

di-vêrsé-city 2011

Austin International
Poetry Festival
ANTHOLOGY

Edited by
Barbara Youngblood Carr

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2011
Anthology
of the
Austin International
Poetry Festival

Edited by

Barbara Youngblood Carr

Co-Edited by

Ashley Steakley Kim

John Berry

Katya Bochenkova

Lynn Wheeler-Brandstetter

Michael Lynn Sadler

Ronald Jorgenson

Cover Art by Kyley Cantwell

Cover Design by Firefly Creatives



**Cultural Arts
Division**
CITY OF AUSTIN



**Texas
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on the Arts**

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Preface

As other guest Editors of the annual Austin International Poetry Festival (AIPF) Anthology have said, the poems submitted for possible publication in this year's edition were unique, creative endeavors replete with personal reflections; rites of passage; ancestry; travel; death; war; justice; and love. Some were negative about the inequalities of life, while others sang with beauty of location or place in time.

Choices of those selected (from over 500 submissions) for inclusion in this Anthology from our blind reading were decided upon by seven readers, including myself. The poems printed here are just a sampling of many outstanding poems submitted. As we read them we discovered many new metaphors for life and love.

Over the centuries, since the first poem was recorded, poetry has risen in popularity and then waned—but it always makes a strong, startling comeback every few years. Perhaps that time for poets' words to march off the page into the waiting ears and hungry hearts of readers and listeners will be this year—during the celebration of our nineteenth AIPF. Even in Oprah Winfrey's monthly magazine this April, she printed a short article about the power of poetry.

Although it doesn't seem possible, yes, this is our nineteenth AIPF. And your AIPF Board members are already making plans for the big twentieth AIPF anniversary coming up in 2012. At the present time, all four original founders are still with us. There are many predictions among some ancient civilizations that 2012 will be our end of this world as we know it. But, if it is—then AIPF plans to go out with a poetic bang!

Our chosen cover art is a reminder that time flies for all of us. We all need the touch of a beautiful or remembrance poem written from some poet's heart that brings us back to a kinder, gentler time before I-Pods, Blackberries, and other Pods with no personal, human-voice touch that we really do need in our lives. Communication is much too fast now—and often goes out on airwaves to some others our words are not intended for—especially when “texting.” I've even received a lot of text messages from Russia and I don't understand why.

Among the poems I, as Editor, with my co-readers, have read and chosen to be published in this year's *divêrsé-city* Anthology, you will find poems

reflecting on old, new, relaxed and modern life situations—poems from familiar voices as well as new, frenetic poetry from some new poetic voices as well.

I would like to thank my Co-Editors, Ashley Steakley Kim, Michael Sadler, Lynn Wheeler Brandstetter, Katya Bochenkova, Ron Jorgenson, and John Berry, whose assistance greatly shaped this collection. Among all the many fine poems entered for consideration, we searched for artistry, candor, ingenuity, uniqueness, etc. and great endings that left us with a sense of wonder and wanting more.

“Today is fair. Tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds. My words are like the stars that never change.”

— Chief Seattle

We hope, dear readers, you will enjoy the selections in this edition and be inspired to create your own new poetry now and forever.

Barbara Youngblood Carr
Editor, 2011

Farm Life

The summer wind whispered through cracks in the clapboards; outside, his high-plains cows rested in the meager shade. Lunch consisted of an unlucky chicken, with okra and tomatoes. She sipped sweet tea while he cleared dishes from the table; he washed—she dried. She tuned the radio to her soap opera, he walked toward the barn to start his afternoon chores.

He could see so far that day—certainly outside Floyd County—maybe all the way to New Mexico. He dreamed of California, forests of redwood trees, beautiful women, water. It was comforting to squeeze that cool trigger, leave this reality behind for others to inhabit. After the funeral, people wondered why he would leave his farm of sixty years, the house, the barn, the cows. She sat, eating vanilla ice cream, and understood.

Adamarie Fuller
Houston, TX

To My Son

When you are an old man and I am dead,
some evening deep in December,
when your bones ache and the furnace sputters,
wipe the yawning spider from the book
of my life, open it to where you begin,
and remember.

Allene Nichols
Dallas, TX

Descent Ascent

tango fire in the half light
ribbons of wind stroking
saying, alright...
soul essence emerges
curiously reaching over
examining,
becoming
A crimson dahlia in the snow.

Amy Vaughan Simmons
Philadelphia, PA

Vow

Curled up in the bed
of her death,
she is his
cross to bear.
Too withered
now to stand or speak,
she watches him
come and go,
mostly go.
When she cries
for comfort,
his hands rub
the thin meat
of her bed-stained back,
the skin salted
with pain
All day long, she waits
for him; no one else
matters. The other men
she has loved left
before she needed this
kind of devotion.
Now in her final
for-better-or-worse-
in-sickness... time,
he alone remains,
his vow
no ceremonious prescription
of a righteous preacher
nor leftover promise
from passion-filled days.
He comes,
because she is still his
mother.

**Anne McCrady
Henderson, TX**

White Heat

After too much time
spent
in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv,
I arrive in Be'er Sheva,
and here I feel the white heat
rise up through my stomach, heart, overtake my body,
separate, surround and keep me safe from
you
and all the others
who
would want to force me into
the unnatural human world you inhabit.
Your shouts in my face are loud and distant.
No culture or government or any human instrument
can match the sensuality
of this,
my home,
my desert.

Ashira Malka
Rockville, MD

Sirens in the Desert

The ambulance calls once or twice each week.
It's only natural that people at the pool
of the retirement community should ask
for whom the sirens sound.

It's only inevitable that somebody
makes a joke about Hemingway or Donay,
and for someone else to correct the name
to Donne, which leads to another round
of lame jokes about being done, well done,
or whatever. Still the sirens sound
and people want to know who has fallen,
who won't be getting up tomorrow.
And when they hear about a drowned grandson
or a lightning strike, they know sirens call us all.

Audell Shelburne
Belton, TX

Hard Promises

After his last surgery, I helped Dad into bed.
Mom napped exhausted in his blue chair.
Imminent mortality drew his face down.
As he settled into his quilts he whispered,
"Will you keep the house when we're gone?"
I averted my eyes, but he knew.
"No, no forget I asked that.
Do what you want to, honey—
when the time comes."
Too much for me, I smiled, patted his hand.
"Of course I'll keep it, Daddy—for the family."
Relief eased his deep wrinkles.
His clear eyes saw the lie,
but his need willed it true.

Barbara Gregg
Austin, TX

Magick and its Materials

If you doubt it, sit in the darkening woods at twilight
and see the deer take form from shadow and early moon,
brown bark, dry leaf, grey rock, and the haunted misty air.
Now the sere tan stalks of grass move to a sweet wind,
and now a bush sways, and now it is a coyote.
See how the clump of leaves falls from the red oak
and becomes the wingspread dove before it hits the ground.
The last flash of sun is batted by the swaying cedar branch
from shade to shade and startles into the clearing as an owl,
swooping on the mouse made as one from pebbles and acorns.

If still in doubt, then go to the city and see what congeals
from the broken concrete, shattered glass, faded graffiti and torn paper,
see what is in the alley that was not there before that acrid wind.
Look in the stark glass of the office buildings at your gathering image,
see what dark and tattered commodities are formed into you.
Slam your car to a halt on a lonely country road as night falls,
fling open the door and run into the busy stirring breeze.
See how long you remain the semblance of a whole
before the wind blows you, like the deer, into
brown bark, dry leaf, grey rock, and the haunted misty air.

Barry Brummett
Austin, TX

Salt

I could tell you my
Foot broke, both hands
Broke I feel my tendons
Ligaments ripped
They stiffen with every
Sorrow

But what does it matter
I go to healing arts
For help
I heal a little
And then sometimes

You heal slowly too
Or you hurt
You cover your pain
I think it must be there
In all of us

I'd hate to fly solo
This way alone
On the planet
Today the sun shines
Through the window
Of the taco bar
In Austin TX

Our favorite goodies
Are everywhere
We pull a lime
From the market basket

Squeeze it
It drips juice
Thank God it
Is tantalizing

Becky Liestman
Shorewood, MN

We Remember the dead

Because he said he liked blue
she invested in all shades,
bargained the sky and the sea for swatches;

fashioned a wardrobe stitched with possibilities—

silk-made nights for unveiled
dreams reserved for his touch.

Colors fade from distance.
Out of season
a hope chest buried in wait.

Focus returned to hues
of her own making,
the greens and olives of forests,

of hikes lit by new moons.

But he conspires with the wind to return.
The sky and the sea
whisper his name in blue.

Brenda Nettles Riojas
Harlingen, TX

Something I'll Miss About My House on Ramsey

The snails
in their smooth spiral shells
the size of hazelnuts
that came out
after it rained

inching their way up
the glass door
sliding across the porch steps
leaving shiny trails
on the sidewalk

and the way I tippy-toed
to the garbage can
trying to avoid
that sickening
sorrowful
crunch

Carie Juettner
Austin, TX

The Leaves and Their Silver Light (Glenwood Cemetery)

Trees twine in gradual dances.
Spiders spin candid silk in the sun.
A leaf falls.
Grief is an artifact here.

A road rivers through
the grove,
past the crowded monuments.
Everywhere,
choruses of angels
turn a shoulder away,
drape headstones,
cradle flowers.
Some stare up at the wide, blue sky.

Between the leaves and their silver light,
a bird pipes its song,
then quiets.
A shower pauses
to wash the dust
from the stones.

Memory is a silken pane
built and broken each day,
the drift of new weather,
a voice lost
in the summer air.

**Carolyn Adams
Houston, TX**

Art over Austin

Yesterday,
continual, mournful-wailing
siren songs
alerted our community—
then mixed with jay squawks
and wren warnings
triggering Cold War memories—
as I cleared the summer garden of crisp stems,
the remains of brunt-saffron sunflowers,
and deleted wild jungle-growth
of fragrant, magenta four-o-clocks,
just a few miles south
of the lock-down campus across the river.
Yesterday, a clear cool September day somewhat like 9-11.

Today, after yesterday's shooting
and lockdown on university campus,
a scissor-cut Matisse moon
slides across a Byzantine-blue sky,
sinks through tangled oak branches,
seeks refuge in another realm
as a power-outage shuts-down
78704 neighborhoods.
thus, two poets meet in the middle
of a freshly-groomed xeriscape garden,
consider the moon at midday,
discuss artistry of nature,
review gun regulation in Texas.
Today, a clear cool September day somewhat like 9-11.

Carolyn Luke Reding
Austin, TX

Family Reunion

My costume for this big event
is stitched from memories of childhood.
We shared our parents, hardships, fights,
few joys before our separate ways
took us to training, jobs and then
to marriage, children, families.
We gathered now and then to reminisce
and add embroidered memories
to what we knew were ordinary lives.

This time we meet to celebrate
two birthdays—eighty, seventy-five—
that make me wonder after all these years
of living continents apart:
what is it that still binds us,
justifies festivities?

Christa Pandey
Austin, TX

Sonnet 2

this “sonnet” has large flat areas of
color, a pomegranate scarlet, a banana
yellow, a blueberry blue, and since this
sonnet imitates the works of Mondrian,
there are no people included—no lover
or bank teller, no large animals even with
enormous hovering love calls dangling
from the foliage, no sunrise over a mobile
home and no cliché shells gleaming
in the sand to scoop up, this is a no rhyme
or reason song and may not make fourteen,
you must give up on that, just bathe in
colors arranged for a chat among friends

Chuck Taylor
College Station, TX

The Ruins of Detroit

*Epigraph: After a photo of the David Whitney building in
"The Ruins of Detroit" by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre*

The David Whitney stands empty.
All white columns and grace,
I could not forget her, five-story
atrium skylight, gilded marble arches,
burnished cherry doors. Maybe
the most beautiful building I'd ever seen—
standing with my father in the crowded entry,
looking up. I had no idea
she was old then,
no thought that Grand Circus Park
had an age, blocks and blocks
of tall buildings that had always been
there—Broderick Tower, Detroit Athletic Club,
the automakers' skyscrapers
connected via tunnels under the street—
downtown was always Downtown,
the winter pilgrimage to Hudson's,
pale mannequins posing in plate glass windows,
the annual family photograph, color-tinted sepia,
as we'd always done. But I have seen
time-lapse stills of Hudson's imploding,
red brick tower falling with decades
of ensconced grime and know
I did not know Detroit
in its power and beauty,
crowded streets of snow and exhaust and
bright tall buildings of limestone and
fired red clay, long, flat factories
of the same brick fitted with grids of glass
before the factories looked like rusted husks,
broken panes dark like bruises
on the face of a fighter
past his prime.

Cindy Huyser
Austin, TX

Sidewinder

He talks in that smooth cognac
voice with modulated tones;
the come-hither inflections and
flicking forked tongue hidden.

He drives the new car; wears
perfect fitting clothes and jewelry;
knows people, places, and correct
manners, yet has no conscience.

He cultivates that southern
drawl that draws you in, and
bides his time; only to take
what he wants.

He schemes, entraps, and eludes
with ease; sliding through life,
burning a cognac trail along the
way; and true only to himself.

Claire Vogel Camargo
Austin, TX

Dog Years

When I lie down and press my face
against the bristle of his body, and hear
his dog-heart in my ear, I think
how definite death is, his animal life
so much shorter than my own, so real
I can already feel the loss, dank
and heavy as his breath,
but loving him anyway, loving him more,
perhaps, because of it, the way I love
all things I know won't last. Once
I was told that they have no sense
of time, that, to my dog, after I leave
it's as if I never existed, but when I come back
he has no memory of my absence. And this is why
he occupies his time with bathroom trash
and sofa cushions, reducing all I've left behind
into a ragged nest of moments. And this is why
I think of death when I lie down at night
by his side: because his life without me
is simple, because the death
I am afraid of is my own, because each time
I come home I am born again.

Cynthia Cox
Richmond, TX

Flame

You sucked all the oxygen out of the room,
left me gasping, but still I loved you.
At times you radiated light,
brightened my darkest corners.
I held my hands to your fire,
and smiled even when your smoky
glances left others weak-kneed and panting.

But when your heart burned blue,
I backed away from your searing
intensity, cowered as you ravaged
everything in your path.
I prayed for your fury to subside,
held my breath until, ragged, it fueled
more sparks, re-ignited firestorms.

Now I hide in dark recesses, weep
holes, or insulated air pockets,
never whispering the unspeakable;
I want you to die
before you destroy
our smoldering house,
before I am only embers and ashes.

Dede Fox
The Woodlands, TX

Untitled

I believe that I must be the first one
out on the trail this morning. The sun is
up high enough for others to be out,
and it is warm enough, though cool and still
and clear. But I walk into spider webs
hanging from the trees. And the grasses in
each clearing are wet with dew—and there are
no footprints through them. (I'm sure the spiders
are surprised that I escape their bonds, though
they may understand that I am too big
to eat anyway. My boots and trousers
are wet with dew drops way up to my knees.)

Except for a cardinal hopping about
in a cedar tree, I have been alone.

Dennis Ciscel
Austin, TX

Finger Painting

... for my Aunt Mae...

i lay on my back in the grass.
my breath moved the top branches of the tree i was under.

i reached up and pushed an airplane across the sky with my thumb
then grabbed a fist full of fluffy white cloud and squeezed it
until creamy puffs slipped between my fingers and scattered across
the dark blue sky!

then i waved the sun toward the west and finger painted
all the colors of the rainbow across the horizon!

and then very slowly and carefully i set the sun down below the skyline.

Diana Trevino
Austin, TX

Enlightenment

*Prologue: "Sooner or later everyone sits down
to a banquet of consequences."*

—Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1895)

Scottish essayist, poet and novelist.

The worm has come.
The lettuce leaves are torn.
The bee has been
And we are wise
With sweets and pain;
And rain has fostered
Weeds and seed to grow.
The ground is not the same.
We've tilled the land
And wait each Spring
For Eden to return.
But nothing brings
The native grass
To thrive again
When the worm's been cut in half.
Thus heaven seeds in Virgin soil
And we live trying still to foil
An earth that's turned
And learned of life.

Dillon McKinsey
Cedar Park, TX

December 10, 2010

Mellowed

I'm softer: not so cognizant hard,
more moderate and mellow
tension mollified and melted
pliant pieces of puzzle me

shaped into elasticity in my seams
that rubber sling holding me
subdued but not depleted
relenting, slack, surreal

assuaging the anxiety,
unwound and fluffed
marinated in ease
bathing in warm not scalding water

beginning to boil under not over
basking in baby better
loose and limber likened to lax laughter
sighing with simplicity

intensity shredded into snow like
feathering flow of confetti calm.

Donella Dornwell

La Grange, TX

***Descanso* “Resting Place”**

(at Thorn and North Desert Boulevard on I-10)

Ancestors would have carried your remains
from here to graveyard.

Descanso.

Family, friends stopped
to recite Rosary, to say prayers.

They placed a cross, flowers, mementos—
to mark the splitting of flesh and spirit.

Your soul rests here.

A yellow marker flags
this celestial intersection.

Your memorial fades over time,
but memory remains fresh.

An intern, you earned a doctorate in bilingual education.
You would have graduated in December of 1992
from New Mexico State University.

Instead, your car skidded several hundred feet,
flipped, trapped you inside and chewed.

Perhaps some woman/mother, dressed in black,
a mourner’s lace upon her head, left these pansies
beneath your lifeless cross, pieces of black molding
from a 1991 Honda CRX.

Separations in the roadway make rhythmic heartbeat-like sounds.
Framed in glass, you reflect your light through dark shades of time.

I am a stranger to you, yet your image welcomes me
in yellowed newspaper, eternally smiling.

Other drivers not nearly so beloved
may pass by safely, unknown. *Recuerdo*.

Donna Marie Miller
Austin, TX

Alien on my Beach

Momma said don't touch it!
As if something so exquisite could do me any harm.

I learned early about the Portuguese Man of War.
Bejeweled alien, left behind by the capricious tide.
You lay there silently, beckoning my curiosity.

Fascinated, I stared into your bloated sail
As if hoping to see the star from whence you came
I found a stick to prod you, to awaken you
That you might return to the mother ship
And take me along for the ride.

Elaine Hosage
Austin, TX

Stars

We were what the stars are made of,
again, and
you peered into my constellations,
and
you were my galaxy.

SuperGiants luminous,
As big as the Milky Way.

We are
fueled by nuclear fusion
converting hydrogen
into helium.

The hotter you get,
The brighter I become.
For five billion years,
I will shine for you.
No matter the distance.

My hydrogen depleted,
your core contracts
outer layers expand.
I explode.

a planetary nebula supernova
a white dwarf,
a neutron star,
a black hole—
your nuclear fuels depleted,
my hydrogen
less than before,
I am the void left by our explosion.

In your arms,
in my arms:

We are star.

Elizabeth Cortez-Neavel
Austin, TX

Fifth Child

If we had a son
a Texas star

shooting across the Milky Way
to our souls
and our mature bodies
God would call him Bowie

He would cradle our aging hearts
like a great knife
cutting apart all the ends of humanity's true decline

unafraid of the universe
stranding beyond the Alamo

for truth and
all that is great

Bowie, John Bowie
works for me
works for God,
Texan.

Elizabeth Anne Hin
Irving, TX

Hackberry Butterfly

I meet you in the street or in the garden.
Pyrotechnic flutters give me pause.
But then another butterfly could cause
the same astonishment. I beg your pardon
for mentioning how absolutely common
is your sermon.

They all have colored wings you must admit.
They all prefer to hang out with the flowers.
They disappear in minutes, and with hours
they travel miles from anyplace I sit.
You cannot claim you're more than ordinary.
I'm not sorry.

Your gold-striped caterpillar offers more
than sepia wings on you could ever claim.
What's worse you wear this less than brilliant name.
Hackberry trees are easy to ignore.
And yet I must admit you fascinate
in this plain state.

I guess that any butterfly does that.
A graceful shape, enhanced by stripes and dots,
even your calm and quiet brownish spots
show elegance that never can fall flat
or fail to captivate a human eye.
And we don't fly.

Elzy Cogswell
Austin, TX

Schizophrenia

Broken heart broken dreams broken mind
Broken mind broken routine broken regime
Broken flow broken beingness broken relations
Lost in despair lost in a tangled web of confusion

Hang on, dear heart
Jesus is there in the midst of your pain
Cry out His name; He will hear.

Pour out your fears
Cry out with your tears
Open your torn soul and let Him enter.

Just a small glimmer of light
But the spark will grow bright
Until all the brokenness is burned away, and
Out of the chaos
Rises the new You
Reborn transformed! Now—we can cry!

Evelyn Erickson
Austin, TX

The Elgin Marbles

The things we value most we sometimes steal
and put them in a place where crowds can stand and look;
they jostle, apprehending now for real
these carvings they have read about in books.

The English plundered Greece and took the stone
procession lines of horse-borne men in frieze
and packed them up, returning them to home,
a stolen beauty all the world may seize.

You saw the room where marble statues lie
and made a sound halfway between a moan
and something lighter, like a girlish sigh.
I knew I had to take it for my own.

Forgive me, dear, the secrets I reveal:
The things I value most I sometimes steal.

Frank Pool Austin, TX

Midnight

Driveway, tailgate, glass of wine;
the stars are few in a steaming slate of Houston sky.
A car is crawling down the street,
its blinding headlights reconcile to Saturn SUV,
mother and father in front and a child in back—
a little girl. She clasps a soft doll by the neck
and holds it to the window;
both heads turn to stare as the car rolls past.
Brake lights glow among the leaves when,
further down the block, the stop sign catches them.
Headlights from another car go by,
then the Saturn turns left, disappears,
and it's back to counting stars before the climbing
clouds can smother them, as the lights
of an airplane move across the billowing,
until it too disappears
behind a deep black silhouette of tree.

Garrett Middaugh Houston, TX

Chipping the Flint

You said you found it trailside
while hiking through a drizzle-rainy day.

Pausing just off trail to sip
from your canteen and rest a spell,
it stood out from the surrounding puddle.

You plucked it up excited, yet so casually
claiming it yours.

Did you even wonder
its origin,
as you pulled it out of the mired clay?

Lost when a long-ago hunter
tripped on a root, it fell from his pouch?
Left in a deer that released from hunt
fell to the wayside in, this once dense forest?

No trail or clues to follow!
The workmanship you see
must have taken hours or days of hours to shape it.

Would that you could return it to its maker,
hand it over to one who,
chipping the flint, chiseled a shaped point,
attached it to straight wood grain, strong and true.

Slicing through fur, hide and flesh,
it would not miss its target.

George Fredric Campbell
Georgetown, TX

Evening Fires

The setting sun scatters through elm and oak leaves
onto his sun browned back, a hint of red.
The light patterns change on his muscles
as he works.

Smoke twirls around him;
he has started the fire
to grill our supper.

His whistle blends with the bird's evening songs,
the cicadas rolling call and response.

It is the loosening of the day.
Our bodies now untwined,
our hearts ever closer.

Gloria Amescua
Austin, TX

Two Stones and a Mystery

When our two stones were struck
along their natural fracture lines,
their chalky outer crust suddenly gave way,
revealing a pair of polished ruby hearts.

Like that night when the polish
of our relationship was redeemed
on an isolated road when an angel lifted you
from the fire just before the car exploded.

Glynn Monroe Irby
Clute, TX

Letters from Exile—I

— *the year in Russia*

Winters were easier somehow. We weren't
so consumed by them yet. In the evenings,
I'd walk around the house and put myself
next to her scarves; water steaming up
the kitchen. She'd return, always in time for Ella
on the radio, and we would listen to her
together in the bath, doors ajar. Later,
go out to lie in the snow, watch
the peacockery of cats while the evening
dissolved all that hovering blue, we would dream
of abandoned hotels on remote islands,
of rainy afternoons over New York city.
Tell you the godawful truth Jenny,
some days we wouldn't even talk.

Hemant Mohapatra
Austin, TX

lowaville

(Final home of Blackhawk, Sac Warrior Chief)

We stand within a town no more a town
Just futile marks to show us it once stood,
Its bustle ended somewhere in the past.
We know its name 'cause that is written down.
On books which focus on this neighborhood,
But they won't mention why it did not last.

Across the highway on a lonely hill
An old forgotten graveyard rich in weed
Struggles with the weather and the wind.
Her stones bear mossy names for cipher still
(If you stay patient and you have the need),
Alike for pious souls and those who sinned.

Time eases all earth's signs from memory,
The way it did this town and graveyard site.
The way it meant to do before a book
Recorded lies and called it, History.
To be forgotten seems both just and right,
A truth our kind will likely overlook.

Oh, town once living, slumber now in peace
As does this graveyard settled by your side.
And keep your secrets as did the Warrior Chief,
Who loved this river-land and found his ease
In death here as in life. Now, let truth hide,
And wind and summer rain erase your grief.

Herman M. Nelson
Austin, TX

Lichen

Crystalline
Colors stalk me, an
Inundation

Around the corner
Phantasmagoria,

I cry aloud

Acknowledgement...

Starts the loom,
Vocabulary strings emerge
To entwine
Neuron

Webs,
To the physical realm,
Images tremble becoming
Convex, concave, and warped

I must cry, stop

Alas, these feeble cries
Secure the knots, and
With every gasp and step
Stitch to being.

Sewn to
This world
I and
The fabric of time, a
Folded, wrapped, and scrunched
Organism,

A stained-glass lichen
Exists
Under the sun

Ian Rice
Austin, TX

Trade-Off

It's that time of year again in the Northwest —
when residents and tourists alike engage in a ritual
dating back to much more primitive times.

Roadsides boast a vast number of bushes,
dripping, and drooping with blackberries
in various stages of development.
Surprisingly, buds, flowers, and fully developed fruit
inhabit the same single branches, guarded effectively
by a barrage of nearly lethal thorns. It is the robust sweet
juicy luminous dark ones that most tempt passersby.

The successful ritual participant must be armed with
determination, dexterity, and, most of all, desire.
Long sleeves and gloves also help because it is fingers,
hands, and arms that take the risk and bear the brunt.

Inevitably blood seeps from punctured skin,
often mixing with the ebony-hued juice
of bruised blackberries clutched in eager hands.
These are the hands that feed
an occasional blackberry to eager mouths,
an act that catalyzes effort to pick more . . . and more . . . and more.

It is no wonder that primitive people used this juice
to dye their clothing and ornaments.
It is easily and quickly absorbed into the fibers of skin,
wood, clay, and nearly everything it touches.

For those who choose to follow this ritual
called “blackberrying”, the telltale scabs and darkened fingernails
provide evidence for many weeks
of where they've been and what they've done,
marring their otherwise perfect appearance and attire.

The secret cannot be kept!

Jane Steig Parsons
Austin, TX

Crone Poet

I don't have many nouns. You have to earn them,
can't look them up. My glasses are scratched and blurred,
too hard to see. Is it a bay-breasted warbler?

It may be, with its dark crown, its chestnut patches,
but I don't know, I haven't earned it. I look up at it
as it chirps at me from a branch. I identify it

tentatively from its teesiteesiteesi and the colors
but I have not mastered it, the way I did
the chipping sparrows, the purple martins

who do not come to the house I built especially
for them. I know them, their glossy beauty,
and they live here; one surprised me

on the roof's edge, but neat apartments built
according to their needs still fail to draw them.
Other nouns so much easier to tame:

words from computers, like motherboard
and CPU, sit around in my head
like coins from other countries, words from cooking

like ghee and mirepoix and roux
are burned into my skin by bubbling fats,
even the names of gods and mountains come,

but I want to chase the words around the yard
throwing arcs of breadcrumbs, sunflower seeds;
my stumbling feet startling them into flight.

Janet McCann
College Station, TX

As It Should Be

Notice the light flirting in her eyes,
little flashes of joyful recognition
as her mother frolics alongside

both of them dancing in, out
of spouting tunnels of cold water,
sleek and wet in the sunshine

slip-sliding past one another, then
whirling together, clasping hands,
each keeping the other upright

four eyes, four ears entrained
for signals of the game's evolving moves,
no leaders, no rules, only adventure

neither paying the slightest attention
to those looking on, yearning
for such trust, such joy, such bonds.

Yes, the mother is gorgeous
And you'd be hard pressed
to find a prettier child

But the beauty in this scene
is the shimmer of bubbling energy
surrounding mother and daughter

a rare glimpse of divine love
holding them in a world all their own
bystanders in awe cannot penetrate.

Jazz Jaeschke
Austin, TX

Metamorphosis

Bold beauty of the butterfly we can't deny
Flying, floating, fluttering amongst the flowers
Symmetrical graceful dancer painting our sky
Entrancing all audiences with its powers

Tis' not rainbows capture my imagination
Sky dancer's wonder fills me with love and smiles
But tis' more the quiet brave act of its creation
Every traveler knows it's about the miles

Did the caterpillar realize what lay ahead?
A leap of faith he wraps himself in final shawl
Will I lie asleep this night, or will I lie dead?
Before we can soar so high, sometimes we must crawl

Jim Parker
Austin, TX

Wait Lift Her

for the women of Juarez

She carries the weight with her
The way God carries the weight of our prayers
The way His Son carried the weight of our sins
It never ends
And it doesn't subside with each passing day
It grows exponentially
This kind of pain only gives way to more pain
She will never put it down
But rather adjust the weight of it from one side to the other
Always remembering to breathe
Relaxing only a few muscles at a time
So that she can go on
Enduring the pain
So that she can always
Bear the wait of it

Joaquín Zihuatanejo
Denton, TX

Ode to Mother Earth

One day, I'll walk back into you,
singing a song of wonder and great joy,
ending long years of idle speculation
that I was somehow different
from the land on which I walked.

One day, I'll up and disappear,
become known by another name
or have no name at all for this
mysteriously breathing
being of blood and bones

that rises from dreams
to greet the new morning,
a creature of time that craves
foolish things as it passes like a shadow
through the flames of the day.

Joe Blanda
Austin, TX

Iris' Prism

I am a kitten with eyes barely open
I am a blossom that blooms in the night
I am an opal that grows from the ocean
I am a garment the goddess puts on

I am a lion in wait for the hunted
I am an oak tree whose leaves whisper words
I am a ruby the shape of a teardrop
I am a garment the goddess puts on

I am a bear giving birth in the darkness
I am a pine tree who's dreaming of spring
I am a key to unlock every prison
I am a garment the goddess puts on

John Berry
Austin, TX

Before I Start Reading This

you should know words connected here
form a sort of surprise.

Not to say too much, but a sideways
Mount Kilimanjaro is revealed on the page
in a high altitude way I hope you'll enjoy.
It's what the known is blowing in your face.

For what you don't know, I brought a boom box.
The second stanza is a humpback whale recorded
from a satellite over the Indian Ocean. Language
is so buoyed. Did anyone bring an extension cord?

When the yellow wheat fields are mentioned,
sway your arms back and forth.
Pretend you're in Kansas. I hope
you didn't want a metaphorical moon. Just howl.

Are you familiar with a pork chop in every
Guinness? It's hidden.

And Merwin is just Merwin, Snodgrass is,
you know Snodgrass, and Collins is just
Judy. The singer.

Actually Snow White never had stepmothers.
They were just mothers.

That mountain is actually a Fibonacci valley
of Times New Roman dripping with carbon monoxide.
You know where the dirty gas comes from.

I forgot to mention I've never read here before.
Or anywhere. Let me just say I brought two poems.
This is the shorter one. And I wrote them today.

John Milkereit
Houston, TX

In the Cornfield Which Time Erases

Beneath the pyramid I saw grasshopper
eyes bulge forth from the walls
of ancient Mexico, as cold as the falls
of maidens sacrificed in Mayan pools
beneath black nightmare of jade and jewels
where the invisible lion of the deep mauls
like the hungry sun or winning balls
in that dreaded game of Here and Never After.

I sink down below the gold and swallow mazes
of infinity. Sea sand in a conch shell sounds
loud to the heart's ear. I drink the ocean
of death laid bare by the barren of bone,
where skulls of children delivered abound,
in the cornfield which time erases.

John Layne Hendrick
Round Rock, TX

In Different Realities

The poet, at ten
is secure in her place
front and center.
This is, of course before—
before the reality of rosaries, she knows
the danger of loaded guns, is sure
her hero will overcome, sees her father
as John Wayne “True Grit” perfect
even his imperfections demanding loyalty.

At ten, riding shotgun to Tulsa, suddenly aware
of an ever-expanding universe
and her hands getting smaller, she
is still learning the vagaries of anger
acted out in silence.

In this game called Life
she will learn sometimes honesty isn't
the best answer, sometimes it's better
to stand alone, or left of center
near the fireplace...
sometimes forgiveness is all there is.

Joyce Gullickson
Georgetown, TX

dream a bundle

if the rhythm don't
get you
or another reason kill
gotta
boogie-woogie life
with a passion
until
 the seasons bow out
until you ain't got y o u
or at least nuthin' like
what you used to see
gotta
shake a little shove a little
 —this can't be
claim the knees and the feet
i used to booga-looga-loo
barefoot in the street
to a lollipop moon
and a wild heartbeat
gotta
dance a bundle dream a bundle
 —that ain't me
say the sprites in the shadow
playin' sneek a peek
go look at yourself girl
 —what can this mean

if the count don't get you
and the rhyme don't die
as the spring holds still
betta
jambalaya
NOW
or you never will

Judith Austin Mills
Pflugerville, TX

Poets at the Poet Tree
Scene III(B)

There's Alcaeus, a Greek lyric poet from the 7 century B.C.,
Are you writing in Alcaic verse form?
That's strophes consisting of 4 tetrametric lines?
Four line stanzas are named after him,

Then there's Anacreon, also from Greece
That's who we name Anacreontic verse after.
It's poems of love, wine, and revelry
He's calling out for you to sing with me
We're writing poems of love, wine, and revelry
So have a glass of wine, it's on me.

Look, there's the Italian Francesco Petrarch,
The namesake of Petrarchan sonnets
Do you know, you have to really be on it
To have named after you a poetic form; it's like a trademark.
For it was him more than anyone else, who did embark
To establish as a major poetic form the sonnet.
He took that Italiano sonetto and perfected it.
His efforts left such a lasting landmark.
Fourteen lines in two parts
An octave of rhythm and rhyme
It's A-B-B-A, A-B-B-A, and is presented as a theme
Followed then by a sextet to resolve what starts
With rhyming variations admissible this time
With rhymes limited to five in this six line scheme.

Oh my MaDonna.
They all been a source of inspiration
Influenced many later extended European generations
Now it's our own age to add our own artistic creations
It's our time on stage, therefore, let us compose
In our own dialect and vernacular a masterpiece
To help raise the culture of our citizenry
That we, too, may leave a lasting legacy.

Julian Enoch Bruno
Dripping Springs, TX

The Wind

The wind is never still.
It plucks at wind chimes
Like a maestro at the piano,
Playful.

The wind howls.
And only the lonely understand
What it says:
It is the cry of the haunted, hollering.

The wind is old.
Storms have left scars there
Adding to its wrinkles.
I hear it coughing, sickly.

They loathe the wind,
Those born on wintry nights
And know they will die
Under its gales.

Let all of them come,
Says the Wind.
Let them be swept away
And feel me.
I am their last sound
And I know their final
Resting place.

Julieta Corpus
Weslaco, TX

The Procession

My emotions now march in silent procession
Alarm, despondence, anger, disgust, indifference.
Years ago they marched in a jubilant parade
Nervous thrill, excitement, sheer joy, gaiety.
Then life was full of promise
Places to go, goals to achieve and dreams possibly becoming a reality.
Now, days drag on into months.
Passions stifled, suffocating.
Turning into snakes that creep out into the neighborhood
Disappearing into the dark, dark night.
How will I soothe my tremulous heart?
What balm can I apply to assuage it?
How do I quell the fear that rises from the depths of my heart
Threatening to pour out onto my face?
My poor heart, laden with tears—drowning, struggling,
Wildly searching for an anchor,
Grasping at melancholy straws only to sink deeper,
Lamenting for the love that once was.
Hush, my grieving heart, hush!
It will be alright.

Kalyani Vishnubhotla
Austin, TX

Charred Notes

Slender, ivory fingers soft and long as a lover's whisper
reach silently for a strand, a frayed edge, an eyelet of an opening
Weaving through melancholic fringes
and charred notes that hang in the air.

'Is it me?' he rehearses aloud.
What if? Innocuous eyes flash prostrate toward his.
In ebony reflection, a tear winces in perpetuity.

Karen Foster
Austin, TX

Louisiana Iris Blues

No use thinking about those windows
no use thinking about that door
I say, no use looking out etched windows
no use looking out for more

Put up your kitchen curtains
go on, rip up my sweet plum tree
you can dig up those old crepe myrtles
it's not my garden anymore

Tear out Yesterday-Today-and-Tomorrow
strip that fig ivy from the walls
parch those Louisiana iris
it's not my garden anymore

No more use that hanging yellow jasmine
no use my daddy's loquat tree—
just let that bed go to weed, I say,
you're not my garden anymore.

Katherine Durham Oldmixon
Austin, TX

Convergence

Octopus sneaks out
from a brown bag.
No longer dead, he slinks
onto the silver tray
and mounts his own
pale reflection. Caressed
by seven arms (one missing)
the image tingles.

My lover comes. Together
we watch the double
octopus change color from
mauve to red to amaranth.
No, we can't cut in
this outburst of carnality!
We go to bed hungry.

Sunrise finds us naked
at the kitchen table.
On the dim silver tray,
complete, Octopus rests,
eight arms at peace—
a flawless chrysanthemum:
put it in a brown bag
and send it to the Emperor.

Katia Mitova
Chicago, IL

At the Dinner Table

Mother always said,
“You can’t get to heaven
if you don’t eat your peas,
but blackberries will work
when you pick them behind
the old church, where the clouds
are so bright, they puff up with pride
—but stick a needle in one
and it won’t pop, just slide right through,
a pin-straight hole in the sky.
Don’t step on them; you’ll fall through
(at least cliffs can be held onto)...”

Her voice whirred in my ears as I sat
eating peas and rice the other night thinking
you never told me it wouldn’t be enough.

I licked the plate clean.

Katlyn Jennings
Austin, TX

By the Sword

When I see couples fight
over the shower curtain,
her drinking, his mother,
his-n-her
robes crumpled
in separate rooms
I am smug, amused
sad.

I, too, ate rage
for breakfast, smoked
my man like that first
cigarette of the day
drove to the rifle range
weathered battles,
planned espionage,
hid in foxholes,
sniped.

But today, this soldier's sword
is plunged hilt-deep in dirt.
I got crops to plant, fields
to plow, seeds to redeem.
Morning's too sweet
to waste. Look!
The sun is high,
the season
late.

Kelly Ellis
Houston, TX

Fantasy

summer months
tracing tattoos
like tomorrow will never come

until the sun invades
each crevice on your face
shadowing the hours.

i've known only
pale moon showers
in these summer months.

though once,
i saw a fantasy in your eyes
and sprinkled glitter in the night
like you'd always been mine.

Kelsey Erin Shipman
Austin, TX

Written in Casa de la Aire, Santiago, Chile, for Pablo Neruda

We each build our own House in the Air
Cut off from troubles
By crumbling stairs
Reachable only
In a cremation of care.
The wise owl howls twice
Once for the dead poets
Who camp in its attic
Twice for the guests
Who take tea in the basement.
But never for the pests
Its permanent inhabitants.

It's a House of Dreams
Formed from young fears
It's a grave of hates
Soaked in childhood's tears
It's a revolving door
As days turn to years
The air is polluted
Your lungs are choking
The flames are shooting
The house is smoking.

Ken Jones
Houston, TX

What Fits in a Hand

An apple stolen from a tree

A fistful of wet sand
sifted in the surf

In a dark theater
my warm hand held by one
who didn't belong to me

A pen jammed into my wrist
to keep from crying
when the bosses
were about to fire me

A black rubber gear-shift
nervously handled as I drove
listening to NPR
my boyfriend asleep
in the passenger seat

A decadent piece of chocolate cake
left out on the counter eaten slowly
deserved after a long day at work
no guilt felt

A snow-globe shaken
furiously hoping
the glass would break

My premature baby boy
who measured only thirteen inches

My father's face eyes closed still warm

Laura Pena
Katy, TX

Womens' Work

Wheat stalk and whiskey spittle
in his dust
nine buffalo
shot up like pop cans
because his boots were too big
to stop at 'one to the head.'

From Yellowstone
to Michigan
they roam
in hoof-less herds,
on eighteen wheels.
Meat. Bone. Skin.

We soak each hide,
elbows cocked
in brain and marrow
through bullet hole hand-grips
dappled shadows
in the stretch.

Our bodies,
arched scythes in a single cleave
scrape them smooth
matted hair,
Montana,
in our fingernails.

Laurel Bieschke
Austin, TX

Kin

Guitar case in hand
I make my way to the Dallas
airport restroom.

The woman with the mop
and broom cart
smiles as I rush in.

Minutes later
the red thread of
her voice
rises above the line of sinks
and bathroom stalls
hushing air dryers.

A sentiment
saudade
the home she left behind
bursts through
for my ears only.

The premature lines
around her deep kohl-rimmed eyes,
the hairnet askew.
The day's weariness
washes away.

She tells me she sings with her husband
and some friends,
especially now,
far away from Iraq.

She points at my guitar.
For that moment
we're kin.
Her sad songstress eyes
look East
while I look West.

Liliana Valenzuela
Austin, TX

Secrets of Grass

Lush green grass moves with the wind
more hush than the lolling waves on a quiet sea.
But when drought and the season
dries the high grass yellow
it is given a voice: a whisper.

As a child I sprawled on a hill
with the scratchy spikes
of tall fescue leaning near me,
lapping my face like cat tongues.
I wanted to decipher that raspy murmur.
Was it a prayer, a poem or a proverb?
I cupped my hands behind my ears,
to listen, just to listen.

Lillian Thomas
Houston, TX

Like Epiphanies, War—

In the great distance, low
rumbles of shells detonating
like epiphanies, which isn't

like it at all. Maybe David Byrne
is merely particle, some adjacent
room with a poster of revolution.

A thought returns like a man
to a field of battle
where a limb was lost.

The great shell I love you not
shaking windowpanes,
just ready to get born.

Lindsay Illich
Temple, TX

The Girl She Wanted

I saw my mother's despair
Daily matins and evensong
Watched her find scraps
to feed her ravenous mind
Hang clothes on the line
Sift flour, iron shirtsleeves
Stir jam in July kitchens with
sweat pooling around her feet
bare on the linoleum she had
washed that morning before
we all got up. I tried to keep
my own shame from her
but could not because I was
cut from her flesh like biscuits

She stopped by my bed at night
when she got up to pee or
look out at clouds in the darkness
Listening for tornadoes and
planning what to do if one came,
my father gone with the only car
She would cup my sleeping cheek
with her calloused palm and promise
someday things would be okay

I have forgiven her more often than
I have ever prayed. What I want now
is for her to come wake me up
one last time and tell me she is happy
safe fed held close, she has at last
gotten a good night's sleep and
I can stop grieving for how this world
used her down to bare knuckles.

Maggie Jochild
Austin, TX

Quiet Femininity

Behind the alluring veil
lies soft strength
in feminine form.
Smoldering eyes
a silent story begins
rolling torsos
sensuous hips and
precision footsteps
shout out
for everyone to hear.
Graceful hand flick
periods, question marks
and exclamation points.
Sly smiles
an elegant tilt of the head,
Goddess woman dancer
bares her soul
with captivating music
as her Muse.
Sharing special talents
not meant
to be silenced
by worldly ignorance.
Leaving the audience
to appreciate and seek
a higher self
the Goddess
exposed to all.

Marcie Eanes
Racine, WI

Message This

Message this barraged human being with paper cuts
from fresh twenty dollar bills and tear apart the stitches
that hold my shirt pocket together.
Ignore the fact or facet that I'm an artist, poet, or a being with meaning and
place me among the messages on billboards and the clientele of cash flow.
Place me among the elite with no feet, give me no notice
when a person is greedy, fix shoes onto my body so I can
feel mechanical, keep working me to death so I become maniacal.
Provide me complaints from the saints of capitalism.
Drag me back to the days of feudalism.
Give me life with strangers asking me things.
Allow me my dreams that reflect who I am.
Give me long explanations of your pain
while I try to suppress mine.
Give me a cell phone for wasting time.
Give me friends when I feel the need to chime.
Give me a pen so I can write this exhausted rhyme.
Forget the sanctity of meeting someone
you haven't seen in a while
and cut to the chase and cede to Skype—
to talk face to face via video pipe.
Give me questions I don't know the answers to,
and with a cherry on top, give me chaos, too.

Mark Zuiderveld
Jacksonville, IL

Remembering Summer

Thick fragrance of Bermuda grass
somersaults and headstands—nose deep
Cool blades of grass graze arms and face
Under a canopy of shade
throughout sizzling August days
on Francis Street

And there you were
Perched on a concrete porch step
Watching us roll and climb and play
I drank in your attention like cold lemonade
anxious for you to watch my clumsy talent
How could I have known you were
longing for the tall pine trees of home

I watch my boys play now
on the dusty sagebrush plains
Running barefoot and carefree
on loose red dirt
And I remember cool, fresh Bermuda grass
And miss your smile.

Mary Connell
Austin, TX

Sand That's Gone Too Far

"It's sand that's gone too far,"
Frank said,
Then stopped in bewilderment
At the laughter in my eyes.
"You find that funny?"
As I envisioned
Sand out on the town
In a low-cut red velvet dress
Drinking one too many margaritas
And pouring herself around one too many men.
"It's a country/western song,"
I said
As my mind
Found its way back
To the construction site.

Mary Beth Gradziel
Red Rock, TX

Vagabond

Again at the precipice,
we stood, a torrent of wind,
a rainstorm of love, a dark
and brooding lick of thunder.
Just one slip of the foot
and our gypsy hearts would be
rolling again. While the others
made babies, we birthed the jagged
edges of cliffs, the imperceptible
blue of sky, the spokes of caravan,
swaddled it all in chainmail,
and left it there to fend for itself—
a modern love, birthed but not nurtured,
cherished but not maintained. You
dressed me in bells like a cat, and when
I danced, you dropped scarlet
and lilac scarves at my feet,
you doused me in the thick sweat
of wine, you stained me henna
with your rough and unread palms,
loving me the only way your Bedouin
heart could, like a plectrum kissing
a lyre, strumming magic out of the silence
only as often and for as long as our voices
could lift each other in song.

Melissa Studdard
Cypress, TX

I want to be/Quiero ser

I want to be
La oja de tu tamale
And wrap myself around you
Y ponerte bien cerquitita

I want to be
El chile
Of your
Pico de gallo

I want to be
Los ingredientes
Of your menudo
And spice up your life

I want to be
Tu mapa
And guide you
Por toda tu vida

I want to be
El aguacate
In your guacamole
Sweet and creamy

I want to be
La chancla en tu pies
So your feet
No tochen el piso

I want to be
El vaso conque tomas agua
So I can taste your lips
Cuando tienes sed

I want to be
El hombre de tu vida
And make love to you
Por una eternidad

Meliton Hinojosa, Jr.
Harlingen, TX

Tragedy at Paint Rock

When my grandchild chose not to live,
I felt the ember crackle and die.
I was looking at the cliffs
painted so long ago,
standing where the shaman stood,
listening to the chants
sing of the cycle of life.

The voices said the future is
a bobcat hidden in a tree...
a coyote watching the flock...
a butterfly bobbing and weaving
just out of reach.

When my grandchild chose not to be,
only the future changed, this *one* particular future.
Not the hope, not the prayers, not the expectations.
I hear the voices and understand.

Mike Gullickson
Georgetown, TX

Cilantro

My cilantro is
temperamental,
fickle—
maybe.

She wants to be
appreciated—
but not overly
appreciated.

She wants fresh ground—
but can't imagine
leaving home
again.

She wants me
to smell her,
taste her even—
but not to consume her
as I am apt to do.

She wants her space.

I want
to give her home.

Molly Cooper
Austin, TX

Winter Jog

for Margie, who did it

January's austere air swirls
through uncovered limbs white-skinned
with ice. Crusty cloud of breath drifts
to low despairing sky in measured beats.
Soft thud of rubbered soles on dirt road
goad her onward. Racing heart heats
muscles red with blood, floods
released endorphins to singing mind.
She sheds her hood, wet with sweat,
tucks gloves into pockets, skirts
black iced ruts, leaps holes into mile
eleven. Lengthening stride, filled
with pride, she prepares to fully finish
thirteen point one at sixty-seven plus.

Mona Follis Houston, TX

A Life

When you
were five you
wondered who
you were. You
held to your
heart the bare
fact that you
could be you
and no one else.
Now that the wind
has worn away
the carved words
on your granite
tombstone, now
what remains to
be said of you.

Monty Jones Austin, TX

Gray Matter

In this jar you will find
a fine gray powder.
Transport
to the nearest Ocean:
the Atlantic,
the Pacific;
it doesn't matter.
I have left my tears in both.
From the shore or
from the dock,
wait for the down wind,
the waning tide,
sunny skies and
moody clouds.
Pour forth what I was
and what I am.
Dissolve in water.
Add a hail of rose petals:
creamy apricot, white, and
pale pink, my favorites.
Make the sea fizz
like alka-seltzer.

Nancy Membrez
San Antonio, TX

Oh, Fudge!

At least I wasn't wand-ed, frisked,
or kept from flying high.
But what I tried to carry on
did catch their watchful eye.

I wished they wouldn't mess with it,
but no—they wouldn't budge.
“We'll have to take another peek.”
They scrutinized my fudge.

They took the sack, to x-ray it,
and then to hand it back.
I smugly claimed my bag of sweets.
“You guys are way off track!”

What would I hide inside my fudge,
to give folks such a scare?
I wanted it all for myself, y'know?
I'd no intent to share!

But there they were, x-raying it,
because “You never know—.”
Oh, fudge—sweet fudge!—you're safe with me.
I'm glad they let us go!

Nancy Fierstien
Dripping Springs, TX

for the monarch

weep does the willow
for she is slave to secrets
secrets only whispered by rain
bound by his beauty
the monarch—her master
her tears are lavender
his freedom is her pain
so still she lies
sewing shade from lullabies
painting prayers for her king
suffering is a sky blue sonnet
written by his wings

magnolia leaves are lovers like we
separated by windsong and chance
we masquerade our make-believe
to waltz between euphoria and can't
you denied my cries
refused my name
i am no longer a capulet
mercutio lays slain—romeo to blame
proclaim your promise—forsake your regret
i will drink the elixir
to unchain your spirit
sew the scarlet letter to my soul
open my heart until the sun sears it
cry blood until my tears turn to gold

there are serpents near the rainbow, my sweet
and more thorns than there are blooms
and so the willow weeps in silence
confessing/crying only to the moon
for if a single drop of sadness
fell from her eyes and onto his wings
he would never fly again
not even in her dreams

Natasha Carrizosa
Fort Worth, TX

The Covered Bridge

It had spanned this stream for many years;
Four wooden beams laid side-by-side
Each one cut from an ancient White Oak tree.
The floor and posts were likewise hewn
And the sides and roof were of Cedar wood.

The builders of this bridge are forgotten now,
But they left a promise for all who pass this way:
An assurance of safe passage across the foaming water;
A covered rest from sun and storm;
A soothing shield for skittish horse or mule.

Few people use this olden way of crossing here.
A concrete span now flies above the bend upstream,
But the curious come to touch, to marvel and
Lovers meet to share a kiss, caress a heart
With murmured words of covenant in this sanctuary
Their secrets sheltered by the walls of the covered bridge,
Carved initials within hearts their testament.

Nicholas Dorosheff
Herndon, VA

Odyssey Blues for Rita Dove

We pile into the Impala, suppered bellies full,
Stoli running through our blood.

Ain't got chrome wheels, just a bunch
Of white boys rolling in the night.

Detour takes us past the edge of light
Where air gets thick and slow.

Silence slams and I recall Tex Beneke,
A long dead sax man singing,

As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
I wish I wish he'd go away

Five nerved cats whistling past a graveyard
Vodka freezes in our fear.

Someone jokes, we're lost, just roll
The window down and ask, but no one laughs.

Leaving city lights and buses, crunching
Gravel roads past old abandoned houses.

Watched by rocked and wounded eyes
Giants slip grey-shadowed through the night.

Smell the music women make: smoke
Of pork chops, beans and cabbages

And we whisper— yeah.

Sliding along a maze of orange barricade
An Impala bursts from this black shade

And we laugh and whisper— yeah.

Oscar C. Pena
League City, TX

Literary Ruminations

My universe is lettered with the words of poets;
past and dead, present and alive, infamous and famous.
In their worlds and words, I found purpose and truth.
I have looked into 'Chapman's Homer' with Keats
and challenged 'Death' not to 'be Proud' with Donne.
Frost and I have been 'Acquainted with the Night'
as I explored distant seas and death with Whitman's 'Captain.'
Wordsworth and I found 'Splendor in the Grass.'
Shakespeare shared his 'Marriage of True Minds.'
I have disparaged his 'Mistress' Eyes' with Spenser,
discovered 'How (Do) I Love Thee' with the Brownings,
and 'Mutability' with Percy Shelley.
Neither Dickinson nor I 'Could Stop for Death.'
Rilke knew I was 'Too Much Alone in this World,
Yet not alone' enough and Maya Angelou and I 'Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.'
Langston Hughes showed me how to craft my 'Theme for English B' and Nikki
Giovanni and I understand the language of 'Quilts,'
but it was Alice Walker who taught me 'The Way Forward is with a Broken
Heart' and how to use its shattered pieces to teach others to write and share their
own unique words.

Patricia Dixon
Houston, TX

Acceptance

He became a daily sighting
sitting on shady corner wall
leaning on cane, calmly, he
watches cars zoom by.—All
rushing like sharks to feeding
frenzy, but feeding on what?
Excitement, motion, variety,
getting what they haven't got.
On access road to Mopac,
I pass him, give a wave.
Though not older than I,
his next trip could be grave.
He sits stoically, accepting,
but our outlooks contrast.
I crowd much into my day,
my interests seem so vast.
I want to see all, do it all,
leaving little time to mope.
Yet I envy his acceptance—
wish he could have my hope.

Patricia Fiske
Austin, TX

When the Light Turned Red

He talked about the revolution
In Brazil
How the rich watched it from up in their penthouses
From up on the hill
With cameras that zoomed down into the action
The rich were upset
For the sound was not working
All they could do was watch silent screens
He watched the tanks roar through the streets
He laughed
As he watched the tanks
Approach intersections
Where they stopped
When the light turned red

Paul Richmond
Greenfield, MA

We Are More

If I teach you one thing little wolflets,
be it that we are more than our fangs and the
hunger that chews at us for weeks.

We are more than the stars we howl to,
more than our fur, our bones, the very breath in our bodies.

We are more than the sunlight which keeps us waking each morning,
more than our warm dens hold, more than our territorial frolicking.

If I teach you one thing little wolflets,
be it that we are more than our fate when the pack disintegrates,
more than the snows and deer can take away from us.

Long from now we will meet again in the forests,
in the meadows, and beside the lakes,
and once again,
we will howl our chants of more, more, more.

Peter J. McDaniel
St. Paul, MN

This Morning

As I make my slow way home,
cooled by the sentinel breezes
of creek and cedar canyon,
sunlight is a study
of hammered gold on terraced hills.
The Palo Duro moves over oak roots,
over shale and yellowed sandstone.
Upstream, beyond the bend
chinaberry trees diffuse morning's haze,
morning's battle smoke.
Sword broken in its scabbard,
empty pistol heavy in its holster,
I water my horse,
soak bruised hands in the chilling flow.
As we ended the Kiowa track
I cracked my saber on a collarbone,
a defender's arm.
I've lived a life of two books—
Morphy on chess and Caesar's commentaries:
all out war, taken up from the page.
Downstream,
regimental colors fly above the field commander's tent,
West Point rings lie on a table,
gathered like agates in a marbles bag.
The best of their kind is dead, our general says.
We killed them all.

R.T. Castleberry
Houston, TX

The Huggable * Washable * Non-Toxic Lamb

Leaving for the desert, ready to serve,
I bought a stuffed animal for my son.
I left him with a promise to return,
And a gift a soldier could understand—
A Huggable * Washable * Non-Toxic Lamb.

Riding through the desert, back to the zone,
I sweat on gear I had just cleaned again.
I scan the horizon, and think of home,
And imagine a mirage on the sand—
A Huggable * Washable * Non-Toxic Lamb.

Waiting in the desert, for nothing to change,
Diet coke and a cell phone in my hands.
I talked to my son today and he said,
Someone else would take my place in this land—
The Huggable * Washable * Non-Toxic Lamb.

Randy Parker Hall
Ingram, TX

To Ourania

The earth is weighed and measured,
bought and sold: all surface
billboarded, all screens seduce.

Only the stars—invisible
through the orange pale
of commerce—are not for sale.

We calculate, bet
the odds we're not alone.
Listen: anybody home?

No answer yet from space.
May they hold their peace,
or better still, not be.

The solace of the sky is
not to see our likeness
mirrored in other faces.

The darkest distance offers
worlds to reach for, but beyond
the grasp of unclean hands:

endlessness that suffers
nothing, nothing, nothing
human at all.

Rebecca Raphael
Austin, TX

Endangered

— *“Most of the tiger’s body parts
are said to be aphrodisiacs”*
www.buzzle.com

Lace her lasagna with 2 tiger claws
and tell her how brown eyes
are windows to the fertile earth.
Sprinkle tufts of orange and black fur
onto her salad and proclaim
the softness of her skin has engendered
a new, more pliant crouton.
Bury sharp incisors deep
in pound cake; serve with strawberries,
whipped cream and a reminder
of how light fights its way
through every crack in curtains
just to reach her lithe, reclining form.
Or you could rely on words.
Every moment is endangered
until it happens, like Schrödinger’s cat
eyeing the lid of the shoebox
searching for any way out.

Robert Wynne
Burleson, TX

Calculations

You have overheard two strangers debating
their weekend plans, or your brother has called you
for a phone number, or your wife has asked if
you still love her——up spring those rapid mental
calculations where each hard fact is reckoned,
each pebble of thought made vital, which only
you know, from events you barely remember,
charged seconds spent deciding what to say,
whether to speak, after which lives will change
like circles rippling out from small, skipped stones.

Robert Allen
San Antonio, TX

Cowboy Sonnet

The wind wears November like an old blue coat
and sings the air in falling leaves;

it rattles branches in a turquoise sky,
whispering daylight into setting sun.

In the center of its autumn-ending tune,
I feel long low notes press their song into my skin,

winter music, reminding me you're gone...
a small blue flame in night that winter weaves.

I never dreamed I'd lose you,
never knew the winter stars could come undone.

Now I have to wonder who will lead me
through December into springtime once again?

Why does the chorus always sound so damned sad;
if Chris LeDoux was singing, bet it wouldn't feel so bad.

Ron Wallace
Durant, OK

Migration

They come on the breath of slumbering snow,
a trickle at first, a flash in the deep woods,
then the honking, chuckling streams on the plain
flowing down to the coasts and south to the sea,
returning wave on wave, these rivers of birds,
down clouds, pregnant with rain.

Rose Marie Eash
Bulverde, TX

Grandma, My Sister

The joy in my sister's heart,
was reflected by a wide slow
smile on her face, as the
fuzzy dark hair on the tiny baby's
head brushed softly against her chin.

Just an ounce over six pounds the
newest member of our family
slept contentedly on her grandma's
shoulder, absorbing love and comfort,
knowing she was safe, all was well
as long as Grandma was there for her.

Rosemarie Horvath Iwasa
Garfield Hts, OH

My People / My Friends

Many in the world today.
Old, new ones being born every day.

Short, tall, fat, skinny
Physical & Mental
Special ones, all are here.

You will never get the chance
To meet them all
Not to say, you'd want to

But those that cross your path in life
Are to be remembered
Each add to a life,
without knowing it.
Something needed or not
You know them

I am grateful & blessed by
Each and every one of you
You've enriched my life in so many ways.
It would take days to explain.

Though I may not talk of see you everyday.
You are in my
Heart
Mind
And Soul
You've changed me
Having crossed my Life path

I will never say good-bye
You people are my friends
We will meet, talk again
LATER

Sabrina M. Cummings
Round Rock, TX

Dreams of Fire and Ice

You look so masculine with your hands
in flames, eager to destroy or enlighten,
veins and motives hidden in the blaze.

I lie fractured and distressed, a block
of ice paralyzed with the anxiety
that my cold exterior is not an act.

You approach, red-hot energy flickering
up your spine, a leaf of fire blazing over
your head as though touched by spirit.

I withdraw, withhold, a frigid cube
of shame and desire, afraid that I
won't melt, just as afraid I will.

Scott Wiggerman
Austin, TX

Purple Passion

Imagine original woman;
Feel the vivid purple passion
that is her symbol.
Her symbol of freedom to question
your impressions of the way
she uses color and bold fashion
to sculpt her world.
A wild place set on
a canvas cloth
Drawings, paints, glitter
Pain and joy
A mixing and intertwining
A love story divine.
Her experiment that
shimmers, glows, lifts her high
with a rhythm only she can hear
and a song only she sings.
For she is the Creator of her world
A woman born of and one who lives in
a paradise of purple passion

Sharon Meixsell
Edmonds, WA

On Hearing Flutes In Santa Fe

It came from the Pueblos.
A piercing sound wounded
the silence of night.

A haunting melody
lifted the weight of time
for a moment,

it floated in the vast
emptiness of the desert
at my feet.

At times the notes were
high, a cluster of birds
in flight.

The trilled vibrations
echoed and re-echoed in
the mountains,

sometimes poured
into a bubbling river.

Rippling,
melting into dawn.

Shubh Bala Schiesser
Austin, TX

Inside This Room

The rasp of our middle of the night
will button up and walk away when the room turns
early morning blue. I may
never again cup my palms to your cheeks—

a tender moment strangers share.
Your bones, like a home where I could rest,
read a magazine, wander

smooth-chested-tin-roof-heart, you smell like cream and sage
dig down deep and release, deep and release
Can you cry for what you don't know?
My body is missing.

The night outside unfolds, zips me inside this room
with you. I only know it is Sean, with no sh: I hate that
spelling, but I am sure I could overlook some things
if you stayed for coffee and eggs.

Stacy Campbell
Hurst, TX

Worry Stone

I have balanced the idea of losing you
On the tip of my nose
It's so heavy it's deformed my features
I wouldn't recognize myself if I saw me
Frowning, with a 10 ton worry stone hanging off my face.
I've decided to size your finger for a ring
So we can carry the burden together.

I haven't told you yet,
But you've seen me fumbling over the setting.

Stephen Gros
Houston, TX

Felipe's Tears

Felipe Gottheil, my grandson, died of Sudden Adolescent Death Syndrome (SADS) on my 78th birthday, September 25, 2010, age 18

He lies there, so pale,
a gentle smile on his lips,
eyes closed as if asleep,
His body is covered to the chin
in huge lace ruffles
and in the corner the lustrous lid of the coffin,
waiting.

The stricken faces of his two younger brothers,
the tears of Mariana, his mother,
as she leans over her eldest son, her hand caressing
his face, his hair.
Her voice whispers loving words in those ears,
now unhearing forever.

The moment has arrived for us to leave for the cemetery.
His mother covers Felipe's face
with her own, murmuring softly,
pressing her cheek to his,
until she realizes she must withdraw.

I go to look at him one last time,
at this grandson so special, so intelligent, so creative,
gifted in music, in art.
Two tears shine under his eye
and it is as if Felipe is mourning with us, for our sorrow
at losing him,
crying with the tears lent him
by his grieving mother.

Sue Littleton
Buenos Aires, Argentina

After a Visit to Montignac

Tallow fills a shallow hollow in stone,
slender fingers strike flint,
fire skims the surface.
Armed with light,
talisman and courage
our artist steps into the cave
in search of a canvas.
Each play of shadow
across rock suggests
the curve of a horn, the arch of a rump,
the sweep of a leg.
Earliest man compelled to create
the hunt his muse
the separation of man and beast
found in their communion.

Susan Ellis
Houston, TX

Sunset Passage

The three friends stood
On the big, grey rocks and watched as
Time stood still and the sun slowly sank into the sea.
The only sound was the barely perceptible soft sizzle as
The ocean swallowed the sun and the day expired.

Their Key West vacation of sunshine,
Shopping, music, laughter and rum drinks
Created a mood and a memory to last a lifetime.
It was the last time they were together
As friends, sisters... soul mates.
To remember that one poignant moment
Means to recall the sadness
Of separating after having come so far.

They were no longer children standing on those rocks,
But women who had experienced all the purest joy,
Brutal rage, tender love and deepest hate
For themselves and one another.
The experiences and emotions which bound
Them together also drove them apart.
From that moment each one knew
Her own path was leading in a different direction
And she would continue alone.

The distance and silence slowly grew among them,
Becoming deeper and more complex
Through the years until it meant nothing
Except the passage of time.

Susan Beall Summers
Port Arthur, TX

Karate—Lesson 1

When a scream would tear your muscles
from their hinges
and grief gnaws at the space
between your breasts;
when memories are carcasses
trailing your ankles by thin strings;
when tomorrow is a duty,
today is exhaustion,
and yesterday is still too fearsome to contemplate;
when you are finally alone
and your allies are depleted;
when beauty no longer beats her wings
in your throat;
when the tall grasses of your heart
fear the sickle
of your thoughts
and the flames in your hands;
Then is the time to do one move slowly
over and over again;
one strike, one kick, one kiai
with one teacher, then another,
then the first again;
and next week, the same thing,
as if it mattered,
at what angle this knife-hand strike
touched an imaginary opponent.
Do it over and over again
until it does matter,
and you finally see
the sun throw off her glorious coat
of midnight blue.
In the tender green and pink of morning,
notice the dying clam
attract the diving gull;
and know, from this day on,
both are equal in your gaze.

Susan Rogers
Georgetown, TX

Untitled

Wrinkled settled foliage nurtures old tree.
Bare twisted twigs birth green leaves.
Buds burst into soft white petals.
Blossoms attract bees and butterflies.
Fruit appears. Circle completed.
Baked apples, topped with honey and cinnamon
grace my table, an occasion for blessings.

Suzanne Zoch
Tularosa, NM

God Is Here With You...

... "That" you 'ask' Him in.
Why are we just~ in the ways of this 'sin'~
To 'Be' it or not, is the terrified way~
Where the World just goes upside down, having 'your' way.

I Am God, your Almighty~! Your Man Up Above~
Who is sitting at 'perch' feeling gallantly 'sworn'
To allow you the 'mischief' that you enter 'in'
And THAT is My 'querrel', for this "To 'Be'" sin.

"I Am THAT I Am" and "That" you have My Ways,
Then to talent your "CO"-wield would then make Me graze.
For I've no way to 'tempt' you away from this 'haze',
Till you suddenly realize that God's Way is "SAVE"~!

Please do not 'refrain' from My Holy Ways.
For they're there to 'forsake' that which you truly 'hate'.
To 'live' in the tempest which hatred creates
Means to Me 'that' you are 'yet' to fathom True Ways.
I AM THAT I AM~! "THAT" is My plea~!
You cannot forsake it. It just makes you 'wease'.
To weasel right now would be to dim that Light...
And this Light perpetuates ALL to more Might.

Right NOW is the Time we've so long waited "For"~!
You just must be 'weary' of that a-fore-yarn~
Where the ways of the 'Tempest' could lead you 'astray'.
Oh God~! Be the Merciful One to Obey~!

Just have My Hand, O you Peoples of Yore,
For your hearts just grow wearier than you care for.
My OWN is THE WAY now, so BE "THAT" for God.
As God is your 'Shepherd', then you shall ne'er want~!

Please~! "Be" the 'Won' one who grows in My Stead.
I'll "LOVE" you till days end FOREVER this 'Sin'.
"Be" just the green man who sends forth true heart.
For 'there' is the "Prefect". You~ with My Heart~!

Suzie Steakley Johnson
Austin, TX

A Meeting with the Gypsy

The five of diamonds is the card of love
and of the girl who mingles with your blood like a poison.
She'll be beautiful. They always are.
The liquor will be heady. You won't get away.

Ten means something different for everyone.
I see a struggle, but, eventually, a triumph.
The suit is spades, you know what THAT means.
A pinch of salt to your left should do the trick.

Hearts are deceptive. They don't tell the truth.
And the nine is the worst of all.
A number of power folded in on itself
Is up to no good. Watch your back and your steps.

There will be a wedding, a house, a child
But none of them will belong to you.
She'll leave you, you know. They always do.
It's not her fault. She's only a girl.

Now, a six of clubs, then a nine of the same
Are another matter altogether.
Sleep with one eye open for a fortnight or so—
Oh, it's only a curse, love. Curses can be lifted.

Altogether, my pretty, your future is grey—
neither bright nor bleak, triumph nor tragedy,
It will be a hard life, but good, and full
and at least some of the time, you won't walk alone.

The five of diamonds is the card of love.

Terri Lynne Hudson
Austin, TX

Woman Size

I am built a Woman's Size
Can't you tell by the rise from the back of my stride
I am built a Woman's Size
Can't you see how I look from the way I give pride
I don't have to fake a pose or twist when I walk
Cause, what I have comes so natural, till it shows
In the way I talk
I am built a Woman's Size
Can't you see it in my eyes
I look straight in your face no matter the race
My attitude cannot be replaced
I stand sturdy
I stand strong
I stand up to any man
All Nite Long
Feel my heat
Feel my pain
Cause once you do, you'll never be the same
Cause, I am built a Woman's Size
Only a few can claim this
Only a few can tame it

Like a flame I ignite
Take flight
Stand for right
And not afraid to fight
Cause when you are built a Woman's Size
You're not worshiped as a prize
You're treated and dignified
Big and Proud
Not afraid to sing out loud
Just one Bad Mama, child
Cause I am built a Woman's Size

Skye the Soul Poet
Honolulu, HI

Gulf Meditation

she sits by the sea
to hear these reassuring waves
she can leave all the noise behind her
in the waters, depth, anonymous
behind her—the crush of time
waves admit only to a tidal frequency
sharp sounds of birds screech cut and cry
this is where we came from
and when the waters rise- where we will go
a preview of the future awaits us
beyond the little that this land knows
sometimes, i seek the waters of a river
sometimes the frequency of sea
oceans are our birthplace and our origins
one day will be our final destiny
meantime, in the Dreamtime, find her sitting
calm as oil near the deepest sea

Thom The Future
Austin, TX

Discrimination

Black and white,
Ebony and ivory.
Two seeds side by side,
One given sunlight and room to grow,
The other left in the dark.

Black face,
Tears welling up in brown eyes,
Longing for sunshine.

I can not bear to look upon your brown skin,
Wrinkled,
Squashed into cramped quarters.
Who are you?
Not the man I knew in my youth.
Vibrant,
Full of life,
Not afraid to try.

Now,
Old,
Tired,
Only waiting to die.

Tracey Huguley
Austin, TX

Combing

She is combing her hair and she thinks
about what she has become
Thinks about tides that scour her
beach, the sparkled stars of her night
She thinks about dew falling on petals,
and how many times she yearned
for this quietude within, this surety
that she is just who she happens to be

She thinks about falling and failure
and kneeling in silence
She thinks about laughter that slides from her
heart as silky as hair through her hands
She thinks about hands and how many
kisses they scattered, the stirring of sauces, the washing
of dishes, the threads of her sewing,
the weave of her love

And she thinks about love and how
often it felt weightless and clean
like soap bubbles iridescent and popping,
how many times she let her heart
be shaken and beaten, an old rug full of dust,
a quilt stitched with care

And she thinks about wounds and she thinks
about worries as she combs her red hair
She no longer cares if the silver
shines through. She thinks about veins
and the gold lode of living, she thinks about
her life with its mother lode of grace

Wendy Brown-Baez
Saint Louis Park, MN

Monarch Butterfly

Green and blue and gray sparkles
flashing in the sea surface
mean hope, happiness and anticipation.

Waves form and dissolve
crashing in the shore.
They suggest the cycle of life.
The sound of pebbles bump against each other
as the tide retreats.
This is all that's left behind.

Black and white sonogram,
Little baby inside its mother's womb,
remembrance of you moving,
tucked safely inside my belly.

Chocolate cake tells the story
of me eating it for the first time,
how you kicked and moved
with every bite.

A picture of a mother,
holding a newborn child,
wrapped in quilt.
Tiny feet and hands moving.

A little face frowns,
then cries for food,
remind me of you
lying quietly by my side.

Orange and black
delicate monarch butterfly
gently flapping its wings
across the wet green summer lawn.

Ximena Leon
Austin, TX

Poetry of 2011 Featured Poets

Blocked

Late May near Charlottesville, and the Blue Ridge mountains loaf along to my left, wrapped in their usual haze. The sky is a blank sheet, untroubled as a baby's sleep. A cardinal twangs out his notes of cheer; he has no truck with irony and post-modernism, and a bluebird—bluer than blue—flashes about the grass in his cloak of sky. The twin bags of doubt and self-loathing I have been dragging around all week start to grow lighter. A breeze gently ruffles the pages of the underbrush, and all the words I've been looking for assemble themselves on the lawn. I just have to coax them onto paper, the shy little darlings. But a gust of wind blows up, and they're gone.

Barbara Crooker
Fogelsville, PA

Poetry as a Quantum Vehicle

Rumi, "Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing
there is a field. I'll meet you there."

If you were to write your poem
by finger in desert sand
it might seem to be no more potent
than the peck print of a sparrow
on an apple;
the meaning gone to desert,
yet every grain rolled by a gentle wind
may form ripples
to become dunes in time
and every dune a product of your motivation,
be it angst, joy, despair, hope,
love or hate.
Emotion is the wind that rolls all particles
from the moment of being alive.
Whether you seek to be
in print in libraries
or on desert sand
poetry extends your hand.

Bob McMahon (Bob Mud)
Lutwyche, Brisbane, Australia

Love Eyes

Each blade of grass looked up at us.
We settled down into the thick greenery,
Pulled together like moon and earth,
Our kiss locked bodies in unison
The long shadow of the grasses,
Fell over the tops of her shoes
Each moment unveiled in the darkness
Her richer fragrance came closer,
Embraced, bound by tangled grape vine.
Leaves, painted the moon with black
Starlight quick to peak through branches.

The fox and squirrel stared at us,
Romantic breezes rustled our limbs.
Shivers I felt, she winked warmth unto me
By the golden twinkle of her eyes,
The buck deer and lonely bear stared at us,
A small menagerie encircled our camp,
We held each other tight, drank draft moon glow.
The animals huddled around our small fire
Their watchful eyes spied on us as we departed,
Sidestepped baby crickets, they hollered
Their little chants, moved us farther
Away from God's breathing creatures.
Branches and leaves no longer covered
Our nakedness under autumn's cool stare,
The stars sprinkled love dust upon us
Our bodies were buried, trapped deep in passion,
We smothered each other in naïve lustfulness
While the apple orchard looked on.

Chip Ross
Austin, TX

Haiku

First: five syllables
Second: seven syllables
Third: five syllables

When mom and dad split
My childhood was the bridge
Burning between them

Love, a drug you can
Abuse and overdoes or
Use and overcome

She wanted a break
Said she needed space, I said
We can't breathe in space

He picked a flower
That set his heart on fire
Flames for Princess Peach

To give Peace a fist
Violently beautiful
Your actions must be

Speakers under clothes
Enters a crowded market
Musical bomber

Is it redundant
To tell a stripper that you're
A womanizer?

When God steals my breath
I catch it using my heart
As the paper bag

Daniel C. Ramos
Midland, TX

Chalk Buddha

my chalk buddha sits
atop a stone pyramid
surrounded by green

in the hard spring rain
milky tears slip over stone
to join earth again

with each passing year
his features soften and fade
his essence remains

bodhisattvas rest
in each of us quiescent
ready to be born

Deborah A. Akers
Austin, TX

His Hands

I remember his hands on the bike
as I struggled to learn balance.

I remember his hands moving in frustration
trying to explain algebra to a ninth grader
who thought it voodoo.

I remember his hands at my first wedding.
The photographer said, "Adjust his tie and
give him a word of advice."
He was right, "Don't," was good advice.

I remember his hands with the scabs
where they had bled on car parts or fence posts

I remember his hands slipping in my pocket
for a cigarette after he quit
but before the emphysema took away
most of what he enjoyed.

I remember his hands on my shoulders
as I played cards in his den with brothers-in-law.

I remember his hands, skin paper-thin and dry
as I held them and tried to share
what little strength I could muster
in the face of what took him away.

I remember his hands folded over the tan suit
in the carved wooden coffin my youngest chose
"Pick that one, Grandad might have made that."

I remember the balance his hands brought me.

Del Cain
Saginaw, TX

Murciélago

“Murciélago,” you called.

Yes, but bat is not my name.
I come from smaller places,

betweens, where cricket echoes fill chinks
and coins land, tail down.

I come from holes where light hugs closest
and love, a sharp pin, points upward.

No, Murciélago is not my name,
but bat is how I think.

Dove of night.
Leathery. Black.

Gail Langstroth Baltimore, MD

Rose Passage

I'm taking the wild curve
the one that will take me to the crest and later defines First Street.
Where strangers nod and smile
and really look into each other's eyes...
Where boys wave, speeding by on bikes offering faces full of simple gladness.
It is here that young whales will prepare for their ocean journey, porpoises dazzle
as water currents texturize the
mighty Saratoga.

Not quite to sunset
when skies cooperate,
a glorious fusion of sun, water and human soulfulness
puts a rose patina on the horizon
suffusing the vista in countless shades of pinks and earthens...utterly visceral...
A world bathed
in an indescribable sweetness.

Even before the Tibetan bell rings
in the center of town
and before the last of the afternoon warmth evaporates
a premonition of heaven exists
for those taking
the wild curve.

**India Rassner-Donovan
Bastrop, TX**

Love Yer Guts

we can talk on and on about logistics
tell stories about love
how we've been so lucky to feel it
as it slowly moved into all of our comfortable spaces
surrounding us like Grannie's quilt on a chilled night
worn, soft, comfortable, protective
we adored every little pattern
each and every single stitch
most days it seemed we were really getting away with it
we sit together around the campfire
a blink of an eye later
find our quilt has been ripped apart
vicious teeth came in and tore it all to shreds
what if it leaves you feeling a lot sad and a lot crazy
I mean this was the thing that mattered
those friends who don't try too hard
flaunt their happiness innocently
all intertwined with their honey dripping off a spoon
swooning, crooning how much I love you
right in front of our faces
we listen bit lipped to lyrics regarding the roof being torn off a home
loss burns marrow of bone
2 hot ladies staring down at palms filled with random string
not even sure when it all began unraveling
I don't even mind as I cry in front of everyone
those who I don't know so well are already gone
birds learn to fly and just as love someday fall from the sky
my friends sit strong in the circle
encourage us to pull out the needle and thread
get on with it
we sit re-stitching our lives

imperceptibly through teary eyes
we watch and learn as
they lay their bald, fat babies lovingly in our arms
they hug around our every lonely square of skin
we are able to recall the feeling of love with grace
the warm, enveloping quilt
made each and every stitch
of true love's precious space

Jena Kirkpatrick
Austin, TX

Street Sales

It's the same smile
and the pronunciation of "darling"
never varies
but the ladies of Kuala Lumpur
who gather in fours on the edge of the night market
in China Town
don't seem half as tragic
in their saris
bindis
and subtly dyed hair
as the bleached blondes back home
hunched beneath hoodies
trying to stay warm on the killing grounds
of our frost cracked pavements.
Kuala Lumpur or Ipswich
each deserves a smile
and I wish them well in their endeavors.
After all, artists, whores or hustlers—
everyone of us sells a little of ourselves on a daily basis.
It's just easier to see from the Swiss Hotel on Jalah Sultan
than the Boulevard in Mid-City
where the taxis are metered and brand new
and a man in uniform carries your luggage.

John Row
Bures, Suffolk, England

view from the bus

i look outside my window

the bus stops, abruptly
my lips knock against the bar
but my eyes notice the young

at the bus stop the young kiss
and so many stare at this—
he is chinese, she obviously malay—

in kissing the usual markers
race, language, religion, age
dont seem to matter, or do they?

Dr. Kirpal Singh
Singapore

Embouchure

And that is why, the next time,
before the morning light broke
and he woke to find her wanting,
he said it, tensed under all those
loosening folds that cannot wait
the uncovering of any coming light.
I can't lay here all day was what
he thought he heard her answer
pressing forward in his left hand
her forgiveness. Had there been,
from the beginning, any other
way to say it—when the light, say,
broke on them first in waves,
then rustled back across the floor
like sand? To be pleased was not
her pleasure? He almost thought it,

let it drop. And so
here they are together, these two.
He offers her a drink, he stokes
the fire. She, caring less for the drink
than the fire, he, caring less for the fire
than for another story, finger together
in their hands of glass the pages
of another dénouement where nothing
was left out. That's what he wonders
also, tapping ash: how all of this
holding on was touched off. They reach
outside the fire's light, his hand
on her hip, her finger drying his lip,
the night turning aquamarine,
which will by morning solidify
again as water, water.

Kurt Heinzelman
Austin, TX

My Mother Dreams of Kites

Her voice is clearer today
not as defeated
she had a good dream
she dreamed of kites
that's good, I tell her,
because I know how it feels
to wake up wounded.
I see the long tailed kites
red and yellow
swimming up into vast deep blue
the sort of sky one doesn't see
very often in Santa Monica
where the air is milky
heavy with ocean mist.
Except when the Santa Anas
blow their hot breath
through canyons
snapping branches
crackling leaves
inciting arsonists
to set the world
ablaze.

My mother's fire
erupts more often now,
her small frail body
unable to contain
her rage.
But today I hear
just a little anger
toward her caregiver
toward her doctor.
At my father for dying.
The dream of kites
has cast her eyes
skyward.

Mary Lee Gowland
Kerrville, TX

Dream of the River Quiet

Summer's river licks each star
with a small silver tongue
whispers of change, of raindrops
of you, a girl or boy on the Brazos river bank.

The rising moon dreams
of falling snow and of the river, quiet.
The metal bars of your window
transform into shadows on the floor.

You could walk away
but your home is darkness
your feet encased
by the concrete block building.

In the cells beyond yours
a thousand restless men or women
turn in sleep, blanketed
by the scent of old sweat and urine.

Few awake to watch the stars
or the moon moving away
taking away jasmine scented
dreams of freedom.

Mary Margaret Carlisle
Webster, TX

Three Love Poems on a Page

THOU ART MORE LARGE THAN FAR AWAY

Should a poet not
attempt to hear
a few notes over
those heard by Rover

and a few below
the long distance tales
of elephants and whales

More ultra than violet
and more infra than red
how else to touch and share
what's in your heart and head

SHYLOCK'S SHADOW

If you are cut
do I not bleed

THE LITTLE DUTCH BOY WRITES POETRY

Only a drop or two
and only from time to time
but you can feel the weight
of the whole North Sea behind it

Neil Meili
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Rather Than Burn

Rather than burn
 you should marry—
said the apostle
who knew as well as any
the tortured heart of sin,
the intolerable skin of saints.

Rather than scorch your soul
in the hell of your own making
your body like a withered
vine feeding the fire,
rejoice instead in your nature
breathed into you by God
to lift you out of the clay,
making you human by desire.

If you owe all your being to him
—without whom was nothing
made that was made—
love as indecorous lust
the chaste as the churlish
all things coiled into the heart,

then to him be the glory
if—scorning love of mother and father—
the one to whom you may cling
boasts the same sex as yourself,
though the apostle's church
forbid you marriage then
and make of you a holocaust!

Denied the valley of its course
to wider waters, a river
swallows its banks and rots
the roots that clutch. And if
they burn who must be celibate
 —for a fecund God—
what wonder that the puritanical
lake of burning blood bursts
and flows from the temple to the cradle?

or, married to Christ,
the body of the church
in whom priest and prophet are one
the blood flowing from his sides
becomes the giddy wine craving
communion with its starved flesh
for a wholly new covenant
with the awkward needs of life on earth?

Ogaga Ifowodo
Nigeria

I love how you when you

push that stroller, wear that skirt, speak into
that cell phone, say my name, hold my hand, smile
when i look at you, write poetry and
e-mail messages, fall asleep beside
me, read books, laugh at my jokes, sing to our
children, bite the inside of your mouth when
you're thinking, apologize for almost
everything, find me in a bookstore,
give me directions that may or may not
be correct, dance with me, have me open
your jar of pickles and hand you items
from the top shelf, move your hands when you get
nervous, ramble on about anything
(and then apologize for rambling),
get lost with me in the woods, lean against
me when we're alone, shut up and kiss me.

Robert Lee Brewer
Duluth, GA

Bastrop State Park

I cross the sandy bottom swale
cut through iron ridges water dug.
Beside the winding backwoods trail
orange needles lie in thick piled rug.

Away the lone woodpecker knocks.
The silly songbirds chirp and trill.
Nearby the sly grayfeather mocks.
They all grow bold while I sit still.

The yaupon thicket's thatch is fierce,
but far the meadow greenly shines.
Straight trunks close ranks no eye can pierce.
There's no horizon in the pines.

Who put this scenic overlook
atop the highest hill around?
Who built that steep steep trail I took
that raised me up but wore me down?

At evening time the colors fade
and dim light glows with slow sunset.
The understory draws a shade.
Above the trees make silhouette.

I hear the woodland toad's high trill
I loved in Houston boyhood days.
In Houston, now, his voice is still,
but here in these lost pines, he stays.

Robin Cravey
Austin, TX

“Girl” (an excerpt)

Out sharpening my enemies with what Eve knew in Adam
Because I am a girl
I open and close my legs
On the faith that the good will come and
The toxic release of traitors will run
Like thieves from territories destined
For greatness
Saving virgins from knives; erected beauty
Slashing at the real war
The core of male identity
My masculine side strikes back
Whipping fights to feel
With the right to dance, rejoice and deal
With the heat of my will to survive
Mutilated in body but not in mind
Because I am a girl
Without a place for peace, without silver for pleasure
He burned my face, my legs, my back, my treasure
For dowries greater than the hellish skin
I grew out of when charred memories colored my lips
Like apartheid’s cancer with head wraps for cover
Because I am pretty on the inside and
From his fire I shall take some of my own and
I tell you this because I am a girl
A drunken man tossed his 10-month old baby girl
Out a window in Shanghai
She survived eight stories
Slowed by tree branches
Landing in soft soil and
Into the arms of this poem
Breaking only her leg and
I tell you this because I am a girl

Tantra-zawadi
New York, NY

The Tortoise

I set my pace deliberately
keeping precious what matters
under the hard shell
I show the world.

Truth is
survival counts
each step I take assures that.

I'm not much on ambition,
but how long you folks been around?

I put that question to Aesop
when he was a betting lad—
gave my bookie good odds against his rabbit
I left him with a moral and a question
“can you hang?”

Takes time to comprehend
but patience comes with my pace
so let me rephrase that
how do you follow your dreams?

Me, I keep what's precious
under the hard shell
I show the world.

Timothy Mason
Cambridge, MA

Battle Cry of Nightmares Awakened

Awaken O nation, is there not a cause
The enemy's advance leaves no time to pause
The call has been sent and there will be a cry
Victory or oppression awaits our reply
Now faced with discomfort see comfort we've known
Let's choose to defend it and send it back home
We live for our children and their children too
If we don't fight for them, then what can they do
So this call is to every woman and man
Stand up for our children and fight where you can
If not on the front lines where I pray to be
Give whatever resource we need to be free
And if it's the case you can do nothing more
Than lend me your pen, I am going to war

Xavior Patterson
Austin, TX

Editorial Staff

Barbara Youngblood Carr, Editor

Author of fourteen books of poetry/prose and short stories about her Native American Cherokee heritage and growing up in Texas the South and Southwest (Nine books in her Ancestor Series partially funded by the City of Austin arts Commission); storyteller/humorist/editor/musician; Austin International Poetry Festival Board member eighteen years (Secretary many years, co-Editor for annual Anthology seven years and Editor three years); venue host and workshop facilitator in Austin for nineteen years; published in many newspapers, journals, anthologies and magazines; published on three continents; appointed as National Poet Laureate for the Military Order of the Purple Heart in Washington, D.C. 2005-2008; September 2009, received the first White Buffalo Native American Poet Laureate Award for her Native American writing. Visit her website at ancestorpoet.com. Complete list of publications on website.

Ashley Steakley Kim, Editorial Assistant

Blue-moon poet Ashley S. Kim is an Austin native and seventh-generation Texan. A professional nanny, published poet and family writer, this “Maya Poppins” of sorts, and self-proclaimed “Captist” (loving Catholic wife, devoted Baptist daughter), can also sing the alphabet backwards and play both hands of “Heart and Soul.” Despite the murder of countless houseplants, she intends one day to garden. For now, she watches the flame acanthus spread like wildfire and the passiflora flourish skyward, tendrils spilling wildly over fenceposts, much like her poetry.

Lynn Wheeler-Brandstetter

Lynn was born in British Columbia, Canada, and moved to Brownsville, Texas, in 1980 with her mother and stepfather. She then moved to Austin, Texas, where she attended Austin Community College. She was employed with the private sector until she transferred to the State of Texas in 1999. Lynn is currently employed with Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Manufactured Housing Division. Her commitment in serving the citizens and residents

of Texas makes a profound difference in other peoples' lives, and provides her with satisfaction. She is known for her dedication on the job as a state employee. She has a passion to write poetry based on her current and past experiences. Her love and creativity for writing is a gift she shares, hoping to touch lives and the people she encounters. Her desire to write poetry has continued through the years. Her zest for life has flourished through her poetry and is exemplified in her writing. Energetic, loyal, and devoted, she has spent several years volunteering her time for several non-profit organizations. Lynn has two beautiful daughters, Meagan and Kaitlan, and two grandsons, Hunter and Garrett. She is married to a wonderful, loving husband, Curtis Dale Brandstetter.

John Berry, Editorial Assistant

John Berry writes Muse-centered poetry celebrating each of the nine muses. He has won more than two dozen prizes in contests ranging from international to local. In addition to being in a dozen anthologies and three internationally distributed magazines, he has four books (three still in print) and three more he is preparing for publication. One of the latter contains a short epic poem (only 2151 lines) about the return of the Holy Grail to the 21st century, and how it got to the Hill Country. He is the yellow man among the founders.

Katya Bochenkova, Editorial Assistant

Katya Bochenkova writes poems that upon rereading say new things. Fluent in three languages, she weaves the grammar, thoughts and structure of many cultures to create haunting, evocative landscapes where what the reader brings helps shape what they find. A local Austin poet with ties to Kiev, Ukraine, Katya has been published in both English and Russian. By day, she runs a school, keeps her cats out of mischief and lives out the family motto "things are not what they seem." By night, she can be found writing, collaborating on music projects and listening to the stars.

Michael Sadler, Assistant Editor

Michael Lynn Sadler is a poet living in Austin, Texas. He currently serves as Art Committee Chair for Austin International Poetry Festival and co-edited the 2010 and 2011 poetry anthology *Di-Verse-City*. Through intense lyrical language and concise imagery his work explores the modern social and political dynamics shaping our increasingly factional culture. His previous collection,

Faith of Mortals was published in 2003. His most recent collection, *Prisoner's Dilemma* is currently available through Smudge Fire Press. For more information or to contact him please visit www.smudgefire.com.

Ron Jorgenson, Editorial Assistant

Native of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Holds doctoral degrees from Marquette University and The Johns Hopkins University. Poetry has appeared in several journals and anthologies and has won prizes from local, state and national organizations, including 2010 Senior Poet Laureate of Texas. He is on the Board of the Austin International Poetry Festival.

Cover Artist, Cover Designer & Judge

Kyley Cantwell, Cover Artist

Kyley Cantwell is curator of collections and exhibitions at the Museum of East Texas. He was born in Austin and grew up in Georgetown. Aside from doing museum work he is also an active photographer, printmaker, and painter who exhibits in all three mediums, sometimes combining them. He received his Master of Fine Arts degree in 2006 from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, and currently resides in the Piney Woods.

Alyson Stringer Steakley, Cover Designer

Alyson Stringer Steakley, an Austin native, grew up playing under her mom's drawing board while she worked on newspaper ads, illustrations and magazine paste-ups.

After graduating from the University of North Texas, Alyson returned to Austin to work at a full-service design firm that primarily served Simon® Malls. In 1999 she became a freelance designer to pursue a wider variety of clients that now include magazines, restaurants, small businesses, summer camps, event venues and more.

In 2003, she and her mom, Cheri Stringer, launched fireflycreatives.com—providing clients with a one-stop shop for web and print design. In 2007, they

launched *truelovelogos.com*—offering couples monogram designs for their wedding and beyond, and coming soon—*familymonograms.com*!

Alyson and her husband Stephen, also a native Austinite, can often be found with their pups, Tucker and Disco, outside somewhere enjoying the views of Texas ... via porch, boat, lakeshore or ranch.

Alan Birkelbach, Guest Judge

Alan, a native Texan, was the 2005 Poet Laureate of Texas. His work has appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Grasslands Review*, *Borderlands*, *The Langdon Review*, and *Concho River Review*. He has received a Fellowship Grant from the Writer's League of Texas, been named as one of the Distinguished Poets of Dallas, was nominated for a Wrangler, Spur, and Pushcart Prizes, and is a member of The Academy of American Poets. He has six collections of poetry: *Bone Song*, *Weighed in the Balances*, *No Boundaries*, *New and Selected Works* (the first in the Texas Poet Laureate Series from TCU Press), *Translating the Prairie*, *Smurglets Are Everywhere*, and *Rogue Waves*. In 2011 he has an upcoming volume—*The Thread* from Eakin Press (the winner of the 2010 Eakin Memorial Manuscript Competition.)



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