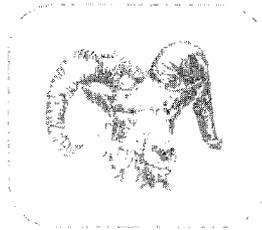


# CURVED LIKE AN EYE

by  
George Perreault



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**Fiddlehead:** "The Ruminari"; "Trying to Breathe, I Think of Wild Carrots"; "Two White Mules"

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*For Luke and Katie:  
earth and air*



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## Introduction

When the eye of George Perreault focuses on the western landscape, we see that “Out here the sky slides on forever” and, as if in reciprocity, “the earth curves like an eye.” When the eye of the poet meets the eye of the landscape, the result, the poem, evokes images that we have come to associate with being Western: sunflowers, hawks, “tractors combing the soil,” the undulating land where “nothing is wasted, not even children.” Perreault, however, does not allow his readers to bask in those consolatory images, but rather, admonishes us that “that’s prettier than true.” These lines, from the poem “Out Here,” contain, I think, what makes, on the one hand, his poetry so western and, on the other, what distinguishes it from other poetry of the West.

“That’s prettier than true,” is not meant to taunt us as readers, as though having given us beauty, the poet delights in snatching it away. The line reflects, rather, a moment that is as much a recognition for the poet as it is for the reader. The poem comes to a stop with that line, as though Perreault has searched the familiar catalog of Western images, has not rejected them completely (they are not *untrue*, they’re just more pretty than true), but has cut through them to find that which *is* true. “But,” he continues,

tonight I’ll sit at that oak table  
from my father, eat the warm body  
of an animal I’ve known since birth.

Truth, then is not beauty, or, rather, not merely beauty. The continuity of the life cycle is the center point from which George Perreault seeks truth, and is that which gives meaning to the West of his poetry. In “Fever 104, Bethlehem PA,” he suggests that this repetitive life cycle can be seen and lived only in the West, where

the rain evaporates before it hits the ground  
rises to the clouds, falls and rises,  
falls and rises over the parched land.

Radiating from this focal point of the cycle, Perreault’s poetry suggests an unrelenting search for images that speak of vitality: the sensuousness of vital organs, the sexuality of women and young girls, desire leading to passion, to lust. He finds tumidity in the West where others find sparseness. His lovers are ample; he sees the “soft open-

ness of squash”; there’s enough yellow fat in the turkey to feed “all the fires of Babylon”; the aspen are boisterous, the stems of beets, “blood soaked.”

Implicit in vitality, however, is not only lushness and sensuality; the dark impulse of humanity co-exists with the life-affirming force. Perreault looks at the darkness of those feelings of “persistent loss,” the latent ax-murderer in his mind, drowning, suffocating, “wounds frozen deeper than blood,” killing the tarantula, an act that makes his narrator feel like “the things/ crawling through my silent bed/ nights I don’t dare be intimate/ even with myself.” Personal loss evokes for the poet the presence of a universal darkness, a suffering that weaves a thread through, for example, “The Brotherhood of the Green Wolf,” manifesting itself in the mass murderer Unruh, whose name means unrest, and in the closing of the universities in Prague.

These images are tempered, however, by the affirmation one finds in his poetry. The word “yes” is no stranger to him, and he says it in response to invitations to love, “a few halfsteps toward yes,” “I always say yes,” “yes.” In the midst of the darkness, in the midst of such persistent questionings (“What do you believe happens? Who are you anyway? What is the point of protecting us from ourselves?”) comes the resolution, “I have decided to love: everything.”

The tension then, exists in the dialectic of loss and love found within the cyclical movements where the ancient ones, the Ruminari who unlike many are known by their “own name,” provide substance for the poet of the present: “. . . sometimes in the garden with you/ I find myself turning into my own name.”

In so brief a space, it is difficult to talk of anything other than these general tendencies in George Perreault’s poetry. But these tendencies reveal the truth that comes to us who live in the West. Our vision is long; we can see forever. Our horizon curves like an eye; we find our place in that vision.

The poetry of George Perreault reflects the philosophical probings of a learned, disciplined mind, whose sole counsel to his reader is “make of this what you will.”

*Kay Anne Kellam*  
Boulder, Colorado  
November, 1987

Out Here



# At the North Second Street Market

Why not start with:  
what do you believe happens?  
I say I believe I don't know  
except that we won't rise like bread  
or the sun drawing water.

We've spent too long  
breathing onions and bell peppers  
the wrinkled pungence of beets  
their blood soaked stems  
and the soft openness of squash.

But we might leach out  
attenuate  
gradually disengage  
turn to other things  
if there are other things.

## Tarantula Time

Late afternoon: in the lower valleys  
crowded with aspen and rabbitbrush  
tarantulas flow again as if  
migrating toward tomorrow's sun.

Climbing above Jemez Springs  
I am startled by one  
and instinctively lob a stone  
no bigger than my heart

for once right on target.  
The tooled segments jump apart  
and lie disjointed in the dry leaves.  
I could say I feel surprise or guilt

but it's more like the things  
crawling through my silent bed  
nights I don't dare be intimate  
even with myself.

## Out Here

From Ragland south: sunpatched  
wheat, milo, and range land  
stitched square with wire and  
hemmed by sunflowers and hawks.

In the half-deserted towns  
brindled tankers wobble by  
following their own geography  
under an armada of rain.

I say I live here for horizons,  
how everything turns slowly,  
tractors combing the soil, bankers  
deep in abstract currents.

Or that it's like the ocean,  
barns rising on long swells,  
everyone unfurled to weather,  
nothing wasted, not even children.

That's prettier than true, but  
tonight I'll sit at that oak table  
from my father, eat the warm body  
of an animal I've known since birth.

# Dead Nigger Spring

The story's vague: stranger or held  
grudge; it ends in the well.

Remember Dead Horse Canyon?  
Our chicken hearts and wine

when halfway down the usual  
afternoon shower turns hail

and into the back we roll  
with thunder and haysmell

wishing it always so easy  
to hammer together some peace.

# Uncle Tenise

is actually my great uncle Stanislaus  
who went west before my father was born  
and only appears in stories which are half told  
and end with, "That Tenise . . . ."

He was in Montana raising sheep with his brother;  
when he came home all the sheep were gone.  
The brother said some men had come with guns  
and taken them away. But Tenise got the sheep back.

"How?"

"Oh, that Tenise . . .  
he had his ways."

## Fever 104, Bethlehem PA

After three days knocked down  
sucking the thermometer,  
the air a vague enemy  
like my cousin the loan shark,  
the sap returns to my knees  
and I drive into Bethlehem.

The drought has persisted:  
fields rattle with brown leaves,  
remind me of Nebraska, the gaunt  
ears and withered stalks of Moravians  
and Methodists who keep eating  
more and more of these sweet hayfields.

The crops of this town are still  
steel and bribery and no one  
seems to care, while out in Nebraska  
the rain evaporates before it hits ground,  
rises to the clouds, falls and rises,  
falls and rises over the parched land.

## Inside the Turkey

The cat licks the axhead  
while I save feathers  
to trade at Santo Domingo.

Then: slabs of liver, a gizzard  
big as my fist, eggs  
clustered like desires,  
four of five bites of heart,  
enough yellow fat for all  
the fires of Babylon.

The cattle look on  
chewing their fermented breath.  
I remember a woman saying  
it's not just the screwing,  
I could sleep with you.

Among the obscure organs  
halfsteps toward yes.

# Companionship

Outside the window: juniper  
fruit paler than sky,  
cloud wisps, blacktop  
to the square, regular  
elms, clustered houses, an  
abandoned Odd Fellows Hall,  
sparrows in vacant lots;

along the spur line  
the boxcars yawn.  
Stop. Look. Listen:  
the usual deals are  
being struck for bread,  
for shaded passageway,  
for other sets of eyes.

## What Nitrogen Has Done to My Tomato Plants

I keep meaning to answer your suspicions  
by describing my friend's new tits,  
how she liked men to say pretty and then  
was angry, how she's dealing with it  
better now, the way I do when pelicans  
come in low along the beach and the water  
smells like napalm, and I just circle  
the dial looking for boxing or karate or  
anything where men beat each other within  
a small space while I try to remember  
the last time I wanted to dance.

## Trying to Breathe, I Think of Wild Carrots

In the grip of the waterfall  
I force myself to kick free  
of the downward churn,  
the stupid fascination with foam and  
bubbles which blossom above my head  
where wives and children sun on rocks  
as I sink further, down to the stream bed  
and the sideways struggle to still water,  
air, dumb smiles, fish-gasps:  
yellow perch which whips my homemade pole  
back and forth until my brother  
who knows about Adam and Snow White  
convinces me to pull in, watch it  
grow stiff with color and terror  
before I bury it in the garden like an Indian:  
the jewelry of its sides:  
my son's first mackerel  
he keeps touching like a mermaid,  
the fillets for that night's supper  
while a fat girl promenades past  
making eyes at woods where my ample lover  
once lay under the willows and the beech  
in a deciduous sprawl,  
our secret tunnels in the junipers,  
August on our bare legs, my passion  
for anything that smells of haylofts,  
summer in the fields, broken-back love  
pulling men and women out of the soil,  
the white roots of wild carrots, my body  
turning slowly in the green water.

# Circuits



# The Brotherhood of the Green Wolf

When you find these stone walls  
walking the back hills, the wonder:  
what men fielded here, and when?  
so there might be cities  
and paved ways.

\*

this sharp March air  
anything could happen  
the sky crack open  
right now  
the earth  
seed

\*

at dusk roadside  
flash of coyote eyes:

later, only the smoke  
light against the sky:

the barks and beckoning cries:  
the rock knives, the holy ladies

\*

Without warning  
the sorcerer lays hands  
on your chest,  
tears away clothing,  
pulls out of your heart  
the emerald serpent:  
you feel it  
pulsing through your body  
from regions below.

\*

You blossom like skunk cabbage  
drift into small talk  
of long-legged Cape Girls  
buried mostly in Truro dunes.

\*

Hey, there wasn't anything delecti  
out there under the trees  
putting up houses for Latham  
one of those guys who looks  
at things upside down  
so you can find the boundaries:  
surveyors, right.  
said he almost stepped on it.

Christ  
don't talk about that.  
It could have been  
one of ours.

\*

That morning:  
matted spots in the corn;  
the air bruised.

That afternoon:  
without any wind  
the rows bend, part:

corn-wolves  
shaped like boats  
in the eyes of fish.

\*

O, how we did gallop  
till nothing but  
my horse pounded body  
disjointed blood and bone.  
Men called: Miss Nancy, Miss Nancy  
and I did not know it was me.

\*

It was me, father,  
and yet not.  
Still I was a white heifer  
and felt,  
from the woods,  
hemmed by wolves.

•

Near the end of the Horn Dance  
at Abbots Bromley  
when they pick which stag  
is divided in the field  
for Wakes Monday:  
all their eyes upon me.

•

I stayed quiet  
and tried not to hear  
each time  
all the others  
kicking  
beating their hobbles  
to be last  
to never

•

Such slaughter!  
King Audulf  
biting the wulfskin  
in rage.

•

What emperors choose is fashion.  
What if he would be caged,  
clad as a wolf? He but  
commands himself loosed  
to prey on bound women.

He pretends to be slain  
and then wifed by his freedman.  
Emperors pretend what they like.

\*

The rescued king walks  
to keep warm.

The other greenmen  
                  les hommes sauvage  
char in the night

He feels his skin  
wrinkle, then freeze.

\*

Of course it's true: a little  
knowledge can be a danger.  
In Prague, the students demanded  
we open the university.

We stripped them in the lecture hall,  
drove the girls into the yard,  
lashed them back to back with our belts,  
had sport till they could no longer stand.

It was dark when we returned to camp;  
we fenced them with the Dobermen.  
In the morning the major took pretty ones  
to see what they had learned.

\*

Remember? This druggist, Cohen,  
wouldn't let him park his car  
so he walked in with a Luger  
and shot Cohen's mother  
and Cohen's wife  
and Cohen through the heart.  
Then the cobbler, the barber,  
the laundryman and a newlywed,  
two boys, a Good Samaritan, and three ladies.

Then surrendered like a lamb.  
Told the reporters he hadn't counted them  
but it looked like a pretty good score.

Some ex-soldier in Jersey.  
It was in all the papers:  
they said Unruh, it means unrest.  
Couple of years ago. Guy named Unruh.

\*

rolls of rusted barbed wire  
tangled with blonde grass;  
muskrat skin laid in birch crotch

her thighs, red nails, wild hair;  
her martin smiles:  
my bones ache

\*

bones not Damballah, master,  
not bring snake on ship.  
from woman on Bon Jacques:  
we go down in storm  
forty days on lifeboat  
men go crazy mad  
woman Julianne  
make sound in morning  
her arms hold cap'n  
he drink her neck  
he pass her round:  
we make shore three days  
lucky bones ride with us  
you ask cap'n

\*

We know it all:  
the gestures and the words,  
how the fire in the eyes  
of the new Loup Vert  
prowls the plump thighs

of our daughters,  
how he feels the year  
too short already:  
the fields soon gone honey,  
women's feet giddy with first wine.

We turn him loose  
outside the village walls.  
In bed we keep hearing  
the almost distinct syllables  
we use to define each other.

•

How they gypsy the village,  
their skirts, pellerine of dane-wort.

The elders souse them:  
the fields fill with rain.

•

in dry fastness  
whisper  
loupgarou, loupgarou:

sweet springwater  
will fall from  
your wulfarer eyes

Charts of Anatomy & Physiology  
by Sir William Turner  
Principal of the  
University of Edinburgh

**Bones**

The whole rube's skeleton  
with a salesman's smile;  
his centipede spine;  
his femur club;  
an egg view of the skull,  
parts adrift, at fault.

**Ligaments**

Our friend lightly wrapped  
to stroll the beach  
in a wreckage of shells.

**Muscles**

Our brother bronzed to whatever purpose  
though below the burnished belly:  
nothing but an ache.

**Heart & Arteries**

Watersheds, tributaries;  
the purple tumor  
flushed like an oyster.

**Veins & Lungs**

Nut shell of ribs  
cracked and picked open;  
lungs as roots,  
roots as grapes;  
the smallest blossomed mouths  
and the whole diaphanous wandering  
of our winged breath.

### **Organs of Digestion**

Finally faced: a weak chinned  
burrow to a central emptiness;  
and always the structure within,  
like a series of boxes,  
a continuing translation of urge.

### **Nervous System**

Yet another blueprint  
and the doubt  
we piece together at last.

### **Organs of Sense & Voice**

The eye front and center,  
bisected like a flounder,  
eating sun bits and focused  
tighter than we usually see;  
snailwork ears;  
the oral cavity,  
the tongue  
halved like an angry wave.

# Old Town

She's bound loosely to the posts  
with silk ties he no longer wears  
waiting for fashions to change.

Where her blood stains the sheets  
it's almost sepia, as in any  
ongoing relationship.

# Socorro

He prefers it outdoors  
a hard blue sky  
leaves burning like dry ice.

He prefers it fast  
and with strangers  
as if there were a choice.

# Quemado

Just a week ago, the air  
busy with grasshoppers, exhalations,  
a doomed series of buds.

Hard frost has shipwrecked  
leaves of squash, cucumbers,  
collapsed nasturtiums.

On the rafters of the south porch  
basil and parsley hung by their feet.  
Outside, the open mouth of the year.

## Nageezi

He chooses an inviting wash  
up into the west hills,  
sees the pelvic bone of a calf  
perfect for a mask; finds a dark stone

about the size of an infant's skull:  
red striated with black,  
one loop of white draped through  
like a shoe lace.

It reminds him of a marriage begun  
in passion, cooled to endurance;  
it has a useful heft  
but the wrong shape for a club.

# Cabazon

I don't know which is worse,  
he's told, the same mistake  
day after day, or the hard dying,  
useless pain or well-deserved fear.

## Jemez

In a while  
the drums, two  
clans over and over  
it doesn't matter  
why fox pelts,  
what's for rain  
for pollen or seed,  
only over and over  
it has come to this:  
a few men dancing  
at the center of the earth.

## Rio Arriba

He hears a feral cat yowl  
from the hay barn:

will accept scraps  
in season.

He loves the root smell  
muscling the soil,

snow spoor from the north,  
the masks:

Who are you  
anyway?

Sweet fruit bobbing  
in the liquid night.

## East South East

A white horse rolls,  
kicks in the dust  
of Elkins corral;  
in the field between,  
cattle eat flowers,  
flowers the dead bodies  
of cattle and flowers.

## Bosque Del Apache

He favors muted tones:  
bleached fronds of salt cedar,  
the sun slanting  
through frayed clouds,  
someone practicing piano  
in a distant room.

He dreams of riding a coach  
through the lowlands,  
the roadsides dense with  
golden stalks, silver seeds  
which bow and whisper:  
the lord north wind.

## Passing through Manzano

He hopes it's not a legend:  
those monkeys escaping into the mountains.  
He prays they're still alive,  
even thriving, in some back  
canyon with sweetgrass and berries,  
that when snow comes  
they steep in the hot springs  
like buddhas.

# Rockabye

Sometimes he wonders  
what his life would be like  
if he just lived it.



# Los Ojos



## Talking About It

At my father's wake  
a friend from high school stopped  
(in town to bury her own father  
who went during the Great Blizzard  
and had to lie idle till spring).  
We spoke of sudden angers:  
crazy drivers in Boston;  
a pissant clerk  
trying to be a man by memo;  
a hospital lackey whizzing past  
to check gauges on the oxygen tank  
without looking at that exhausted man  
whose breath's a gasp in  
again, always in;

anger at the funeral salesman  
with his half-wit routine  
and Lon Chaney's teeth  
laying the suit in each casket  
so the new widow can choose  
her favorite color scheme.

At my father's wake  
was the old church bus driver  
now with no lower jaw,  
only a scar like braided rope  
from ear to ear.  
When he talks to you  
the cobra head sways back and forth.

In Phoenix my friend Jenks  
keeps night watch in the cancer ward,  
writes of cleaning up  
his father's urine and blood.  
He says he found  
a dead rat in the swimming pool  
and a lot of tenderness on the floor.

Pat spoke of her parents' death:  
long Montana winters  
where even on good days  
when a warm wind comes  
and the children are drugged with play  
you turn to share and realize  
you're alone with a persistent loss.

# Housewife Blues

Smoking the highway to a fancied lover,  
punching the AM dial, dislocating the news:  
ex-president Nixon appeared in public  
with a woman who claims for twenty years  
she has slept with oatmeal as  
the New Mexico legislature decided  
auto standards are inadequate  
and voted to abolish them  
details next

what is the point  
of protecting us from ourselves?  
who doesn't grab air like a tree  
or see cloudherds in canyons  
underhairs dripping light,  
giant sea mammals rolling  
in the desert thighs  
where the Dineh poured through

the land is rooted with people  
eager to be desperate  
like that latent ax-murderer  
who walks my head  
squanders this unnatural prime:  
kiss me hard now  
son of a bitch  
anyone don't love  
this life  
got to be crazy

## That Other Wino

The first two are easy:  
that old guy called Apache Pinto  
used to be a medicine man,  
now he just sings in the bars.  
Someone will buy a drink for him,  
ashamed he wastes the magic  
or scared of bad music;  
we all pay for peace and quiet.

The second wino will be here later:  
a Navajo called Hummer.  
There's two stories about him  
but the ending's the same.  
Either he got trapped in a blizzard  
and was lost for a long time  
or he went to Korea  
and the army reported him killed.  
Anyway he comes home  
and they think he's a ghost.  
If he comes in, they'll send a round  
or some food so he won't follow them.  
By now even Hummer knows that he's dead.

But that other wino, it could be anyone.  
Sometimes in the drinking everything comes  
clear; we've all had glimpses of that.  
It might be that logger yelling how  
trees smell like a woman in heat.  
Or maybe it's that bastard  
last night at two o'clock.  
I'm dreaming of the stars,  
galaxies booming like river ice as  
elsewhere the cops grab some famous  
criminal, give him a phone call,

and of all the numbers in the universe  
he gets mine, and I have to stumble  
bare-assed to the kitchen, worry  
about old folks suffocating in Florida.  
Doesn't even apologize: hangs up.  
Maybe that's the other wino; maybe it's just me.

# The Ruminari

Unlike many, we are known by our own name.  
We are not the Bark Eaters or the Big Nose.  
We are not called Winnebago, the Stinking People.  
The state, like older enemies, tried to label us  
the Impoverished Ones, Those Who Do Without,  
but we have remained the Ruminari,  
Those Who Tolerate Freedom.

Our cousins once had buffalo and horses  
and a strong custom called the busking:  
built fires in springtime, burnt every possession,  
started clean, naked in the new grass.  
Now they scribe tongues, listen  
for the hiss and slurp of machines,  
the splash of warm money.

Don't explain the hungers of the vanquished,  
for we are not speaking of the hostile generosity  
of potlatch or of any work done at arm's length.  
We are speaking only of things you will not  
believe but which worry you: of the spirit egg  
attached to both ends of your spine that grows  
as you chew the world and for which you are the cud,  
speaking of how you risk dying like a dog  
or like that egg: broken, unfeathered,  
filled with soft bone and wet, blind eyes.

## Ice Storm

Gray wet bitter cold:  
trees drawn as architecture, as desire,  
limbs bone white with ice.

This calculated risk in groves  
where everything related to fruit  
apes a man's heart

is a trick that strands us  
jackknifed on the high plains,  
wounds frozen deeper than blood.

# Seasonal

On these crisp winter mornings  
the balloons go over  
air heaters huffing like dragons  
trying to break free of the planet

like my father on his spring deathbed  
his eyes tired, unfocused  
trying to stay interested in us  
(which is all that makes a ghost):  
the amputee in the other bed  
sobbing, "Christ, sweet God in heaven  
have mercy on me."

On the last day of the balloon races  
when the air is full of Christmas bulbs  
the CBs crackle to retrievers  
across the dry mesa:  
I'm here, over here  
somewhere west of you.

Between  
there has been  
a season  
of insufficient grace.

## Two White Mules

Henry Burrill traded for mules on the loose  
and invested a winter's patience getting them  
to the corral. None of his tricks,  
the flying W or sitting on their heads,  
ever got them accustomed to duty.  
They were nothing but more stock  
to watch for driving the valley.

For a while it was a joke at Los Ojos.  
"Hey, Burrill," someone would holler,  
"the other day over near Borrego Dome  
I almost poached your two white mules.  
Ain't you ever gonna train them things?"

"Aw, hell, I can't keep the big one penned  
and I think Annie's about given up on me."

"Well, shit, Henry, what's it matter  
if they're sure-footed  
and don't suicide like horses  
if they won't carry your load?"

He'd just smile like the goatman,  
Bonifacio Lopez, watching descendents  
of his old strays scramble up Guadalupe Mesa  
living wild in the pinon and scrub oak,  
like Louis Casiquito as he skirted  
the ranchers and the Forest Service  
to bring the eagles down from Redondo  
toward Zia, toward the People,  
toward the holy dancing.

## Hank & Maria & the Rest of Us

Another night at Los Ojos  
drinking beer and naming the animals:  
on the canyon rim, coyote brazen with young;  
porcupine push into Maria's garden like old cows;  
Deer Creek Landing, the clatter of wild turkey;  
Schoolhouse Mesa, thick with elk:  
that big buck, head like a dead piñon,  
walking the stones of the frozen stream.

Hank's round: "Last week  
in the hills behind my place  
I met up with a bear."

"Did you shoot it?"

"No, we just stood real quiet,  
about from here to there;  
never thought about the rifle.  
Looked for a long time and  
then we both walked away.  
Spooky. God damn."

Outside later  
piss steaming off rocks  
lean back into the stars:  
count my dreams of women  
just like that.

# San Joaquin Mesa

tactiturn pines  
and boisterous aspen

a thousand years crusading  
for this elk-ridden glade

a slice of hawk  
sharpens the air

like a young breast  
under gauze

a cord of split cedar  
in October snow

## Ten Years

The other night during Phil's story:  
the startled duck flopping along the ditch  
in wounded mime away from her fuzzy-headed young  
and the hope she'd die of exhaustion  
in time for his supper

I thought about the old Jemez  
catching wild horses on the mesa  
chasing them all day  
allowing no food, rest  
until at twilight —  
horses' chests and flanks  
like wet drums —  
the men could walk up  
and head them home  
breathing heavily together  
in the dark.

I thought of these ten years  
you have insisted on loving me.

# Living with the Elements



## The Retired Couple

Nights, all hours, I hear their  
slow-footed walking on my ceiling:  
the indistinguishable rhythmless steps  
of those who don't sleep well  
and don't know what to do.

Hear rumors of seductions thrown away:  
Norma huskily, "I want to see you naked,"  
and naming the night;  
Pamela shivering,  
"You make me feel eighteen again";  
and, especially, canescent Annie  
needing help in the library  
that whole week.

Hear the neighbors sign the floor  
in their heavy shoes,  
my father's wings  
sweep by in the dark.

## Yesterday's Mail

The novelist in San Diego describes his study:  
handbuilt trestle table, two windows, bamboo,  
his trip to Big Sur with the ghost of Kerouac,  
the backwater villages on Baja where we could  
hide out forever with Dos Equis and fresh fish,  
get away from people who treat themselves  
like merchandise. But we're addicted  
to the mail, to everyone's kindness,  
causes we can reject, books we can't afford,  
notes saying please try us again or  
have you considered professional help.

The novelist asks if he can use me  
in his next chapter, that my exit,  
when it comes, will be graceful.  
How can I refuse? I don't  
recognize the face in my own resume  
or in stories my wife tells her friends.  
At reunions I'm always being  
astounded by what I've done:  
played connect-the-dots on a dalmatian;  
made love to this young girl in her bed  
with the family downstairs for breakfast;  
her kiss is proof enough, but  
I can barely remember what happened:

Somewhere on the coast  
in a turn of the century house  
with a formal garden, lily pools  
and carp, marble benches,  
that same old quote from Dante,  
tides and slick black rocks:  
a girl in her summer dress  
who looks up and vanishes.

# Nativity

All Hallows. You. Thanksgiving.  
First days dark then lights and colors  
and the slow unfolding of the year.

Out here the sky slides on forever,  
the earth curves like an eye.

Hogs surly in the pens  
shrewd  
cloven almost dainty  
almost ham.

I can nearly smell you  
there (weed.musk  
and there.

All the whens I have known you,  
none better than now.

## Starting with Susan

Parked under the cedars:  
she likes my eyes,  
wants to love me,  
asks if I'm married  
which is usually  
not a real question like:  
Do you have a wife you love?  
With whom you have some understanding?  
Or some arrangement?

I always say yes  
either to the question asked  
or the one heard  
for whatever reason  
and ask back:  
Do you want the rain  
to rattle the roof tonight  
so we can comfort each other  
in my narrow bed?

This is not to change the subject  
for I would kiss you in daylight  
(your skirt full of apples)  
your half-smile dancing with mine.

I would kiss your eyes closed  
now that you've looked at me  
in a way that says: anything  
as pieces of you cling to my furry parts  
as we ripen together  
yes.

I would kiss your ears,  
the curves which distinguish  
elisions & omissions  
conjugations & consummations  
the rich lobes wired to your spine,  
to your toes, to everything in between,  
your hips blossoming like sage  
drifting through the window  
into our legs, hands,  
drifting into our hair and our lungs  
parked in this car, this sun  
today as always  
yes.

This is where roots  
break through into air,  
where the branching begins.  
Here, today, while you are  
still wondering what to do  
I have decided to love  
those clouds on the face of the mountain,  
the air full of sparrows and hawks,  
red cattle sitting down in the long grass,  
the whole spice rack of autumn; today,  
all the numbered days we are married to,  
I have decided to love: everything,  
starting with Susan.

## Living With the Elements

We've driven 700 miles between us  
for a few hours of near misses, things  
we never quite intended, a way  
of seeing every sadness who  
started out with clean limbs and  
an open heart and is dead ended  
cut off and too damn good  
at arithmetic.

It's dark at 6:30 —  
37° and raining.

•

Overhead the cranes argue a wedge,  
head south into Mexico.

•

Sometimes I manage  
after all these years  
to love you right:  
when the whole field's done  
and we sit down together  
in the green shade.

I know sometimes friends look at us  
like over the edge of a cliff:  
glass and steel for half an acre  
and wonder how anyone survived;  
but sometimes in the garden with you  
I find myself turning into my own name.

## Milkweed Days

Late summer Sunday slides along the Snake River Basin.  
Behind us, a sudden range fire south of Pocatello:  
four houses already gone; slurry bombers  
creaking back and forth through the thick smoke.  
Miles ahead, Farewell Bend sweeps north to the Columbia.

Here, out away from the sheltered lawns of my son's school,  
among wheat fields cut and dry in the long heat,  
marginal plants release to the breeze  
small white fluff such as a boy might follow,  
a dalliance across a pasture on invisible currents  
past this fence or that, the sky so cloudless blue  
he'd think to see it rise forever or till he turned  
to woods, creek, half-remembered seeds drifting  
over the round earth toward some far field.

## The Learned

depict background radiation,  
that feeble hiss barely three  
degrees above absolute zero,  
as proof eight billion years  
happened like a thought  
going on and on into what

provokes us bulb by bulb  
through the soil till you alone  
have memorized the garden's  
rough stone walkways,  
resilient islands of milkweed,  
wild morning glory and why

I want a flat marble slice  
raised on six iron legs  
to a comfortable height and you  
to sit in spring sun with  
a meadowlark's liquid fullness  
when I have gone ahead into what.

# Mexico

Headed for Guaymas  
Easter on the beach  
everyone asleep in the back.  
My son crawls up, wonders  
where we are:  
somewhere in the desert  
south of Hermosillo  
only the cold stars, small animals  
sparkling in the dark,  
a few foreign signs.  
Hey, dad, I know that word:  
peligro — it means danger.  
Don't ask. Stand on the brakes.  
Lurch toward thirty, the bridge  
out, bounce down a hill, across  
the arroyo, up the other side, the road  
and on our way as if it were nothing.

That is nothing, you say.  
There was a man sailing the Gulf  
when a freak wave crushed his boat.  
In time he also sank. But at once  
there was an upswell, a bouyancy.  
One dolphin rolled him  
onto the back of another and  
they sang as they swam until shore.

There was a man  
you might say  
walking the beach  
drinking Tecate  
laughing with the seaweed:  
make of this what you will.



George Perreault was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1943. He has earned a degree in literature from Boston College and a doctorate from the University of New Mexico. Since the early 70's he has worked primarily in rural areas of the West among "artists and farmers – holders of the only real wealth." He currently lives in Elida, a small town in eastern New Mexico.

Perreault's poetry has appeared in several anthologies and in magazines throughout the United States and Canada, including: **Fiddlehead, Greenfield Review, High Plains Review, Puerto Del Sol, and Yankee.** He has worked in the Poetry-in-the-Schools program in New Mexico and Montana.



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