

"THE NAMES OF THE LOST"

by Philip Levine

THIS year's Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize judges considered volumes by more than 80 strong contenders—among them James Merrill, Muriel Rukeyser, W. H. Auden, Wendell Berry, Elizabeth Bishop, Philip Booth, Robert Lowell, James Tate, David Wagoner, and Richard Wilbur. In the end the prize went to Philip Levine for his collection *The Names of the Lost* (Atheneum, 1976), the seventh in a series of volumes that since 1963 have won him a fervent, rapidly growing following.

Philip Levine's poems celebrate a certain kind of humanity. The "lost" in *The Names of the Lost* are people who flourished unnoted in their time and who are now waiting to be called up in memory. They loom close in these poems, brought near through the artful telescoping of events. Levine's poems, formally independent of each other, coalesce into a single recollection: one memory stirs, and the rest all ripple together. The elements that make up these vignettes are so charged with emotion that they cannot be easily forgotten, yet they are so much associated with hurt-

ful loss that they cannot be recalled in any sustained, concerted way—only in fits and starts.

Above all, Philip Levine's lines bring a warning: that which now seems fleeting and transient may come back into your consciousness later, with all the mass and velocity of a reentering space vehicle. These are poems that make you recall times long past and make you ask, "Where was I then? What were the distractions that kept me from knowing at the time what it has taken time (and Philip Levine) to reveal to me?"

It is a pleasure to welcome a book like this. As the selections that follow will prove, Philip Levine's poems give life back to us—and give onward:

When you grip
my arm hard and lean way out
and shout out the holy names
of the lost neither of us is scared
and our tears mean nothing.

—William Stafford

YOU
THE moon gone dark
in the smoke of the rolling mills,
the switch engines quiet
in the iron sheds.
On our last break we smoked
in silence, the night cool at last
in its last hour.
When your head dropped to your chest
I parted your fingers
and drew the cigarette out
and smoked it.

A thousand years away
our father lay down
in the hymning shade of the olives
and dreamed of that road
twisting back,
and he wakened in the world.

A box car rasped.
I blinked the poor light
of another day, all around me
the houses had started.
In bare kitchens
men bowed
to coffee and cold porridge.
You were gone, brother,
the face I never saw in darkness
gone, the cigarette gone,
and I haven't touched you since.

THE SECRET OF THEIR VOICES

WHEN they wakened
in the gray
of just after dawn
and knew the birds
were gone and saw
the diesel fumes
gathering above the trees
and felt the cold anger
of machines that have to eat,
did they come hand
in hand through
the bare wood halls
to sway above my bed
and call me back
to the small damp body
curled in dream.

He pulled the long socks
up and eased his feet
into the narrow shoes,
tied the laces, and stood
staring down the hard creases.

Roses are blooming
in Picardee, she sang,
and looked sideways
at herself in the mirror
drawing her cheeks in.
But there's only one
rose for me, and stood
smoothing the wrinkles
from waist to knee.
If they left,
whose hand cupped
my forehead when I lay
in fever? Who moaned,
help me, help me?
Who lay full length
beside me, belted and all,
and let his tears
pour over my hands?
Who huddled beside me
whispering like a sleepwalker
in the wet grove
north of Anniston?
Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!
I might have helped.

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NEW
SEASON

MY SON and I go walking in the garden.
It is April 12, Friday, 1974.
Teddy points to the slender trunk
of the plum and recalls the digging
last fall through three feet
of hard pan and opens his palms
in the brute light of noon, the heels
glazed with callus, the long fingers
thicker than mine and studded with
silver rings. My mother is 70 today.
He flicks two snails off a leaf
and smashes them underfoot
on the red brick path. Saturday,
my wife stood here, her cheek cut
by a scar of dirt, dirt on her bare
shoulders, on the brown belly,
damp and sour in the creases
of her elbows. She held up a parsnip
squat, misshapen, a tooth pulled
from the earth, and laughed
her great white laugh. Teddy talks
of the wars of the young, Larry V.
and Ricky's brother in the movies,
on Belmont, at McDonald's,
ready to fight for nothing, hard,
redded or on air, "low riders,
grease, what'd you say about my mama!"
Home late, one in the back seat,
his fingers broken, eyes welling
with pain, the eyes and jawbones

swollen and rough. 70 today, the woman
who took my hand and walked me
past the corridor of willows
to the dark pond where the one swan
drifted. I start to tell him
and stop, the story of my 15th spring.
That a sailor had thrown a black baby
off the Belle Isle Bridge was
the first lie we heard, and the city
was at war for real. We would waken
the next morning to find Sherman tanks
at the curb and soldiers camped
on the lawns. Damato said he was
"goin downtown bury a hatchet
in a nigger's head." Women
took coffee and milk to the soldiers
and it was one long block party
till the trucks and tanks loaded up
and stumbled off. No one saw
Damato for a week, and when I did
he was slow, head down, his right arm
blooming in a great white bandage.
He said nothing. On mornings I rise
early, I watch my son in the bathroom,
shirtless, thick-armed and hard,
working with brush and comb
at his full blond head that suddenly
curled like mine and won't
come straight. 7 years passed
before Della Daubien told me
how three white girls from the shop
sat on her on the Woodward Streetcar

so the gangs couldn't find her
and pull her off like they did
the black janitor and beat
an eye blind. She would never
forget, she said, and her old face
glows before me in shame
and terror. Tonight, after dinner,
after the long, halting call
to my mother, I'll come out here
to the yard rinsed in moonlight
that blurs it all. She will not
become the small openings
in my brain again through which the wind
rages, though she was the ocean
that ebbed in my blood, the storm clouds
that battered my lungs, though I hide
in the crotch of the orange tree
and weep where the future grows
like a scar, she will not come again
in the brilliant day. My cat Nellie,
15 now, follows me, safe
in the dark from mockingbird
and jay, her fur frost tipped
in the pure air, and together we hear
the wounding of the rose, the willow
on fire—to the dark pond
where the one swan drifted, the woman
is 70 now—the willow is burning,
the rhododendrons shrivel
like paper under water, all
the small secret mouths are feeding
on the green heart of the plum.

ON THE BIRTH OF
GOOD & EVIL
DURING THE LONG
WINTER OF '28

WHEN the streetcar stalled on Joy Road,
the conductor finished his coffee, puffed
into his overcoat, and went to phone in.
The Hungarian punch-press operator wakened
alone, 7000 miles from home, pulled down
his orange cap and set out. If he saw
the winter birds scuffling in the cinders,
if he felt this was the dawn of a new day,
he didn't let on. Where the sidewalks
were unshovelled, he stamped on, raising
his galoshes a little higher with each step.
I came as close as I dared and could hear

only the little gasps as the cold entered
the stained refectory of the breath.
I could see by the way the blue tears squeezed
from the dark of the eyes, by the way
his moustache first dampened and then froze,
that as he turned down Dexter Boulevard,
he considered the hosts of the dead,
and nearest among them, his mother-in-law,
who darkened his table for twenty-seven years
and bruised his wakings. He considered how
before she went off in the winter of '27
she had knitted this cap, knitted so slowly
that Christmas came and went, and now he could
forgive her at last for the twin wool lappets
that closed perfectly on a tiny metal snap
beneath the chin and for making all of it orange. ◎

The Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, given annually to
"the outstanding book of poems published in the United
States," is cosponsored by *Saturday Review* and the New
Hope Foundation. The \$5,000 prizewinner for 1976 was

selected by William Stafford, Charles Wright, and Carolyn
Kizer—all poets in their own right. Previous winners have
been Denise Levertov for *The Freeing of the Dust* (1975)
and Cid Corman for *O I* (1974).

"Learning" to Give Up



by Albert Rosenfeld

WE ALL have an intuitive knowledge—supported by personal experience and common sense, reinforced by religious beliefs and folk wisdom—that our attitudes toward life are of critical importance to our enjoyment of it. Whether we overcome our problems or not (or in some crisis situations, whether we even survive or not) may depend on whether or not we have hope, whether we give up or keep on trying.

Over the past few decades, biologists and psychologists have been carrying out some fascinating research that reconfirms how powerfully our mental outlook can affect the outcome of our life situations.

You can, for example, do a simple experiment (as Dr. Curt Richter of Johns

Hopkins has done repeatedly) with two rats: hold one rat in your hand firmly so that no matter how valiantly he struggles he cannot escape. He will finally give up. Now throw that quiescent rat into a tank of warm water. He will sink, not swim. He has "learned" that there is nothing he can do, that there is no point in struggling. Now throw another rat into the water—one that doesn't "know" that his situation is hopeless and that he is therefore helpless. This rat will swim to safety.

Another experiment (done by Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania), this time with dogs: suspend a dog in a hammock into which he fits so snugly that he cannot get loose. Give him electric shocks. He will struggle for a while, then just lie there and submit. Later, take the same dog and put him down on one side of a grid that is only half electri-

fied. Though he is perfectly free to get up and move to the unelectrified side, he will sit where he is, enduring the shock, resigned to his fate. Put another dog down in the same spot—a dog that hasn't been taught to be helpless—and he'll move around until he finds an area that doesn't shock him.

Okay. Fine for rats and dogs. But what about people?

Seligman has been one of the pioneering investigators of the ways in which people's perceptions of themselves as being helpless can in fact render them helpless. His seminal book, *Helplessness: On Depression, Development and Death*, has influenced many other psychologists to pursue this fruitful area of research. Here is a sample Seligman experiment:

Take two groups of college students and put them in rooms where they are blasted with noise turned up to almost intolerable levels. In one room there is a button that turns off the noise. The students quickly notice it, push it, and are rewarded with blissful silence. In the other room, however, there is no turn-off button. The students look for one, find nothing, and finally give up. There is no way to escape the noise (except to leave the room before a previously agreed-upon time period has elapsed), so they simply endure.

Later, the same two groups are put in two other rooms. This time, *both* rooms contain a switch-off mechanism—though not a simple button this time and not as easy to find. Nevertheless, the group that found the button the first time succeeds in finding the "off" switch the second time, too. But the second group, already schooled in the hopelessness of their circumstances, doesn't even search. Its members just sit it out again.

There is an obvious parallel here. In each of the three cases—rats, dogs, and students—the situation had changed decisively, but because their efforts for alleviation didn't work in the first instance, the "helpless" subjects didn't even try the second time.

Yes, you may say, but the students knew that at a given point the experiment would be over and the noise would stop. Otherwise they would have been more highly motivated to keep on looking. Besides, in the first instance, no matter how motivated they may have been, no matter how hard they may have tried, there simply *was* no way to turn off the noise. Their efforts would have been futile. Aren't many life situations like that—no matter how hard you try, you're doomed to lose?

True enough. In at least one of Richter's