.

KENNY SCHEXNAYDER lives in Norfolk, Virginia where he works with the AWP. His poems have been featured in The American Poetry Review, Raccoon, Tar River Poetry, and Willow Springs, among other magazines.

HILLEL SCHWARTZ's latest book on the history of dieting in America will be published by the Free Press/Macmillan in the fall of 1986. His poems have appeared in CutBank, Chicago Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, and others, his fiction in Fiction Monthly and Corona.

BARRY SILSKY edits Another Chicago Magazine. He has poetry and prose in Grand Street, Black Warrior Review, Poetry Northwest, Yankee and others.

G. ST. GEORGE is a graduate student in Math at the University of Montana. This is his first publication.

TERRY TAFOYA works with United Indians of All Tribes Foundation in Seattle, Washington. He is registered with Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. Publishing both fiction and poetry, his work has appeared in numerous publications throughout the U.S.

BETTE THIEBES is an undergraduate student at the University of Montana. Her book reviews have appeared previously in CutBank.

LYDIA VIZCAYA is a graduate in the University of Montana School of Education, where she's working on her art teaching certificate and a masters in education with an emphasis in art education. This is her first publication.
DANIEL WALLACE lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Another of his stories is forthcoming in *Triquarterly*.

LINDA WEASEL HEAD is a member of the confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes. She is an undergraduate at the University of Montana, majoring in English and History. She has held jobs as a Head Start teacher, an adult education instructor and a chemical dependency counselor. The story and poem of hers in this issue are her first published works.

DON WELCH was the winner of the 1980 Pablo Neruda Award for Poetry. His poems have been published in numerous magazines. He has three books of poetry out and lives in Kearney, Nebraska.

JAMES WELCH lives in Missoula and is the author of two novels and a book of poems. His new novel, *Fools Crow*, will be published this fall by Viking Penguin. Born on the Blackfeet Reservation in Browning, Montana, Mr. Welch lived also in Portland, Sitka and Minneapolis, among other cities. He attended the University of Montana where he studied under Richard Hugo and Madeline DeFrees in the M.F.A. Program. Mr. Welch has taught at the University of Washington and Cornell and presently serves on the Montana Board of Pardons.

MARTHA WICKELHAUS lives in Monroe, Louisiana. She's had poems in *Quarterly West, Carolina Quarterly, Cimmaron Review* and other journals.

JEFF WORLEY teaches at Pennsylvania State University. His poems have appeared in *Tendril, New Mexico Humanities Review, Intro* and others.


WILLIAM S. YELLOW ROBE is an Assiniboine Indian from the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. He is a senior at the University of Montana with a dual major in Journalism and Drama. A one-act play of Yellow Robe's, entitled *Sneaky*, is currently being performed by the Native American Theatre Ensemble in Los Angeles. Yellow Robe is working on a novel called *Drum Song*. 
**Books Received**

Decoys and Other Stories, Ken Smith, short stories, Confluence Press, $12.95 cloth.  
*Fish, Flesh & Fowl*, William Hathaway, poems, Louisiana State University Press, $13.95 cloth; $6.95 paper.  
*Haunts*, David Baker, poems, Cleveland State University Press, $6.00.  
*John Haines*, Western Writers Series, Peter Wild, Boise State University Western Writers Series, no cover price.  
*Restoring the Chateau of the Marquis de Sade*, Laurie Henry, poems, Silverfish Review, $3.00.  
*Scaffolding*, Jane Cooper, selected poems, Anvil Press Poetry, $4.95.  
*Shelter*, Laura Jensen, poems, Dragon Gate Press, $14.00.  
*Snow of the Backs of Animals*, Dan Gerber, poems, Winn Books, $6.95.  
*Spirit, Hurry*, Rolly Kent, poems, Confluence Press, $7.95.  
*Tap Dancing for the Relatives*, Richard Michelson, poems, University of Central Florida Press, $8.95.  
*The Census Taker*, Marilyn Stablein, poems, Madrona Publishers, $8.95.  
*The Coldest Year of Grace*, selected poems, Giovanni Raboni, Wesleyan University Press, $17.00 cloth; $8.95 paper.  
*The Hawks in the Backyard*, Sherry Rind, poems, Anhinga Press, $6.95.  
*The Wind of Our Going*, poems, Patricia Goedicke, Copper Canyon Press, $8.00.  
*Throwing Shadows*, Ken Gerner, poems, Copper Canyon Press, $8.00.

**Magazines Received**

*Agni Review*, (No. 22) Sharon Dunn, ed., P.O. Box 660, Amherst, Mass., 01004. $4.00.  
*American Voice*, (No. 1) Frederick Smock, ed., Heyburn Bldg., Suite 1215, Broadway at 4th Ave., Louisville, KY, 40202. $3.50.  
*Boston Review*, (Vol. 10, No. 3) Nicholas Bromell, ed., 33 Harrison Ave., 7th Floor, Boston, Mass., 02111. $1.50.  
*California Quarterly*, (No. 26) Elliot I. Gilbert, ed., 100 Sproul Hall, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA., 95616. $2.50.  
*Carolina Quarterly*, (Vol. 38, No. 1) Emily Stockard, ed., Greenlow Hall, 066A, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC., 27514. $4.00.  
*Chariton Review*, (Vol. 11, No. 1) Jim Barnes, ed., Division of Language and Literature, North East Missouri State University, Kirksville, MO., 63501. $2.00.  
*Cincinnati Poetry Review*, (No. 13) Dallas Wiebe, ed., Department of English 069, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH., 45221. $3.00.
Clark Fork Currents, (Vol. 1, No. 4) Lance Girder, ed., UM Student Action Center, University of Montana, Missoula, MT. 59801. No price listed.


Footwork '85, Maria Gillan, ed., Passaic County College, College Boulevard, Patterson, NJ., 07509. $3.00.


Greenfield Review, (Vol. 12, Nos. 3 & 4) Joseph Brouchac III, ed., Rd 1, Box 80, Greenfield Center, New York, NY., 12833. $4.00.


Iowa Review, (Vol. 14, No. 3) David Hamiltion, ed., 308 EPB, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242. No price listed.

Iris, (No. 14) Sharon Davie and Caroline Gebhard eds., B2 Garret Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA., 22903. $4.00.

Ironwood, (Vol. 26) Michael Cuddihy, ed., Box 40907, Tucson, AZ., 85717. $4.00.

Jazz Street, (Vol. 2, No. 1) Michael Even Dobran, ed., Union box 273, UWM, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI. 53201. $2.50.

Kansas Quarterly, (Vol. 17, Nos. 1&2) Harold Schneider, Ben Nyberg, W.R. Moses, John Rees, Homer Socolofsky, eds., Department of English, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. 66506. $6.00.

Literary Magazine Review, (Vol. 4, Nos. 3&4) G.W. Clift, ed., English Department, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. 66506. $3.00.

Mississippi Mud, (No. 31) Joel Weinstein, ed., 1336 Southeast Marrion Street, Portland, OR., 97202. $4.00.

Montana Review, (No. 7) Rich Ives, ed., Owl Creek Press, P.O. Box 2248, Missoula, MT 59806. $5.00.

Mr. Cogito, (Vol. 11, No. 3) Robert A. Davies and John M. Gogol, eds., Box 627, Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR., 97116. $1.50.

Naked Man, (No. 4) Mike Smetzer, ed., English Department, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS., 66045. $2.25.

New Southern Literary Messenger, (Vol. 3, No. 2) Charles Lohmann, ed., 400 S. Laurel St., Richmond, VA., 23220. $1.00.


Poet, (Vol. 1, No. 3) Peggy Cooper, ed., P.O. Box 44021, Shreveport, LA., 71134-4021. $4.00.


Poets On Ripenings, (Summer 1985) Ruth Dagon, ed., Box 255, Chaplin, CT., 06235. $3.50.

Puerto Del Sol, (Vol. 21, No. 1) Kevin Mcllvoy, ed., Department of English, Box 3E, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM., 88003. $3.00.
Quarterly West, (Summer 1985, Fall-Winter 1985-1986) Wyn Cooper, ed., 317 Olpin Union, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84112. $3.50.

Raw Bone, (No. 5) Tom House, ed., P.O. Box 120661, Nashville, TN., 37212. $1.50.


The Small Press Review, (Vol. 17, Nos. 8-10) Len Fulton, ed., Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA., 95969. $16 yearly.

Sou’wester, (Vol. 13, No. 1) Joanne Brew Callander, Elizabeth McNeilly, Tonja Robins, eds., School of Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, IL., 62026-1001. $1.50.


Stand Magazine (Summer 1985) Jon Silkin, Lorna Tracy, and Michael Blackburn, eds., P.O. Box 648, Concord, MA., 01742.

Tar River Poetry, (Vol. 25, No. 1) Peter Makuck, ed., Department of English, Austin Bldg., East Carolina University, Greenville, NC., 27834. $3.00.


Western Humanities Review, (Vol. 39, No. 2) Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, 84112. $4.00.

Willow Springs, (No. 16) Bill O’Daly, ed., P.O. Box 1063, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA., 99004. $4.00.
CutBank 26 will feature:

poetry by
  Robert Bringhurst
  Wendell Berry
  and others

an interview with
  Stephanie Vaughn

reviews by
  William Pitt Root
  Bette Thiebes
  and others

fiction by
  Julie Brown
  and others

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the winners of our

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& our

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THE STONE WOMAN

A young woman climbed
Into a green and blue stone.
Coyote threw her into the river
right in the middle
of Winter.

All she heard
was clinking ice

All she saw
was a brown bottle

All she felt
were jagged edges
that cut her fingers

All she tasted
was her own dry lips
thirsty for water

All she smelled
was thick piss
that clung to her hair

She remembered
she had children
somewhere.

Rolled downstream
By fast melting mountain snows, she tumbled,
Stumbled out an old woman.
Her stone broken.

Linda Weasel Head