



# *Watershed*

*Watershed*  
*a literary magazine*

*volume 5*

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# Watershed

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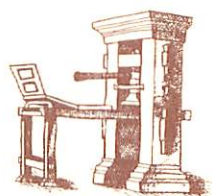
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*Watershed* is a literary magazine that enables a student editorial staff, from Ellen Walker's Literary Editing class, to experience the production of a literary magazine. *Watershed* also enables local writers to publish their works.

The submissions for this eighth issue of *Watershed* numbered over 400. For a staff of eleven people to come to an agreement is not easy. It involved long hours of debate, defense, and disagreement. There were pieces passionately supported by a few, which did not make the final selection. We received many pieces of fine fiction but were unable to publish them all due to lack of space.

We feel this issue of *Watershed* is inclusive with poetry, prose poetry, fiction, and translations. We would like to thank all of those who submitted their works and would like to encourage future submissions.

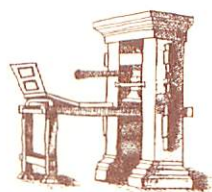
*The Editors*

# Contents

Fall 1981

<i>Cathleen Micheaels</i> Walla Walla, Washington 1927: What She Remembered .....	1
<i>Chris Howry</i> Three-quarter Beat .....	4
<i>Cathleen Micheaels</i> Postcard: Stockholm 1919 .....	5
<i>Katie Hulbert</i> Of Hippolyte and the Moor .....	6
<i>Thetis A. Tanner</i> Nubieber Bridge .....	7
<i>Gary Will</i> Hop Harvest, Oregon, c. 1900 .....	8
<i>Edward Ernest Aust</i> imagine in your heart .....	10
<i>Candice Favilla</i> Changing Signs .....	11
<i>Susan Brown</i> Coyote is forever inside you .....	16
<i>Chris Howry</i> in california .....	18
<i>Edward Ernest Aust</i> vision .....	19

<i>Elena Jayred</i>	
<b>The Fisherman</b> .....	20
<i>Cathleen Micheaels</i>	
<b>The Color of Pomegranates</b> .....	21
<i>Gary Will</i>	
<b>On Cunningham's Portrait of</b>	
<b>Roethke (1959)</b> .....	22
<i>Byron Fountain</i>	
<b>The Measurements</b> .....	24
<i>Pamela Thomas</i>	
<b>After dinner she reads</b>	
<b>from the orange book</b> .....	25
<i>Gail Peterson</i>	
<b>Summer</b> .....	26
<i>Barbara Kimball</i>	
<b>Memory in Oils</b> .....	28
<i>Clark Brown</i>	
<b>Quintus Horatius Flaccus</b>	
<b>and the Disco Age</b> .....	29



## **Walla Walla, Washington 1927: What She Remembered**

It was cold; the air was icy, burned her cheeks. She remembered this and the snow falling. Her mother stood by the stove, poking each piece of wood to a red glow. She never turned. She spoke as if the door had already been slammed, as if her daughter had been gone years or she was someone else's daughter. Her mother said it was sinful, at sixteen, it was just sinful, and that she had no right to leave, no right to be dressed like that. Her mother said not once in all those years did I leave, and now two weeks after her sixteenth birthday she thinks she can up and leave, she thinks she doesn't owe me a damned thing, just like her father.

From where she stood at the door, she could see the snow, the way it crusted at the river's edge. Clean banks of snow that looked like huge feather pillows. She thought if she stood here long enough she'd forget the way her feet felt against the floor. She remembered when her father had stood here, how it had been the same: that he seemed to stand there for hours. The snow falling; the way he kept shaking his head. The way her brother held the hunting knife her father had just given him. And late that night hearing a frantic yelping and then nothing—except the blackness and snow melting (she always seemed to hear the snow). She remembered waking early the next morning, how still the snow seemed, walking out to where her father



and brother had stacked wood at least two feet above her arm's reach: it was there she found her father's favorite hunting dog, belly slashed, the knife buried deep in the soft, thick fur at her chest.

She stood at the door, listening to the snow falling. She remembered how the first time she danced it was like snow falling: spinning and twirling, her body dizzy and light. It was this way, too, when she cut her waist-length hair, tight curls brushing against her neck, the silky way satin felt against her legs. She remembered seeing her father and mother dancing: how he could lift and spin her mother, how his huge hands covered her mother's small, round shoulders. How his hands had seemed so small and frail when he had stood here, at the door. How her mother had sat, her lap full with photographs: her father, at fifteen, standing by a train, her father with his arm around her mother's tiny waist (the way her mother's smile seemed never to end), her father with his hand on her brother's shoulder, the two hunting dogs curled at their feet, and her father holding her at three months (the way she seemed to fit there like a puzzle piece between his arm and chest). She remembered how her mother had burned them, one by one, in the stove while her father had stood at the door.

She listened to pieces of ash whirl from the stovepipe and melt against the snow. She listened to her mother sitting quiet behind her. It was the same when her grandmother had sat there, that tired heaviness of someone who'd never known the lightness of snow falling. That is what she felt

behind her, but in front—crystal shapes were spinning. She was sixteen, her coppery hair was pin-curl tight, her lips were bright red, in her new high-heeled shoes she was almost 5' 2"—she cut into the glassy snow like diamond.

—*Cathleen Micheaels*

### Three-quarter Beat

“And once she became herself . . .”  
R. Loewinseohn

She became herself  
once. The graceful spiders  
danced at her feet, and a  
low storm was coming in.  
The mountain was bare and  
in its prime: a purple blanket.

She became a heartbeat  
pumping slow jazz. The earth  
almost trembled. Flowers  
slipped from her hair,  
catching the air with their landing.  
The sun burned a hole  
through the sky.

When silence clapped its transient hands, she  
bent herself and called to gods,  
asking them to become her.  
There was no obvious answer. Her heart  
was still counting time.

—Chris Howry

## Postcard: Stockholm 1919

Sometimes I want to be that woman,  
sitting: soft skin and loose braids.  
Her shoulders, leaning. Her even

curves. On the cherrywood table  
scatters pieces of paper and flowers,  
garden flowers, in green glass.

A window. Because sometimes I want  
to be that still. A portrait.  
Nothing except the window open.

— *Cathleen Micheaels*

## Of Hippolyte and the Moor

God came down last night.  
I heard the frothy breathing of the horses,  
the clanking bronze ankle bracelets  
and then—straight backed  
in my mahogany and tapestry chair,  
nostrils flared—gold earrings shining  
in the dusky midnight light  
against her dark brown skin—  
she told me of my former life:

God said I was Hippolyte and you, my loyal moor.  
She said I returned one twilight lusty from battle  
my mouth oozing warm blood after the slaughter.  
You came dutifully to care for my tired stallion  
and—my flesh still passionate from the victus,  
sweat still soaking my leather armor,  
I cast you to the ground and raped you.  
There in the dusty courtyard—the geldings shying,  
dogs whimpering, my eunuchs laughing,  
I held your hair with one hand and satisfied my body.  
My lust, she said, reverberated to the black sea.  
Standing then above you, sword still strapped to my waist,  
I helped you up and allowed you to bathe me in the river—  
to anoint my body with sweet oil and cover my bruises  
with my whitest tunic.  
In my chamber I lay on feather pillows  
while you brought me red wine and sweetbreads.  
When you left to mend my leather thongs,  
polish my silver breast plate and sword  
for the next day's battle—  
when, at dawn, I mounted my black steed  
and led my sisters to the plunder.

God came down last night and told me why you seem—  
so familiar.

—Katie Hulbert

## Nubieber Bridge

It was my thought and your telepathy  
that stopped us after crossing Nubieber bridge.  
Wild geese were flying  
stitching lake to sky  
and I wanted to hold that sound of wind through feathers  
to wear like perfume  
because your head came up  
and your eyes went blank  
and I saw you flying over water  
with the wild geese.

— *Thetis A. Tanner*

## Hop Harvest, Oregon, c. 1900

The photographer's weapon is planted  
on three broomsticks, steadied by  
his steady Jersey hand.

Why  
have they assembled here? Sullen-  
faced harvesters with children, infants  
and the single obligatory dog.

The daylight they've swindled  
is wasting, and the work barely begun . . .

Still,

two hold sprigs of berries, a woman  
braids twigs into a heavy crown.  
It is not yet noon, already hunger  
weighs on every face, even  
the young ones.

A stout old dame  
presides, hands folded, over a choir  
of boys. One dances like a monkey  
on an upturned crate, one holds aloft  
a formless bundle (flowers?) while another  
seems to be shouldering a ghost.

No one smiles, except the man whose fingers  
slowly press the bulb, and

fireworks!

explode to send them scattering  
the rest of their days.

— *Gary Will*



imagine in your heart

imagine in your heart

gray clay walls  
a straw thatched roof  
the sun shooting through  
in prison-bar streams

and on the walls  
scratched and chiseled  
the catch-phrases of your life.

—*Edward Ernest Aust*

## Changing Signs

—Candice Favilla

July 9th diary entry

I worked all afternoon in the garden, weeding the tomatoes and squash. I find genuine pleasure in such work. Mother used to claim a parallel between gardening and cultivating the psyche. After I left my husband, during that period of nervous seizures, Mother silenced me by asking, “Where do the roots of your mind grow strongest?” The next day, I began to plan my own garden.

That volunteer squash—the one that defies classification through any of my catalogues—is growing so rapidly, so curiously. It looks as though it may consume the entire yard. The fruit are great white pendulums. They seem to glow with interior light. I had my back turned on the plant while I bent over the peppers, and when I began to straighten I caught a glimpse of the squash’s fruit under the foliage. It has an inscrutable eye.

My father knows everything there is to know about vegetable gardening. I would like to ask him about this squash. I spotted him in his garden beyond my back fence, and I was tempted to call out to him, but I hesitated. It has been a long time since we last spoke. I was not sure how to phrase the question. I thought that he might fumble for some immediate solution. His confusion always did become my own. I always had a compulsion to retrieve his blunders. A suggestion from him might throw us both into an uncomfortable situation. With a solution one must act. No, an act is too binding. An act demands commitment. Then too, I was afraid that he might not answer me at all, but merely put his hand up to his ear and search the near trees for jays, as he so often does.

The jays are my father’s biggest worry. He watches for them every morning, sitting propped against the cellar door of his house, broom stretched out beside him like a skinny wife who shares the bottle he keeps cradled in his lap. When a jay flies into his yard, my father rises, very craftily, to his feet and slowly drags the broom up to his side. Then, he tosses his bottle down and makes one crazy rush at the bird, waving his broom as though it bore the ragged flag of some historical war. The sequence is the same every time. He waits for those damn jays

like they are the only threat—as though old age and the diseases which gratefully attend alcohol were inconsequential. Every day it's the birds. And every day they come.

July 10th

The moon is making her way back with broad increase, pulling her slow-footed child, Earth, who meets the embrace—they are metamorphosed, becoming lovers. Growth is a voiceless phenomenon.

I have noticed the air thickening. A new energy is forming, tumbling around the yard. I had dreams, last night, of transmutations—hot clouds with sharp points rolling over the sky. The sky became a creature and the creature flew.

That squash—it is something not to be labeled. It watches with a leafy, easy smile. I don't find the smile in the least bit threatening, even though it does come from a plant. Mother used to say, "Take amusement where you find it. And don't hesitate."

July 11th

My mad father—the old back-door bandit—did battle, today, with windmills. Don Quixote, himself, could not have been more grand nor futile against those raucous jays.

Four of the birds clamored into his yard—it's odd that they seldom come over here—He was especially ferocious in his attack, and the birds were jubilant. They performed maneuvers, cutting through angles and drafts, turning with precision on points, pursuing aeronautical improbabilities. My father screeched and shook his broom, and the jays dove with delight from four directions. In one skirmish the old man was off his feet—broom, arm, and body making a forty-five degree angle with the ground. He regained his balance like a warrior and cursed the jays with his fist and open, graceless mouth.

He didn't look this way. He seldom does.

July 12th

I really need to ask someone about this squash. It is entering my dreams at night. It is pushing up through the floorboards of the house. It has fingers and makes rumblings.

I telephoned Ellen, an old friend of Mother's. Ellen knows a good deal about gardening. All of Mother's friends shared her interests. They used to meet every other Thursday to discuss the growth of some pet vegetable, treating each project with equal attention. It made me chuckle at their assumed knowledge—those combed-cotton matrons discussing the best fertilizers, pruning techniques, cross-pollination. They sat around the table in Mother's back yard and judiciously weighed each testimonial



of progress. They would lick their wise little mouths, salty as fading coral, cracking at their own words. Occasionally, one of them would bark, throwing back her head in an unrestrained, lusty laugh—laughter so unpleasant in ancient women—it has the odor of mildew and Calvinism—the stench of dual mysteries and truths that are kept secret.

Ellen didn't want to let me tell her about the squash. Even on the phone, I felt her curl into herself, turning from my questions before they were out and at her.

July 13th

I am not sleeping well. Each time I fall off, I can feel the squash nudging under the crown of my skull. I've tried to decipher the bits of dreams I do have, struggling for some combination of the plausible and the ludicrous. Nothing takes. The dreams are not even dreams. There is no action. There are no faces, only images. Last night, for a few minutes, I slid into sleep and entered a matrix—white lines on black charting a constant space. Then, the flower of the squash, yellow-gold, moved towards me from beyond the matrix. This image returned throughout the day. This morning, after coffee, I walked out onto the back-porch, and, placing my hands on either side of the screen-door, I peered out to see the squash, stately in the sun, reflecting the negative of the dream image. From beyond the screen and the squash and the garden fence, my father was patiently hoeing.

July 15th

Father took a spill today. He must be drinking heavily, for he lost his footing when the jays climbed down the sky to clamor in the air around his shoulders. He landed hard—I could see that, clearly—I had been rebuilding a trench near the back fence, and was standing only sixty yards from him. His face turned into soggy, beaten wood. He groaned, a long, low sound that came from his interior, as he pulled himself up. I dropped my hoe and started towards him. I meant to help him, but the back gate was stuck. It has rusted and is held, firmly, by sweet-pea vines that tangle around the bolt. I called out to him. At least, I think I called out. Yes, I remember that I called out. But, he didn't turn to look. He made no answer.

The jays were triumphant, darting in and out of his reach, as he absently shrugged his left arm at them, in an effort to wipe them from his yard. He slowly made his way into the house.

Perhaps he'll cut down on his drinking. Mother always hated his drinking. Mother used to send him out of the house when the ladies came. She was so ashamed of his drinking. After she died,

he must have been joyous—he could drink all he wanted with nobody to answer to. That's been twelve years, now. Mother gone twelve years.

July 16th

I'm writing this in excitement. Such energy here. I woke up a few minutes ago and felt drawn to the back yard. I crept through the house in my bare feet—no robe—the black and silent rooms were thick as iron.

Outside, the moon was a giant. Everything it touched was lifted up. I felt lighter, lighter as I neared the squash—and the squash! God—it took the yard into its mouth and it ate its way up the spine of the yard, towards the moon. And I began to think of that time after Mother's death, so I backed into the house to consider, and I have to write it down.

Mother died in her sleep. She went peacefully—Doctor Wills told me—but I don't believe it. Mother never went peacefully, anywhere. She always fought hard—not in any way that was obvious—not striking out or with fits and worry and tears—but in a way that made you feel her churning when you sat next to her, or stood beside her at the sink. Her mind was always examining each particle of an idea, always picking up nuance and labeling motives and she was so right. She made sense. She'd begin talking (Oh, say, about some incident or something one of the ladies had told her) and she'd pick at every angle, scrubbing away at a subject as she scrubbed the eyes from potatoes, until your brain was nearly seething from just trying to keep up. Sometimes, she made these leaps in her thinking—not always a sequential process, but straight to the matter by means of random, intuitive dives through expansive areas. I used to think she flew when she'd talk to me like that. She used to say, "Learn to hover, Mary. You are too massive." (Yes. She used to say that my marriage failed because I am too massive. She used to say that living is like learning to speak in tongues or like reading a lost language. She used to say that lovers decipher with their fingers—that she and the old man had decoded volumes—that a heart too massive is incapable of fluency.) So, why would she ever go easy? No.

I handled the burial arrangements. Father was useless. The bastard was drunk at the funeral. We sat inside the chapel with all of Mother's friends sobbing and sniffing, while the pastor of her church said things about her—vague things—things as incalculably stupid as those terrible plastic flowers hung from the walls—those flowers depressed me. They were dusty and unreal. Mother would have snorted at them. The old man was motionless. He sat with his bleary eyes and his ton-heavy hands—

God-awful hands—he sat with his shoulders drawn in and his crumpled, dissipated arms hanging down between his legs and I hated him just then for all the shame of alcohol and the light at 3:00 A.M. turned on in her kitchen when I knew she was there waiting up for him. When he wouldn't come. And that old bastard, in the middle of the pastor's tribute, listened to a jay outside the chapel window and followed it out of himself and out of Mother. And at the cemetery, he stood off by himself, under a pine tree, watching the sky—disinterested—craving his bottle, no doubt. We didn't speak after that. Mother going sadly, easily to death.

July 18th

I haven't seen the old man for two days. He didn't have lights on, last night. He always sits up late, slouched in his stuffed chair, reading as he sips from his bottle. I can see straight from my kitchen window into his room. But he didn't read last night. I wonder what it is that he reads, anyway.

July 19th

The moon is starting to close. I suppose that's why the squash looks so placated, almost shrinking. The whole yard seems to be resting. After the static energy of these last few days, I welcome this quiet breathing. Even the jays seem sedated.

Still no sign of the old man. I suppose I should go holler at him. If he doesn't show up in a couple of days, I'll go over to check on him.

## Coyote is forever inside you

I was fishing  
not catching anything  
just liking the pull of the line  
the casting and leaning  
back to the sun  
climbing through green light  
and cool pines  
rock to rock  
resting a while in a calm spot  
where the creek dropped deep  
into shaded pools.

A strange plant grew  
along the sides of the water.  
Elephant ears I thought.  
My thoughts were few and elusive  
easily lost in the sudden flight of a bird  
red and yellow and black  
skimming the water almost knocking me  
off my slippery stance.

I regained my balance and looked up  
the slope of the canyon to see  
a young buck between trees  
carefully watching.

It seemed he shyly nodded to me  
and stepping softly

over rocks and small flowers  
disappeared in the forest shadows.

I spent the night listening  
to the brilliant silence  
of the moon rising shining  
a narrow avenue of light  
through dark trees.

My heart was filled  
with an absence  
of need.

Everything I wanted  
was lying before me  
like so many glittering stones  
I'd picked up that day  
and skipped across long gleams of water.

Some kind of howling  
started in me then  
from a place darker  
than the spaces  
between stars.

A beautiful crying  
like being alive  
for the first time.

It was the coyote that is forever inside me.

—*Susan Brown*



in california

she's standing in the garden now.  
you see her long  
and careful fingers  
clip the stems.  
you watch her move,  
a full sky in april,  
no careless breeze takes her  
far or close enough  
to the rose.

and she will come  
into your home, arms full  
and languid. she will ask  
for a vase  
with the voice of a child  
who wants the day  
to be longer.

and if you are quiet enough,  
if you catch your breath  
between two moments,  
you can hear the rain move  
through her eyes.

—Chris Howry

## vision

hand in hand, we walk through the oily dusk  
while the trench-coated dwarf sings hymns and spits.  
we do not see him but we feel his wetness.

black mamba night, full of slush,  
drip this path with mercy,  
for we are sinners passing.

the slave girl, swollen, trembles at the gate,  
her reptile tongue entangled in the bars,  
and we, two zealots of the night,  
caress her with dusty solace.

black mamba night, full of slush,  
panther this pale child.  
neck full of worms, she dies.

now a goat, the dwarf has stopped his joking.  
he puffs serious rings of ashen smoke  
the slave girl's soul rolled tight between his lips.

black mamba night, full of slush,  
pluck out our hearts that offend.  
this world dies, we feel nothing.

—*Edward Ernest Aust*

## The Fisherman

You push your red-grey hair away from your face,  
tucking loose strands in your hat; its band  
accented by fishing flies hooked in their places  
of honor. Grey hackle peacocks, browns and yellows;  
you've made them all, your nimble fingers securing  
the threads to the hook. Each day in that boat, you've  
watched the glare on the water, the trees in the wind—  
and you've watched whole summers pass by, your children  
straying further away from you, your husband getting  
older, painting on the shore.

Now, while you stand over the stove, the  
cast-iron skillet massive against your tiny frame, your  
face is drawn and old. Long afternoons in the boat  
have taken their toll; the sun and memories burning,  
wind wearing lines in your cheeks, and each fish,  
struggling to take more of your lonely days away.

—*Elena Jayred*

## The Color of Pomegranates

“Think of the kitchen table then,”  
he told her, “when you’re not there.”  
Virginia Woolf  
*To The Lighthouse*

Think of the half open  
venetian blind, the thick  
glass, behind which stands  
only the suggestion  
of a woman. Fields spiced  
with lupin. And at night,  
a violet sky, a window  
open, the woman’s hands  
as she unbraids her hair  
thick with the faint scent  
of pepper. The silky black  
raven at her sill. Think  
of her hands, the pomegranate  
necklace she strings  
for her lover. Behind her,  
old women in veils, full  
of shame. Such subtle beauty!  
Even her eyes, cast always  
at her feet, her dark eyelids.  
Only the suggestion of a death.

—*Cathleen Micheaels*

## On Cunningham's Portrait of Roethke (1959)

Here at some desperate hour  
you sat with the last slanting light,  
suit ruffled, inevitable frown  
unbalancing your brow, and the dark  
behind your back.

You were a giant, a bear and a man,  
but here seem almost gentle,  
almost a small thing.

Could you really be the lost son  
Papa waltzed off to bed?

Behind you, on the damp wall  
studded with moss and the carnage of snails,  
an irregular crack widens  
to enter your skull.

Why this large initial of your heritage,  
and above, the vague hand  
pointing in an opposite direction?

Perhaps you remember another summer  
or a wonderful ship,  
its immense hull full of roses,  
to carry you in the night.

Crazy as a bat,  
you must have loved it!

And though you held such meekness  
in your bones, to me  
you were always the heron.

Playing awkward against uncommon grace,  
you could soar and swoop  
then become suddenly quiet,  
refusing to stir.

— *Gary Will*

## The Measurements

All summer we have lived  
in our bodies. Mixing  
our magic numbers.  
One combination rises  
like bread. And we  
are left on some other  
shore. The promised  
land rises and falls  
with each breath.  
Above the shared sea  
of our bed my fingers  
are five sails  
measuring the zenith.  
Each night past solstice  
the globes spin a cold  
song. But this is our  
song, our planet born  
of us again: the fluid  
earth, the waiting earth,  
the mortal earth turning  
in darkness.

—*Byron Fountain*

After dinner she reads from the orange book

After dinner she reads from the orange book,  
her voice rises with the smell of butane  
and strong coffee,  
rises to where we three sit  
in the bed my father made.  
The night lamps glow and sputter.  
Her voice, smooth and strong,  
tells us the moon forms a bowl  
on the other side of the forest,  
tells us the night will be calm.

—*Pamela Thomas*



## Summer

Tonight the air  
hangs heavy and close

nothing moving through it  
but that cricket sound  
clicking out a code  
that can only mean summer.

Everything is waiting  
suspended in mid-air  
to happen.

That screen door is  
about to bang shut.

A perfectly ripe plum  
will drop to the ground.

Some rocking chair is stalled  
an instant above its familiar creak  
and that uneasy moment holds

all the years ahead  
vacant without her  
afraid of growing old alone.

Suppose a small boy across town on his porch  
his pet dog crossing the street  
and a fast car held  
just barely at the corner.

And I am on the verge  
of something

a word, a warning  
a well-placed prayer.

When it all stops spinning  
and the moment hesitates  
like a proud and thankful lover  
you can afford anything.

—*Gail Peterson*

## Memory in Oils

In the lamplight she stands  
by the iron cook stove;  
stirs up hungry scents;  
fried potatoes and cornbread.

Her hands still warm  
and red with supper  
smoothes back the hair  
from a small upturned face.

An auburn curl falls  
down onto her forehead:  
blue eyes smile and veil  
a deeper beauty  
above the tapping feet  
that keep time to a tune  
no one hears.

Unknowing, she pulls  
a memory  
into tomorrow.

Best Wishes  
to one who  
believed in me.  
Barbara L. Kimball

—Barbara Kimball

## Quintus Horatius Flaccus and the Disco Age

—Clark Brown

. . . no poet has given me the same artistic delight as I derived from the very first from an Horatian ode. In certain languages what is achieved here is not even *desirable*. This mosaic of words in which every word, as sound, as locus, as concept, pours forth its power to left and right and over the whole, this minimum in the range and number of signs which achieves a maximum of energy of these signs—all this is Roman, and, if one will believe me, *noble par excellence*. All other poetry becomes by comparison somewhat too popular—a mere emotional garrulousness.

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

Begin with certain data chosen almost at random from *The San Francisco Chronicle*:

1) Two women walk nude up Market Street. Walking with them, also nude, is a dwarf with a peg leg.

2) Outside Bakersfield the CHP stops a San Francisco Muni Railway bus whose driver has tired of the usual run. Previously (it develops) he attempted to run for mayor, listing his profession for the ballot as “asskicking motherfucker.”

3) The stripper for Jesus.

4) A headless body found in Golden Gate Park (half column, page eight.)

5) For nineteen dollars men may now purchase phone numbers of women who would like to receive obscene calls. (No charge to the women.)

Each item is worth a poem, but that is not the point. With such items who is going to read a poem? As Phillip Roth says, “the actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.” Above all, who is going to read an old fool of a poet whose profundity seems to consist in telling his servant to put more wood on the fire and open another bottle of wine, and who tediously

reminds us to (a) avoid extremes and (b) enjoy ourselves since life is short—something we already know from the beer commercials (“You only go around once, so you gotta grab for all the gusto you can!”)?

We read Horace—if we read him at all—as antidote to the junk in our lives. Looking through a newspaper, watching television or driving to Safeway, we feel as Graham Greene did contemplating bombed out London: contemporary civilization seems to demand blowing up. Something inside us flees it even as we exist within it. We seek a cure. Thus, anyone who has ever regarded with delight the fresh sunlit snow on Lassen or Shasta can respond to *Vides ut alta* (“See how bright Soracte shines”), and whoever has rejoiced in the almond blossoms—that popcorn blizzard all over town—and the warm spring breath can relish *Solvitur acris hiems* (“Sharp winter goes”). Of course we don’t—most of us—do any such thing, but that is because we don’t really know the poems or the poet. We only think we do.

Horace hates what *The New Yorker* calls “wretched excess,” preferring plain myrtle to “Persian” chaplets. A good Roman, he can’t stomach Cleopatra’s oriental luxury and kinky followers (*grege turpium/morbo virorum*), and such restraint and plain dullness don’t recommend themselves in *L’Age de Discotheque*. (What would he have made of the Rolling Stones? Or the designated hitter?) Besides, it all seems so predictable.

It isn’t. What saves the poetry and charges the lines are the twists and turns beneath the apparent simplicity as the verse curls back upon itself and leaves the reader someplace he never expected to be. Horace hates and fears Cleopatra and tells us to celebrate her demise with our best wine and ecstatic dancing, but as he considers her death his sadistic enjoyment of Octavian’s pursuit drops away. The poet is awed in spite of himself. (“Serenely she dared visit/the ruined palace, bravely/fondling the rough snakes . . .”), and finishes with a cry of admiration (*non humilis mulier*). So in the great spring poem (I, iv) the celebration of earth’s renewal slips before we’re aware into a vision of death and the gloomy afterlife (“Once there/you will not/run the dice and/wine . . .”). So too, after the brilliant evocation of freezing winter in *Vides ut alta*, the poem curves into thoughts about the unknowable future and the exploitation of ripe opportunity, and from there (in a single line) to the delights of love and flirtation (“Even now in fields and plazas—/soft whispers at night . . .”), and we’re far away from the sharp air, the frozen river, the snow piled trees and shining mountain.

All this is easy to miss. As everyone who has ever struggled at the task confesses, Horace does not translate. There is no way in English to capture both the tautness of the poetry and its

sensuousness and elegance—as though you could simultaneously enjoy a fine dry Chablis and a rich port, no way to catch the heartbreaking spare statement **and** the lovely music of *vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*, no way either to get across the suspense and sudden resolution when the verb flashes at the end of a line and everything clicks into place, or when meaning it abruptly reversed, the kind of thing E. E. Cummings does (but clumsily in comparison):

pity this busy monster, manunkind,  
not.

We have to face it: Latin is an inflected language and English is not—or hardly so—and requires more rigid word order. Latin Poetry—classical Latin anyway—depends for its rhythm on the relative length of syllables. Some things done in one language can't be done in the other. My own approach is to sacrifice elegance and even music, restraining and frustrating momentum, so that—with luck—words can **operate** and meaning **emerge** as in the original, with that energy that so delighted Nietzsche. The result is a poetry that seems to trip and stammer at times (something the Latin never does), but better this than that jingly elegance where everything slops together into some cheap commonplace. Horace seems dull because translators have sanded and buffed out all the surprises, turning the poems into wall samplers.

Whatever day your fortune grants,  
That day mark up for gain;  
And in your youthful bloom do not  
The sweet amours disdain.

(Roswell Martin Field)

Above all, it is necessary to try for that vitality so easily lost shifting Latin into English. *Virtus est ordo amoris*, St. Augustine cried, and somehow “Virtue is the right ordering of love” loses the snap. Even “one out of many” drops the punch from *e pluribus unum*, and “All Gaul is divided into three parts” sounds simply dumb. Translation, though, like politics is the art of the possible.

Is that possible worth it, all that labor to trick words into some ingenious and satisfying arrangement? Is it even worth the effort to **read** old Horatius? I think so, for there is a real sense in which such battles tell us more about ourselves and the world than do reading newspapers and watching television. It may be that,



ultimately, the only interesting struggle is that of the mind desperately shaping the world (through language in this case) while the world insidiously shapes the mind, because it is from this endless tension that the headlines come in the first place. Moslem "fundamentalists" killed Sadat—so the newspapers tell us, but do **not** tell us if they killed him because in their eyes he betrayed Islam or Egypt. Is this (we want to know) one more murder in the centuries old battle of Islam and the West, or the final infection of Islam with western nationalism? Journalism—**our** Tacitus and Suetonius, our Caesar, Vergil, Horace and Lucretius—doesn't ask such questions. Journalism doesn't know and doesn't care. Such inquiries make its head ache. Journalism, diverting us with nude dwarfs and headless corpses, tells us, as Chesterton observed, that Admiral Jones is dead—never having told us he was alive in the first place. It is, as Henry James said, "the great new science of beating the sense out of words," and poetry is its mortal enemy, as Horace is the enemy of our time.

For which we should welcome him.

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*Nunc est bibendum* (I, xxxvii)

Now comes the drinking,

the dancing,

the free foot

pounding the earth.

Now friends.

let's furnish

sumptuous banquets

to the couches

of gods.

Before,

it would have been

unthinkable!

(choice cabernet  
from the moldy cellars  
and all Rome threatened  
by a crazed queen's  
Egyptian sopranos  
soused on their  
last great  
chance?)

One ship only  
saved from the  
flames scarcely  
eased her fit,  
and Caesar,  
oars beating from Italy  
after the flying queen  
(hawk after soft  
dove, hunter  
tracking the poor  
hare in frozen  
Thessaly),  
forced to her mad and  
desperate mind the  
grim truth.



(He brought chains  
for fate's monster.)  
She sought death  
nobly, neither womanlike  
fled the sword,  
nor with her swift fleet  
made for hidden shores.  
Serenely she dared visit  
the ruined palace, bravely  
fondling the rough snakes,  
her flesh drinking the  
black venom, **she**  
fixed on a bold end,  
scorning the savage ships  
and Caesar's proud unqueenly  
triumph.  
No mean woman  
She!

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero  
pulsanda tellus, nunc Saliaribus  
ornare pulvinar deorum  
tempus erat dapibus, sodales.

Antehac nefas depromere Caecubum

cellis avitis, dum Capitolio

regina dementis ruinas

funus et imperior parabat

contaminato cum grege turpium

morbo virorum, quidlibet impotens

sperare fortunaque dulci

ebria. Sed minuit furorem

vix una sospes navis ab ignibus,

mentemque lymphatam Mareotico

redegit in veros timores

Caesar, ab Italia volantem

remis adurgens, accipiter velut

mollis columbas aut leporem citus

venator in campis nivalis

Haemoniae, daret ut catenis

fatale monstrum. Quae generosius

perire quarerens nec muliebriter

expavit ense nec latentis

classe cita reparavit oras;

ausa et iacentem visere regiam

vultu sereno, fortis et asperas

tractare serpentes, ut atrum

corpore comibiberet venenum,  
deliberata morte ferocior,  
saevis Liburnis scilicet invidens  
privata deduci superbo  
non humilis mulier triumpho.

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*Vides ut alta* (I, ix)

See how bright Soracte shines,  
piled with fresh snow,  
how the trees  
strain with their load  
and the rivers  
freeze in the sharp air.  
Dissolve the cold,  
Thaliarchus!  
Logs on the hearth!  
Wine in the two-eared jug!  
And plenty of both!  
All else to the gods.  
Laying low the screaming winds  
and tumbling seas,  
they still the shaking

cypresses and

ancient ash.

What tomorrow brings

leave off seeking

and take as gain

what chance provides.

And don't neglect sweet love,

boy, or the dance

while grim old age holds off.

Even now in fields and plazas—

soft whispers at night

(the appointed hour)

Even now

the girl lurking

(the dark corner)

her quick laugh,

the token

snatched from her arm

or teasing finger . . .

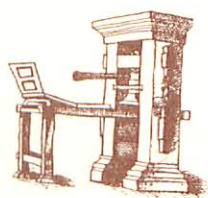
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Vides ut alta sted nive candidum

Soracte, nec iam sustineant onus

silvae laborantes, geluque

flumina constiterint acuto.  
Dissolve frigus ligna super foco  
large reponens, atque benignius  
deprome quadrimum Sabina,  
o Thaliarche, merum diota.  
Permitte divis cetera; qui simul  
stravere ventos aequore fervido  
deproeliantis, nec cupressi  
nec veteres agitantur orni.  
Quid sit futurum cras fuge quaerere, et  
quem fors dierum cumque dabit lucro  
adpone, nec dulcis amores  
sperne puer neque tu choreas,  
donec virenti canities abest  
morosa. Nunc et campus et areae  
lenesque sub noctem susurri  
composita repetantur hora;  
nunc et latentis proditor intimo  
gratus puellae risus ab angulo  
pignusque dereptum lacertis  
aut digito male pertinaci.



# Contributors' Notes

**Edward Ernest Aust** says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of creativity, celebration, and self worth, not to mention the courage needed to live in the nuclear age." He is working on graduate studies in Communications.

**Clark Brown** is a Creative Writing instructor at CSUC, and author of the novel *The Disciple* (Viking).

**Susan Brown** received her M.A. in English from CSUC. She is presently teaching composition at Butte College.

**Candice Favilla** says that "creative writing is the derivative of beastly lies, mathematics, and religion. I am a beastly liar."

**Byron Fountain's** poem, "The Measurements," was inspired by the youngest of his two children, six-month-old Cyrus. He is presently doing graduate work along with developing the discipline of poetry.

**Chris Howry** is a graduate student in English who is presently working on a teaching credential.

**Katie Hulbert** worked on the East coast as an actress, singer, script writer, and teacher. She decided it was time to get serious, and so, she came to Chico.

**Elena Jayred** is an English major at CSUC with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She hopes to land a job at a small publishing company, and her big ambition is to write a book on Northwestern wildlife with her father's illustrations.

**Barbara Kimball** was born and raised in a small rural town in southern Kansas. An English major at Chico State, she states that her big dream in life is "just to write."

**Cathleen Micheaels** will graduate this spring with a B.A. in English.

**Gail Peterson** is a ten-year resident of Chico who says, "Usually, I only write poetry when I have a broken heart, but I'm trying to become more independent."

**Thetis A. Tanner** was born in Florida and is now pursuing her Communications degree and hopes to publish a collection of poetry this year.

**Pamela Thomas** lives in Chico with her husband and her two cats.

**Gary Will** grew up in western Michigan and every January turns into a fish. He is currently teaching composition at Butte College.



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