

FOUR POETS

Each year American universities compete for billions of dollars of research grants so their scientists can explain what is now unexplainable, can comprehend what is now incomprehensible.

Poets have been doing that for years.

"All around us the imponderable and the unfathomed," wrote Carl Sandburg. "At these targets many a poet has shot his bullets of silver and scored a bull's-eye, or missed with dull pellets of paper."

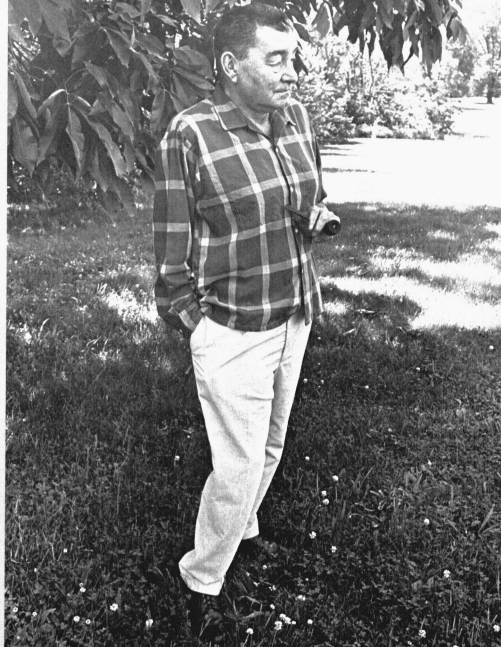
The dean of active poets on the University of Missouri's Columbia campus Donald Drummond, explained that he is led "to seek the simplest whole expression I can achieve in a world which seems to me neither simple, whole, nor self-expressive."

On these pages are selections from the works of four poets in the English department of the College of Arts and Science.

Drummond, professor of English, has written four books of poetry.

"A poet has the right to expect that a reader will study the poem with enough care to discover the poet's intention, his method, and his talent, and to assert some judgment of each," Drummond once wrote. "If the poet is a fool, the poem shows it; if he is a liar, the poem shows it; and if he is right, the poem shows it."

No scientific experiment could do more.



Donald Drummond

INEFFABLE

The density which makes mud filter out,
Fall to the bottom and there remain inert,
Does this mud hurt?

And what is different from the silting silt
Drifting below the bellowing sea, the bout
Of water and of cliff, the trying halt
Of each to each. Does this mud hurt?

Or like more active substances sustain
The death of feeling, is it a bowl of pain
Or is it mud, bud?

Or the decay of leaves in winter, brush
in fall,

The deep decay which must consume us all
Into a whole which is infinity?
Death like an absolute urn, I must assert:
Frightened I am, and of eternity.

ROOT AND BRANCH

Ruth's great-grandson, Jesse's child,
Absalom's father, tangled wild,
Strong in battle, speak the truth,
Great King David, spawn of Ruth,
What did you feel beneath the tree?
When his dark hair was dead, was he?
They live in the mind,

the cherished dead;
Revolt against the chosen king
Has fallen and his sister raped
By his own house. King David shaped
The fall of Israel. Twelve from One:
Bathsheba's second: Solomon.
No man escapes the thunderbolt:
Father, forgive my own revolt.

Donald Drummond, "Ineffable," "Root and Branch,"

Daniel Lusk

THE DUSTY GODDESS

She is like an old love
in plaster
no longer responsive
to the slightest touch
her eyes
like the eyes of spectators
in a gallery of nudes
like ours in the crumbling house
averted
as you stroke shoulder
elbow, breast
like an old love
but you both knew
at the time
all that couldn't last.

A DREAM FOR FATHER

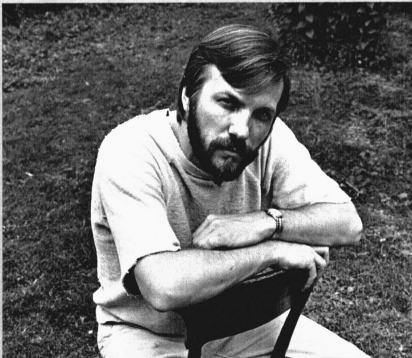
Soar, soar sweet geyser
born of brittle bones,
boon of graveside flowers
blown among the stones.
Down the pungent darkness
booms the vibrant sound,
flesh to earth, earth to flesh
in the ageless round.
Warm ellipses blooming
pink beneath my shade,
Father hear me crooning
in the shrouded glade.
Mars speaking in thunder,
red against the sky,
bless me in my wonder,
sing to me and die.
Soar, soar sweet geyser
born of brittle bones,
boon of graveside flowers
blown among the stones.

MORTEM. MORTEM.

They sit in rows off musty chapels,
sister, sons,
in-laws, nephews, cousins
(any who remain
behind, in the rose-scent,
scraps of lace
and tarnished teaspoons)
blowing behind the velvet curtain
into sodden handkerchiefs,
moaning
now and again,
a low moan cursing Death.
Poor Death, caught
and bridled to every passing bier,
whistled to hand on every sad
morning, bullied, sent
fleeing in erratic lines,
a great buzzard
nagged by small gray thieves,
innocent.

FALLOUT FLAP AT FALMOUTH

I love the world. I love the way I know
What I must love: my eyes, my ears, my fingers
Show April frost and April green, the flow
Of slate Missouri water, and the languors
Of eyes upon that blonde girl on the lawn?
Not for me now, not ever again for me
But for a sleepy boy, turning in the dawn,
Seeing on his arm the face he ought to see.
I love the world. I name the things I hate:
The poisonous power which will not let it be;
The pompous princes who in the innate
Private primate push, lose what they see:
Lose the blunt love of manhood, fall:
Drown in the flame which can engulf us all.



Winner of the 1969 Mahan award for poetry, Daniel Lusk is a graduate student in English, working on his doctorate. A former journalist, Lusk spent the summer as a ranch hand in South Dakota and also is a jazz singer.

R. K. Meiners



R. K. Meiners considers himself a religious poet. "though others might not agree with me." Associate professor of English, he also does a great deal of work with 20th century German poetry.

MY DAUGHTER, SLEEPING

Now after all these years
I know indeed that there are moments
when the Presence comes through
and tells the endless tale of origins.

The music begins.
The musician bends over his instrument
and, singing, a different face looks
through his eyes.

And there, on the pillow
the face of my child in repose.
I can read there
the confirmation of reality,
word after word.

Now I can see the testimony
that in the depths
all is as it must be
and that all shall be well.
Can anything be disastrous
as my child turns aside into sleep
and, turning outward into the wide cone of reality,
brings back the news that all is well?
I must change my life.

BESTIARY

It seems months now that each night
I've heard those infernal beasts
scuffling through the coathangers,
Pawing the shoes, snuffling
my pockets for mothballs,
clawing through my clothes for scents.
What will they have? What nourishment
can they find in paisleys and foulards?
Why should their bright harsh teeth
search my weaves and surfaces?
Come now, go to the closet door
and lay it open. All its enticing wares
sprawl against the moonlight. Perhaps there,
murmuring his throaty tune within the night,
curled among my vests will be a beast.
He will say: fly the profane world,
full of light as a chameleon;
seek with me the warmth,
the fulsome shadow here behind these shirts!
If you attend, a truth lurks in that cuff;
and there, behind your coats, a shade,
a gleam so true you dare not leave it.
Follow it with me through this wall.

Tom McAfee

DIALOGUE ON THE WAY THINGS ARE

He tells her: "See,
The violet blooms from
The dead pig's ear.
The sun doesn't care.
The bee doesn't care;
It circles and darts,
Flusters the air
Till it's satisfied."

He pulls a violet and says:
"Wear this in your hair."

She moves away and says:
"Once my mind is fixed
It's staid. I could take
That violet to an oak tree
Shade, watch it strengthen
In the cool—but I am a fool.
I would remember a dead pig's ear.
When you spoke pretty words
I would not hear you.
I would not kiss you.
I would be afraid."

He dropped the violet and said:
"We'll leave this to the dead."
And they did

and they walked to the shade.



Tom McAfee is associate professor of English and the author of two books of poems. In addition his novel, *Raver Youngblood*, will be published this fall. Two of the following selections appeared in *I'll Be Home Late Tonight*, published in 1967 by the University of Missouri Press.

FOR WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS: POET AND PHYSICIAN

Even if your rhythms—
your "American"—
and your touchable images
didn't move me so much
your heartiness
and your gentleness
and the feel of blood working through
your fingers
would.
And even if
you had not said, so many times,
"I love,"
the alphabet, some way,
would have to say it for you—
even without the plum, without the hearse,
without the asphodel.

SKULL PRACTICE

In mind, bent for the scrimmage,
and in body, relaxed,
we watch the chalk
slide its way on the slate.
The coach groans on
about arrows and Jesus
and winning.

It is truly
skull practice. I know
by heart my plays.
But what will happen
to this art I've perfected
when those other skulls,
perfected too, thud
against mine
and redefine these obviously
infallible rules?