

et al.: Calliope 1.1

James Bertolino
William Ferguson
Linda Lappin
Robert McRoberts
William Matthews
Michael Ryan
and others

Calliope

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Calliope

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James Bertolino

SEVENTEEN YEAR LOCUST

To him the window
blurred with locusts
becomes a picture
of his infancy, a small room
writhing where his sister
has submerged him in the cold tub.

He is drowned. The locusts have darkened
the cellar. She hasn't
brought him food in four days
& now his appetite is gone.

Linda Lappin

WHITE NIGHT

Staring through the snow,
I imagine stepping out into the white night
to look for you.

Everything comes back:
the blur of your body
when you turned to me

the blue light
of the phone booth at the end of the street
snow in the hands

of the statue you showed me
before you took me home.
Where we stood

the willow
is still wired with ice.
That night,

the evening eased into our skin
fashioning shadows
we haven't become again.

Nothing can lead me back to you.
Not the smell of the gas
which I could grope along

as along a rope in the dark.
All night I keep a burner lit.
The flame's blue fingers

open, close
upon a hand holding nothing.

James Bertolino

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upon a hand holding nothing.

Sharon Olds

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE FALL RIVER
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The lady in ruched sateen is lying
on the Turkey carpet, belly-down,
a dropped seal, a dark pool like
oil under the face, darkness like
hair all over the face.

Something has been stopped.

The gentleman is resting on the horsehair
chaise, his legs in Sunday black
bent like stovepipe.

The face has been divided into parts like a map
and broken up like a puzzle, each piece
outlined darkly.

It is clear there was someone
in there, someone who has been driven out.

The furniture in the parlor is well-
polished. The little figurines
stand on the surfaces. All the heavy
clothing is in place. Only the heads
are unmade, a hard job of work
on a silent morning, after a breakfast of
mutton soup.

The daughter was let off,
but as you look at the pictures, the long
cracks between the sections of his face,
the back of her skull uneven as some
internal organ, the conviction grows flat.
Only a daughter could have done that.

Sharon Olds

THE BREAK

I put up with everything, hands being tied
to a chair, all the food that I hated
and did not finish, served, cold,
until I ate it; the big sister
kneeling up over me in bed
and pissing on me, knowing no one
would believe me, the well-known liar.

I stood for
all of it. I watched Mother with
Father, seeing that the way to heaven was to
stand for it, and the worse you stood for
the better you were.

I put up with it all
until I stood on the rear platform
of the London bus, with my baby in my arms,
and the bell rang and I realized I was missing
my stop. The bus started up,
and a cold rage took me
and I jumped.

When I hit bottom, the brick street
jerked out from under us like a rug
but I held that child up in my arms,
a flag that must not dip. All day
I dragged my sprained leg along,
terrified at what I'd done,
unable to understand the violent
exulting in my heart.

Michael Ryan

AN OLD STORY

Like an old story's need for detail
each time retold, the syntax twisting
through it like tails in water,

what's needed now's another timely lover
to make love as touchable as a tight curve.
Her syntax does the tricks: her animal parts

move beyond herself, you think, as you touch
knee gliding always to thigh, and wind
about the solid geometry of breasts.

If you also realize *she doesn't need me*
when you come to her brain living alone
like a queen, and that you to her are only

another lover, remember even love obeys laws
of time and need, and like a simple wave
rises to its height, breaks, and is over.

"An Old Story" first appeared in *Poetry* (April 1976)

Martha Christina

TEA AT BRIDGE STATION

You say you will not
qualify your statement:
you are not "somewhat" depressed.

Grey is a color you've
purged from the spectrum;
black is black and spreading fast
and you've ceased believing
in white stars.

A Chinese girl
with hazel eyes tells you

dusk is a bad time for departures;

she presses a fortune cookie
into your palm;

it says *Your face*
is a galaxy of half-smiles.

William Matthews

POEM BEGINNING WITH TWO LINES FROM JOHN UPDIKE

In the end, fashion overcomes personality:
all the mistresses of Louis XIV look alike.
On each of these women God's gaunt help,
sparse rain, came down. One way
they looked alike was misery:
Louis, the rat with women.

And these were women who dressed like Rose
Bowl floats or topiary sculpture.
They set themselves as if they were tables.
In every clean plate Louis XIV saw himself
dwindle and shimmer, looking like Louis,
crueler the faster he grew historical.

William Matthews

DRIVING FOR HOURS

Driving the interstate to Boulder,
driving the sags in the telephone
wires so slack this call will cost
\$200, driving a nail so well it won't
need to be counter-sunk, driving

a bargain so hard I'm said
to be *driven*, driving to my left
because they say I can't, driving
people crazy and driving them
to the airport in a driving rain. . . .

Driving up the canyon into the sinking
sun, each dust-fleck on my windshield
broadcasting light, blurring
and slowing the signal to pass it along,
though not by much, as I urge myself home.

William Ferguson

PROSE POEM FOR BORGES

...es klang nach nachtiger
Heide im Sturm und Irrsal und
heillosem Gram der Seele.

--Mann

What did the poets mean?
We have no knowledge of 'endless night';
the nights here are nothing if not ends,
and the Fens are full of dry leaves
in every season.

I do not mean
that we have forgotten poetry, that heroin of the soul;
we would like to love this city
like children again,
and to love her as a child would not know how,
but the crowds we wander in
(or do they wander in us)
fade back into miscellany over the yawning bridges
and streets we love
somehow outstretch our embracing arms,
hold us in like windy uncles,
cold, ungatherable, older.

Even in April, as the rambler roses
bloom and brighten its melancholy walls,
the Charles flow's unaccountably
backward into the hills, or so it seems,
and every rain
reminds us of a flood we never saw.

What can we do
but wander through the monstrous weight of the air
after a dream already broken,
to find one solitary vantage
from which to see
the motive for every morning,
the importance of being Adam
and all things new;

William Ferguson

from the watery east to an indefinite west,
sunrise to nowhere,
by the swans of the Public Garden,
the crowds of Copley,
Symphony with its hands illuding water,
a Chinese bell;
by a young man drowning in a lake of air,
by words of brick and whisper of steel
and sidewalks jammed with miracles
we walk, avoiding
Kenmore with its drunken Alexanders,
every face an impenetrable Asia,
better in Charlesgate where the lissom
willows bend in the gentle breeze
like geishas.

Students sweep over Commonwealth in long
diagonals of light;
professors in their thousands
lecture to ponderous classes
they have never bothered to read.
But what are we students of? We too
have read so little;
we decide to study bridges; are we deluded?
Does the herring gull
fly according to our lights?
Is it only by permission of intellect
that all these whitening sails
billow with fresh air?
As we watch,
the light, so soon, begins to fade at the edges;
bodies are changing shape all over the world,
nations vanish in place
as the day recedes and we are no longer sure
whether it was ever more
then the spark of a double darkness,
endless night.

Borges, how do we manage to be born
so desperately small
that a single sigh from the long jowls of the moon
can sound to us
like a hurricane smashing a tenement to splinters,
an ambulance wailing through these criminal streets,
a shout of pain from a disease so ancient
only our bones can say its name?

All over town
sleepers gasp for breath and wake in a fever,
intuiting grief
for a death they would never admit to
under the sun;
and over their roofs
the luminous wheel of history lies spinning on its side
like a flying saucer
no one really believes in,

except that we live
in the weather of its planet,
the scattered thundershowers,
the early frosts,
the gentle southeast winds
increasing to gale force sometime before morning.

HAIKU by Shiki (1867 to 1902)
translated by Lucien Stryk
& Takashi Ikemoto

Imagine --
the monk took off
before the moon shone.

Storm -- chestnuts
race along
the bamboo porch.

Dew, clinging
to potato field,
the Milky Way.

Heath grass --
sandals
still fragrant.

Indian summer:
dragonfly shadows seldom
brush the window.

Midnight sound --
leap up:
a fallen moonflower.

Sudden rain --
rows of horses
twitching rumps.

White butterfly
darting among pinks --
whose spirit?

Peter A. Bouffidis

THERE ARE NO FIRES

There are no fires
just
the howl of a bleeding dog,
and old men, decaying,
 on their walks through town,
or melting into a bar stool.

The night smothers all
but a woman's frantic shriek.
She must have, in a
moment's horror,
 been seeking help.

But there are no fires,
 and all the lights,
 extinguished.

Maria Flook

GROW UP

So what, she left you. She changed panties
like channels, against static. Call it
marriage, the underthing you slip out of.
Become an adult, become the perfect mirror.
Your desire a silky image. For seven years
you've been drinking the wrong skin.

It's like giving up and climbing back down
getting green, more luscious as you descend.
You reach a certain age and you want to roll
the rest of the way. Think of ravines, bleak
at the knees. How it took you all night to
hike with her to sleep. Each thrust pushed
you under the summit rising, left you dangling.
You think of the moon, inches of dust, of spear-
ing it with a flag. Blood-spotted silk. And
sliding back to earth, shimmering in your cool
tin foil. Peel down this frozen suit of regret,
see yourself again. A reflection suddenly tan.

Laurence J. Sasso, Jr.

JOINTS

1

Watching the girl
with HELL tatooed
on her wrist
the empty mechanic
touches his pocket lining.

2

A rivulet of soda
running from under a highball glass
dissolves dirt crumbs
on the bar by the farm worker's
wrist. He shakes dice.

3

The knee of the telephone
operator, its cords loose
as cut rope, the patella
lost in fat like a coin
in dough, trapping the fingers
of the laundry driver
to the stool.

4

The neck of the barmaid
coarse as a rooster comb,
red and stretched over
a short Appalachia of bones;
her smile, a rehearsal of
eternity.

Laurence J. Sasso, Jr.

5

The birthday girl,
drinking her first legal drink,
neck fluid as a leather whip,
fingers snapping, knees
like shock absorbers as she
bumps and prances, wrists
together overhead while
her body writhes beneath
like a bell ringing
in bone-rattling wind.

BOARDING HOUSE

A place of other people's lives
I came there wrapped in a peplos,
a bag of bottles hidden.

I came there to survive.
Settled in a cell,
I wouldn't breathe,
sat on the edge of chairs,
left things on the sill.

My movements strange,
my eyes aching,
I bit crackers,
cried,
believed I wasn't really there.

Laurence J. Sasso, Jr.

FOUNDRY MAN

You understand
as little as a
fly walking across
Don Quixote

The drop forge pounds
like God's heart,
sparks rain

You could read a novel
in the glow from newly
poured castings

Your helper drops a hose
it flails like an idea
seeking the tongue

here metal is liquid
liquid is metal: a place
of confusion and mutability
a vision of the options
of matter

It must be as hot at
the center of the brain

You can walk away at four
with singed forearms
and feel no tenderness
or love

You can be silent
about alchemy, the day's
work cooling into shape
behind you like life

Ted Kooser

MARRIAGE

We are now made one,
saith the preacher,
but what about
the arms and legs
left over, the extra
head? These cling to us,
grow numb and tingly;
the extra hands
no longer make their fists,
and the extra eyes,
averted, slowly close.

Robert McRoberts

SNOW

1

A school of frightened
minnows flashes
beneath a raft of gray clouds.

2

There is a sawdust rising
now through the floorlights
arranged for a dance
at the high school gymnasium.
In the eyes of the dancer
a snow appears, falls easily
before him like the lace
fringing the slip his girl
let drop slowly around her head,
on the way to her hips.

3

These houses are old whales
suddenly happy in a sea
of phosphorescent plankton.

Phillip J. Szenher

APPLICATION TO A HOME FOR AGED CITIZENS

"I've taken my share in the general woe;
Felt the wounds of private despondency.
No wonder, then, after a miscellany of women,
I hear my heart thump as I climb your hill.
But, I am told, in these days for retiring virtues,
Old men should creep closer to the fire--
What fire there is, the cost of energy
So dear. Now I will take my ease
Among grandmothers, my rusted thighs
Tired of flashy steel appearance;
Here my squeaking knees will find a place
In the entourage petitioning the great king,
Cabbage, and your royal highness, Stew.
Otherwise, my teeth being gone
From a wicked smile, I am quite put out."

Phillip J. Szenher

PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH

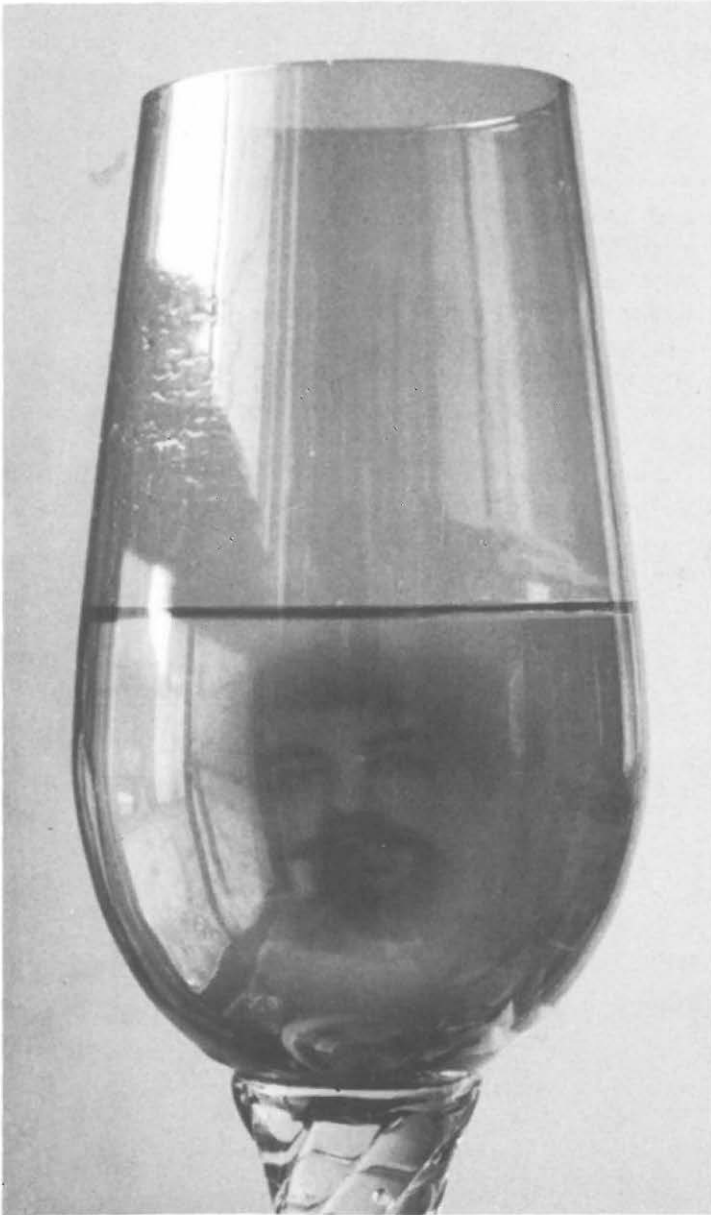
With blacksnake hair uncoiled on even shoulders
Elizabeth walks, irreducibly smooth, splaying the floor
With her movements. Not a wave shimmers
On the shallows of her skin. Her voice fits
The harpsichord, is all the perfection of coral.

I transpose her music through the winding ribbon,
Reflect her steady breath in chattering
Letters keyed on the snowfield of flat dreams.
Carving an embassy of words across the impulse of silence,
I begin with blacksnake hair uncoiled, Elizabeth...

Phillip J. Szenher

WAITING FOR A REPLACEMENT

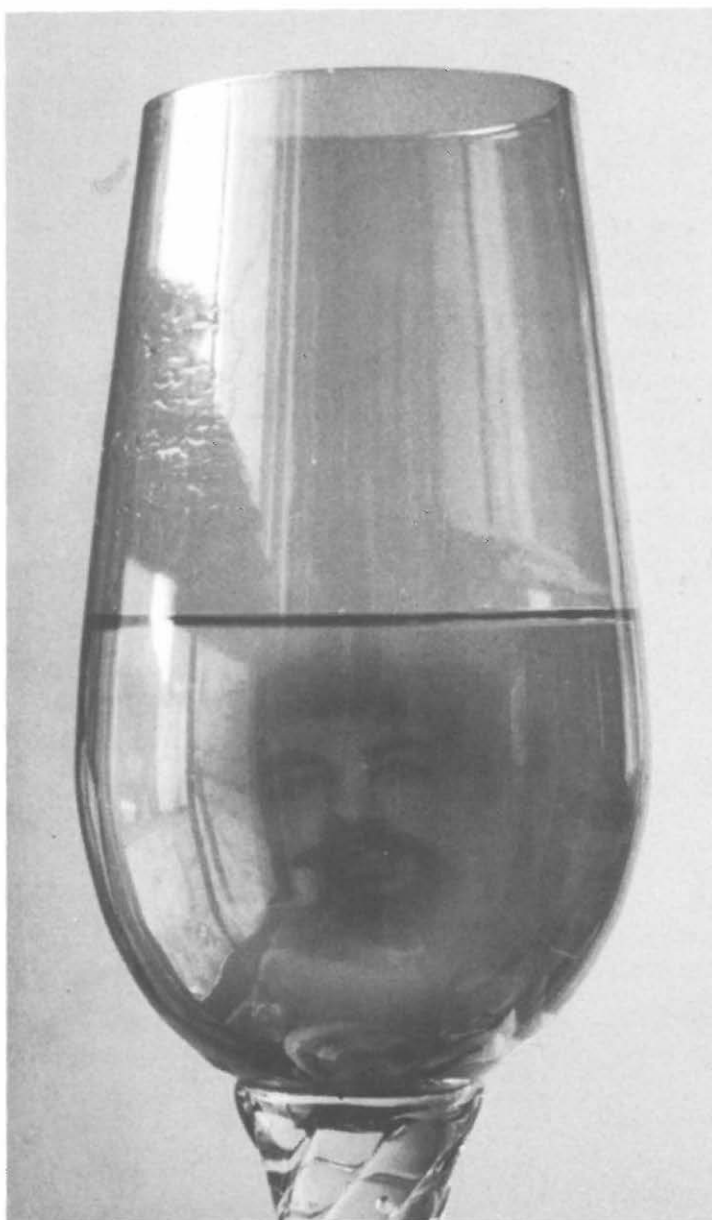
In my watch over spiders' bastions
And into the night's hard eyes,
I have tasted rain, sucking it
From the tips of my fingers.
I have been cold beneath armour,
My spear has clattered on the stone floor,
An alarum in my dream.
In the winter I wounded one whose blood
Sent up cries and steamed in the snow.
I have lately heard sounds
Of cuckoos and frogs laughing
From the wood of the enemy's country.



Phillip J. Szenher

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CONTRIBUTORS

James Bertolino is the editor of the *Cincinnati Poetry Review* and an associate professor of English at the University of Cincinnati. His poems have appeared in literary magazines throughout the country, and his *New and Selected Poems* will be published by Carnegie-Mellon in 1978.

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William Matthews has appeared in literary magazines from coast to coast. His books include *Sleek for the Long Flight* (Random House) and *Sticks & Stones* (Pentagram). He teaches at the University of Colorado.

Sharon Olds teaches poetry in New York City. She has been published in several little magazines, including *Kayak* and *Aldebaran*.

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Lucien Stryk is an acknowledged authority on Japanese literature. The Haiku included here are merely a small sample of the body of work he has translated with Takashi Ikemoto. He is the editor of *Heartland* and *Heartland II: Poets of the Midwest* (Northern Illinois) and his own *Selected Poems* was published by Swallow Press in 1976.

Phillip J. Szenher teaches English at Roger Williams College. His poems have appeared in the *Merrill Poetry Quarterly* and *Aldebaran*.

FROM THE EDITORS

CALLIOPE is the class project of the Literary Magazine course in the Creative Writing Program at Roger Williams College. The student staff participates in all aspects of preparation and publication except the actual printing, which is done by photo offset.

As people new to magazine publishing, we felt free to experiment without regard to preconceived ideas. At the same time, as the first staff, we recognized our special responsibility in the selection of title, format, and content.

Each subsequent issue of CALLIOPE will be edited by a new staff, but the editorial policies and procedures will remain the same as those followed in the publication of CALLIOPE 1. Manuscripts will be read and evaluated with the author's name masked so that beginning and well-established writers are judged equally.

It is our hope that future issues will expand to include fiction and graphics.

\$1.00