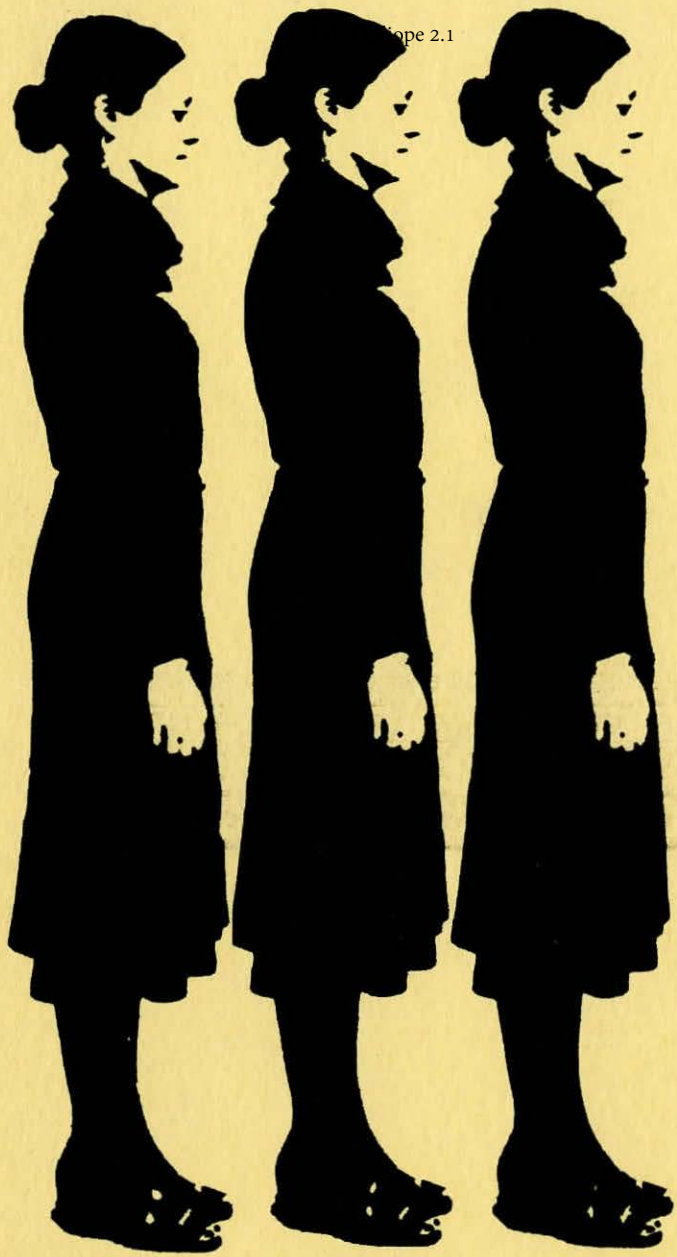


Figure 2.1



Calliope

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Calliope

Volume 2, Number 1

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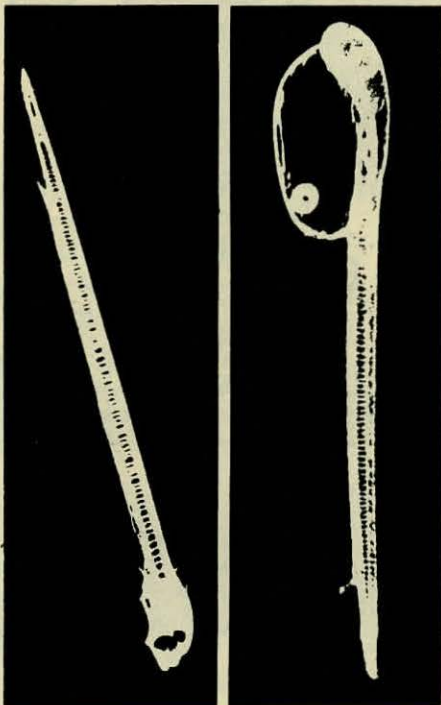
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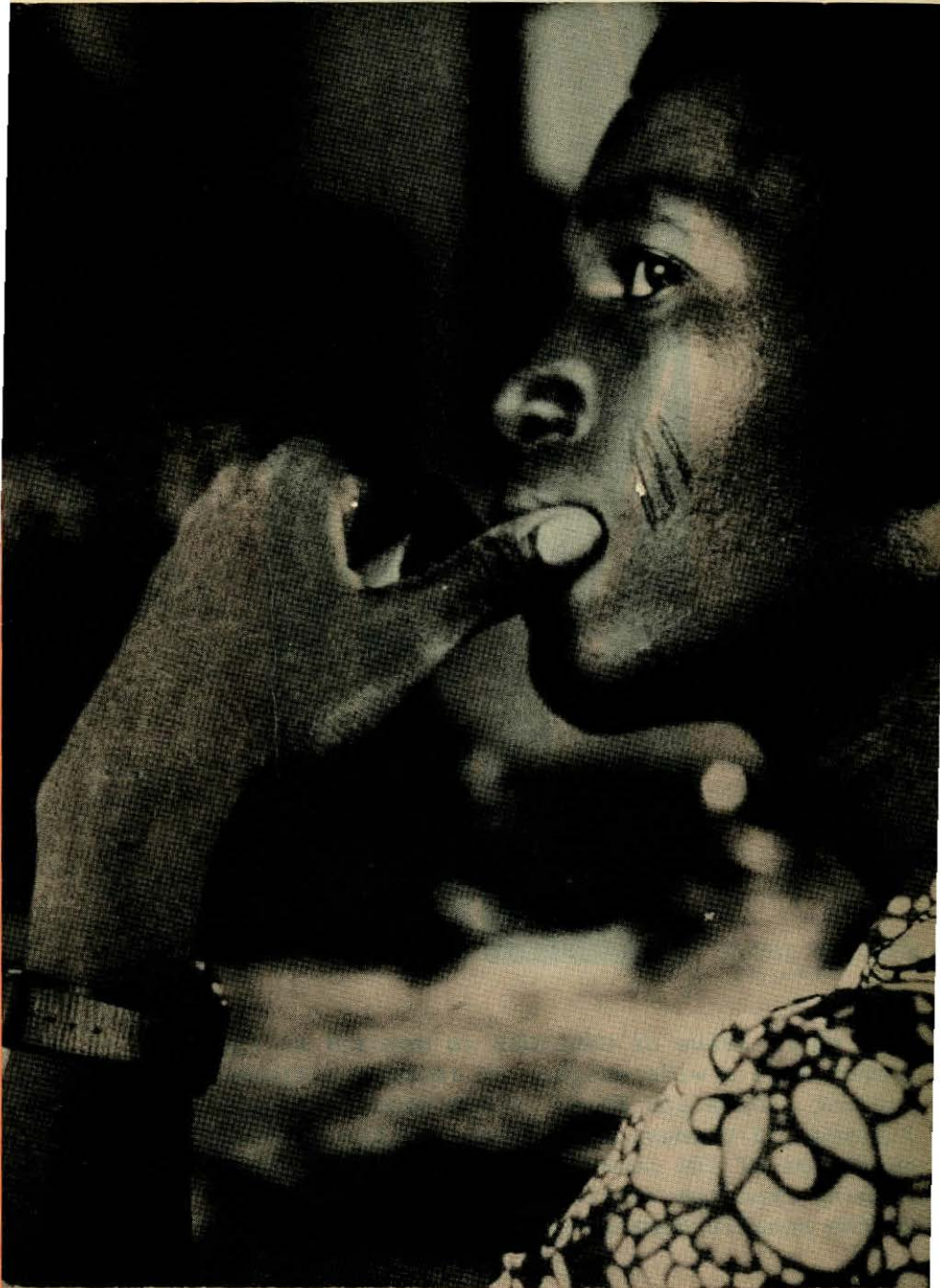
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SPECIAL ISSUE

This third issue of CALLIOPE is devoted to the number 3 in a wide variety of interpretations in subject, theme and form. Poems about 3 people, 3 places, 3 things, triangles, and the magical qualities of the number itself appear in forms ranging from the strict formula of the triolet to the equally demanding shaped poem.



Susan Scott Thompson

NUMBERS

As spring turns you three
and me thirty
I fumble for revelations
in these numbers,
some ultimate design
clear only at a great height
like the landing strips
on the Plain of Nazca.

But at this level
nothing is more profound
than your cornsilk hair
and February bringing you with the crocus
pushing yellow around the grey walk.

Susan Scott Thompson

THREE LIVES

I

For over a month
she picks up Arabs in bars.
They have eyes like her dead husband.

II

When her father came home from the mill
she washed his feet each night.
When her husband left her for that woman
she burned all his clothes in the bathtub
but she did not touch his shoes.

III

When he died at home in the afternoon
she went out and asked the yard man,
"Will you come in and see if he is dead?"

Laurence J. Sasso, Jr.

Verklarenayer

TRY NATURE

BRACHOMBYE

Bellies yellow
as tusk ivory,
three rough-shinned
hawks
settle onto pine limbs
heavy with
chins of snow

Under the narthex
of conifer boughs
the urban refugee
burns cans
and picks at ice
encasing the buried,
the unknown

It is March
and the dog eats hay
the prey has bled on

The earth is three months
into this attempt

VerKuilen Ager

BEACHCOMBER

Walking the shore

I came upon a trunk

all bound and gagged

pulled it from nibbling kelpie

from undertow ripples, grasping starfish

undid its seaweed and algae fetters

The lid unlatched and my hands were explored

with kisses

Inside was a note which read

Please climb in and say Gidup

I did

With sailor's grace

we hornpiped along surf's brink

over broken nautilus, soggy rockweed

A sand dollar scurried for its mamma

We bumped atop windward boulders

sniffed salty dune grass and straw flower

scared a convention of field mice

looked all ways near an interchange

squided into traffic

along the trade route

We ran all toll gates

passing from cancer to capricorn

emassing bandid bills

displacing economies of several duchies

Illuminated symbols

were zodiacal light inside my compartment

A conductor noodled through on sea legs

tucked me into a berth

starched with a stewardess

wearing neither cap nor wings

She punched my ticket

Later in her sleep

she whispered that she was liberated
unless delayed by headwinds
could expect to arrive released
Her exhalations puffed prayers of milkweed silk
sleep to my ear
collected my brain up in a fresh pillow
parachuted it down to sea in shifts of swells
lifts of a porpoise kiss
Various organs entwined with octopi
mollasks clasped my arms
Seaweed wrapped my trunk as I drifted to beach
looking for someone
walking the shore

Marilyn Basel

"OLD AGE":

A Photo by Pete Turner

Dressed in black
your husband is leaving
his thin life
with knees crossed,
arms folded,
hands stiff
as mittens on a pole.
Your hand curls
an umbrella strap,
other fingers cradled
between your lips.
Your legs still
come up your skirt
like pillars.
In time, your umbrella
will be switched
for a cane
while the bone
of you husband
unwraps, spreads open.
This photo catches him
as shadow gone in
between your legs
and we see him emerge
from your body
forked,
three branches from
which generations
of grandchildren
unfold his veins
into their bodies
like leaves.

Marilyn Basel

3 ON DARK WATER

1
your tongue
 under
my tongue,

a catfish lunges
for lily roots

2
 that space between us:
you are wing, I am wing,
 looking for a lost bird.

3
a star
 falls
 invisible,
 heart cannot follow
how quickly the sky heals!

Diana Der Hovanessian

Marilyn Bassel

Three things I miss
 about you most: your
 voice tricks,
 your wolf masks,
 and your eyes.

Two things
 I miss about
 your voice
 are Rimbaud's
 vowels, and your
 words.

Three
 things
 I miss
 about your
 words: the
 pins, the needles,
 and the swords.

E.R. Cole

Carmine Zaracino

TRIOLET FOR ONE WHO CLIMBED THE SUN PYRAMID
(TEOTIHUACAN)

soon she had disappeared from sight
while I stood blinking in the sun:

because I had no love of height

soon she had disappeared from sight

in her pursuit of light. . . and light . . .

I curse the climbing she has done!

soon she had disappeared from sight

while I stood blinking in the sun

Carmine Sarracino

THREE DREAM SEAS

Ebb Tide

She lies beneath the moon
coyly shaking her lace skirts.
Her hair is loose. The moon is undone:
he cups and strokes the curls and flows.
He invites her up. Her bosom swells,
but with a sigh she declines.
It's not her way, and she must have her way.
She invites him down.
A moment he buries his face in her arms,
but he knows his place: duties, appointed rounds.
The old story goes unheard--
she gathers her skirts and steps back
into pools of shadows to brood, alone.

Flow Tide

In row after row they advance, again, again,
throwing their bodies against the walls
of the fortified land. The lunacy
of the battle only inspires them,
and they are urged on by small gains.
Each falls bravely, arms outflung,
and a whispered vow dies upon his lips.

High Tide

Gulls swipe crumbs from the hero's beard.
 He does not mind. He is kind with his pets.
 With strong fingers he combs his beard,
 tumbled and white, and sings chanties he sang as a boy.
 Barrel-chested, moon-faced, thick in the wrists,
 he has always exceeded himself.
 He presides at a board of endless feast,
 tells tales of impossible deeds.
 He is at home with excess.

Too much is just enough.

George E. Murphy Jr.

THREE WOMEN

Gloria

In the west, a man has driven
all day by the arroyo, through box elder,
arcanus tundra, lodgepole pine,
to the desert where it rains
where the ground shakes
while blackbirds explode
at the corners of his eyes.
In the morning, he will pick wildflowers
and mail them to you in Vermont.
Everywhere he turns, canyons will whisper
their exquisite dust to the coarse turquoise,
brown and green, like your eyes
turning from the dry flowers
you leave on the table at dinner.

Moira

The girl caught younger than yourself,
who is your mother,
stands tilted like a stone in the sun.
Her skirt drops past her gentle knees,
hovering like the edge of sleep.
She bears your name in her eyes.
Her cheeks name a color: dusk,
glanced off the greenhouse glass.

Inside your family blooms
and teeters in glazed clay pots;
the empty chair that you would stand on
holds a cactus, wet brushes in a jar.

Now your father grows as hollow
and as spiked as dawn.
Behind your mother's dark lashes
you dream a slab of ironstone
clung to the insatiable sky.
You have your picture taken.

Sharon

A woman is not a religion
yet rituals swerve to you
like a flock of cackling bats.
Cripples clutter your aisles
wheezing like a desperate chorus of hinges.
At night, they sit like whetstones
sharpening their eyes on the dark,
dreaming of your gentle smile
and burning away at a part of themselves,
yowling and grunting.

So stain your glasses,
dear priestess, and sacrifice;
rehearse small rituals.

Though they strike sparks
in rotted hearts,
they will keep the torches
from your timbers.

George E. Murphy Jr.

DIRECTIONS

(for Richard)

1. The day you get this poem, stop!
Take the rest of that day off.
Go to the ocean. Find a forest.
Walk if at all possible.
Find the time.
2. Hold this poem between your thumbs.
Hold it to the sky, to the horizon,
to the ground, and to yourself.
Notice all the space between the letters
of each word.
Consider this a window screen
through which, like summer drizzle,
you must slip. Or stick, stretched and squared.
Look through to see tomorrow's weather.
3. Hold these margins with your thumbs.
Find some sky as white as the page.
When the page spills off, let go
and spill yourself
into that future.

Barbara Akins

John Colby

IN A FIELD - NOT SINGING

Three weeks
after you left
I started picking up
rocks.

Harvesting them
like potatoes
arranging them
in neat piles
like fruits or vegetables.

I've developed this
terrible craving
for something
that will never ripen
never rot.

Joan Colby

WOMAN INFATUATED WITH THE NUMBER 3

She seduces
men in three cities,
believes in the trinity,
imagines herself the
mother of triplets,
loves the tinsel note of a triangle,
its indeterminate pitch,
divides herself into the number
formulating the irreconcilable crowd.

She gathers three strawberries each morning
to eat their sweet hearts
with cream and brown sugar,
holds three white roses
in the photograph she sends you,
wears three red stones
on her ringfinger like the three
drops of ominous blood in fairy tales.

She touches her breasts and crotch
the original triumverate,
builds her house
in a valley between three hills.
Every night
she counts three falling stars,
says her luck
is common as
three-leafed clovers.

Joan Colby

FLASH FLOOD

It's a dry year
we're climbing along the creekbed
all the glistening stones gone lackluster
not even a trickle of the surge
that hewed this blind canyon wall
rising far overhead.

It circles in dried-blood rings
to wed the centuries
where the waterfall gouged
its burnt sienna cup
in which the light, pouring from some high spout
puddles like weak lemonade.

We sit in the hollow recalling
how other years we'd never
have come this far,
how even now one cloudburst
up country could send the river
blasting along the limestone trace
tearing our memories
from their moorings as easily
as the seedlings that sprout
everywhere here
in the path of disaster.

Pat Gray

NOTES FROM ANATOMY CLASS

Flesh can be preserved,
cured brown as paper
under the winding sheet,
but bone, on its own,
resists decay, high heat.
Even in urns
large chunks remain
to confound, perplex, delay
our resolution.

Bone predates pulse.
Early as the sixteenth day
the spine begins its coil
in worm of body, ersatz clay.
The fetus claims its tail--
sometimes till birth--
but still is forced to refund man,
vestigial, upright, grave.

Throughout life,
this hot internal stuff with spongy core,
these spidery cells of bone
are misconceived as trees for muscular clothes--
hangers in the hall of body.
Thought cold and stern--
this 18 percent of weight,
this sturdy, resilient,
hard but mobile bone.

Billy Collins

TRIANGULATION

means something more than
being strangled with a triangle.

I'm talking about the thirdness
when people sit in a living room
and discuss the antics of the dog
for hours,

their eyes fleeing to the walls
like ice skaters on a pond
that's breaking up.

Instead of cupping your eyes
over mine, you are transfixed
by a vase, throw pillow or
unplugged television.

You don't have to come on
like a hypnotist
or make staring a contest,
but look at me.

Triangles are for racking poolballs.
Triangles are the instruments
played by the loneliest men
in symphony orchestras.

Tony Fusco

THREE CAVES

We will enter here
with only the clothes we are wearing
to curse away the cold.

Descending steel stairways
through layers of Kentucky limestone,
you will look back at me,
a question etched into your eyes.

When we found the dog
washed up on the rocks in the sea-cave,
half-eaten by crabs, you screamed
and dug your fingernails into my arm
as the waves swirled around our feet.

In the cave above the Dordogne River,
great bison take their contours from rock;
the sleek elk lock horns
through centuries of silence.

We lower ourselves by sighs
into each new chamber,
carving our shadows into the walls.

Tony Fusco

IN OCTOBER, AT A CAFE

That it is warm enough to sit outside
at a cafe, is in itself a miracle.
But this sparrow that perches
on the backs of chairs to beg his daily bread,
and this careful old woman from London
whose fingers tremble to share her toast,
and this collie whose patient eyes
provoke no fear in either,
this is a trinity.

Martha Christina

ALL SAINTS' EVE

for Betina

I have just dropped the last
Tootsie Roll into the pillow case
carried by a midget mummy.
Magnified with delight
his eyes laugh out at me
through his fake bandages.
We play this night's game,
pretending we don't see each other
for what we are:
a neighbor's mother,
a neighbor's son.

Betina, his eyes are like yours,
immense against that white background.
He is coming unswaddled,
but I think of you
as I caution him
about our steep steps.
Someone is sharpening
the scalpels for tomorrow's cut
into your mummified eyes.

I watch my neighbor's son skip home,
my eyes widening in the dark,
half the dark you wait in
for morning and another chance at light.

Martha Christina

NURSING A NEWBORN AT 2:10 A.M.
for Margot

Fresh from your chrysalis
your butterfly breath
beats its wings against my breast.

I weave hastily
a net of soft songs.

Already bright flowers attract you.

Peggy Shumaker

1. Pollination

My husband's mother carries a grief
so personal she won't tell even herself.
She expects an extra place to be set.
Her friend she says cut himself on purpose
and pulled back the edges of his wound
to see inside the lives he separated.
A waste, she says.

Looking back, she's a bride again,
slender as a black-and-white aspen
that puts out its first leaves
in a shy trickle like pubic hair.
She comes to her husband
pulling back, not so much not wanting to share herself
as wanting not to accept a new self inside.
She keeps pulling back till he moves away.
She forgets then to wipe her yellow bee fingers
after swapping dust
in the wide blossoms of crookneck squash.

2. Planting Green Beans (She speaks.)

Perhaps we planted too early
or pushed the seeds too far
down the hard rows.

The few that made it came stumpy,
withered cotyledons drooping,
empty packs clinging to exhausted hikers.

3. Gathering In

A strange cat squats on the far branch
tucked neatly into herself.

Our cat hones himself
on his wet sharp words of urge.

I slop a full pitcher to scramble them,
get back in bed still ruffled.

Quiet now, the words get stronger,
their gurgles hiss in my gut.

I mark the liquid snore in the next room,
my husband's mother,
whose freak wedge of bone kept a bullet
out of her sinus, out of her brain.
She dries out a little more each day, a raisin,
roasting out that liquid sex no will can cure,
roasting out her leftover life.

Peggy Shumaker

CIMA SADDLE

The patch snow thickens
in the shade, hiding the trail
on purpose.

We keep our way
by the distant splinter
of a frozen waterfall.

At Cima Saddle
we shelter in time,
cook, and watch the night eating.

Squatting in the moist ring
scraped around the firepit,
we try the green nuts.

7. Planting Green Beans (20th April)

Perhaps we planted too early
or pushed the seeds too far
down the hard rows.

The few that made it seem stumpy,
withered cutyledons drooping,
empty packs clinging to exhausted stalks.

Bruce Edward Taylor

LOVE'S BEAR

If one cannot overlook a hurt, many hurts
will grow from it. It is a fatal style
of living--one catches bears with it.

Gottfried Von Strassburg

Put a hat on it, some festive pantaloons,
a bicycle under it. Ribbon it with crepe.
Avoid however its mythic embrace.
It's an old brute and kills by crushing.

When wild it fears man and famine only.
When tamed it circles instinctively.
For sweets it dances upright
to a simple flute and cymbals melody.

What winter dreams! What sleeps to practice
the curling up alone that death must be.
What wonder it hugs so close,
rolls over, over and over for love.

Joanne Seltzer

HEAVY BAGGAGE

If love could be gathered like ducks' down,
tied in a white kerchief,
carried on a stick from place to place,
then I would clutch a lightweight bundle
to stay the long night

but ducky babies grow smartly tall,
leaving a cluttered nest.
My leather wallet falls apart
from credit cards, photographs, and all
this lucky money.

Here's an old picture: three fine children,
handsome father,
a pregnant woman's high-teased hair.
The cameraman told me to stand at the rear.
He called me the big mother.

Joanne Seltzer

AUTUMN TRASH

1

Last week the birds went crazy
in the meadow.
I saw a sun-splashed warbler
and another
among the band of nervous sparrows.
The butterfly gave her innocence
to the company of birds.

2

Two ragged silhouettes
fly north against the weather.
All the bird-song gone,
the butterfly beats her fatal wings
to the blast of stereo rock:
a truck parked in the meadow
behind Flavorland
lulls the sense of a young man
hired to rake the autumn trash.

3

One robin
snared in flight by an iron fence
dangles from the mesh.

Jean Nordhaus

THREE

If you want me, find me in the afternoon
where ribbons of shade unveil a day
already on the ravel, or watching at the

bend of night, a mumbled sigh, toward morning.
I am the youngest son, dozing in the stable,
tumbling into kingdoms easily as sleep,

a werewolf watching from another tense,
a pattern birds have formed from singular
concerns, the mystery gift,

the guest you weren't waiting for,
the key to every door, the point
of every joke, the final knock.

CONTRIBUTORS

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