

*The Wormwood
Review*



Second Issue

The Wormwood Review

Vol. 1

No. 2

THE FIRES OF HOME

Home is where the balanced mornings fall
Like orange and noiseless dominos beside
My father's bed. Piping like a flute
Upon the concert of his youth — he notes
My mother, a sober courtship in a timeless
Middlewestern town where Darwin and the patterns
Of Oak accustomed avenues prevail, where
Gloom and vanity are hauled to the curb
Before pedestrians and jailed like drunken drivers.

He grieves for the pale, defective child
Who spits out the cream and turns
Away from his father's hearth. "My son
Sits tuneless as shadows, feeding one
Hand to the other and eating his brain," he sighs.
I mutter how the snow drifts towards us
Over our lawns like the population of Asia,
He replies, "a burden but distant, bad
Manners and gone with the season, my son."

Before dawn I heard him call
"Come, come to me without a quarrel."
The cur that napped beside the grate
Howled like history at his door,
The strangled song which was my youth
Rose like a bird and flies away — Father,
When the moon burned like the fires of home
Were the hills warm with mortal desire?
Before history, were the trees startled
A deep green blush by the sun?

"You rave of dreams without design
You will not mourn for me," he sighed.
Grinning the lazy wisdom of the aged
He kissed the hound that tore his throat,
"With my death I will you all
The Certainty there is," my father said,
"Your son must follow his father's wake
As the geese fly dangerously in spring
From winter toward no natural home."

Grandin Conover

ENTER THIS DARKNESS

Enter this darkness.
Feel the folds of the rock and sigh.
Light the way through the cold fall of water.
The wrinkled seeds
that patter as they tumble
reveal the eel's lair
beneath the crow-beaked rock.

Here is a new house
and an unworn garment.
The hand's ring is empty,
the finger's skin restored.
A nest of everlasting
apple-breasted birds
is perched on the tree
beside the vacant window.

House of mist
hall of cinders
hope of tomorrow
hell of empty night —
by these four signs of darkness
I pledge the needle and its eye.

Michael Bullock

THE BREAKFAST

Mythology in a bowl. The morning
arrives and seeks the birth of sound
and cherubim denounce these chairs,
these florid fruit, and the voice
that vines around the news.

It feeds on someone's yesterday.
Perpetuates and deludes. Say,
on a hill two barefoot boys trade
diction and throw rocks at a target.
In a city, say again, a clerk looms
about his cloth and holds it against
window light. Between hours time
sanctifies a horticulture of events.

This family of dishes makes simple
in the round the popularity of being
where milk, cream, and buttered
notions accumulate about a table.
On a cupboard shelf, spice and other
inventions befriend the hand,
and nearer than spoons to the soul
the community of passing the dreams.
Say again, this day is planned
to collect experience to port
and rearrange. Between events time
sprouts hours for remembering.

Come mysteriously seated, but not
in sinister mystery, the act of time,
so natural to acceptance that it gives
what is asked and takes in forgetting.
Say again, the food is good and means
to make us new and partakes of us.
This helping of being shares time
and makes an island under morning light.
The city is divided to keep us sane,
and the land is traversed by a nation's
plans, yet time bounties this time
with its host. Let us kiss one another
sweetly gently on the forehead.

Henry Birnbaum

A
Bodhisattva
sitting
for
a
painter
or
a
seed
sitting
for
the
Rain
or
a
circle
waiting
for
a
Musician
began
to
rise
carrying

Audience
and
Universe.

John Tagliabue

THE GIRL WITH THE FIREFLY

The lightning-bug in her hand stammers wildly
As she stands there on the verge of darkness,
A fulcrum for dusk. Her green torch
Flares sporadically, like a code
To which she alone can find the key.
Motionless, her figure fades into black

As the garden blends into earth. The signals
Come more faintly now, like the pulse
Of a dying child who feels the balance tremble
And slide into the night.

When all the green is gone,
She looms out of the shadows, brushing the dark,
Bewildered by the silence in her hand.

Larry Rubin

A CENTAUR IN NEW YORK

You seemed to think it strange that I,
A centaur in New York, should speak of love.
You laughed when I produced my trove
Of periwinkle, kelp, and royal palm.

I wore a chain of hyacinths to charm
Your eyes. I wove a skirt of olive leaves
To cover my extremities. My hooves
Trod soft on rugs, the grass on which you lived.

Alas, I saw in your eyes I was two;
I saw that I was doomed to harry self;
I saw that nothing I could sing or give
Would shake the terror you would have me live.

Resolutely, I surrendered flowers.
My ancient four-foot passion was a joy
No biped could encompass or delay.
I clattered down Fifth Avenue, away.

Stephen Stepanchev

LETTER TO W. D. S.

Christ, you made me sad
with your love tunes gone awry
and the bitter root twining, mossy,
among the pages of a songsheet tossed to

wind down the wind and
moulder in a lost cranny
of some meadow. I'm not used to loss,
though aware of it, as one is aware of

cancer. A woman
I knew, wrinkled like blown snow,
died of a wild part of herself which
ravened its own life. Her children, grown to seed

themselves, kept locks on
their tongues, but their hearts' faceless
prisoner snarled at the world through the
portcullises of eyes. Like those striped lines of

yours, that scourge of ink
and pillory of paper.
Why did you flay yourself there, in the
marketplace? Was it because sorrow shown is

simpler than covert
loneliness? All of us are
alone. The world we blow through is cold.
Snow fetters our sorrow, yet we flute and fife.

Lewis Turco

FOOLISH, FATHER

Taught how to write, he never wrote
No novelist — more lamb than goat —
Was Trollope's son. He took, poor fella,
Trained by Trollope to write a novella,

To sheep-grazing. Just why, Lord knows!
Was it his father's woolly prose?
Fixations father Fixed Ideas.
Bah! There are no panaceas.

R. W. Stallman

SHORT STORY

"Read me what tea-leaves spell."

"Beauty, Mademoiselle."

Arsenic she stirred in
The cup she drank for him
Stained the teacup's rim,
But spared her pretty skin,
Her beauty and her youth,
And kept from him the truth.
Knowing her youth was up,
She fixed time in her cup.
But one day time cupped her,
And clocks began to tick.
That day she didn't stir
They said, "It's arsenic.
It was that wicked sinner
Put the poison in her."
Sinners, drink it up:
Poison's in the cup.

R. W. Stallman

IN MEMORIAM, J. H. W.

Death takes strong-legged men,
asking no questions, answering none.

But no one thought of death, there,
where boys' games and boys' things
filled the short winter afternoons
with guns, snares, tracks in the snow.

Or the long summers, with school
far off and the woods near
and large enough for running —
just running, not going anywhere.

He ran (and swung far out
on wild grapevines, and climbed trees)
because the young, strong legs
wanted to know how strong they were.

Death would have had to run
fast and far to catch him then.

Later, going away to college,
working and marrying, the legs
still sometimes wanted to run, but the woods
were smaller and farther away.

And if he dreamed of going somewhere
(or getting away somewhere) the dreams
faded, and the circuit closed,
from home to office and back again.

Death didn't even have to follow,
then, to catch him. Death waited
quietly, while one day's round
turned back upon the day before.

And casually tripped up the middle-
aging legs, and took him.

Barriss Mills

THE ULTIMATE COMPOSITIONS OF HER THIGHS

to kiss the essential symmetries of
her lips and within that kiss to move
the sharp responses of her need
for behind that body stir the
astonishing expansions of the mind
that is the meaning to touch

the absolute proportions of her
breast and around that touch to change the
deep attentions of her will since
within that body move the surprising
contractions of the heart that
is the idea of loving to embrace the

ultimate compositions of her thighs
and within that embrace to stir the eager
motions of her thoughts because around
that body change the amazing alternations
of the soul that is
that pleasure of loving a woman

Norman Friedman

BLOOD

Jew and Celt and Slav
rush through my veins

it is no trouble to kiss
the Jewess on the lips
to love the Irish baby
to listen to the iron song

of Russia's red battalions

What is more terrible
is the reconciliation

of listening to my heart beat
next to hers to watch his hands

unformed pluck at the air
while they keep drumming
singing of what is past
Like Roman renegade

or traitor to the Crown

I soon forget when horses pull
me East and North and West.

Christopher Perret

LOVE

When I was five I loved to swing
And run around the playground like a hare
Climb onto the monkey-bars and sing,
And tell things to the grey attendant there.

In winter when my fingers became cold
From zipping gloveless down the sliding-pond
He took my hands in his — and he was old —
And rubbed them, as a vagabond

Protects his fire from the wind.
Now, often when I have misplaced a glove,
Despondent that my passions must be pinned,
I brood about those chilly days of love.

Florence Victor

BRONZE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

In October comes a voice
From this passive-burning bush,
A speaking to the Moses in me.

In this flame-and-mist time comes
A command to the exodus,
To the far-country journey.

Leave your quiet sheepstrewn hills
Drowsing in the silent sun, it says,
Leave love and the lost dream.

Go down, it says, to an ancient land
Trouble the old gods, the old king,
Make fugitive the peoples of your mind

Go over into the wilderness;
Go in rage or go in peace,
But go humbly in your knowing.

The bronze chrysanthemums —
Bush burning, voice burning,
A revelation, single and unique,
Speaking to the Moses in me.

Marden Dahlstedt

HOME TO OSTIA

Come home to Ostia where no ship sails
Our quiet harbor. Finding fishnets burn
Dry on wharves and how our seaport fails

To serve an inland city, merchants turn
For coastal villages where commerce calls.
Touring the vacant marketplace, we learn

Carved wood decays, at shrines white plaster falls;
Austere or lusting, while mosaics break,
Cavorting gods go lame across thin walls.

Come, we shall watch them tumble in the wake
Of summer breezes, before sunlight trails
Down walks, along calm docks by whose mistake

We have, avoiding red flags flown for gales,
Come home to Ostia where no ship sails.

G. F. Keithley

OBJECTS

I. Madam Schaparelli's Birdcage

She kept it mounted high against the satin draperies :
a golden birdcage, its wooden pieces pierced and sculptured,
its tiny wire bars more fragile than the threads embroidering
her Aubusson with pale, gently pornographic Fragonards.
She kept it, a Baroque pendulum, riding upon the breeze
she made when whispering through the room.

But no birds perched upon the inner clockwork of the cage,
no trained canary singing, nor even jungle parakeets
speaking seldom, like ancient green and yellow crystal radios,
and especially no gross crow or parrot to hone their bills
on cuttlebones and spot the sandalwood with seeds and waste.

No birds sat silent or singing within the cage, because, she said,
it was too fragile, being old, Rococo, made for some King Louis :
to decorate the endless hallway of his mistress' home.
It was too fragile to hold a bird, and thus it served no use,
nor any function, swinging silent and golden so she might just
touch it like a delicate, frosted palace with no princess
prisoned in its tower, and pass on to tea, secure with knowing
that it would be there still, when she returned
to close the drapes against the violet sunset.

David Ossman

REFLETS DANS L'EAU: FONTAINEBLEAU

Enlarged and restored by men of taste
In no awe of symmetry
This palace climbs from a terrace
With a statue in a fountain.
Around the foursquare shaft from which
Medusas rig steady water
Discs dazzle green slime where coins lie
And duller discs show where coins lay.
With that vain stillness of Roman
Copies of Greek originals
Freedom wears the Phrygian cap and hurls
The discus across the lake.

Across the lake colonnades and stairs
Realize a figured bass
To chimneys and eaves: all recommend
Themselves to ears of the eye.
When the lark sights sunlight he carols.
Carp wrestle in boils for bread.
A dappled percheron carts to plant
About wild boxwood: flowers.
The moles sniffle blackness and hark
Under rich lawns which offer up
Their reiterated prayer: Prière
De ne pas MARCHER sur les PELOUSES.

Michael Lebeck

**TO BE READ, LAUGHING
FIT TO KILL**

No matter how fat your friend has been
You will not suffer a heart attack
Nor strain your sacroiliac
When carrying his coffin.

Even little children know
Nobody ever catches flu
Attending a formal rendezvous
With death, even in snow,

Even bare-headed, wearing
A linen suit and no coat.
Busyness is an antidote
For men, pall bearing.

I apologize for being old.
Today I caught sight of my skull
At a stranger's funeral.
Today, I caught cold.

Hollis Summers

WORDS FOR A NEIGHBORING SONG AT A FEATHERING NEST

Grinstead's comb is red as a turkey's
Although he and it are fifty-three,
And still he wants to marry his mommy
Although he has tried it twice and again
When all men know from the age of ten
True mommies are scarce as the teeth of a hen.

But sing, for once, that Fate can be bested.
Miss Nell O'Dell, chicken-breasted,
Moves next door to Mr. Grinstead
Loathing love and her music pupils.
Gather alburnen and yolk and shell,
Ring all doorbells. All is well.

Hollis Summers

SOUTHWEST OF BUFFALO

The long lakes, flanked
by the conservative
farms, which are asleep
but thinking, collect
water from the quiet
hills, which as they slope
and touch, make towns
to hide from the wind.
Near Ellington, in the Randolph
graveyard, Albert Gallatin Dow,
who died a hundred years old
in nineteen-eight,
remains in the massy tomb
which he ordered built
towards the day when the short beard
of even a centenarian
would blow in the wind
of flowers, on
the hills of New York.

Donald Hall

MYCENAE

In the shaft graves, butterflies
of gold flutter at the gold
masks of the Cretan traders.

Over the gate, the simple
lions of the Achaens
stand upright in fierce combat.

The King climbed the long carpet
to be struck like a zebra
drinking at a water-hole.

Donald Hall

BY THE EXETER RIVER

"What is it you're mumbling, old Father, my Dad?
Come drink up your soup and I'll put you to bed."

"By the Exeter River, by the river, I said."

"Stop dreaming of rivers, old Father, my Dad,
Or save all your dreaming till you're tucked in bed."

"It was cold by the river. We came in a sled."

"It's colder to think of, old Father, my Dad,
Than the blankets and bolsters and pillows of bed."

"We took off his dress and the cap from his head."

"Undressed in the winter, old Father, my dad?
What could you be thinking? Let's get off to bed."

"And Sally, poor Sally I reckon is dead."

"Was she an old sweetheart, old Father, my Dad?
Now lean on my shoulder and come up to bed."

"We drowned your half-brother. I remember we did."

Donald Hall

ON RECEIVING A DANISH BOWL OF DEHYDRATED ROSES

The hart, my lady, leaps on the lid
of your forest graven Danish bowl,
as if from Solomon's canticle,
and over a buried summer bed
of the small roses you have salvaged
for a lover in his cubicle
of winter shade, needing a graceful
antler crown swinging above these red
and huddled buds and their sleeping blood.

Having grazed a thought of the melan-
choly Dane on this morning in March,
and some pain trickling of an old search,
you ask the mind if it is willing
to be limber again and fall on
the ancient track and under the arch-
way of your pine and skeletal birch.
And the mind is already filling
hollows with roses wet and swollen.

Raymond Roseliep

FOR THE MARRIAGE OF DAPHNE AND APOLLO

Let Apollo be man's paradigm: In Rome
He lingers still beyond his pagan past,
Startling in grace like the best Latin, supreme
But human in desire. Man-shaped he roams
The ancient groves and ruins, fondling his dream
Of finding yet in Rome a nymph to grasp.

Recall the god's desires — Daphne his tamer,
Passive like any woman, but how she runs,
Outdistancing the great Apollo's strides
Until her mother Earth reacts and stuns
Apollo with his fate: The scene is summer
And Daphne branching leaves on every side.

Apollo is agape among the leaves,
His body scratched from looking for the face,
At least, of beauty . . . How can knowledge know
The ways of other gods and find its place
In nature? God of healing, of songs that flow
Like winds from Helicon — what had displeased

Old Earth to treat him so? There was the case
Of Hyacinth too, his head become a flower,
With blood marks left to mortify desire . . .
O cruel nature: Apollo can't empower
His own desire as law. His lustful fire
Must burn to ash, a laurel wreath replace

The mouth of Daphne. Ideally now the sun,
Apollo moves beyond the moving earth,
But still his man-sized image finds rebirth:
In Rome the heat advances all the claims
Of young Apollo . . . How can a godling shun
What nature gives and then withholds for shame?

Nor will he shun it but for Daphne's sake:
Let Daphne image Beauty, pure beyond
All other nymphs, Apollo's wife in art
And shadow only. Apollo tunes his heart
Tuning his lyre, transmuting life to mate
Beauty and strength together in one song.

Douglas Nichols

BLUES FOR MISS HATTIE

When they held the auction at Miss Hattie's place, I swung back and forth on the picket gate and watched the blue denim men lug all her things out onto the dog-eared lawn. I guess they pried into every nook and cranny of her big square house because when they got done, everything from a porcelain chamberpot to a big brass double bed sat in the crab grass and Jimson weeds. They had taken down all the curtains too, and I could see right in the naked windows of Miss Hattie's bedroom. While I swung back and forth on the picket gate, a big purple thunderhead sprouted up over the back of the house and the people went past carrying painted china lamps, wax flowers, a mandolin, some old feather boas, a cockatoo's cage, and jars and jars of strawberry preserves. And all the time, Miss Hattie sat stiffly on the edge of the big brass double bed, looking at her lap. Pretty soon the moving van pulled up under the honey locust, and the blue denim men began loading the heavy stuff. They were just jamming one of those fancy curved love seats into the back of the van when the big drops began to splash on the sidewalk and I had to light out for home. The last I saw of Miss Hattie, she had just put up a peppermint striped parasol and was sitting in the middle of the big brass double bed in the slanting rain.

James C. Waugh

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