

## *Audience*

This is a solitaire, a voice  
made of hands, a hypnotist, a mute  
event, a poster

Below me, victim faces,  
faces like biceps,  
expressionless but flexed

My fingers  
begin their monotone slow dance,  
I spell out rats, love, miracles  
of coloured string

They follow the silent vowels  
my thumbs make, their slack mouths  
avid, they want mistakes

but I am a good performer,  
I make none.

It demands little  
but precise wrists, practise, a stock  
of colours, minor illusions

They suspect: necks  
peer, they glimpse  
the extra names  
bulging my sleeves like aces.  
The white eyes jeer

The end: throw out  
my hand, release these  
jewelled birds, red and scaled;  
they glitter, whirr to the ceiling,  
pretty as gnats, as watches

(If I could say the denied  
word, the word to be spoken  
only with the concealed hand

the dead would return to life,  
they would speak, they would believe  
they exist again)

Applause, the faces all turn  
upwards, open  
themselves like zeros.

MARGARET ATWOOD

## *Chronos at Quintana Roo*

If there was a god of the moment  
 would I worship him?  
 I guess so:  
 Hail Chronos thy servant approaches  
 and please add these instant flashing birthdays  
 of now to the great rustling garment of infinity

We are driving thru a green tunnel  
 on the road to Tulum parrots and ditto quetzal  
 birds shat most bountifully  
 on the windshield and beat  
 a retreat hastily back to the jungle  
 birds so green they're aflame  
 like hot glass to the eye  
 and the shat is ashes  
 John the ex-dancehall owner says  
                                   "Tremendous"  
 and "Tremendous" I say too  
 sincerely insincere  
 but he keeps his face in the guidebook  
 constantly my housewife reproves me  
 with a look and wherefore  
 am I unfazed?

Sea slams against the jungle  
 road and grey iguanas do the hundred  
 yard dash then full stop to watch  
 the Caribbean in fluorescent turquoise  
 "Fantastic" John says  
 instantly inventing the new word  
 I take a beer from the cooler  
 prop it in my crotch  
 steer between stones and smack  
 my lips "Fantastic" I remark  
 "The sea?" my housewife says  
 "No the Yucatan beer" and feel her eyes  
 askew caressing my askance neck  
 from her back seat command post

I am hound-dog tired from driving  
 some heat too  
 sweat bursts inside my pantaloons  
 At ancient Tulum mortality strikes  
 I HATE RUINS

to hell with ruins not another  
 bloody ruin for me  
 and stay in the car and drink beer  
 "Marvellous?" John says tentatively  
 when the twain return full of beans  
 they et under the eyes of Mayan gods  
 and we drive off  
 thru the jungle

At this point  
 having noted the birds and sea and ruins  
 irritably observe the huge old trees  
 passing us dispossessed by speed  
 calmly wearing and having worn  
 a mantle of their own shadows  
 every day for centuries

Hey—must follow up that image  
 and think of grass criss-crossing  
 with their little green swords forever  
 the sun an instant taxidermist  
 and the beer pretty good too

Chronos thy servant approaches  
 in a 71 Ford at 30 mph respectfully  
 with an offering of adjectives and green birds  
 refrigerated verbs and medium cool nouns  
 wherefore then do the ex-dancehall owner  
 and my housewife chant ecstatically  
 in unison "Yea marvellous fantastic tremendous"?  
 I mutter under my breath "Get ye hence  
 debased semantic carrion vultures  
 bastard offspring of a nonplussed polysyllabic  
 pictograph get lost"  
 "You're fulla shit" my wife says  
 instantly telepathic  
 and I am relieved

*Quintana Roo*

AL PURDY

## *Lampman in Heat*

No matter how hot Mr. Lampman was  
he still managed to write his poem  
whereas in Yucatan  
it was just too damn hot  
I couldn't write a lousy line about heat  
until I got back to Canada  
and the salubrious boudoirs  
of my native land

Nevertheless I am grateful to Mr. Lampman  
he gave me standards about heat  
and tho we're different as day and night  
standards are handy  
even if you're not a dog  
even used in reverse  
But what I wonder most about Archibald  
is why did he mess around with fahrenheit  
instead of  
—er girls girls girls?

AL PURDY





## *On Being Temporarily Blind*

If I were born blind  
and not waiting  
for these bandages  
to be removed  
I would think that men  
other than myself were  
spherical, for that  
is how I picture  
the sources of  
the voices.

But of course I'd have touched  
somebody at some time  
and learned different:

how strange it feels to be  
one blind man shaking  
the hand of another!

I'd always heard  
the blind learned more  
from touch than others.  
That is not true of this  
amateur: the hand in mine  
is not so much an object  
as simply a solid,

another part of  
the absolute  
hardness that I know to be  
a wall but no longer  
think of as such;

I become less and less  
aware of the particular;  
it is almost as if  
I were surrounded by  
some one thing  
that I cannot penetrate.

I wish I could shake off  
this body and become  
lighter than air like  
the beach balls and balloons  
with whom I converse  
as they float about me.

**ALDEN NOWLAN**

## *Funeraria 'Olea'*

In bold black letters:  
SERVICIO DIA Y NOCHE  
Obviously this is not a dead business.

It is a thriving business.  
Go in,  
See for yourselves the white coffins  
Lying in wait for the townspeople.

The tiniest caskets  
Are the most numerous;  
The women in these parts  
Are always pregnant with them.

*Zihuatanejo, Mexico*

IRVING LAYTON

## song 6

Evensong, even  
 ever even  
 ing the  
 even song of  
 lightfall, nightfall  
 moonrise even  
 against the even  
 ing of sky into  
 darker blue • the moon  
 is white, the night  
 an even hue, & even  
 you are  
 watching are  
 listening for  
  
 the song the even  
 ing brings

## song 8

autumn leaves song of  
 leaf leaves  
 the green  
 behind, the blind  
 beggar winter  
 waits with his white stare, leaves  
 nothing there a  
 falling air leaves  
 off where  
 it began

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

*Pictures of a Long-Lost World:*  
*1917, The Kaiser in Riga*

Tomorrow the twelve cars of the Kaiser's retinue  
 will leave the Schwarzhäupterhaus promptly at nine  
 and return to Spa; but this afternoon there is time  
 for a casual photograph at the harbour front,  
 where he stands, cane in hand, adjutants close by,  
 blinking a little in the August sunshine,  
 but erect always, stiff-backed as the scabbard  
 showing below his coat, moustaches bristling.

He leaves here with a token victory—  
 the Russian's second Baltic port is his—  
 but as so many times now in this war  
 the big win, the total crusher, has escaped him,  
 the Twelfth Army of the enemy has retreated  
 out of a well-set trap, will fight again.

But his admirals tell him: the U-boat campaign  
 cannot fail, Britain will be brought to her knees,  
 starved out at last! And his generals tell him:  
 wait until next year when we'll unleash attacks  
 based on new concepts, bold, frightening,  
 and end the trench stalemate! Always there are mouths  
 close by to say the right words at the right time.

One thing he knows though: he'll survive it all,  
 God and the Hohenzollerns are as one,  
 the Kaiser and the German people one,  
 Ein Gott, ein Volk, Kaiser und Kaiserin.

RAYMOND SOUSTER

## *The Kinetic Poem*

Be careful how you hold this page.  
There, see, your fingerprints  
whorl in the poem: let it escape  
by breathing on the ink  
in which the words are frozen.  
Thaw them with your voice.

Careful, you are **spilling out the poem**:  
black streams are running down the page  
catch those tingling waters in your hands  
feel their lacy touch along your fingers  
suck them clean from crease and knuckle  
taste the words that slide inside the inner lips  
that pulse on tongue deep within the mouth.

And now your kiss will open  
lexicons for your speechless lover.  
She will savour sounds  
gentle, then more fervent,  
she will feel vibrations growing,  
she will feel them  
enter her.

Be careful how you handle poems.  
Turn the pages slowly.  
Do not disturb  
from their all-sensuous rhythms  
all the lovers lying in these sheets.

PETER STEVENS

## *Refusal*

No, I will not  
write with knives, with  
claws and

talk of contests  
no one wins, disquiet  
edging in, and

no, I will not  
write of hooks that  
snag, yoick out

anger into  
light gloating for  
all to see

me fondling  
slime like  
silk and

I will not,  
no,  
for long

marches stretch, not  
forced but quiet in step  
across wide-open

plains broken by  
only an occasional  
depression.

PETER STEVENS

## *Between Two Words*

Stand here at the feet  
of Rodin's Balzac, think  
how a curious lust for words  
has become a whole landscape,  
a man achieved in rock  
and waterfall.

Rhetoric  
is not too splendid  
for what we are.

What I mean to say  
is not in truth but in time; grass grows  
in the sand; the brain is clay  
and the hands grip there, shaped  
by enduring the weight of clay  
they work.

Dead fish and birds  
come to rest in the sand. This is dying;  
this is the only omen we have.

A man is a whole landscape,  
the shape of water falling and the rock  
on which the shape breaks.

Between two words there is space  
for falling water and for light.  
Galaxies burst in the space  
between two words, and rhetoric  
is a strategy for naming defeat.

And that is what we win.

DAVID HELWIG

## *Your Hand Once*

All crippled. All with flaws.  
You, me  
the wheeling young  
buds blind on their stalks  
eggs in their nests  
sealed from the sun . . .

Tuck it all up.  
Turn it in.

Yet there where no flaw shows  
in the full sunlight  
that  
bright spot, lancing sight  
dancing dazzle of motes . . .  
your hand once  
your face  
swam in that light  
and shone.

P. K. PAGE

## *Masqueraders*

What curious masks we wear:  
bald patched and grey hair  
who once wore dark or fair.

Wear too much flesh or none—  
a scrag of skin and bone.  
The gold gone.

Bi-focalled and watch-bound  
who once, time out of mind  
glimpsed world without end.

Worse masquerades to come:  
white cane, black gaping tomb  
as if we were blind, dead, lame

who, in reality, are  
dark, fair and shinier  
than the masks we wear or wore.

P. K. PAGE

## O *Permanent Paean Periclean*

There, acronychal, the marvel and marble,  
 More harmony than rivet ever drove to.  
 The Parthenon. Men with their damned  
 Wars blew it up. What wigs  
 And willows man bequeaths and bungles!  
 Brahms, bongos, pitched-out latex,  
 Immortal plastic, Pergolesi  
 (Diddled this night at Odious Atticus),  
 Pigiron, billyboards, Bach! What  
 To choose, eh? Stifled rubies!  
 People aren't worth the world.  
 Consider 'P. Kelly' cut  
 In the mural paint of eleventh century  
 Mary and her Jesus-child  
 (The right-hand chapel out at Daphni  
 By bus demotic from Eleftherias).  
 Just now, down there  
 Under the moon, Stuttgart Germans  
 Scrape the gut and toot the brass.  
 Haydn! O Haydn's "Farewell." Ja,  
 Die abschiedssymphonie zo-called.  
 The players play the latest page.  
 Above, the floodlights on the Parthenon  
 Are dowsed. Each takes his candle and gets him  
 Aus. Alas, alas, beauty  
 Is done. Haydn! Your candle flickers,  
 Fumbles Athen's fading walls . . .

RALPH GUSTAFSON

*Take, For Instance, Architecture*

There are barrel vaults and groin vaults  
And underpitch and quadripartite  
Vaults and tierceron and fan,  
Counterpoints of cathedral magnificence.  
Who will live long enough to distinguish  
Coverings, transcendence, closures of soaring  
Stone, that, from a mortal plot?  
I have seen lidded tombs in a row—  
At Alis-camps? Certainly, nearby,  
At Chartres with my love, glass was in  
Sun, thrown in fire on pillar,  
Fire at our feet. Stone  
And fire: the world its infinite moment.  
Cribs and moldings, arches at Cordoba,  
All that remains; fire on stone  
That hour at Chartres — what you will —  
The infinite, how shall we distinguish?  
The veriest dawn when you more than awaken  
To the intensest moment you finally fear.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

*Forest Poem*

I am alone now  
in the tall forest;  
I tread the water  
of your absence

More bitter to me  
than salt is the  
world emptied of  
your meaning and

Who will now kindle  
the lights for me  
or wrap up the evening  
in its white shawl?

MIRIAM WADDINGTON