

Pat Nolan

The Nolan Anthology of Poetry

Volume II

The Modern Era



Revue Fell Swoop

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Photo by Maureen Hurley



FELL SWOOP

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THIS IS FELL SWOOP #64

From I Forbid Myself To Dream

TEA FOR ONE
after Jean Follain

The apparent gloom
of her sighs
signaled a late afternoon
the dust bunnies
had retreated under
the wine dark velvet sofa
now the brown delivery van
sped by without stopping
the kettle's hiss and
rumble whistle broken
long ago went unnoticed
till the windows veiled
in steam dulled the light
later as the amber sky
faded to black the overstepped
tea cold much too bitter
to drink splashed onto
the gleam of the porcelain sink

YOUR HELLO

Ringling in my ears
the telephone
takes a while to register

my normal condition
high strung
wired

buzz constant
line busy

in touch with myself
and no one else

I get up to answer
as another
part of my life

recognized as a voice
other than my own
drawn as a curtain

open on
the darkness within

attention gathered
by the earpiece

and funneled
down behind the eyes

as a pebble into a well
the splash of your hello

I FORBID MYSELF TO DREAM

How to hold the infant moment
branches in the breeze and
sobering attention of green
clouds hurry in mute bright
colors excuse approaching chill

"together for the rest of our lives"
secrets mocked in popular songs
but the guitar work is really nice
and so sing along voice breaking

children grown and groan
how can anyone listen to that stuff
taste a one way street obviously

I want to exchange my beliefs
for something simpler longer lasting
the lull of a late morning forever
horizon delineated by a fog bank
resting on the furthestmost ridge
its meringue billow burnished
by an ever shifting lemon light

COMMON COLD

Bamboo dew drops
uncomfortably cool
on my fevered skin
an imperceptible drizzle
marks the day
with sheer curtain gloom
columns of smoke billow
bright bands which
knit into the mass
of a dark conifer forest
ragged undersides of clouds
raked across barbed peaks
empty themselves
on the drear landscape
that my head feels stuffed
with cotton or old socks
does not contribute much
to diminish this perspective
oh ache groan moan snuffle
sneeze watery eyes nothing
tastes right confined by
a virus so simple
it defies cure
trying to cope with
the holiday mess just
a dream of myself like
the fog that envelopes
the trees I mix with
pins and needles
in this appendage or that
real sit-down weather stare
out the window and record
the slow movement of nature
eons in seconds pass
as they always will
just the bug in me
makes it seem like forever

GONE APE

Part memory part prophecy
the inference of the possible
with the improbable
implied by the syntax of the future

I could possibly be right!

ah the wonders of science
 render everything
to its lowest
 common denominator
that should explain
 a craving for bananas

being upright will become
more of a social distinction
if it hasn't already

and the insinuations of pedigree
regain their pervasive sway

everywhere you look
the inclination is to narrow down
your waist your hips legs rear
diet income family thinking
while being breast-fed
on the pleasure principle
that the longer we live
the more we'll spend

CALIFORNIA STATE OF MIND

Eyes rolled back in sun stream
feet up till tomorrow then
acknowledge passing time
as a spinning wheel which
always returns to the same moment
so the rush to get from here
to there put in sunny perspective
motivation if you can call it that
muted by bright blue afternoons
calmed by light days go by
satisfaction in soaking up rays

From Intellectual Pretensions

INTELLECTUAL PRETENSIONS

You may not like me. I'm an intellectual. That doesn't mean I'm not real people. You might be put off by someone you can be sure is thinking, being intellectual, just about every waking second, someone who would notice how you hold your hands or lean on a table or subtly pick your nose and flick it away and not say anything about it but just think about it and why or what motivated you to act that way; that kind of person might just be scary. And if you shove them on the shoulder with the tips of your fingers and get in their face, they talk faster and use big words that are supposed to beat you across the brow but can be confusing if you make the mistake of listening to them and some can even make you madder and some make you stop and realize what a jerk you're being, and depending on how you feel about being a jerk, you either back off and apologize or you just rear back and waste the fucker. Intellectuals take some getting used to.

BUBBLEGUM FROG

The Indian has a message for my youngest son. There would be a potluck after the work party to restore the old hotel. "That goes for you, too, General," he said to me, "you could bring a crumb cake." At the old hotel, my son was perplexed by something that he had no word for. When I looked at it, I saw that it was just a wad of old bubblegum on the lip of an old cabinet. On closer examination, I saw that it was a wad of bubblegum shaped like a frog. I pried the bubblegum frog off the wood surface. My son insisted that it really was a frog, and he was right. The red frog began to stir. Later as we made our way down the length of the trunk of a huge fir that topped the log deck at the lumber mill, my son pointed out that the frog was following us. "Be thankful that it doesn't have those little vampire teeth," I said. At the end of the log deck, the red frog hesitated and I picked it up to bring it with us. It transformed into a pink infant on whose head was a beaded skullcap. I marveled at the way the swirl of beads caught the light and dazzled me with an incredible sense of well-being.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

I'm under estimation on my best behavior. Don't hold your breath, I know what I'm talking about. No matter what age we reach, we are, after all our parent's children. At least that's the way I feel about it. When I say it this way it becomes opinion. Do opinions make you cry? A circle of fine cardboard and a chance to see a castle? I had no reason to. A horse is saying, "I'm a cow." Wait until you read why. "J'ai trop de trop." Now don't go putting words in my mouth. The fire that stirs around her when she stirs -- I can't argue with that. Her delicate green arms tangle lightly in my heart's ropes. There's that then that's that.

PAYDIRT

Our snakeskin boots kicked up the powdered granite covering the trail like a layer of white volcanic ash. My partner wore his straw Stetson at such a rake that the shadow of the brim sliced across his nose and bisected his narrow profile. His girlfriend wore a long dark overcoat. The sun beat down, a metallic bright glare. The berm at the edge of the fire road where it dropped down into the chasm below indicated that it had been freshly graded. The hillside across the ravine was also rock. What looked like vegetation was a mountain of baled hay piled precariously around to the steep side. Cows grazed at the periphery. Occasionally, a dark shape would plummet down having lost its footing. We arrived at the gate across the road that led to the peak. It was set between sheer declines, a massive, high-tech barrier but with a skeleton key lock. The woman said she thought she could punch in the right codes on the control panel in the guardhouse. There were vultures on the other side, she informed us. And, we would have to do something about our hair.

From Exile In Paradise

What Ink Can't Capture

"Fog veils the river and mountains"
the bridge crosses from one world
to another where sunlight brushes
the tips of redwoods and firs
mist necklaces drift to far off hills
pockets among the pines puff out
like paper lanterns illuminated
from within by slanting light
crude shadows mark the houses
half hidden among the trees
this stillness is always there

Failed in Letters Happy in Life

"Cherishing my ineptness I'm carefree to the end"
enjoying a little peace cup of herb tea cold
attentive to the sound of the eaves overflowing
after a rush of late winter rain passes through
where I have gone wrong fills many notebooks
file cabinets bulging with personal hyperbole
here mistake after mistake accumulates like dust
documents of my timeless imperfection

Black Out

"Tall pines catch the wind sounds of rain"
the beginnings of a storm is somewhat romantic
an awesome power nature barrels through the dark
roof tiles lashed eaves overflow dripping to
a rising crescendo of whistling rushing air
the solemnity of the blackness as power goes out
and the devotional candles lit one by one
in the overwhelming silence of appliance absence
those quiet prayers of self emerge

From Elbowing The Stars

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

Violence is just a sex substitute
friendship is those thousand
 tiny betrayals overlooked

the long arm of the law of diminishing returns
just caught up with me

 call my lawyer quick

after health insurance legal insurance
otherwise known as

 The Big Professional Payoff
everyone is on the take
eventually it works out for the best
we pay our taxes to ourselves
what's left of us

 the organism regulates itself
we all feel in our bones
 but are in full blown denial

don't despair
 repair

heirs to the mysterious power of discontinuity

and settle for the relationship of one
map deep attachments
uncover the hieroglyphics of the psyche
a synapse of pixels

 get the picture
it's the beauty of the particular
attended to in passing
whose sum is a memory
an exquisite sample
there

 importance loses its touch
the equality of a jelly doughnut
 to the Hope diamond
music in the air
 settle for that

FALSE DAWN

Is it because it's February
 a large de Chirico existentialism
 overcomes me at the top of the stairs
 not that I'm any tinier than usual
 horizon barely defined and
 the space between the garage and
 the hedge still narrow as ever
 in fact there aren't any vast distances
 except maybe between me and my feelings
 pebbles dark as roasted coffee beans
 among clumps of walnut mulch

there's a mist or a haze or smoke
 something making it all indistinct
 could be it's just me I'm in a fog
 not acknowledging my surroundings
 walk against the red light nothing
 at the video store looks appealing
 two red-cheeked men befuddled sitting
 in the planter out front the gay bar
 timelessness of day's grim white pall
 odd edgy familiar smile from a blonde
 makes me think I know her from somewhere
 wheel shopping cart around in a daze

river wide and beige and swifter
 keeps up along the straight and narrow
 music only my ears hear on the radio
 as the subconscious of this automobile
 I'm a Cartesian fallacy of my own making
 once in a while I smile at a wry irony or
 shout a word of lyric (the only one I know)
 scenery speeds by the corners of vision
 shifting gears my sole motor response

I try not to notice the tremendous
 predictability of every moment unless
 I just want to make myself miserable
 there's always escape in a good book
 or in an evening's seductive sitcom
 and I could be doing the laundry
 which is piling up as are the dishes
 (t-shirt draped on the foot of the bed
 should probably go in the hamper and

half way there I bring it to my nose
to judge its particular ripeness
the odor mine distinct musk of dust)

later unseen I slip out onto the back deck
chill of evening rises out of the shadows
pace a vain attempt to escape the inescapable
pause where I can look down into a neighbor's
wide undraped window and see clearly as if
watching a televised drama on a big screen
he has his hand on her waist she has
her hand on his shoulder their gazes
fixed on each other in silent contemplation
then they begin to dance carefully solemn
to a music I can't hear but sense as meaningful
and dear to their moment just by the way
she puts her head on his shoulder

so I might as well be watching TV and
ride the evening to the edge of sleep
in aimless surfing an act disturbing
in itself a kind of electronic boredom
my thoughts conveniently on hold
images flicker in the near distance
ultimately meaningless cryptic trivial
until an inane jingle tries my patience
to the max and I experience the big yawn

then what is it about February
shadows turn transparent in the rain
the promise of days ahead in yellow
flowers of the acacias in the pink of quince
step out into the chill blue air of morning
shivering with the anxiety of any moment
pale buds at the tips of bare branches swell
an expectant green waits to spread its wings

WHERE THE HEART'S CONCERNED

All this self-examination has made me raw
 set on edge by my own complexity
 to suffer from a hypochondria of the spirit
 even glib optimism can't often dispel
 so that I have to springboard past caring

a triple double twist
 perfect nose dive
 into the wet sponge that is my anima

that is my own applause I hear

it's like a tiny door in my heart opened
 out steps a little guy and takes a bow
 finally acknowledged the romantic in me
 down swings a trapeze
 and I'm flying through the air
 with the greatest of ease
 head over heels
 as if I'd invented it

if I believed in any of this
 I could go on to be normal
 instead
 life isn't easy where the heart's concerned
 and I've been in love too little too long

I have to laugh to stay serious
 the poet as joker
 though priestly notions try to repress humor
 this mocking skeletal frolic
 takes each step
 as a celebration of passing
 and of the return
 heel toe heel
 (which time will wound)
 grim but graceful
 I knock on wood

scattered sunshine in the forecast
 "the hassles of the day make a real mess of me"
 Chrissie Hynde sings in my ears
 preoccupied by the danger signals
 of a terminal existence
 everything on the line
 which is the very

very edge
 and as much as I try
 can't stumble forward
 while falling backward is so simple
 I can never catch up with myself
 always a little off register

the dance macabre of a dying star
 makes its effects felt across eons
 multiplied by a room full of mirrors
 and dominates the headlines

the heart more direct
 it's live
 not Memorex
 the thrumming of wings as it soars
 leaves behind every care
 as well as good sense judgment
 duty and responsibility
 slips the bonds of certain gravity

no verifications of levitation
 you say
 ever heard the expression
 "walking on air"
 have you talked to a man in love
 ("has a man in love ever talked?"
 being an entirely different matter)

emotion requires a song to escape
 its captivity in the cavity of the heart
 and so in the karaoke bar of my privacy
 I wail out my lungs with maudlin sentiment
 suddenly overwhelmingly meaningful

in meditation the self flows out
 so everything that was kept out can flow in
 I experience displacement
 that which was heavy is now light
 that which is light becomes heavy and must
 trade with the heavy which is now light
 the logic of push pull populates the world

"is this love that I'm feeling"
 is not really a question
 because if you gotta ask
 you got it bad

upon which I write
 no one thinks it unusual
 I had a long talk with Mao
 I remembered when I awoke
 Capitalism versus Communism the topic
 he hefted into a heavy red coat
 when we finally got up to leave the café
 I told him he looked just like Santa Claus
 we have nothing like that in China he replied
 outside saying our good-byes
 he pointed out the rabbit in the full moon
 down the street the dogs are barking
 no really
 someone's rolled away the stone
 and released spring from the vault of winter
 rejoice etc.
 radio turned up loud
 through the trees
 a laugh booms ancient wise happy
 some old bird up to the country for the weekend

UPSIDE DOWN

A narrow memory reduced to symbols
 I diagram myself through life with words
 what can happen has happened again
 meaning has come into question
 all within the last few minutes or days
 how I wish for a miracle in disguise
 the unusual hour phone call so dreadful
 and late night the knocking only wind
 the body an awful burden to the mind
 mortality is held to be self evident
 to the extent that anything ever is
 I float slowly as I would underwater
 what's up is down and down is up

From PRESCRIBED, Words In Progress

Ah yes, the narrowness of the winding ever upward social ladder; it confines the mind as well. "Irish, I take nothing at face value." I had admired her ability to osmosify. We all have decidedly unique ways of achieving our objectives, and once locked into these particular rituals, we pay hell breaking with them, though sometimes the divorce from redundancy is the work of an instinct for survival. In the hide and seek of words, patience wins (more often than not).

Break scorch rib mantle (now why would I write that if I wasn't inspired?). I just want to put my face on and forget it. An absentee formula is responsible for the deterioration of this poetic edifice, and the sotto voice jealousy of other writers tags along.

Communication exists as a formula. The word "pretty" comes from the old English, "perdy" which comes from the corrupt Latin "per Deus" meaning "by God" or "of God". Trust your unconscious on these matters, playful and timeless. There is no excuse for that kind of a word (kind words)! Sometimes it simply adds up, other times it takes an Einstein.

Dead, he is examining road maps on a table, folding, unfolding, tracing a route with a finger. He's looking for maps with a particular symbol on them, but can't seem to find them. He turns away from the table, dissatisfied, irritated. I begin clearing the table. He demands to know what I think I am doing. I shouldn't assume that he's done yet. I explain that this is my job, to straighten up, to file things away, to classify. This is what I do for a living. This appears to interest him. That I impose order on things and put them away in drawers. Alphabetically. This perks him up. "Like in the military?" This, like nothing else I ever did, pleases my father. I wake, sweating.

Each poem is its own proving ground, and its own diversion. Sometimes I get it right the first time and then spend years trying to prove it myself. In sleep, I'm at swim with the electrons. Moments before waking, a woman I can't identify asks me to sample the strawberry jam on her cheek. I also dream that my pillowcases are large manila envelopes. The degree of difficulty of any work distances itself from entertainment and increases its atomic weight, inches toward the eternal. Blame it on the mitochondria.

Fame makes you detested by your own kind. The more you are identified, the more you are hated so a rise in popularity can cough up some real venom. It sticks in the craw of your contemporaries.

Grammatical altruism. Early morning rush out the door, barely awake even after two cups, the brew of centuries. I shut out the world with noise until the batteries run low. Impulse: the shortest distance between two points: thought and act. That's me, it always has to be right away, reflects the immediacy of my needs.

Hope is grammar. The benefit of my experience: I don't call the shots. New York City, just a big ghetto with Paris-envy. Incarnadine intent. Absolute beauty is already the quest of death. The intervening years come to this. Idiot bravado. The realization of my cartoon existence.

If you don't think we're on the road to extinction, take a stroll through any supermarket on a busy weekend and look at all those types on whose gene pools natural selection won't bother renewing the contracts.

Juice or water will do. Poetry is a necessity not an affectation. Tiny black specks swarm over cold kitchen tiles, warmer than outside to them. Alone at last, idle and uncertain, have I ever been alone or this alone by myself? I create the anxiety of too much time on my hands, room to room each as empty as I am alone.

Language is derived from the naming of gods. Anthropomorphosized, they are allowed to act as temporal beings. Sloped shouldered giants stand guard in the mist. Thunder dons a flashy hat. What I have, what is it worth? Priceless privacy is its own reward, a kind of momentary immortality. Yet, I complain that I am alone as a reminder of an imminent mortality. What was once important now less so in the inevitable entropy of priorities, and I seem to be satisfied with that

Out here at the high end of the zip code, a work of random genius. If you let the wind take you wherever it goes, have a look at where the other things the wind blows around end up. In a state of constant negotiations, I cross another bridge.

Prescribed: "it is written." Imagine the power and significance of those words when writing was the province of the very few. A law now gained authority by virtue of being transcribed. Thus the inception of bad manners and the exaltation of the self. Now for the irony – all the great geniuses of the future are dyslexic.

Readng about angels, I am buzzed by a fly. If our greatest blessings come to us in our madness, I unwittingly chose the path of sanity and remain unfavored. All the bad luck, terrible accidents, cruel circumstances, the waking horror that we have all been through which we brush off simply to continue.

Sometimes what I write is revelation, other times it's wordplay. Trouble is I can never tell the difference. Sometimes it takes years before I can understand what I've done. And I have it in writing! Poetry is the art of being read.

Then there's the real me and I ask why?" Some stray lyrics to a song misunderstood. Deliberate ambiguity and arcane formula, this cannot be taught. My family thinks I freak out too easily. Late night, stumped again.

Warning! Academics Beware! There is a saying among real people. "Book smart, brain dead." For the most part, it is frighteningly accurate. They are on to you!

From **LIGHT YEARS**

I am the cool guy
I see in the mirror
no adjustment necessary

a bony white cloud hand
reaches across the blue

*

Late evening
a moth frolics inside
the paper lantern

too often I allow myself to be
too easily entertained

*

The older I get
the harder it is to keep up
with my vanity

threw out my knee
dancing in the kitchen

*

Wind blown blossoms
robins stake out
a stretch of bare earth

he who laughs last
laughs alone

*

On a day like this
the bench in the yard a throne
in a palace of light

a sprig of wisteria tops
the fir with a purple tassel

*

The part of myself
I tend to deny leaks out
the tip of this pen

please say "I love you"
with a neon sign

*

Sun's wide low arc
sweeps across the yard
snow won't last the day

once you know it all
boredom comes easy

*

Shoes finally kicked off
whole day on my feet escapes
through the tips of my toes

albino spider descends into
a last glimpse of daylight

From The Uncollected

BELIEVE YOU ME

The long song of my life
comes up short

disappointment is a bitter drink
I've tasted too often

never in fashion
either ahead or behind

unrecognized under my own rock

I have the confidence of a fool
unfounded and unrealistic

obsessive creature
irrational creature

I am urged to try
Minus Sinus
 a new cold medicine

survival means making choices

abandoned to the polite

a steady stream of words
runs through the pipes
of my unconscious
I only have to turn on
the tap to fill my cup
much overflow runs down
the drain
 or simply
 flushed away

the obvious progression
my self-consciousness

I no longer glance
over my shoulder
I have a mirror

ZERO TO SIXTY

Morning's quiet contemplation
amused by the shapes smoke from
my neighbor's chimney can take

well traveled conventions
the getaway to never have left
found here again

"I will remember you"
but in Bob Kaufman's words
"I wish to be forgotten"

living this long should
have cured me of my delusions
instead I have theories

trying leads to failure
success is intention
leave it at that

obscurity is my reward
I realize now
it is the Grand Prize

understanding's different
from knowing
long evening's cold feet

SPRING CLEANING

Now that the spider webs
have been taken down
the flies seem bolder

high thread count sheets of rain
variety of birds out for a soak

phantom presence looms
from pale vapor drenching
the jagged hillside

blessed with misty vistas
the odd geometry of rooftops

cloud chasing cloud
no scribbles today
vacant happy thought

Pat Nolan resides along the Russian River in the redwood wilds of Northern California. Writing and reading poetry are his primary literary occupations. His poems and translations have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies including *The Paris Review*, *Rolling Stone*, *Big Bridge*, *Fell Swoop*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *The New Censorship*, *Poems For The Millennium*, *Up Late*, *Out Of This World*, and *Thus Spake The Corpse*. He has published eleven books of poems, all of them out of print. He has also privately published a very limited four-volume work of poetry, prose, journals, and interviews entitled *Made In The Shade*. *Tangram Press* of Berkeley recently published in limited edition **Four Poems** from *Exile In Paradise* as a fine letterpress chapbook.

