

## Exigent Futures: New and Selected Poems

MICHAEL HELLER is a poet, essayist and critic. Among his many books are *Conviction's Net of Branches*, *In The Built Place*, *Wordflow* and *Living Root: A Memoir*. He wrote the libretto for the recently performed opera, *Benjamin*, based on the life of Walter Benjamin. His awards include the NEH Poet/Scholar grant, the Di Castagnola Prize and New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowships. He was born in 1937 in New York City where he now lives.



# Exigent Futures

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MICHAEL HELLER



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*for Nick & Jane*



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## Acknowledgments

The poems in Part I of this volume appeared in *Accidental Center* published by Sumac Press in 1972. Those in Part II appeared in *Knowledge* published by SUN in 1979. Those in Part III appeared in *In The Builded Place* published by Coffee House Press in 1989. The poems in part IV appeared in *Wordflow: New and Selected Poems* published by Talisman House in 1997. With the exception of some minor corrections and some regularization of capitalization, numbering and punctuation, the poems are as they originally appeared. The author thanks the publishers of the above mentioned books and the many magazine and anthology editors who originally published these poems. "Cyclical" was originally published as *Backwoods Broadside* No. 48.



I *from* Accidental Center



## In the Difficulties

In the difficulties of the rough seas  
of the passage—for that  
is what it was—a thing to be endured,  
but for the beauty of the powerful lunges  
of the dolphins seen  
from the deck, a wildness  
in the seas, as wild as seas  
and natural, as we knew  
ourselves not  
in the blindered shuttered salon  
as the heart jumped  
when the rose  
and its fluted vase  
fell to the table  
after an untoward roll  
    —untoward as the steel meaning  
unbending of the ship's prow  
or the rock's entrapment  
against which, a wild sea  
& wild dolphins . . .  
    kinship  
and miscalculation

## Pressure:

Didn't you say you loved me?

under what conditions

under what  
under what  
under what

---

under the air  
@ 15 lbs per square inch on the roof  
on the safety-factored I-beams  
    slipping down thru curtainwalls  
to the ground  
to gravitational bedrock  
    accidental center: home



which we sailed from

under black  
and glitter

irony  
and smugness  
facing out on the frozen rocks  
of the universe

the hard energy

spectral pinpricks

excitations given and received

the pulsar's wave peak

falling from enormous source  
on the steel mesh of the antenna  
drowning the signal of the probe  
impaled on the far off planet  
whim and fantasy and power



the radio at sea  
the monstrous groans of the empty airwaves  
for two days  
midpoint Atlantic

now  
to face ourselves  
amid the gush of plumbing  
the whirr of ventilators packing air into the cabin



My God  
    what we felt  
one night on the deck  
of the *Novi*  
    the beat of engines  
thru her plates  
            overhead  
the tenuous milk clouds  
  
their silent movements  
  
myriad possibilities  
  
concrete and eternal  
  
spaced as waves  
  
feel

THIS

she said, wanting desperately my participation

awash in the bombarding cosmic rays

in the mysterious cosmos

itself on the heights

of cause and being

# Maro Spring

1

in a tissue  
of dusty air

over dry  
impoverished fields

no plow  
can break

rock pitted  
fields

on which  
crops of laborers  
have had their backs broken

we pick  
ourselves across

crablike  
under the sun

the cities  
the desolations of war

fought for women or fine goods  
are human if unreasonable

but this stone  
set in stone

—accursed—  
until

a mile  
into its center an aureole  
of rank vegetation

around  
an immense

reverberating  
recess