CURVED LIKE AN EYE

by
George Perreault

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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,

\[
\text{tonight I'll sit at that oak table} \\
\text{from my father, eat the warm body} \\
\text{of an animal I've known since birth.}
\]

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

\[
\text{the rain evaporates before it hits the ground} \\
\text{rises to the clouds, falls and rises,} \\
\text{falls and rises over the parched land.}
\]

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 probing 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
cut 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
prows 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, pellertine 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.
Cabezon

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.
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 cloud herds 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.
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 pinon,
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
corrections & 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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