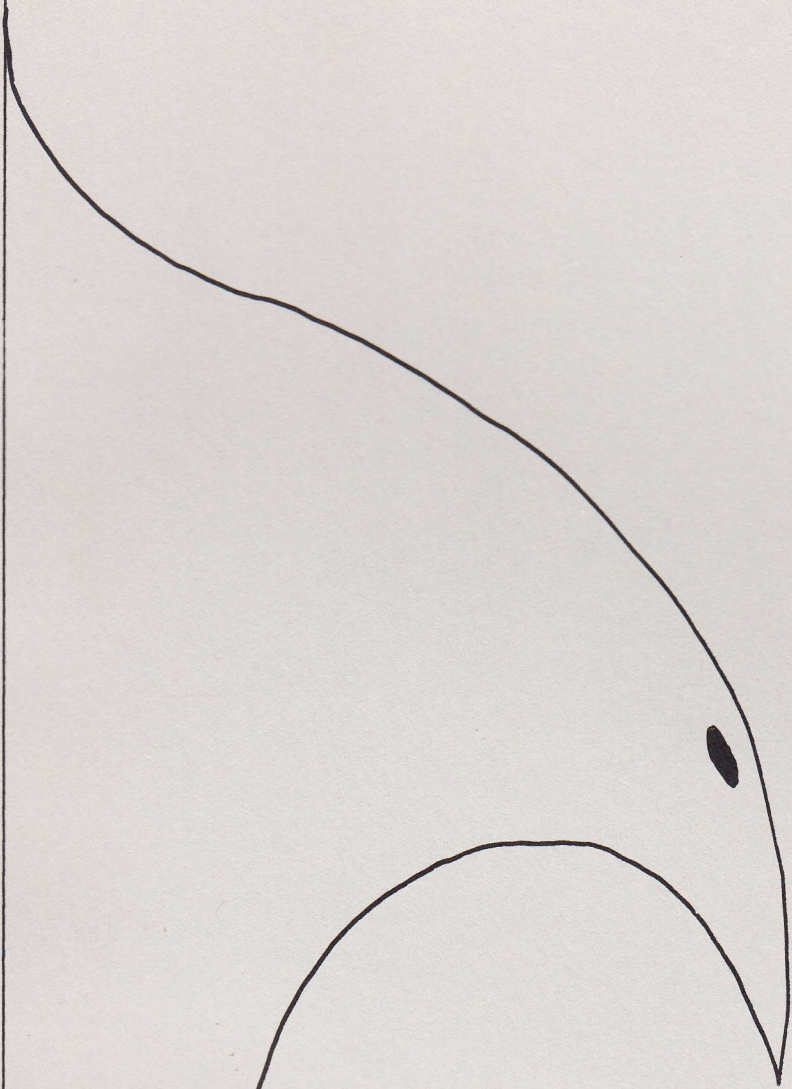


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# ALBATROSS

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ALBATROSS

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A special thanks to our advisors:  
Daniel Wolber, Jackie Smyth, Pam Millace

Subscriptions: One issue \$2.00  
Two issues \$3.75  
Three issues \$5.50

Checks payable to Albatross

Subscription orders, manuscripts and donations should be sent to Albatross, 4014 S.W. 21st Road, Gainesville, Florida 32607. With a donation of \$50.00 or more you will receive five complimentary copies and will be listed as a patron. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Please allow six to eight weeks for a reply. Thank you for your support.

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ISSN 0887 4239

POEM ON AN EMPTY PAGE

1

I see as if on a screen  
or in some untouched space  
a coiled shape of things

perhaps on a page, perhaps floating in itself  
a veined jungle of leaves and colors  
involuteed like a shell

it is round, it is coiled, it is architected  
it is not said yet

it is like a city in an Escher sky  
its spires pointing all over from inward  
celestial sea urchin

detached in itself with hidden roads

up close it is a frozen explosion  
of leaves now and flowers  
a cupped mangrove thicket

a bell in the wind

a cry of invisible birds

2

before it is said  
no wind can bend it  
nor colors blur down with the rain

it lies along the edge of the sight  
like a promise of foliage

it will be the gathering of a perfect thing

it is already gathered  
webbed round within  
and round again  
within

dreamed shape

rondure

3

is it poinciana burst into flower  
and long looping mangrove roots  
wheeling in water is it

the sea perhaps  
beaded in words  
and droplets of tide

and the burnt sky with herons

flashing down in the margins or  
the forest of fire

winding palms in its tendrils

the curved fans of palmetto

is it thronging of oaks  
beyond the green vestibule

4

that shape of things  
is gone from the eye  
spiraling inward

the forest and sea never there dissolve

like a shell  
drawn in diminishing circles  
around its pink whorl

fading pink  
pinking to white  
dwindling into

a pale rose unseen

sinking into  
the ghost  
at its

center

BIRDMAN

Through the window, a scene of suburban blight--  
Overgrown lawn, unused hose, rusted fence,  
And the skeleton of a backyard umbrella,  
Its canvas shredded by the sun and rain--vies with,

On my inside wall, Baskin's black birdman,  
Bent down and flapping, a feather-armed vampire  
Hunched to a landing, or trying to rise.  
So life and art darkly nudge one another.

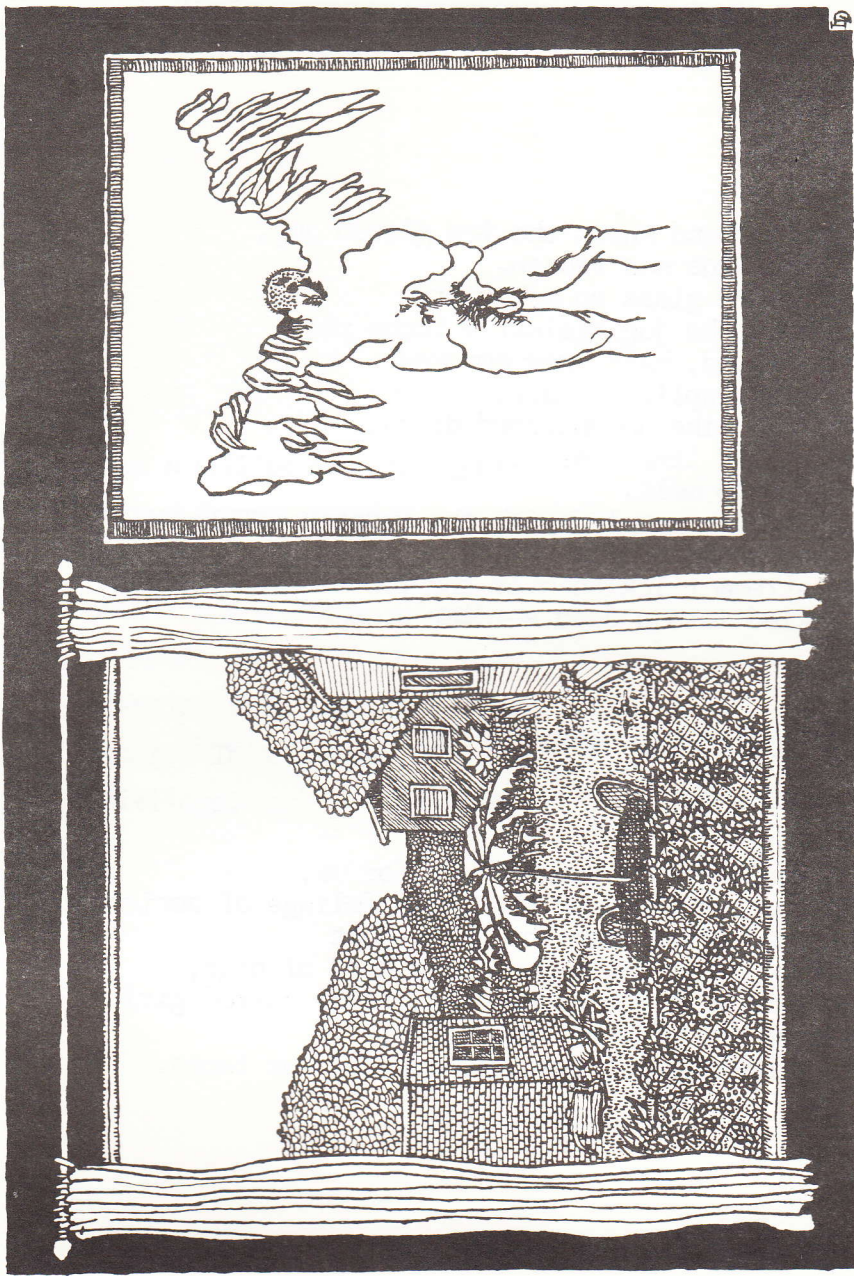
Ugly weeds twine on the crumbling links  
Of the skewed fence, as the sky burns down  
On umbrella bones, and the hose, twisted serpentlike,  
With venomous nozzle, appears as impotent as

The birdman's tool strangely shaped like a carrot.  
An indifferent steward of his narrow domain,  
My neighbor, who recently passed away,  
Would seed his garden with beer cans and bottles,

And keep his hose coiled, and sit out weekends  
Under stripped ribs and rags that provided no shade  
For his private sorrows. He was not an easy man  
To get to know, but once, I recall,

On a rare, pointless visit, he'd stared  
At my strange print with disbelieving eyes,  
Clearly wondering why I'd want anything as awful  
As that on my wall, and I couldn't find,

In those sparse lines thinly webbing the paper,  
In the scribbled torso with its absurd penis  
Suspended in blankness from spindly wings,  
Any clear, sensible answer to give him.





WINE

A gloved hand shook the ice glazed jug,  
but the wine was frozen.  
Inside the glass no movement.  
He threw the jug against a fence post  
that leaned, half snow covered.  
The glass split in half,  
fell off like an unzipped dress,  
and glowed like a saint,  
started to melt.  
Its redness mingled with the redness  
of men's and horses' blood.  
One stream trickled over the foottracks of boots,  
trickled into a dead soldier's open mouth.

A ROAD NEAR MONTALCINO

The road of sand reaches out for us,  
the road darkened by the thick foliage of ancient trees,  
the road misty from the white dust  
stirred up by the hooves of a herd of pigs,  
the road with the barefooted, black haired girl  
guiding the pigs to their home.  
The fingertips of the road touched our faces.

Like a COUGAR from behind  
potted ferns I  
watched the young girl  
catch up the front of her  
swimsuit on  
emerging from the  
water. This was my  
privilege.

A ROSE AND A BABY RUTH

for Stephen E. Smith

It takes so long to sit in the balcony and wait for sweet  
love to hold the sweat, while the chocolate in your pocket  
melts to mounds everywhere and you wish your pain would just

get up and walk out the door so you could enjoy "Rebel Without a  
Cause," but it's no use--lust sings in your blood more than any  
preacher's plea out to save yore pore soul--and if you could

kindly cut off your leg for thirty minutes or pick up the front  
end of a tractor the clothes would be themselves as they  
were in the beginning, before shade, springwater, reruns.

A CANDLE FOR MARIA

In you I have ended my search  
for what has gone mute and nameless,  
in you who are still  
with the stillness of lanterns.  
I have descended to mark  
a buried phosphorescence, decay of stars,  
light in the porous bone,  
as when a candle's eye is hollow  
to create a home for your injury.  
Yet, what remains escapes my divining,  
a hidden cloud to embrace  
no voice or appellation within you,  
for what is earthen and full of sadness,  
the slender lightning of your movements,  
is erased, leaving no fear of anonymity.  
In you there is a memory of light  
that hangs from the skeleton  
of its image, luminous husk of absence,  
the afterimage frozen in its socket,  
only as a rainbow which withdraws  
into the silence of an oyster shell,  
only as an insecure man  
who would become a candle for you.

APOLOGY TO THE SANDSPUR

Beneath what the sun  
was planning for day,  
I told her:

For leaving you  
widow of the dry summer  
grass,  
I am sorry.

(They say that  
like a shoreline you  
dressed yourself in sand.)

As a boy,  
from a model  
I assembled you  
and I would be your husband.

For not loving  
the orbit of your paper  
world,  
I am sorry.

(They tell me  
that you live still  
in the south among beetles.)

How strange to see you  
there,  
green and delicate  
like the vegetable kingdom!

TO ALL THAT IS

i tremble with miracles--  
the Earth pushing upward,  
the universe pulsing around me.  
I am too small for such wonders,  
i want only to know the flowers i planted,  
the shapes and sounds of the house,  
not the vibration of stars that exploded  
a hundred ages ago,  
not the mind of the sun.  
My brain is invaded by guns,  
my heart contracts to the size  
of a bird by the side of the road.  
I know i will die unless i can hide  
under a tent created by mind.  
Why have you opened me so wide?  
Does my body draw strength  
from the trees and the sky?  
Are my physical limits another illusion?  
Why make me so small and then draw out of me  
threads to the distant reaches of  
All That Is?  
Pregnant with reality,  
my mind collapses to gibberish,  
my legs can't hold the weight of galaxies.  
Please see that I'm frightened.  
My womb is huge,  
i struggle to tie my shoes.  
No matter how many stars you plant in my stomach,  
i trust you because  
what else can i do,  
madly in love with you,  
who are so vast and beautiful.

STURDY SAETA

let the door  
    open  
wind  
will sing a mass  
    and fine white sand  
    dance  
        on  
the brawn  
    of an orange sky  
    brow filled  
by one star  
above  
a limpid  
ragged  
    negro cypress  
    elbow  
safe  
in spanish moss  
    sway lace  
    the sensate fractal  
of  
    my  
banyon song

TRANSCENSION

sonata music  
    moves  
    sunflower rough ocean  
waves like knees  
    shoulder sweet open  
    silent wounds  
torso urged  
    out the gulf  
off an arm white shoreline  
    lifted on pale long  
currents where white bellies  
    porpoise slick little scars  
slide on  
the bird throat blue  
    tide  
    there to receive  
    forearms of rain  
left to a flesh myth  
    to walk  
a humid  
beach



FIRST DAY OF SPRING

a shadow  
  feeds on earth  
a cardinal  
  washes  
his dusted back  
  crows  
speak overhead  
  the sky moves  
    toward  
and must cast  
  us up and back  
  as dust  
to become stones  
  and trees  
  a permanent heart

TREES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Green is the structure  
that in the brain of clouds  
unfurls its branches.  
In clusters the avocados grow  
still after the jay's spring  
and its buoyant echo  
of leaf and twig are hushed  
by the breeze,  
another page in the syntax of summer.  
Is not a season a language  
overgrown with unthought  
propulsions?

The tree greens, flowers, and fruits--  
a lesson too perfect to risk losing  
in the vortex of origins,  
although it is creation itself  
that this rote harmony proclaims.  
Walk beneath its mottled shadow  
and think the tree holds you  
like a wordless memorial of flesh  
in the easy heat of backyards.

The wind jolts an avocado to the ground,  
a bomb that thumps on the unhurt grass  
its mime of the old shatterings.  
If laid on its side like the horizon  
of a bleached grammar,  
the trajectory of the falling fruit  
would have at one end Galileo  
and at the other Dresden.  
This fruit could be a heart,  
if hearts were green.

CONSTRUCTOR

Silk folds lost  
in leaf redundancy  
flow in jeweled  
provinces  
to a knot, release  
to another branch,  
and await their becoming,  
like a mind with one thought.  
The thought comes  
with the prey, to kill  
consumes  
this green latitude,  
turning coils  
into a fist within  
which the prey is buried  
and, crushed, will rise  
into the mouth.  
The lump in the body  
is slowly reduced  
to hunger.

GEESE

Fling your chest out  
and strut.  
Break away from dry twigs  
and matted straw.  
Leave the earth, your  
bottom-shaped cradle, and  
fly around and around  
to the road of immense,  
parting, time-scented air  
for the silent dusk splashdown.

PUERTO MADRYN AND LA BALLENA FRANCA

I thought last night in my hotel bed  
facing the bay, raining outside, wind,  
of the whales in this gulf, mating.

I imagined the dignity and ponderousness  
of them in the water.  
I remembered the man at Comodoro

Airport, foggy and cold,  
telling in a Spanish voice  
of how the whales join

belly to belly,  
and roll,  
over and over,

first one breathing,  
then the other.  
Rolling and breathing and mating.

Conscious and unconscious at once.  
I longed to ask how long the joy  
but of course I could not.

How chooses a whale a mate?  
Ambergris in the raw?  
Or for an especially fine fin?

Or how high the blowhole spray  
these water mammals fling?  
Is it patterns of barnacles,

encrustations random on live bodies  
created by a larger God than ours?  
Outside, I feel the whales this night

large shapes gliding: breathing and mating.  
I send my mind to the whales.  
Live, I tell them. Live so  
we'll know how small we are.

HARE

First off, you know the skills  
of the rabbit and his limitations,  
the way he sleeps but moments  
crouched in wind-knotted weeds  
and leaves his form to mark a safe  
place, how he blends with autumn  
to elude the fox's lean jaws,  
even to decipher sweet dew,  
even to discern the fire etched  
against evening. His whisper and  
quick scamper if startled, his zig-  
zag path and nocturnal nibbling,  
even if rue anemone is the only  
local blossom. Listen, you have  
seen him freeze in the folly  
of his instinct within your easy  
reach, have caught his glance  
and yearned to touch his nervous  
bright ears, his fur, in spite  
of fevers he is said to carry,  
in spite of your old fears. You  
know his secrets. He is your kin  
in bramble, moss nestle, sand.  
Like you, anywhere he rests becomes  
his form, and he will return,  
himself sourceless, wild, so often  
lost to fang or sickle and reborn.



A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.



THE FIRE EATER

He exchanges words  
for these: the visible flame  
and scarred mouth.  
A lifetime's painful silence.  
When he lies down to sleep  
the house still stands.  
No wife consumed,  
no child misnamed.  
When he wakes  
the street is blameless.  
All stones forgiven.  
And the crowd pays  
again and again  
to see the unspeakable.  
A man alone. His tongue of light.

FAITH IN DELTA

Any of these could be  
a second flood,  
though the natives never believed  
in a forgetful God.  
They pray for fire  
and sort the clouds for sun,  
a light to these marshy fields.  
They speak the language of drought:  
heat, caution, dust.  
And between rains  
the earth does dry;  
trees brittle as kindling  
fuel the faith of a few.  
Never two houses  
but one alone  
crowds the high ground:  
a house of sticks  
warmed by distance,  
the odd, blinding day.  
What stands for an altar  
is a life beyond the highway's edge.  
No sound but the land  
turning slowly on even brown.  
The eye waits  
while the hand delivers the eye  
from thunder, the tempting storm.  
And faint rays fall  
through outstretched fingers  
like sparks of burning heaven.

GHOST FLOWERS

near mt. vesuvius workmen excavating an ancient seawall  
uncover skeletons trapped 2000 years under ash;  
teeth still clenched skulls smooth as a baby's knee

the mathematics of bone:  
how the slope of your cheek sharpens,  
angle of wrist and elbow as you lean on the table  
shirt open at the neck  
the last fraction of flesh a small wind ruffling the water

you hide your son's bones in baby fat won't touch  
the soft place on his head where bones grow toward each other  
like old hands

inside the skeleton of a young woman  
scientists find fetal bones broken eggshells  
they take out one by one  
nearby an older woman gold jasper rings on her fingers  
bracelets in the shape of snakes

on your birthday you stand by the bathroom mirror  
tracing the lines of your face  
you have your mother's bones you say  
the sockets of your eyes deep like hers  
the same high forehead jaws that clench in your sleep

the skeletons were preserved by water  
filtered through volcanic ash  
now vulnerable exposed to air they're dipped in plastic  
arranged on locked glass shelves

your daughter asks if the chicken leg she's eating  
is the same as her own  
you change the subject quickly she drops the meat  
on her plate but you save the wishbone  
hang it where the sun comes in  
later you'll pull it with her  
holding low on the bone so she'll win

bones wait under your skin  
shift slightly toward the sun  
the knobbed ends of your wrists ghost flowers  
pushing through soil skin giving its  
slow consent.

CHANGES

life has thinned to this one corner  
of one room: the scratchy brown sofa  
browning plants, indian wall hanging of geese  
unraveling what looks like the sun.

outside the window, a jungle  
of succulents climb the screen;  
their serrated arms find the hole  
you never repaired.

I am ready to believe anything  
that crawls along my skin;  
I'm through with words, sounds  
that rattle on your lips at the end.  
(when I start over my skin will be good  
as paper, I'll tap out your absence in braille)

sometime after dark I weigh my losses:  
the job, three cats in a year, you,  
obsessed with how light I've become.

by morning, the sounds of cars  
starting in a row of driveways, animals  
wanting to be fed, the edge of a succulent  
knifing my cheek, a new language for grief.  
(you would say loss is an illusion,  
that there are only changes)

a poem can be the absence of sun  
in an overcast sky, the thin glow  
where it almost breaks through.

THE LORDS OF NATURE

I

Speedway, downcounty past Honeywell, enters curbstone  
Straits; in thermonuclear  
Target zone, ten thousand engines juggle  
For position. Mind-scrambling smoke blues Charger's  
Cockpit. The city

Glides by on 34th Street's banks. Electric guitars'  
Air raid in incense hushes  
Traffic, trumpets at stoplights seen through haze.  
Playing matador, Jesse weaves through traffic  
Past GenTel office,

At tollgate throws coins, accelerates on Skyway Bridge.  
Nerves panic; hands concentrate  
On wheel through hornets' blaze of oncoming  
Terror. His eyes jerk back in time from tanker  
Passing Egmont Key,

But on the main span a millisecond's error  
Dooms wrench and buckle of steel,  
Sparkshower over shipping channel, scream  
Of infant, bloodsoaked safety glass scattered on  
Concrete, and seagulls.

II

The searchboats, out a week since Jesse sailed  
Clear of the iron rail, the song still playing  
In his head, and died before he ever  
Hit the outflowing tide, still have found  
No salt corpse. The usual activists,  
Suspecting liquor, console the families of  
The victims, call for tougher laws, while his  
Flesh floats on in the belly of shark and tarpon.  
Beyond Blackthorn Reef, his bones crumble  
Beneath their new coral plating. Certain friends  
Of his miss him, yet salute his daring  
At Blue Sink the night he plunged from the high  
Platform nailed to a tree, through a mushroom  
Hallucination into the black bottomless spring,  
And with what wisecracks he braved the patrolmen's  
Harassments, and to what high score he manoeuvred  
The blips and lights of the Phoenix, and the thrill  
That sped him over the Skyway, and his last  
Perception: a tumble of sungold thunderheads, sunblindness,  
And the rise of the sequined water that will break, enfold him.

Now the molecule of his moments flies on the wings  
Of the evening gulls. It will never compound  
With construction jobs or bussing tables,  
The midnight screams of babies or rental leases.  
What for his friends is passing into memory  
For him is locked in eternal Now.  
His girlfriend walks numbly, except for the hour  
On the beach between sunset and night  
When she can at least cry, and where she swears  
She has twice met him walking and touched his face.

III

Sunrise pinkens angled surf, longshore  
Currents shifting riversand into beaches.  
Sink the pier's pilings deep against  
The winter fullmoon that drags the summer  
Sandbars out. The tide undermines the lawn's  
Sod; in the mornings of the last quarter's ebb,  
Build seawalls to hold them in.  
Sandbag jetties to keep the serrated beach  
The new moon always swirls away. Dredge  
Away the shoals that choke the channel. Noon  
Hears the incessant motor throb the standard  
Navigation depth. Spring tide sprays  
Against the rockpile the highrise rests upon.  
High up, the aircraft beacon blinks  
Its first redness in the dusk. Tropical storms  
In autumn and cold fronts agitate the waters  
Into waves that slap, break the ever crumbling  
Concrete into the black gulf by night.



IV

In a steeped tractorshed on one of the highways  
Leading past the city's outskirts, the crowd sang  
The words unrolling on the overhead screen:  
The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea!  
They shouted and they prayed to no nothingness,  
No stark lightningstroke of symbolism, but  
Christ Crucified. They raised their arms  
W-wise to catch the descending dove.  
This ultimate dissolves all dilemmas,  
Even guilt and grief for the sudden violent  
Death that would provide the healthy liver  
That Mr. and Mrs. Calloway's baby needed.  
Surely the miracle would be granted, for  
God does not desire that his children  
Should suffer death and pain. The minister  
Sweated in prayer, cried in a sea of salvation,  
The mind of each drifted in the white glare  
That the strength be found that could forbear through  
The needles, nausea, and discolored skin.  
Surely the operation must turn out well,  
For the Calloways love their child who mustn't die  
Without knowing Him to whose arms he'll fly.  
And Micky Mouse had come to wish him well.  
They hoped someday to visit Disney World.  
A collection will be taken for the time  
At Ronald McDonald House and the work missed.  
Yes, the dove that dissolves fear and logic,  
Gives hope of Thanksgiving Day and football games,  
In lovingkindness filled the tractorshed,  
And plunged the horse and rider into the sea.

V

The green line on the screen at All Children's straightens  
And the helicopter bears

The tiny corpse across the bay. Hands make  
The proper incisions, skillfully remove  
The wet brown gland, lay

It with both palms in icechest rushed to Learjet  
With priority clearance

For the two hour's shriek across a thousand  
Miles, the run across the floodlit tarmac  
To police escort.

An expert team has diverted the baby's blood  
Through tubes and pumps and excised

The failed organ. Now tense eyes monitor  
The hundred meters and display terminals  
As through exhausting

Hours, the smallest ducts and glands are found, rejoined.  
Other teams hold vital signs

Above a certain threshold this side of  
Death's Door until through shattered nerves and crises  
Surgeons nudge it shut.

PROGRESS AT BUILDING SITE  
WITH (FEWER) PIGEONS

Visitors, a lost last remnant,  
to the pilgrim shrine  
of something neither we  
nor they know what  
to make of,  
they hang in, homing,  
above the pit a swiveling  
derrick gangles out of--  
at its foot, far down,  
a yellow scutterer  
of an earth mover

engaged in trading  
with a red, caterpillar-  
pedestaled steam shovel  
at street level,  
crawfuls (gouged,  
precarious, self-undermining)  
of the very precipice  
it's perched on--such  
large gobblings  
and regurgitations  
miming a

by now obliterated  
memory of being fed,  
eons ago, atop  
some window ledge,  
the ghostly lost  
escarpment of an  
extinguished other country. See  
how the winged vagrants  
still hover, haunting  
the laddered cage's  
gusty interstices

like the question no one  
poses, as to what we're,  
any of us, doing  
here: what is this  
elbowed, unsheltering,  
obtrusively  
concatenated fiefdom  
we poor, cliff-dwelling  
pseudo-pioneers  
have somehow  
blundered into?

WILDERNESS LOST

There is no shelter.  
There are no caves.  
You may not hide.

An ancient map points  
to one faded spot:  
"You Are Here."

Startled, you recognize  
your oldest home.

The map is right.

You are here, and safe.  
Nothing will touch you again.

You are home.  
You may now huddle  
against the earth's burnt cheek,  
and weep.

WAITING BY THE SEA

This tidepool day you inhabit contains more than  
you need. It stirs now and then to bring  
faint news of old storms deeper than the earth.  
From caves around you feelers and claws wave  
their greeting, then slowly withdraw  
and wait for tomorrow.

Sunlight is alive when it swims down where you are,  
and you stand still, alert to take in the sun.  
You become a stone, then the ghost of a stone,  
then the gone water's brilliant memory  
of where a stone was.

Making the day expand in your heart and return,  
you play a limited part in whatever life is,  
practicing for that great gift when enlightenment  
comes, that long instant when the tide  
finally calls your name.

Hans Juergensen was born in Germany and fled to the United States in 1934. After graduating from Upsala College in 1942, he joined the U.S. Army and saw action in Africa, Sicily, and Italy. He was severely wounded at Anzio. In 1951 he received his Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University. Since 1961, he has been teaching humanities, creative writing, and German at the University of South Florida. The author of fifteen books of poetry, Juergensen has had poems appear in over 200 magazines, nationally as well as internationally. For a number of years he has been formally invited by the Swedish Academy to nominate candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is presently the editor of Gryphon.

You have been publishing poetry for almost thirty years now. How have you found your concerns changing over this period?

My concerns have been of a number of types. I change approach a great deal depending on mood, inspiration, experiences. For example, I do write about nature, philosophy, art and artists, the mess we are in, which is the hardest to write about, for you have to be both objective and subjective. You have to distance what you are doing so that it does not become preachy. I have written a great many poems about the Holocaust in my own experience. I was not in a concentration camp, but I was a refugee from Germany. I was very much involved in bad experiences with the Gestapo at the ripe old age of fourteen. There's a great deal of experience, a great deal of concerns I express. You have seen them in the poems called Watchman What of the Night...?, a quotation from Isaiah in which I have fifteen of my poems which deal with the Holocaust. When I read them of course I get strong reactions. A big problem for any artist is to find the right balance and tone between intellect and emotion so you don't go overboard--so you don't preach. Great art has subtlety. Not all my poems are subtle, but there is something in the language that has to be the arbiter of a great work of art.

What initially led you to want to write poetry? At what age did you begin writing?

This is interesting. I was 13 years old living in a small town in Germany--Hitler had come into power in January 1933. Having been raised in a rather political environment and being a Jew I knew what was going to happen at the ripe old age of 13--I warned people to get out, but they didn't listen. I was called all kinds of things, including the equivalent of smart-ass. One night, in 1933, close to my barmitzvah, I wrote my first poem. It was a farewell to Germany. I don't have it; I lost alot of papers. It was a 13 year old's poem, but I never stopped writing after that.

How have religious convictions affected your poetry? How have these emerged in your work?

I read Goethe's Faust at the age of 10 and Immanuel Kant at the age of 12, because I had to find belief. I was brought up in a more or less orthodox Jewish environment to which I have no objection, but I began to doubt, especially when Hitler came to power. The day I was barmitzvahed I started doubting the existence of God. So I read for the next six years, a great deal of philosophy. I know the classics very well. They certainly influenced my poetry. I read just about every kind of philosophy trying to find out what the human condition is. In graduate school I studied the German mystics of the 14th Century and the Kabbalah, and that study shows in my poetry very much so. These themes have emerged in, for example, Fire-Tested, which is about the prophets--my favorite part of the Bible (both testaments). In this, I trace the development from justice in Amos to compassion in Isaiah, and then Jeremiah, my own favorite, who brings us to the personal relationship to your own God. Then I thought of a solution--I started writing a new poem based on Baruch, which means "blessed", who was the scribe of Jeremiah, and without realizing it (it was pointed out to me),



I was writing about myself, which I was not conscious of. This is one of the most wonderful things about writing--that you do not always know why you write and what you write.

Yet, I need to seek God again  
within my own presence--  
although He has receded  
into the unknown  
and will not speak to me.

Still: I am of His creation  
and--at unhoped-for hours,  
enraptured by its wonders  
or the simplest act of kindness--

and that, perhaps,  
must suffice. (from "An Epilogue by Baruch"  
in Fire-Tested)

Having to say that was terribly important. Having seen tremendous tragedies, having lived through some of my own, I am very much aware of the virtue of kindness. I am essentially a moral poet, a moralist.

Do you find it painful to write?

I've written poems where I've literally sweated them out. A poem can be very painful to write. I have poems that have cost me. The poem called "The Scar", in which I describe what happened to me when the Gestapo killed the man next to me. Took me 32 years to write it. 32 years before I could get it out of my system. I was fourteen, four months before I left Germany. He was 38 years old when he was executed. One Sunday afternoon when we had a picnic, he and I were talking when the Gestapo men came up to us. They turned to me and said "Son, you'd better take a walk." And after he was killed, I expected to be next.

He lay face down.  
I waited for my moment--  
No longer quite afraid,  
Or making thoughts.  
The executioner approached  
Unhurried--not unkindly--  
Weapon slack, to warn:

"Sag' nichts davon;  
Sonst weisst du,  
Was passiert."

"You understand  
You must not  
speak of this."

(from "The Scar--August, 1934")

In your poem "Near Hill 769. Cassino Front" from your book  
Beachheads and Mountains, you say that "I know already more of  
death/Than others will of life." How has having seen so much  
death affected your life?

I've seen so much death all my life. Even when I was a kid, when there were streetfights with the communists, I remember my father pushing me into the doorway when there was machine-gun fire. Life is precious; however, it doesn't stop me from writing about death, or about cruelty, for these things are a part of life, and I suppose that makes me the moralist as well, having seen these things.

What do you feel is the role of the poet?

This is one of the most important questions you can ask. Let me be very pompous: any nation that does not have good poets is decadent, in decay. Art is that important. The vast majority of a nation--the people who make things happen and that includes politicians, scientists, and leaders--they appreciate art because it is the highest and most intimate expression. All's you have to do is to refer people to the Bible or quote Shakespeare--it's well known that all the great poets leave their mark.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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WILLIAM STAFFORD has a new collection of poems due out from Harper & Row any time now, entitled An Oregon Message. A new book about writing, You Must Revise Your Life, is due out from The University of Michigan Press in their "Poets on Poetry" series, where he has an earlier book called Writing the Australian Crawl. He is retired from teaching (he taught for many years at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, as well as at many other places). Now and then he goes on reading circuits and takes part in writing workshops.

SHELBY STEPHENSON has had two chapbooks published: Middle Creek Poems and Carolina Shout. He is currently working on another chapbook entitled Finch's Mask, as well as a collection of poems entitled Bone. Dr. Stephenson is the editor of Pembroke Magazine and has previously published in Albatross.

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