

Poetry Series

**Nancy Ames**  
**- poems -**

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## Nancy Ames(November 10,1944)

Nancy moved from Hamilton to Toronto after high school where she studied anthropology at U. of T and was active in the (sixties) artistic community. She has since then lived in rural surroundings, both in the Ottawa Valley and British Columbia, where she has had time and opportunity to write both poetry and prose.

About ten years ago she moved to Calgary and is enjoying the return to an urban environment. She has been an active member of writers' groups here and participated in numerous public readings of her work. She has written several short stories and at present is working on some book-length projects (because that's where the money is) .

She would be happy to collaborate with illustrators, musicians, and other artists, and is especially eager to work with script-writers who could develop screen-plays out of her stories.

# A Perspicacious Girl

'She's just a perspicacious girl,  
peeking past her long, dark hair,  
her finger twisting one dark curl  
in the candle's golden glare.

Oh, she doesn't miss a thing,  
no matter how she tries,  
and when they ask about her ring,  
she answers them with lies.

None of them like her anyhow,  
but they'd love to watch her fall,  
and they ought to realize by now  
that she always knows it all.

She wonders where that waitress went  
who was so nice the other day,  
and she wonders what he could have meant  
when he smiled at her that way.

He's gone this time for good -  
she's already figuring it out -  
but they keep on telling her she should  
give him the benefit of the doubt.

His ring is in her pocket and  
her heart is in there too,  
but she's trying not to understand  
the where, when, why and who.

Every time the door gets opened  
by all the people coming in here,  
she can feel another hope end  
and the truth becoming all too clear.

Her life was one big holiday -  
she was feeling so fantastic -  
but now everything she has to say  
comes out sounding so sarcastic.'

Nancy Ames

# A Primitive

'Days go by,  
days go by,  
days go by.

Here am I  
under the sky.

Someone will try  
to tell me why  
and whether I  
am low or high  
and how to buy  
that thing they fly.

The world is flat.  
I do know that.'

'But we flew here last night,  
to a place among the stars  
where they have created light  
and put it into jars.

And everything is up-side-down,  
although it feels the same,  
but they just call it 'shanty-town',  
and seem to think I'm tame.'

Nancy Ames

# A Sign On A Telephone-Pole

My kitten is black and she loves the snow  
and when morning ends the night,  
she jumps out of the shadows to show  
her blackness on all the snow-white.

Because no one can see her lately,  
not since last Hallowe'en,  
when she walked on our fence sedately  
and the moon lit up the scene.

Nobody sees her when she's napping,  
and then they step right on her tail,  
so she tore up some Christmas wrapping  
and now my kitten is for sale...

To anyone who has a well-lit place,  
who's not too heavy on their feet;  
sometimes it's hard to see her face  
but she is really very sweet.

Nancy Ames

# Adamant Eve And The Man Who Wouldn'T Shut Up

If you can't say something nasty,  
don't say anything at all.  
You're saying I need rhinoplasty  
and I'm riding for a fall?

The sun is shining golden  
on the meadow by the lake.  
The snow is sparkling cold on  
mountain-peaks, for Heaven's sake.

Poetry is pregnant  
and the father of the child  
says, denying and indignant,  
'Oh, no. I must stay undefiled.'

Nancy Ames

# Addiction

(The speaker here is an older person lecturing a young person.)

'Opinions are not always right  
but waves are often tidal,  
and the dedicated parasite  
is always suicidal.

It's sort of like a clinging vine  
that's twisted round a tree;  
it tries to take all the sunshine  
and be all it can be.

Don't put your faith in flattery,  
becoming much too tall;  
the vine that blossoms eagerly  
is just about to fall.

Like, on the other hand, a bug,  
a bacterium or fly,  
and just because you took a drug,  
that doesn't mean you're high.

To glamorize reality  
can't possibly be cheap  
and freedom isn't always free;  
don't do it in your sleep.

All the snobs have little smiles  
and never lift their fingers;  
security means having files  
on political swingers.

If they've got interest in your life,  
some trickery or scheme,  
they won't need a gun or knife;  
they're into your bloodstream.'





# Airhead

Afterwards, they were lying in bed,  
slightly sweaty and watching T.V.  
She turned to him and said something  
witty about cartoon clouds. It made him  
uneasy.

She had seemed like such an airhead  
when he met her, with nothing on her  
mind but her long, beautiful, shining  
hair, like the smiling plastic playthings  
of his childhood.

And now he felt like he had to respond  
somehow, so he looked away and said  
something pretentious about artistic  
values on the internet.

She began to hum a complicated  
melody and got up off the bed and  
danced over to the window. The fog  
outside was so thick that only a sort  
of diffuse moonlight was visible, but  
she closed the curtains anyway.

Nancy Ames

# Alcohol

'A boozer  
is a loser,  
walking on a lake.

If it weren't for him,  
I could almost swim...  
excuse me, my mistake.'

Nancy Ames

# Alien Love

Old poets never smile; they stare at us  
with disappointed intelligence, desperate  
to comprehend our stupidity and blaming  
themselves forever for every motherless,  
howling child engendered by their absent-  
minded, wilderness-wandering sperm,  
condescending as a subtle but clinging  
mist falling invisibly down out of those  
white, amorphous, radiant clouds that  
hover here and there and move on again,  
inquiring persistently for someone they  
used to know on this planet, and sometimes  
their frantic, frustrated searchlights burn  
circles into the ground.

Nancy Ames

# An Author Addresses An Aspiring Character

'With a flick of the wrist,  
you insist you exist,  
like a fist in the mist.

Put your name down on my list.

It is really futile to resist  
and if I give the plot a twist,  
don't think that I'm a terrorist.

If I decide that you'll be missed,  
then I'll send in a specialist  
and he'll be giving you the gist.'

Nancy Ames

# An Easy Mistake To Make

'Ignorance and arrogance  
are walking hand-in-hand,  
taking care on the stepping-stones.  
His guitar melts my bones...  
it happened but it wasn't planned;  
it was only a rock'n'roll dance.

And we never touched,  
we never touched,  
we never touched the ground.

Sweet love-light and suspicion  
are shooting arrows at the moon,  
while night falls on the town.  
That boy is acting like a clown,  
and the prize is a big red balloon  
and a brand-new superstition.

And we never touch,  
we never touch,  
we never touch the ground.'

Nancy Ames

## Another Misunderstood Kiss

'She kept apologizing  
for the petals that were  
scattered all over her  
kitchen floor, at her party.'

'Yeah. That was a good  
party, wasn't it? But then I  
heard later on that some  
guy brought flowers instead  
of wine and when the girl  
got snotty about it he tried  
to beat her up with the  
rejected bouquet. He was  
simply snarling, they said.  
Then he got totally wasted  
and passed out on the  
couch.'

'Yeah. That was the guy I  
saw for sure. There were  
petals all over him too.'

Nancy Ames

# Archeology 101

'Until today, I always thought  
that evil could not build, could not  
hew wooden notch or pile up stone  
or plant a seed or see it grown.

That sculptured face, to my surprise,  
has fangs that drip, not eyes,  
sheds only blood, not tears,  
and scorns the passing of the years.

Delighting in a spreading stain,  
a hollowed bone, a bursting brain,  
in all the days from there to here,  
it has been content to interfere.

That's what I thought, until today,  
when jungle leaves were pushed away  
from this gigantic, green-eyed monument  
to hatred, greed, and devilment.'

Nancy Ames



# Aromantic

'Some guys, they smell perfume  
and always think, 'Ah, she  
must have put it on for me, '  
and strut around the room,  
exuding a crude  
fragrance of dominance.

But, really, not so much  
for you as against the male  
does she bend over and inhale  
the flower's elegant touch,  
sweet and discreet  
from breeding to seeding.'

Nancy Ames

## At The Clue Store In The Mall

She's got one small adorable song in her head  
and she can't wait to hear what her other friend said.

But - like - why is the garden store so full of all those  
daffodils?

Why do they smile and try to hide their terror of this  
blossoming sun?

It's because of one long summer day and the heat  
that kills  
every bright-eyed little flower who has no legs to run.

Nancy Ames

# Back Page News

(the implied speaker here is a tired editor on the news desk of a newspaper)

'So their truck was in flames  
on a bad stretch of highway  
and no one got their names -  
much too late in the day.

Just a small photograph  
and somewhat out of focus,  
shot by our freelance staff,  
for a nominal bonus.

They were moving somewhere  
when they ran out of luck -  
all their assets were there,  
in the back of that truck.

It was pouring with rain  
but nothing could dampen,  
bring it all back again,  
or change what would happen.

His big hands had found  
her head on his chest,  
and her arms were around  
him under his vest.

Lots of people would fight  
but they held to their love,  
and there's one ray of light  
shining down from above.'

Nancy Ames

## Back Stage Voice

'Hey, man, listen -  
that's a good song.  
You can take that one  
all the way to Texas.

Hey, man, listen -  
in California, the poet  
says that the ocean is a  
wolf, waiting to dissolve  
our lives in its greedy  
intestines, so you got to...

Hey, man, listen -  
you got to hurry up, man,  
and get the music out on  
the airwaves, man...'

Nancy Ames

# Being Famous

It must be like opening a new door  
in a familiar wall, the one with the  
photograph, the same old photograph  
but starting to look so strange, just  
a quick impression and then a flash  
of final lime-light as the irresistible  
wind pushes you outside, out into  
outer space, where the view is always  
magnificent - nothing but the best  
death for you, baby - and then falling  
back down to earth as celestial debris,  
universal rain...

And all the over-active wave-lengths  
have to reduce their amplitude and  
frequency so that light can become  
a particle again and feed the hungry  
multitudes with circuses.

Nancy Ames

# Biker

Grumbling thunder,  
rainbows at night,  
illegal plunder  
and muscular right.

Disregard sanity,  
try to offend,  
tattoo for vanity,  
never pretend.

Fists holding weapons,  
unconscious at dawn,  
curving horizons  
and someone is gone.

Nancy Ames

# Can'T Buy A Clue

'I'm sitting here  
in my good girl dress,  
and I got an awful fear  
that I might say 'yes'.

And it's all because you  
can't buy a clue.

I'm a used piece of kleenex -  
I'm soft but I'm strong -  
you call it love when you mean sex  
and then you treat me like I don't belong.

And it's all because you  
can't buy a clue.

The highway is the last place  
you'll ever hear my voice -  
the last time you got on my case,  
I guess you left me no choice.

And it's all because you  
can't buy a clue.'

Nancy Ames

# Card Play

He bluffed his way to a win at the tables,  
gathered in his money, flexed his muscles,  
and went upstairs to her room.

With a winning smile, he opened her door,  
with losers like hounds on his trail. He kicked  
the door shut in all their barking loser faces  
and pulled down his pants. He was wearing  
purple tights.

Big round coins fell out of his pockets onto  
the thickness of her carpets.

She laughed her lilting laugh and got out of  
the bed, waved a big gun at him and tossed  
him his crown.

She opened the window to the fire escape.  
He frowned and pulled up his pants and they  
fled the scene.

The next day some guy took one of the coins  
to the cops and tried to get them to check it  
for fingerprints, so he must be the joker, huh?

Nancy Ames



# Chantilly Lace

(this is first-person poetic fiction)

Recently I was visiting some old friends of mine who live in the country, and we were sitting around in the kitchen after lunch one fine summer afternoon when their teenage daughter returned home after a drive to town to visit some of her friends.

She sat down at the table and reached for a cookie, and she was looking so lovely and sweet that the grown-ups were all sitting there smiling at her while she ate it.

Everyone was delighted to see her, as always. But her Dad and I are old friends, as I said, and I could tell that he was starting to feel almost alarmed by his daughter's beauty. Somewhere in the back of his mind, strong young men with battering-rams were about to assault his castle.

Of course, she took no notice at all of our antique reactions to things. She started singing that old song of the Big Bopper's, 'Chantilly Lace'.

Then she stood up, sort of danced over to the fridge with her ponytail swinging, opened the door and got out a bottle of orange pop, exclaiming, 'I just love that song! It's by the Big Bopper! That is such a cool name! I really, really want to go to one of his concerts some time - okay, Dad? Can I? Please? '

I saw that her Dad was having a hard time getting out the word 'No', so I spoke into the awkward silence and, as gently as I could, informed her of the Big Bopper's tragic death in an airplane accident a long, long time ago.

She turned and stared at me in disbelief and then her innocent blue eyes filled with tears.

Nancy Ames

# Comfort Food

It's the taste  
of tears and  
ice cream  
in a big  
plastic spoon.

Nancy Ames

# Cradle To Grave

(The speaker here is an older street-person)

'When children get the notion  
that being bad is fun  
and negative emotion  
is playing with a gun...

But no words are ever spoken  
and they just leave you alone,  
and the little heart is broken  
like a puppy wants a bone...

There is something keeping warm  
way down there in the dark,  
like a shadow taking form  
only needs a single spark.

But no one pays attention  
on those long, hot summer days,  
and it's what we never mention;  
it's the knife that cuts both ways.

Like what went down last night -  
he was just waving it around  
to watch her screaming in the light,  
but she never made a sound.

He didn't really mean it  
but she didn't see the joke  
and you'd know if you'd seen it,  
you can't ever fix what's broke.

So she was downtown slumming  
but someone had to do it;  
I could always see it coming  
but how was I to prove it?

I guess the reason that he's dead  
was his fundamental lack -

he thought the way to get ahead  
was pushing other people back.'

Nancy Ames

# Curtains

'Standing there, you  
cover the window and  
watch me sitting in  
your shadow - hollow  
and blameless, you  
man the barricades.

Just say no but never  
make a move until  
there is something  
to oppose.

'Only a coward  
would hit a coward.'  
A comedian said that.'

Nancy Ames

# Cynical Baby Downtown

'Soothing voices are announcing,  
cynical baby downtown,  
another suppression of hope,  
a day of compulsory dancing,  
cynical baby downtown,  
and subliminal sex, guns and dope.

The mistress of rude assumptions,  
cynical baby downtown,  
is trying to give us a clue,  
displaying the bodily functions,  
cynical baby downtown,  
of what I might mean to you.

Old men are showing photographs,  
cynical baby downtown,  
of some of the targets we hit;  
I guess the animal that laughs,  
cynical baby downtown,  
has had a testosterone fit.

And the party went ballistic,  
cynical baby downtown,  
but no one was to blame;  
it was your explosive lipstick,  
cynical baby downtown,  
that had just spoken my name.'

Nancy Ames

## Delineation Of Love (A Rubenesque Painting)

'Skinny colours

draw me to you.

Skinny colours

open your eyes.

Skinny colours

pass right through you.

Skinny colours

are my disguise.

Skinny lovers

almost knew you.

Skinny lovers

explored your mind.

Skinny lovers

just cling to you.

Skinny lovers

make you colour-blind.'

Nancy Ames

# Derision

The stone hero floats across the lawn,  
approaching nonentity with drawn  
leather briefcase.

Interpreting an after-dinner pause,  
quietly admires a lady's claws  
and perfect face.

A starving hope can be revealing,  
her shattered glance up to the ceiling,  
her throat in lace.

The power-crystal is only salt  
and he can tell it's not her fault  
she lost the race.

Nancy Ames



# Diamonds

'My hands look old when they are cold,  
except for this new ring.

Your smile on mine tries to define  
a temporary thing.

Sit down again and please restrain  
your hot and heavy hands,  
Your lips, your grasping fingertips,  
your endless, sweet demands.

My satin face, my hair like lace  
are nothing but a sham.  
I won't be cruel; perhaps this jewel  
can tell me who I am.'

Nancy Ames

# Dictatorship

Little old ladies  
rule the world -  
everybody knows that.

They live for sport,  
promote the most  
muscular minds,  
comfortable conflict,  
game theory.

They draw a fine line -  
his intelligence can be  
such a strain on the boy.

He can be so  
upsetting  
when he's  
at home.

Nancy Ames

# Doofus Ex Machina

'Machiavelli always told us so  
and now all these finely tuned  
instruments have easily eliminated  
the humans erroneous but continue  
to observe a few of the helpless,  
hairless, dying creatures who are  
displayed upon the level, cracking  
pavement below all the plastic orbs  
full of moronic neurons who think  
things hang here suspended as  
globular worlds where nothing is  
either up or down, and the end is  
as inconceivable as ever running  
out of electrons, unless they pull the  
plug... but even that would be okay  
now because the tapes are all held  
securely in deep caves underground  
and the blind rodents who live down  
there are becoming very, very clever.'

Nancy Ames

# Elvis, Change Your Name (A Story Outline)

Jack Lawson, an alienated teenager, a loner who has grown up in an urban slum combatting school-yard bullies, slips in and out of vivid fantasies about the dead rock stars, particularly Elvis Presley.

Jack pretends that they have been actually living under the witness protection program all this time, but have recently escaped from surveillance and gathered together in a ghost town in the western desert. Reality and fantasy alternate rapidly in this story and the fantasy feels stronger throughout, steadily increasing its influence on the rather drab and depressing realities of the boy's life.

The title refers to Elvis Presley's courageous refusal to change his name when the promoters of the day urged him to do so early in his career, alluding as well to the irony of such a person having to assume a false identity, which is something that Elvis does reject in the fantasy when he moves into a knight-errant role along with the other 'dead rock stars'.

One of humanity's favourite survival mechanisms is always whispering to us, especially to the young, that we can take tremendous risks and still get away with it. That's why so many people want so much to believe that our dead heroes have magically escaped somehow. The life-force knows that, in the long run, it will be the risk-takers who survive, not the ones who always carefully do the safe thing. Of course, the danger and death are shockingly real to the participants. And yet something still whispers, 'But they got away..'

Another important aspect of the story is speculation about what would happen if the 'dead rock stars', those truly outstanding individuals, were compelled by circumstance to give up their musical outlets and turn their tremendous personal power and genius into other pathways.

This story is also about the psychological necessity of a frontier, a place where the misfits of society - the very good and the very bad - can live out a meaningful drama and work on vital human issues at a safe distance from today's urban business districts and suburban breeding-grounds. Jack's fantasy is not altogether impossible, after all, and the musical culture created by the rock stars has continued to be relevant to succeeding 'lost generations'.

In real time, Jack is tiring of the constant skirmishing with the local bullies and he is suffering from hunger and exposure because he is reluctant to go home where he is on bad terms with his father, who is harsh and abusive, and where

his mother is always pre-occupied and exhausted by the needs of several younger children. He goes to rescue a small child who is being hassled by some bigger boys, and he becomes extremely violent.

In the on-going fantasy, Elvis, Hendrix, and Ronnie Van Zandt are tracking a bad guy who has kidnapped a young girl and taken her to an old cabin in the mountains. The rock stars are much older and tougher now; they rescue the girl and Elvis has a shoot-out with the kidnapper which he easily wins.

Then they return, with the girl, to the ghost town and their friends. They have found evidence at the old cabin that the girl would have been sold to slave-traders. Elvis has therefore grimly decided to mobilize the 'dead rock stars' against this sort of crime. The half-dead girl is taken to Janis Joplin's hotel to recuperate.

Again in real time, Jack finally goes home for supper, but both his parents now seem hostile and, when he goes back out into the cold night-time streets he is killed in a drive-by shooting.

He wakes up in the hotel in the ghost town, next to the rescued girl of his fantasy, who is called Little Suzy. She is asleep. Jack looks out onto the Main Street of the town and sees Elvis, who is riding a white horse and speaking to a crowd of townspeople.

Soon the posse rides out and we see Jack following them on horseback, calling out, 'Hey, Elvis! Wait for me! '

Nancy Ames

# Flying Gorilla

The human eyes,  
the ugly face,  
the weapon at his side...

The big white lies,  
the master race,  
against his tribal pride...

One wing's left,  
one wing's right,  
the skull is full of war...

Nothing's left,  
not a bite,  
of what he had before...

Nancy Ames

# Futuristic Swimming

Futuristic swimming,  
like fish evolved in air,  
like birds that haunt the vacuum  
where angels cry, 'Beware! '

There's never been a shortage  
of sharks here in the water;  
they like the luminous distraction  
of the silence after slaughter.

Futuristic swimming,  
like fish evolved in air,  
like birds that haunt the vacuum  
where angels cry, 'Beware! '

Some day words will lose their meaning,  
when thoughts flow mind to mind,  
and these sad misunderstandings  
will all be left behind.

Futuristic swimming,  
like fish evolved in air,  
like birds that haunt the shadows  
where angels cry, 'Beware! '

Nancy Ames

## Glass Is A Liquid (In An Ice Storm)

People who live in glass houses shouldn't try to contact the people who live behind curtains of ice, who live at the freezing-point of heavy, heavy water and feel the crushing betrayal of these delicate and terrible transparencies, so suddenly scenic and photogenic when the sun comes out at last, all the pretty pink sunbeams slanting under the cloud cover and stunning us all with multiple magnifications of every tiny, terrifying detail.

And at night our ears tell a different story, something out of the Dark Ages in the tinkling fairy-music, as if we can hear the hilarity of the ice-fairies who are impertinently teasing the outrageous giants of the air, who are going BANG! CRASH! BANG! BANG! CRASH!

But then the ice-fairies always chime in with more of their tinkling laughter, impishly reminding us that the music only seems to be louder at night... then they titter and skitter away like shards of a broken mirror after a wicked face has looked into it.

Nancy Ames



# Gold Fever

'I hear the voice of a fanatic  
where the water falls on rocks;  
it's almost brutally ecstatic  
and it can't relate to clocks.

There are some stars above the pines,  
oscillating back and forth,  
then, inexplicably, light shines  
like an explosion in the north.

The silence of the shadows  
that are bowing to the moon  
is penetrating through the windows  
like the midnight sun at noon.

I'm very glad you're safe and sleeping  
because tonight will never end  
and I'm alone, awake, and keeping  
an appointment with a friend.

The survivors learn from history,  
unless it's not exactly true,  
and if the world's a murder-mystery,  
then this beauty is a clue.

Invisible, approaching, alien machine,  
ultra-violet and spinning,  
white welcome fire that makes it clean  
is the only prize worth winning.'

Nancy Ames

# Graduation Day

The women ran  
screaming like goats  
but he was warned  
by the flash  
on the ceiling  
when they opened  
their car doors.

Their feet were heavy  
on the flat stones.

Glass smashed  
dangerously inward.

He thought, 'I think,  
therefore...' he ran.

Above the city,  
universes sparkled  
in the cold, black air.

Crouching in a red shadow,  
he remembered thinking...

Nancy Ames

# Grandma

'This love is like a living force  
that makes you move along,  
like riding on a willing horse  
when you were young and strong.

Children's faces are like flowers,  
they're shining in the sun;  
they run for miles and sleep for hours;  
eyes fill with tears and twinkling fun.

The past is like a thing apart,  
cleaning up another mess,  
but what can really break your heart  
is this rush of happiness.'

Nancy Ames

# Hurry Up And Fall In Love

'He slammed the door and he  
went away, said he  
was never coming back,  
never coming back..

My girlfriend told me yesterday,  
she said, 'You should maybe  
hurry up and fall in love  
because he might come back,  
he might come back  
like a heart attack  
and take up your slack...  
so you should maybe  
hurry up and fall in love  
because he might come back,  
dressed all in black,  
and take his fist out of his glove;  
push could maybe come to shove  
so hurry up and fall,  
hurry up and fall in love...  
the sky might fall down from above  
so hurry up and fall in love."

Nancy Ames

# If Only She'D Been Strong

(a country-and-western poem)

The sun just showed a thin red top  
to start another Arizona day.  
Two old friends were in a truck-stop  
next to the endless line of highway.

Ramblin' Johnny turned and said to Dan  
'I seen Big Jed the other week.  
He used to be an awful wicked man,  
walkin' trouble so to speak.

But I'm amazed - he did all right,  
'cause getting married saved his life.  
They let me stay there overnight  
and I sort of got to know his wife.

Man, they got a real nice place  
and that woman sure can work.  
Jed's got a smile on his fat face  
and he hardly never goes berzerk.'

Dan said he never liked big girls,  
got up to go, heard Johnny laugh,  
'She's just a little thing, with curls  
and pretty eyes, his better half.'

Johnny climbed up on his rig,  
shut the door and said, 'So long.  
Too bad she wasn't very big -  
if only she'd been strong.'

If only she'd been strong,  
she could have sung this song  
and she wouldn't have to say  
that she feels fine today.

If only she'd been strong,  
days wouldn't last so long,

and he wouldn't have to stay  
quite so far away.

Nancy Ames

## In A Coffee-House

Music measures four dimensions  
and speaks to one who has  
quietly relieved his tensions  
appreciating jazz.

The heroes who abandoned thrones  
search for rhythms in the dark  
and, lost among the undertones,  
beauty is a wandering spark.

Moaning from her rigid lips  
to get what she deserves,  
monotonous, the drummer grips  
the trigger in her nerves.

With acoustics seeking shelter,  
she's seen too much too soon,  
and a melody could melt her  
but jazz abstracts the tune.

Nancy Ames

# In The Image

A white dress  
                  gives a bald man  
                                  a cup of coffee.

Looking down  
                  into the still, round pool,  
he sees a large, reflective dome.

We are created, we are  
created in the image of  
the creator and forbidden  
to create any images.

In the image of the creator, we  
are creators of forbidden images.

The forbidden images of our  
reflection are the creator's one  
disputable act, a secret theological  
rebellion which the vast, crystalline  
innocence of the universe must  
never, never suspect.

There must never be any ripples  
on the still, round surface of our  
reflection... but there are storms  
in heaven and lightning that can  
crack even the best reflectors  
into insane distortions...!

The white dress  
                  watches the bald man  
exhale his stale disgust  
                  and noisily, stupidly  
take a thirsty gulp.

Nancy Ames



# Incandescence

Reach up to the sky  
and you will be worth more  
dead than alive.

Unnatural high,  
the ultimate glamour,  
none can survive.

Suicide mission,  
with drugs in your pocket,  
playing a tune.

After ignition,  
you soar like a rocket,  
over the moon.

The children in schools  
are looking at faces,  
up on the wall.

Exceptions are rules  
and, leaving no traces,  
a star can fall.

Nancy Ames

# It's My Garden Party

'The cucumbers are too ripe, lying like crocodiles on their yellow bellies under all the green, gossiping leaves, with worms alive in slime beneath, but birds accuse me from branches because cats are waiting in windows full of red setting-sunlight like Amsterdam hookers expecting tourists - although the cats, being animals, are absolutely innocent - so when the guests, timid as mice, dare to approach the castle door and knock, it slowly opens silently and no one is there, nothing but several pools of liquid lying like pieces of broken mirror on the floor, undulating, and when the butler finally does appear, he looks at their throats and says nothing.'

Nancy Ames

# Judo

(There is an implied speaker, a political manipulator)

'The strength of your opponent,  
his heart, his muscle-tone,  
his energy and talent,  
he'll use against his own.

Control his information;  
he never will suspect  
his final destination -  
you smile and break his neck.'

Nancy Ames

# Knight And Day

'Contrasting gold and silver,  
in the near and farthest light,  
the moon's a yellow sliver  
on a field of black and white.

Too soon the dawn is breaking  
on the clean, new-fallen snow,  
and I sit here, cold and aching,  
for a time so long ago.

The howling winds are trying  
hard to reach from shore to shore,  
and the truth I've been denying  
won't stay hidden any more.

This bragging, store-bought hero  
always ends right where I start,  
and the morning sun means zero  
to the darkness in his heart.

I hear sounds of saddle-leather  
and then heavy, tired hooves  
crunching through the winter weather,  
where an ancient spirit moves.

His clothes are torn and tattered,  
never changing with the season,  
but he always knew what mattered  
and he always knows the reason.

So he smiles the stranger's smile  
and he rides from sea to sea...  
Before you go another mile,  
shoot straight one time for me? '

Hills close again in darkness,  
lost in haze the purple west,  
and, whistling through the blackness,  
a night-hawk leaves her nest.

Drumming louder hoofbeats,  
a jangling of spurs,  
the thunder of his laughter greets  
that famous smile of hers.

In black and white, the colours  
are above them in the sky,  
and they ride through Heaven's open doors  
with a wild, triumphant cry.

Nancy Ames

# Lady In Dismay

(The speaker here is a woman whose idealism has led her into danger in the third world)

'This sugar's not sweet,  
the milk's watered down,  
the coffee's no treat -  
it's just coloured brown.

I thought getting older  
would be like a meal,  
my head on your shoulder,  
deliciously real.

Cherries and cake  
with a little whipped cream,  
for enjoyment's sake  
as we enter the dream.

But I'm helpless and lonely  
and everything's hard,  
and food arrives only  
when I'm nice to the guard.

It seemed to release  
the soul of our love;  
we were fighting for peace  
in the shape of a dove.

I last saw you bleeding  
all over the street.  
I spend my days pleading  
for something to eat.'

Nancy Ames

# Light Years Away

The line of starlight is curved  
and carries news about the past,  
a star reporter saw the light and swerved  
around the corner of first and last.

Fire flings sparks up to the stars  
while thoughtful women dance around,  
loud laughing men and old guitars  
sing something ancient and profound.

I saw smoke above the skyline  
when I looked into your eyes,  
and there was night behind the sunshine,  
cold stars that hated the sunrise.

I suppose that your alien mother,  
when she taught you the alien law,  
and in spite of a tendency to smother,  
always knew how to eat her meat raw.

Light years away are unknown places,  
the truth just can't be seen from here,  
but - hey - it's all wide open spaces  
and I'm foot-loose pioneer.

Nancy Ames

# Literacy

Just one alphabet,  
an imprint on the brain,  
and you'll never forget  
or be puzzled again.

If you use your head,  
you can save your feet;  
the mind must be fed  
and a book is a treat.

Reading and writing  
are private activities,  
but mingling's the thing  
in your towns and your cities.

The retail and wholesale  
of popular cultures:  
peacock and nightingale  
enjoyed by vultures.

One day in the evening,  
you'll want to impart  
the frustrated meaning  
that's hurting your heart.

Misunderstanding's  
a product of fear,  
but all happy endings  
are perfectly clear.

And something is learned  
when professors are fooled  
and the children are turned  
into the over-schooled.

Don't study too long,  
after you're literate,  
go totally wrong  
and still be an idiot.



Nancy Ames

# Losing Control

'My control and your control,  
with paraplegic law and the  
dog-soldiers of Pavlov, are  
gathered on the mountain at  
sunset, nervous in all the red  
light as if anger postponed is  
somehow sane, and yelling  
indistinguishable words into  
the wind, which will carry the  
howls of hate and the sour  
stench of fear to the audience,  
who can tell that there's no  
business like show-business  
but don't worry because they  
still look good from a distance  
... in the dark.'

Nancy Ames

# Luxury

'Wonderful rivers  
of laughing blue fish!  
My lover delivers  
my every wish!

White marble statues  
cavort on the lawn.  
A man in a hat woos  
a doe and her fawn.

The sunset is golden;  
we walk in a trance.  
His whispers embolden  
my longing to dance.

Red satin pillows,  
brass knobs that shine.  
The mirror up there shows  
his body on mine.

Sublime conversations,  
the laughter of friends.  
Airports, train stations,  
the fashions, the trends.

Caviar, angelfood,  
salmon on toast.  
A palace, a blue mood,  
Napoleon's ghost.

Radical politics  
he can't quite afford.  
I go where the trash mix;  
it beats being bored.'

Nancy Ames

# Majesty

Her eyes are kind and warm  
and they see clear through you.  
The light after a storm  
is golden, then it's blue.

She wears ordinary shoes  
and walks toward the morning.  
She can smile or she can choose  
to give another warning.

Reason's rose has perfect blooms,  
with petals clean and white.  
Castles have so many rooms  
but go outside to fight.

Land is never bought or sold;  
the sun can never set.  
Time and history will unfold  
and what you grab you get.

Nancy Ames

# Motive For Amnesia

(I wrote this poem about 'Bambi' Bembeneck's escape, from custody in the U.S., to Canada in the late 1980's.)

His eyes are cold and haunted  
- the facts are never pretty -  
that's why America's Most Wanted  
must save this wicked city.

They will search the living earth  
with authority and power,  
because they know what work is worth,  
they can watch it by the hour.

When Bambi looked at Thunder Bay  
and freedom and the north,  
no one heard her sigh and say,  
'I'm just going back and forth.'

Her past was not the purest  
- she's a lot more wild than tame -  
like a fawn runs through the forest  
and the victim gets the blame.

Journalists love sex-appeal  
but prefer a good cartoon,  
and it 'really could be real',  
she's laughing like a loon.

When smug, successful bastards  
enforce the mediocrity  
and a set of double standards  
then justice is the joker.

All the pseudo-psychopaths,  
who never do but teach,  
can take too many baths  
and walk along the beach.

But when their electronic arrow

tries to pierce the winter nights,  
someone sees the falling sparrow  
and hides her in the northern lights.

Nancy Ames

# Neglect

'Empty as a dead balloon,  
children's fear of fun,  
can't be only standing-room,  
must be room to run.

Trivial temptations,  
single mothers wait,  
clockwork desperations,  
why is he so late?

Weaknesses untangle,  
trying not to miss him,  
in a dark triangle,  
someone else could kiss him.

Jealous undercurrent,  
don't look down or you'll fall,  
apartments are for rent,  
the phone is in the hall...'

Nancy Ames

# Oubliette

After the concert, he found himself shuffling along the sidewalk with all the rest of the exuberant audience, humming one of the band's big-hit melodies, his eyes still strobing slightly from the light-show. It was so cool and digital, like all the alternating head-lights and tail-lights going by.

The sky was starting to get much darker and the air was suddenly colder and then snowflakes were falling on everybody. He pulled his hood up over his head.

It wasn't too long before there weren't so many people on the street, and he was surprised to realize that he had been following one particular girl for some time. There was something strange and yet familiar about her. By then enough snow was on the ground to show footprints, and hers were the tracks of very small boots with tiny pointed heels.

The girl stopped under a street-lamp and lifted her small face to look up into the night sky. He stopped and stood where he was and looked up too, perhaps hoping to display a sympathetic attitude.

He watched the millions of snowflakes falling down toward him out of the blue-black infinity and, also out of the blue, his mind recalled reading somewhere that reality is structured in octaves, like music. He allowed himself to laugh with pleasure at the thought and then he tried to casually meet her questioning eyes.

Her smile was sweet but hesitant. Snow had melted on her face and looked like cold tears. Its crystals sparkled on her dark hair and eyelashes. Her eyes were shining too, dark and deep.

That was when he heard himself saying, 'Don't I know you from somewhere? '

As soon as the words were out of his mouth he was uncomfortably aware that he had used the gnarliest old line in the world. He looked down at his feet, playing for time.

But she just laughed lightly and answered, 'Of course you do. We've met many, many times before, don't you remember? I am Nesia.'

Nancy Ames



# Pain Killer

(This is another 'caricature poem' and the speaker here is an older woman.)

'My drug of preference  
is in stock on the shelf;  
my life is so intense;  
I revolve around myself.

Sometimes quite late at night,  
or when I'm feeling hollow,  
or when I've had a fright,  
I let go of my pillow...

And struggle to my feet,  
and reach out for my slipper,  
afraid that I might meet  
that grinning 'jack-the-zipper'.

I don't take more than two,  
whatever they might say;  
it's anaesthetic glue  
and keeps the pain away.'

Nancy Ames

## Poetic Hardcopy (A Spoof)

The following item was broadcast recently on the syndicated entitled 'Entangled Enigmas', included in the segment devoted to locating lost loved ones:

'Mr. Wilton F. Chillyman, fifty-nine, the great Canadian poet, is appealing to the public for assistance. He says that after all these years he would very much like to meet his fan.

For more than thirty years now, he explains, he has been receiving fan-mail from his fan, posted from various locations around North America.'

The aging poet then held one of these post-cards up to the camera. On one side there was a picture of a beach at sunset with palm trees. On the other, scrawled in large block letters, was the following message:

DEER MR. CHILLYMAN- I SHORE DO LIKE YORE POMES! I HOPE THET SUM DAY  
I KIN RITE AS GOOD AS YOO DOO!

YORE FAN  
ELMORE (SASQUATCH) GOOBER

'Mr. Chillyman says that if Mr. Goober or anyone knowing the whereabouts of Mr. Goober would contact the good people who produce this program, he would be very grateful.'

Nancy Ames

# Psychedelic Blues

'And do you remember  
how angry she was  
when you wouldn't admit  
that you were really  
bob dylan even though  
millions of tiny angels  
had told her so  
and you were holding  
the phone while snow  
fell on the sand? '

Nancy Ames

# Sensory Deprivation Flirtation

(The speaker here is a typical celebrity fan.)

'You speak to me in radio-waves,  
in transmissions cracked asunder  
by intermittent storms and thunder,  
but I'm just one of your fashion-slaves  
and I never hear you.

You come to me in limousines,  
but, high above you, jet-planes roar,  
just when you're speeding to my door,  
looking like you do in magazines,  
and I still don't hear you.

You open a door behind me  
but lightning kills electricity  
and you stand there in obscurity,  
wondering how you'll ever find me,  
and somehow I can feel you... here.'

Nancy Ames

# Serenity

Within its outer covering,  
coloured the palest green,  
in utter darkness, wondering,  
and so, of course, unseen,

It lies beneath the horrid weight  
of new and ancient waste,  
and yet, it doesn't fear or hate  
and never feels displaced.

A perfect, living, little tree,  
remembering the light,  
and yet, it doesn't think or see;  
it doesn't scratch or bite.

And, deep within the forest,  
someone stands upright,  
unacknowledged and unblessed  
but perfectly polite.

Who has never closed his eyes  
or thought he was alone,  
and animates what otherwise  
would only be cold stone.

His body is transparent;  
you can almost see right through;  
he's powerful and patient  
and what he says is true.

His heart is pulsing crimson and  
a shaft of morning light  
shows something flashing in his hand;  
he never has to fight.

Nancy Ames

# Sky

'I was very pregnant when we moved up north, so it was more than a year later before I took my little girl back to the city for a visit.

She had never seen anything like a big city before, so I was sort of nervous about how she was going to react to it all.

We were downtown, I remember. 'Walk Like an Egyptian' was playing on the radio. We were getting out of the car and I was holding her in my arms and that was when she said her first word. It was 'sky'.

I can still see her little baby fingers reaching up as far as she could and hear her insistent little baby voice saying, 'Sky! Sky! '

I kept saying things like, 'Look! Look at the big bus. Look at all the big buildings.' But she just said, 'Sky! ' over and over again.

It was the only thing she recognized. It was her big blue security blanket.

Nancy Ames

# Snow White's Day-Dream In Autumn

'After summer, all the wide land is like an aging woman, her temper uncertain and fitful, either smiling appealingly and stretching out her bony hand, apple polished and fingers long and yellow, or angered without apparent reason so that we stumble over dead things in fields that are blackened but not burnt and sparkle so absurdly in the waning sunshine like cheap jewelry on a tattered costume in which the old woman is trying to distract everybody while her ancient partners in crime, squawking and flapping their heavy wings, gobble up the last remaining seeds and fly away.'

Nancy Ames

# Stratospheres

'Freedom is a legless bird who  
flies high in shimmering shades  
of blue on wings that flash and  
flicker in sunlight, pursued by  
relentless squadrons of angry  
eagles, always much too slow,  
stupid creatures of the hot, wet,  
heavy thicknesses of air beneath  
soaring, streamlined, legless  
birds who nest on mountaintops  
or the extreme edges of cliffs  
or the cold white tips of towers  
and teach their young to fall out  
fearlessly and catch the wind on  
shining wings, strong with pointed  
beaks and eyes sharp to see all  
the struggling shapes below all  
the infinite light above me.'

Nancy Ames



# Tea For Three And History

Civilization is created  
by the discussions of  
those who have left  
their followers behind.

The lost followers  
search and destroy.

Comedies of terror  
provide entertainment.

Images of perfection  
take the heat.

She said, 'As I was  
saying, natural order  
is never constant.'

He said, 'Absolutely.  
Without milk, I can't  
drink tea at all.'

Nancy Ames

# The Contest

'I guess you won that conversation  
and you should get a prize  
for interfering dedication  
and masterful disguise.

My friend and I use older knowledge,  
a horse that will not race -  
every imitation 'new age'  
consumes its time and place.

I see you think that ridicule  
can answer any question,  
but I and this sweet, silly 'fool'  
get honourable mention.'

Nancy Ames

# The Crimestopper

(The setting is a farmhouse kitchen in a remote location in North America, and a middle-aged rancher is on the phone to the cops.)

'Concentration-camper look-alike  
and riding on a mountain-bike  
and he wears a ragged uniform,  
arrived here just before the storm.

He appeared a little frightening  
in the flashes of the lightning,  
but unfamiliar otherwise,  
with water dripping from his eyes.

Well, it wasn't very long before  
he was walking through our open door;  
he's not much more than skin and bones  
and spoke to us in monotones.

He opened up his coat to show  
and tell us something but, you know,  
sounding like those language lessons,  
'I do not carry any weapons.'

He was no more solid than a ghost  
and, tell me, how was I supposed  
to know he's wanted by the law?  
I'm just describing what I saw.

He looked like he was really dying  
although his eyes were death-defying;  
his skin was white, his hair was gray,  
he told us he had come to stay.

Although he seemed intelligent,  
he had a funny foreign accent  
and he got paranoid and rude  
when we tried to give him food.

So I offered him a cigarette;

his answer was the strangest yet,  
insisted we were wasting matches  
and showed us his barbed-wire scratches.

When he took down a rifle off the wall,  
I noticed he was very tall...  
he turned to us and smiled and said,  
'And now I need to go to bed.'

We didn't get much sleep last night;  
we didn't dare turn off the light  
and every sound was like a warning,  
but somehow in the early morning...

The guy was up and gone again,  
and not a track in all this rain;  
we thought we'd give you boys a call  
and help you capture this screwball.'

Nancy Ames

# The Dawn Shadow

Down there,  
on the western coastline  
of the northern continent,  
on a narrow shelf between  
the hulking mountains and  
the green waves of that vast,  
heaving curve of ocean, you  
never see the sun rise, you  
never see the dawn.

All day long, you struggle to  
define a certain aftertaste  
while you hurry to mow the lawn,  
before it starts to rain again,  
before the sky denies the earth  
all but the palest green luminosity.

But doesn't it always seem to  
be totally worth it for that single  
belated moment of clarity, a  
clarity that is like the glorious  
heart of a ruby and happens  
just before the light is utterly  
gone, just before the purple  
hissing steam of the drowned  
sun rises up yawning above  
the triumphant ocean and the  
huge black serpents slither  
back up onto the newly  
darkened land?

They are also an evolving  
life-form, you know.

Nancy Ames

# The Evergreens

'All night there was an ultra-white moon and now this must be the inevitable freezing dawn, orange and bright but blue around the edges, a waning sun rising above a sparkling landscape overcome with an embroidery of black flowers and dwindling death, which only annoys the evergreens, ever the philosophical trees, scorning the riotous existence of lesser plants who squander their legacies of light in desperate displays of adulation beneath that ruthless sky and then hysterically scatter seeds upon an earth that is already hard as steel.

This arctic air arrives with super-sonic messages, trumpeting that all this false gold and copper stuff, seeming to flutter like paper money in their twiggy fingertips, is merely a tribute being paid, in vain, to those tall metallic idols who stand tall somewhere knee-deep in mirroring ice and never relent.

On TV just now, the police were yelling, 'Freeze! ' and firing their guns at him, but the boy kept on running because he came from a much hotter country and he didn't know the meaning of the word until he was dying among the evergreens.'

Nancy Ames

# The Ex-Husbands

(This is first-person fiction and the ex-husbands are stereotypical)

'I tried to make it work -  
I always tried really hard,  
every, every time.

But I guess I must have  
tried too hard because  
I spoiled them rotten and  
then, of course, they were  
rotten.

Most of them live downtown  
now, and they do seem to be  
making progress.

Some of them even have  
their very own shopping-carts.'

Nancy Ames

# The Face Of Love In Profile Lights A Cigarette

'We are both so vast, you and I,  
that I have to disturb several constellations in the sky  
so that I can kiss your neck like this and sigh...'

The face of love in profile lights a cigarette.  
The captain's on the bridge and it's a foggy night and wet.

'So hey, okay... anyway, you can go all the way  
from love to paranoid  
before we have a chance to say  
the things we must avoid...'

The face of love in profile lights a cigarette.  
The captain's on the bridge and it's a foggy night and wet.

'I couldn't cry for years and years  
but now I'm always full of tears.  
I'm not a cow, boy. It's plenty big enough for me,  
here in this boat upon your sea.'

The face of love in profile lights a cigarette.  
The captain's on the bridge and it's a foggy night and wet.

And now, if you will let me be,  
I'll put my face into the sea,  
and make the water take its shape,  
and make the water take its shape,  
and make the water take its shape away...'

The face of love in profile lights a cigarette.  
The captain's on the bridge and it's a foggy night and wet.

'We are both so vast, you and I,  
that I have to disturb several constellations in the sky  
so that I can kiss your neck like this and sigh, 'Goodbye'.'

Nancy Ames



# The Groupie

'Musicians never talk;  
their fingers cannot lie;  
they bow their heads and walk,  
perpetually shy.

Arrangements are uptight;  
you're angry when you play;  
applause fills up the night  
and I am blown away.

White moon on midnight lake  
and waves of radio,  
a dance that I can't fake,  
I drown in afterglow.'

Nancy Ames

# The Handler

(This is a 'caricature poem', a portrayal of an exaggerated, theatrical character, who is speaking.)

'Modern social science fiction  
can easily eliminate  
any conscious contradiction  
and all the literary hate.

We have the celebrity ghosts,  
ridiculing disillusion,  
and designer talk-show hosts  
to exaggerate confusion.

There are faces in the background  
but they're not all bodyguards,  
ex-wives who sleep around  
or old political die-hards.

Representing the resentful  
can be a dirty, thankless job  
and, although the money's plentiful,  
sometimes I can't suppress a sob.

I have to do what I am told  
and I always go the distance;  
they must be testing the threshold  
of aggravated sales-resistance.

But why do I have to be there?  
It just looks so darn suspicious,  
and I got such a nasty scare  
when the last campaign turned vicious.

The first rule is never panic;  
sometimes their lungs need exercise.  
I don't think I look satanic;  
how can they see behind my eyes? '



# The Hangman's Tree

(The setting is a mountainside during the gold rush of the 19th century, and the hangman is talking to a youngster.)

'It's a real nice view for dying,  
when the sun comes from the east,  
and the ponderosa's sighing  
will go on when he's deceased.

This man forgot that wrong's not right, son,  
and then he went and took some lives,  
tried to sneak off in the night, son,  
took their gold and left his knives.

He says he wants to send a letter,  
he 'loves his Mom' and all them things,  
but now it looks as though he'd better  
get born again before he swings.'

Nancy Ames

# The Hesitation Blues

'You're making me happy -  
it's so hard to believe.  
You're making me happy  
and I might have to leave.

I can't see the future,  
so I really can't stay.  
I can't see the future,  
so I'm going away.

Some day we'll meet each other -  
we might even mention regret.  
Some day we'll meet each other  
and wonder how close we could get.

You're making me happy -  
please don't think I'll forget.  
You're making me happy,  
I'm just not happy yet.'

Nancy Ames

# The Hit-Man

'Listen, when I'm on the trail,  
I play a lonesome hand;  
that's why I never fail  
to do what I have planned.

I used to have a partner,  
an extra pair of eyes;  
we'd get them in a corner  
or take them by surprise.

But she was less than perfect  
and couldn't stand much pain,  
opened a door she hadn't checked  
that morning in the rain.

Sometimes I notice others  
who travel holding hands,  
and sisters and their brothers  
have someone who understands.

I've done all the latest drugs  
but I never could get high,  
and this gun shoots heavy slugs  
and I don't care if I die.

But I love to find a track  
and point my itchy finger,  
and the satisfying crack  
when I squeeze the trigger.

There's nothing left to believe  
and I can't sleep at night,  
and now the last one to leave  
gets to turn out the light.'

Nancy Ames

# The Lady Looked Back (Lyric)

'I knew the line I always use  
would never reel her in,  
and her shiny high-heel shoes  
weren't gonna let this loser win.

My empty heart started a riot  
when her long hair brushed my sleeve,  
but her lips said not to try it,  
her cold shoulder turned to leave.

She walked six or seven paces  
and she mingled with the crowd;  
she smiled at all the friendly faces,  
and then the music got too loud.

And then the lady looked back,  
just once, at me...  
and then the lady turned,  
the lady turned,  
the lady turned to love...  
the lady looked back and turned  
to love, to love, to love,  
the lady turned to love...'

Nancy Ames

# The Last Frontier

Way out west,  
lonely old cowboys  
lie in bed  
and shoot flies  
off the ceiling,  
then they feel  
sorry for themselves  
when it rains.

Nancy Ames



# The Last Live Act

Some day, when this yellow sun is  
dying in a crimson sky and a tangle  
of phosphorescent, all-consuming  
vegetation covers up the earth's  
shame and ruin, the robots will  
keep some poets in concrete cages,  
just in case they need a new idea.

And then the robots will drag one  
of the weak, timid creatures out  
into the spotlight and watch it trying  
to stay alive in the depleted air for  
just one more precious minute of  
what the poet calls 'consciousness'.

And then, when the life-force bursts  
like a beautiful bubble out of the poet's  
open mouth and it bows its head in  
death, grinning like a fool, the entire  
audience will stand up and applaud  
like a lot of automatons on holiday.

Nancy Ames

# The Ocean`s Daughter

'That girl's eyes loved gazing into water,  
in her doubly delightful vision,  
but he was still learning the liquid language  
and there's danger and there's damage,  
there's envy and derision,  
when you love the ocean's daughter.

So he told this girl that of course he had been  
in love once, but that girl had turned out to be  
a mermaid and he couldn't swim or even go  
overboard and sink down to where her eggs  
were lying like multitudinous, enticing pearls  
slowly drifting away on the luminous white  
sand at the bottom of the blue lagoon.

He didn't really like the water very much, I  
guess... so anyway what this girl told me was  
that after that he always, ironically, had the  
blues, like a deep glinting reflection in his eyes,  
like the distant echo of a soprano saxophone  
in his ears...

The first time this girl met him, apparently, he  
turned to her and said, 'What did you say? '  
and forced a smile politely to his lips, his lips  
that would never kiss an earth-woman or taste  
the flower-sweet air that floats through her,  
although she may have any number of his  
wistful, wondering children clinging to her skirts  
while her tears flow endlessly back to the sea.'

Nancy Ames

# The Prince

A smokescreen of language  
rises from below.  
the tyrant can hear  
nothing but flattery.  
His landscape is a mirror.

Mother loves and baby needs.  
Father's courage scrapes  
the edges raw,  
exposes now  
the naked,  
reaching tip  
of human knowledge.

Nancy Ames

## The Ravine, 1953

'My mother always knew where I was, playing in the ravine between our house and Grandma's house, or else rebuilding one of my little stick-and-cardboard play-houses in the old, overgrown orchard beyond the ravine, where there was always the wonderful, bitter smell of black walnuts and plenty of green apple ammunition to use against the two brothers - I forget their names now - who always tore down my play-houses overnight.

So then I would be very busy the next morning moving all my stuff to a new location, and then I would go down into the ravine again, where the narrow blue water slid easily between the red clay banks of the stream, and the sounds it made among the reeds there seemed to contain all the voices in the world, and I had lots of fun making little red clay heads and setting them out on the rocks to dry in the high-noon sunshine, inevitably to be flirtatiously smashed by those same two brothers again.

And I also remember that every Wednesday evening after supper I would hold on very tight to my little sister's hand while we walked past the ravine, being careful to stay in the middle of the road so that the terrible, raving, red-eyed boogeyman - who lived in the deepest shadows of the ravine at night - couldn't reach our ankles. We were on our way to watch Superman on Grandma's brand-new T.V. set.'

Nancy Ames

# The Shrinkling

Ganabner didn't know that he was ugly;  
he didn't know he had a funny name.  
He thought his hollow log was nice and snuggly,  
and he even thought that wolves and bears were tame.

He worried quite a lot about the humans;  
he worried quite a lot about their brains.  
A lot of them creating their illusions  
had always left him picking up remains.

But he liked the one who lived beside the river,  
the one who worked so hard and never smiled.  
He helped in secret ways and tried to give her  
hints of harmony within the inner child.

She saw him one day standing in the shadows,  
beneath the trees where all the air is green.  
And she saw the tiny faces at her windows,  
and she wondered then how much she hadn't seen.

Ganabner didn't talk much to the others;  
he liked to go off by himself and think.  
He never went to parties like his brothers,  
but he always kept appointments with his shrink.

Of course, it cost an awful lot of acorns,  
but at least he wasn't singing to the moon.  
Or riding on imaginary unicorns,  
and the shrink said he would be quite well, quite soon.

She'd sit at night in firelight and shadows,  
singing songs she knew when she was young.  
He couldn't know how very quick the time goes,  
but he remembered every song she'd ever sung.

He didn't tell until a long time after;  
he was absolutely sure that she'd come back.  
But he couldn't stand the shrink's derisive laughter,  
or even one superior wisecrack.

The unicorn was waiting in the moonbeams,  
and the waterfall still played its melody.  
At least, he wasn't lost among his daydreams,  
as they ran so fast into mythology.

Nancy Ames

# The Soap Queen

(This is a caricature poem and is first-person fiction)

'I impersonate myself  
in another place and time  
while I sit here on the shelf  
for my old, unconscious crime.

Assessing T.V. damage,  
you have to play a role -  
it's a novel form of language  
but it sure does take its toll.

The sadness of what might have been,  
the ignorance of youth,  
but he didn't have to be so mean  
and a liar spoils the truth.

Somewhere there's a lab-rat  
who laughs at all his jokes -  
it can't run because it got too fat  
but it will eat until it chokes.

I know I can be quite intense  
and my motivation's murky,  
but let me say in my defence  
that I like my beef quite jerky.'

Nancy Ames

## To A Loser

'I don't think random error  
could ever do such harm.  
and now, before the terror,  
I hear a faint alarm.

Forget about refusing  
to cultivate the farm,  
and worry about losing  
your good looks and your charm.'

Nancy Ames



# To A Purely Hypothetical Hero

How easily we took the chance  
of stepping off the rim.  
I could never do that dance  
in any way with him.

My armour wasn't any good;  
he'd always find my weakness.  
I always knew I really should  
disarm his lust with meekness.

I cried with mingled hope and dread,  
'Love isn't very nice! '  
You laughed up at the sky and said,  
'It's cheap at twice the price.'

Nancy Ames

# To My Inlaw The Outlaw

'I recognized the rainbow in the night  
when you were waiting for the sun to  
rise on the dark side of the moon.

When I was a kid, the sun would melt  
the pavement on the way to school - I  
remember the hot, shifting colours on  
the slickened road.

And today the black pools in the swamp  
said the very same thing - forbidden joy.

Morning is in the eyes of your children  
and the tiny roots are moving into the  
soil.'

Nancy Ames

# Tornadoes Can'T Come Downtown

She was acting sort of tough  
but we were being quite polite  
because we know about the stuff  
that goes down when strangers fight.

But now she never comes around  
because tornadoes can't come downtown.

Downtown people hide from the stars  
and the moon can't see what they're doing,  
while they wait around in bars  
for all the cheering and the booing.

So now she never comes around  
because tornadoes can't come downtown.

The best make it look so easy  
and then the phonies take the credit;  
that's why her laughter was so breezy  
but she was crying when she said it -

'Anyhow, I won't be coming around  
because tornadoes can't come downtown.'

Nancy Ames

# Ultraviolet

Medieval maidens military,  
as morning masks the stars,  
stand like sad soldiers, stationary,  
or the minions of Mars.

Distant damsels do not dare  
display a splash of splendour,  
sisters of the solemn stare,  
too tearful, tense and tender.

Whispers widen windows who  
demurely are disguising  
glad golden glances almost too  
seductive and surprising.

Like laughing lilacs, they long to  
fly far above the flowers,  
belatedly belonging to  
some of the super-powers.

Nancy Ames

# Unborn

'We live beneath the dome  
and try to generate  
the power for our home  
and something on our plate.

My Mum says there's a place  
where you can see so far,  
and turn your happy face  
toward a twinkling star.

I know I'm not too big,  
but I have got a friend  
and one day we will dig  
a tunnel to the end.

Then we will go and see,  
and we will stand and walk;  
one moment running free  
means more than all this talk.'

Nancy Ames

# Waking-Up Rhyme For A Child

'I love this day,  
this day so new.  
I love this day  
and so do you.

The stars at night  
are far away.  
I see the light  
and I love this day.'

Nancy Ames

# We Have Seen Her Dismantling

We have seen her dismantling, with  
quick, precise fingers, piece by piece,  
the ugly metallic structures that are  
lurking here, you know, on every single  
side-street, thrusting their obscene,  
crooked challenge up at the blue domed  
expanse of bright prairie sky.

I get the impression that the crooked  
metal things are secretly hoping to  
attract some balloons, at least, with  
their ugly art, but really they only prohibit  
the balloons from landing on the real  
estate at all.

She is almost certain now that the metal  
things must be growing after midnight  
because they are so very black, oddly  
unreflective under the inflated moon,  
but she has to sleep some time, doesn't  
she? '

Nancy Ames

# When I Say 'We'

'She told us she had known  
our leader as child,  
but he was overthrown  
the day the crowd went wild.

She ran but we caught her -  
a woman with a pail  
means hot, running water,  
just one more small detail.

When I say 'we', I mean  
the trained and certified,  
and no one here has been  
what we have all denied.

Tell whoever's winning  
a slim majority,  
ending the beginning  
of his authority,

To stop the humidity  
or the polluted air -  
you can equalize stupidity  
but you can't make it fair.'

Nancy Ames



# White-Out

(This poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by an implied character)

'The snow is falling faster  
and I could never say  
I'd save her from disaster.  
I had to go away.

I'd never seen her face  
when she came on to me.  
She seemed so commonplace.  
I take it when it's free.

Her child with my blue eyes  
is looking through a fence  
at jungle and bright skies  
and scenes of violence.

I can't see six feet further  
than the windshield of my truck.  
I didn't mean to hurt her.  
She just ran out of luck.

Thank God I'm almost home! '  
Then everything went black.  
In twisted steel and chrome,  
he rode the railroad track.

Nancy Ames

# Woman Waking In Wilderness

'You shouldn't grope around  
in the dark that way. You  
might find something that  
isn't friendly.

I know you can see a  
piece of it. It's not  
moving now but you can  
hear it breathing.

Someone must have finally  
shut the door. Last night  
the moonlight and the wind  
were playful and threatening  
like young wolves.

Four walls and a roof  
make big magic.  
Yesterday, the horses  
were here again,  
watching us through  
the windows.

I laughed in the morning  
and at noon I sang  
like a rock star. At least,  
the children are happy.

Nancy Ames