

VERSE WISCONSIN

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FEATURES

BEYOND *HAPPILY EVER AFTER*:
WORKING AT THE ENDINGS OF OUR POEMS
BY SARAH BUSSE

POETRY AS A SPIRITUAL PATH BY CATHRYN COFELL

STILL SMALL VOICE: A MEDITATION ON FAITH &
POESY BY CHARLES NEVSIMAL

WENDY VARDAMAN INTERVIEWS
JOHN KOETHE

**“I am interested
in the holiness of
everything... I am interested
in the consecration of every
cacophonous experience in the
conglomerate of my life.”**

—Charles Nevsimal

THE BELIEF ISSUE

**“I don’t
think belief can
be voluntary. I think
we’re often drawn
to believe things we
know at a higher
level to be false.”**

—John Koethe

POETRY

BY Gale Acuff ❁ Idella
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**“I have a hard time
thinking of myself as an
artist. I have a harder time
thinking of myself as spiritual.
Somehow, while my back was
turned, I’ve become both.”**

—Cathryn Cofell

🌀 Editors' Notes 🌀

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

Pop the champagne corks, this issue marks our first full year at *Verse Wisconsin*! Thanks to all our subscribers, donors, and volunteers for helping us bring our vision into being, and especially thanks to the poets whose words and images have filled the pages, online and in print, of *Verse Wisconsin* over the last year. We are truly grateful to each of you for your contributions, and the many exchanges, conversations, and friendships that have developed through the course of our work.

Recently, we met to brainstorm what the second year might hold in store. We will continue to publish both a print magazine and an online issue. The content of each will continue to be different but interrelated. As happened this year, some of the prose may be featured in both places, and we will continue to select a few of the online issue's poems to feature in print. Remember our selection is not based on any sort of "best of" criteria. Rather, we hope to feature the variety and range of our online issue, for our print audience.

The biggest change we plan to make is moving to a tri-quarterly schedule, publishing three times a year instead of four. This will allow us to ease up on ourselves a little bit and find more space in our lives for our families and our own writing. Issues will appear in March, July, and November. Your subscription will still cover four issues; it will just last a little longer. We will also no longer read submissions in the summer months of June, July and August.

The next issue of *VW* will appear in March. We'll take this opportunity to remind you that although we're not a non-profit at this time, your donations are most welcome. We're grateful for every subscription that comes our way, and equally so for each donation, no matter how small. We operate very close to the bone; *VW* is an all-volunteer effort, and even \$10 makes a difference.

Meanwhile, we're busily at work on the next year's plans...partnering with **Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf** for our online summer theme, "Luck of the Draw" (visit versewisconsin.org for details), looking at possible upcoming features on form, verse drama, spoken word, and more, and of course reading the poems that poets across the country and around the world submit. We welcome your poems, letters, and suggestions, and look forward to hearing from you soon!

Thanks to Alice D'Alessio, Marie Loeffler, Richard Roe, and Jeanie Tomasko for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of *VW*'s editors.

Contact us: editors@versewisconsin.org.

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Books Received Spring 2010

Publisher & author links available online

- Paul Bussan**, *On Freeing Myself from a Full Nelson Hold and Other Sonnets*, PSB, 2007
- Emery L. Campbell**, *This Gardener's Impossible Dream*, Multicultural Books, 2005
- Robin Chapman & Jeri McCormick** (Eds), *Love Over 60: an Anthology of Women's Poems*, Mayapple Press, 2010
- Sue Chenette**, *Slender Human Weight*, Guernica, 2009
- Sue Chenette**, *Solitude in Cloud and Sun*, Silver Maple Press, 2007
- Dan Chiasson**, *Where's The Moon, There's The Moon*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *Recess*, Woodhenge Press, 2009
- R. Virgil Ellis**, *Fuzzy Logic at Hartford High*, Woodhenge Press, 2010
- Fabu**, *Poems, Dreams and Roses* [children's book], 2009
- Ed Galing**, "Sunrise, Sunset," Peerless Press, 2010
- Ed Galing**, *Lower East Side Poems*, Alternating Current, 2008
- Brent Goodman**, *the brother swimming beneath me*, Black Lawrence Press, 2009
- Barbara L. Greenberg**, *Late Life Happiness*, Parallel Press, 2010
- Kenneth P. Gurney**, *Fluid Shape of an Empty Womb*, 2010
- Joan Wiese Johannes**, *Sensible Shoes*, New Dawn Unlimited, 2010
- Richard Kovac**, *Untitled*, PM Books, 2008
- Nick Lantz**, *We Don't Know We Don't Know*, Graywolf Press, 2010
- John Lehman**, *The Village Poet*, Zelda Wilde Publishing, 2010
- Gerald Locklin & Beth Wilson**, *Modest Aspirations*, Lummo Press, 2010
- Jack Phillips Lowe**, *Revolt at the Internet Café*, 2010
- Mokasiya**, *The Shaman's Dream*, 2010
- Ander Monson**, *Vanishing Point, Not a Memoir*, Graywolf Press, 2010
- Jamie Lynn Morris**, *From Odes to Ends*, Lulu Publishing, 2010
- Jamie Lynn Morris**, *Ode to Naughtiness*, Lulu

- Publishing, 2007
- Cristina M.R. Norcross**, *Unsung Love Songs*, Lulu Publishing, 2010
- Stephen Roger Powers**, *The Follower's Tale*, Salmon Poetry, 2009
- Nydia Rojas**, *Stealing Daylight*, Flutter Press, 2009
- Kay Sanders**, *That Red Dirt Road*, Parallel Press, 2010
- Robert Schuler**, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, 2010
- Matt Schumacher**, *The Fire Diaries*, Woodcraft of Oregon, 2010
- Richard Swanson**, *Not Quite Eden*, Fireweed Press, 2010
- Jacqueline West**, *Cherma*, Parallel Press, 2010

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Books Reviewed Online

- Kim Addonizio** (ed.), *Best New Poets 2009*, Samovar Press, 2009 by Erik Richardson
- Mary Rose Betten**, *Finding Your Best Angle (Give this to an actor)*, Fithian Press, 2009, two reviews: by Julie L. Moore & Moira Richards
- Dave Bonta**, *Odes to Tools*, Phonicia, 2009 by Noel Sloboda
- Robin Chapman & Jeri McCormick** (eds), *Love Over 60: an Anthology of Women's Poems*, Mayapple Press, 2010, two reviews: by Judith Barisonzi & Beatriz Fernandez
- Wyn Cooper**, *Chaos is the New Calm*, Boa Editions, 2010 by Timothy Mayo
- Maryann Corbett**, *Dissonance*, Scierter Press, 2009 by Judith Swann
- Bruce Dethlefsen**, *Breather*, Fireweed Press, 2009 by Lester Smith
- Carmen Germain**, *These Things I Will Take with Me*, Cherry Grove Collections, 2008 by Lisa Vihos
- Edward Hirsch**, *The Living Fire, New and Selected Poems*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2010 by Wendy Vardaman
- Karla Huston**, *Inventory of Lost Things*, Centennial Press, 2009 by Lester Smith
- Don Kimball**, *Journal of a Flatlander*, Finishing Line Press, 2009 by Sarah Busse
- John Koethe**, *Ninety-fifth Street*, Harper Perennial, 2009 by Wendy Vardaman
- Michael Koehler**, *Red Boots*, Little Eagle Press, 2009 by Robert B. Moreland
- Nick Lantz**, *We Don't Know We Don't Know*, Graywolf Press, 2010 by Lisa Vihos
- Gerald Locklin & Beth Wilson**, *Modest Aspirations*, Lummo Press, 2010 by Lou Roach
- Charles P. Ries**, *I'd Rather be Mexican*, Cervená Barva Press, 2010 by Alice D'Alessio
- Nydia Rojas**, *Stealing Daylight*, Flutter Press, 2009 by Marie Loeffler
- Penelope Scambly Schott**, *Six Lips*, Mayapple Press, 2010 by Moira Richards
- Richard Swanson**, *Not Quite Eden*, Fireweed Press, 2010 by Kathleen Serley
- Jacqueline West**, *Cherma*, Parallel Press, 2010 by Judith Swann

Books Received Summer 2010

Publisher & author links available online

- Ned Balbo**, *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems*, Story Line Press, West Chester, PA 19383, 2010
- Brian Kevin Beck**, *Poems*, Wonderside Productions, P.O. Box One, Whitewater, WI 53190, 2010
- Cathryn Cofell**, *Lip* (CD), music by Obvious Dog, www.cathryncofell.com, 2010
- Philip Dacey**, *Mosquito Operas, New and Selected Short Poems*, Rain Mountain Press, 2010
- Alix Doom**, *Cedar Crossings*, Blue Light Press, P.O. Box 642, Fairfield, IA 52556
- Karl Elder**, *The Houdini Monologues* (plus CD), *Seems 43 & 44* (special issue), 2010
- Bart Galle**, *Everything Is True at Once*, Passager Books, 2010
- Carmen Germain**, *These Things I Will Take with Me*, Cherry Grove Collections, 2008
- Adam Halbur**, *Poor Manners*, Ahadada Books, 2009
- Erin Keane**, *Death-Defying Acts*, WordFarm, 2010
- Jim Lally**, *Stick Tight Man*, Accents Publishing, 2010
- Jude Lally**, *The View from Down Here*, Accents Publishing, 2010
- Midwest Poetry All-Stars** (Kaveh Akbar, Steve Henn, David J. Thompson, & Oren Wagner), *Show Stoppers*, stephenthenn@aim.com, 2010
- Julie L. Moore**, *Slipping Out of Bloom*, WordTech Editions, 2010
- Charles P. Ries**, *I'd Rather be Mexican*, Červená Barva Press, 2010
- Thomas R. Smith**, *The Foot of the Rainbow*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010
- Katerina Stoykova**, *The Air Around the Butterfly*, Fakel Express, 2009
- Katrin Talbot**, *St. Cecelia's Daze*, Parallel Press, 2010
- Lesley Wheeler**, *Heterotopia*, Barrow Street Press, 2010
- Gail White**, *Easy Marks*, David Robert Books, 2008

Submission guidelines can be found at versewisconsin.org. Please send us a review copy of your recently published book or chapbook! Join us on Facebook for announcements & news.

Poetry As a Spiritual Path

by Cathryn Cofell

The End of the Story

If, in fact, the way
it all turns out is just
that, after flood and feast
and famine, after war and
disease and cataclysm,
after climate change and
evolution have their way
with us, the earth wears
out and becomes extinct
and we are not even re-
membered at the molecular
level, quarks and strings
going on about their own
quirky business, and nothing
matters but empty space
and energy, why do I care
so much about all my
catastrophic ignorance of
the right wines and coffees,
the spices that shore up
the sauce, how the lungs
or the liver or the spleen
or even the poor heart works?
And why do we flirt with
embarrassment, make out with
grief, marry atrocity, as if
we lived in a universe of
hurt, and were not just
a sympathetic vibration, a
symphony in which
each plucked string's swells,
each rung bell's swing
tells another story altogether?

—RON WALLACE, MADISON, WI

Fortune Cookie Fortune

You feel full
will love soon
die soon joy

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI
*visit VW Online for more by this
author*

I have a hard time thinking of myself as an artist. I have a harder time thinking of myself as spiritual. Somehow, while my back was turned, I've become both.

I have poetry all over my house: lines from poems taped in the oddest of places, paper and pens in every crevice in case I am inspired while folding towels or cleaning out the litter box. I subscribe to the best poetry magazines and attend the best festivals. I have knelt at the feet of Gwendolyn Brooks and was struck dumb.

But it's smoke and mirrors. I cling to the appearances but struggle to admit I am a poet in certain company, a somewhat successful wanna be who never has the time or motivation or perhaps courage to be what I consider a true artist.

Growing up, "spiritual" meant Catholic and all the trappings—parochial school, CCD, no fish on Fridays, the rosary, all those c words—confession, commandment, communion. . . I never made a firm decision to stop being Catholic, I just snuck away. I stopped going to church on my own but still went when visiting family. I stopped going to communion but always had a good mortal sin recently committed as just cause. I stumbled around alternately plagued by guilt and relief at this decision and indecision to be and not be Catholic, to be or not be spiritual.

But like all good cases of guilt, it had a hard time staying buried—that anger, confusion, passion trickles its way out and into my poetry. Actually, to use the word "trickled" to describe anything in my work is like saying the Klan is a friendly little men's club. My poems are in your face, rock 'em sock 'em stuff. I write about addiction, sexuality and yes, religion—and often from the first person so my readers are sure it's me in there even when it's not.

Mediocre, mixed up—I became the anti-poet, the anti-spiritual poet. I didn't plan it that way. I would write a poem about playing catch and be surprised to find the word religion tucked inside. I would describe a place and find a Catholic church as a landmark.

It was when I tackled the issue of abortion in a poem that I first recognized that this struggle was picking my lock. In original drafts the poem was convoluted and vague. I brought the draft

to a workshop and the instructor asked "what are you afraid of? Just say it." So I did: "The only hard part about the abortion was getting the car to start," is the first line of "Her Religion," my turning point poem and the title poem for my first book. One stanza in particular best suggests my state of mind at the time: "She was only sixteen but understood her religion better than any Sunday morning harridan. God would forgive her. Her mother would not."

After I wrote that and lived to tell about it, my poetry literally exploded. No taboo was safe from my pen, especially religion: in one poem I flail about folks who do evil in the name of God, with "our lady of perpetual deodorant waving her agnostic arms" as a flying tour guide. In another I dream Newt Gingrich black and gay. And so on and so on until I published that first book.

After the book came out, a friend said "you needed to get that out of your system. Now you need to move on." And she was right. I knew I would never be a poet the likes of Mary Oliver. Nor would I ever find peace kneeling over the rosary. Problem was, I didn't know how else to be, so my poetry became my weapon.

Through the ministries of a patient husband, a wild child, strong friends and, of equal importance, a spiritual path that landed me at a Unitarian Universalist (UU) Fellowship, I am slowly coming to terms with the me of this equation; I am coming to discover the poetry in my spiritual path and the spirituality of even the harshest of my poems.

This hasn't been a presto chango magico awakening and I know I've got a long way to go. I'm still uncomfortable answering some of those philosophical questions the UU minister first asked me years ago when I contemplated joining—and no, I'm not going to tell you what they are; let's just say years of bible stories take a long time to turn over in one's head.

As for my poetry, I still use it as a weapon when the need arises. But not always now, and the tone is often more introspective. I will most likely never lead a group of you on a hugging and hand-holding spiritually poetic retreat, my words may never calm the sick or bless a wedding, but I now realize that who I am, what I have to say and how I have to say it are just as important to my spiritual path and perhaps to yours too.



Know For Sure

All we know for sure is
 all places that exist
 were once one place.

All we know for certain is
 all the beings that exist
 or will exist
 or have existed
 were originally all together
 in an infinitesimal dot.

All we can know for sure is
 if humans went from dugout canoes
 to spaceships to the Moon
 in 10,000 years,
 in 10,000 years humans can go from
 spaceships to the Moon
 to Moons made into spaceships
 traveling to other galaxies.

All we can know for certain is
 a Blue Whale swims in its life
 a distance equal the distance
 from the Earth to the Moon and back.

All we can know for a fact is
 Sequoias grant the desires
 of those who worship them.

All we can trust in is
 the wind rustling the leaves of the Oak
 is our ancestors speaking to us.

All we can know for pure is
 azure lures hawk-gyre.

All we can grow for queer is
 superb boyrump in moonlight.

All we can row for endure is
 pebbles are bubbles of stone
 that just take longer to burst.

All we can show for mirror is
 druids were so certain of immortality
 they lent money to other druids
 on the condition
 they pay them back after they're dead.

All we can glow for echo is
 one followed by octillion zeros
 would fill a book
 a trillion pages long.

All we can flow for gecko is
 all the unwritten poems yet to emerge
 from brains of humans yet to be born
 from now till the Sun explodes
 are as a child's vapor cloud upon a window.

All we can snow for cure is
 the center of the Earth isn't that far away
 and if we walk 20 miles a day
 we can get there in 200 days.

All we know beyond question is
 the supernova rate
 in the observable universe
 is one per nanosecond.

All we can know beyond exclamation points is
 if humans went from sculpturing
 a tiny stone into a human face
 to sculpturing a mountain into a human face
 in 25,000 years,
 in the next 25,000 years
 humans can go from sculpturing a mountain
 into a human face
 to sculpturing the Moon into
 a head sucking a cock.

All we know for sure is
 at the exact moment time-machines from the future arrive
 we depart in time-machines from the present
 into the past
 and miss them
 and end up going through a wormhole
 into a parallel universe we can't return from.

LAUREL BASTIAN

Songs for Small Arms

from the work and for the subjects of Michael Kienitz's photographs

This is a man inside a boy. Down
to the way he wears his clothes,
(jacket hung open, hands in pockets)
the way he stands against the brick

wall as if on break. His face belongs
to neither man nor boy; it's seen as much
as a woman's; one who's given birth
to both living and dead, eyes fixed

on some space of darkness that does not
lift, common as weather. His brows
knit, they are set that way, they are
brackets the world presses in through

and does not stop coming although
he has been against the wall his whole life,
which might be less than a decade or half that,
mouth set not from will but because

the body is empty and still must stay
upright; it expects you to keep kicking
the ball and saying goodbye and dancing,
some nights even, and the thing is you do.



Me and my sister are twins. From far away what we stand in looks
like empty circus grounds. The town is gathered in a ring around
us two, some with umbrellas lifted against the sun's press, most
everybody dusty. Side by side in the big dirt circle we're dressed
church-clean in white. We have wings tied under our arms that
auntie made from wire. We each hold a pigeon. The crowd prays
hard enough to make them doves. Peace isn't a wish. It's the first
request, when you feel the air switch and know horses come,
death on their backs. Open your hands, sister. May the sky trade
us this.



The first time I grew like a man
like my father

I was in the barber chair, and the radio
played rancheras, and my hair fell soft

like bits of a goose's belly. Each
punctual shear was a starting line.

When I was clean I knew
they expected me to start running.



When everything is broken open
it's impossible to tell
whether this edge of metal came
from a fender or the slat of a window.
Even if you think you could,
difference is told in context.
And the walls fall off
And the earth blows wide
And concrete is not a thing anymore,
or lamppost, they're reduced
to limbs in a pile of the world
you are wading through, calling the name
of your mother who still stands,
and you know her heart has been
shaken out of her and you both
must pretend to be living.



In turns, we toss palms of dirt
on the hollow that holds my father,
which is when I know for sure

there's a period after his name.

Please cover his face quick.
When we're done I will cut
every green thing that dares.

I will not eat. God is an awe-thing

with teeth. We've got to get out
from under His eye. Hide together.
So we can sing without stopping.



I want us to burn first world machines
and watch what hands are doing, everywhere else.
Some other pair doing the body's work for us,

billions, some holding dead shells
our machine-hands pressed, some making
bright bolts of silk and raising others on little,

who will in turn make bright bolts of silk,
some making the ammunition themselves
that we will send back to them, fire-opened,

along with the sparse powder we insist
should replace mother's milk.
On the other side of the observation room's

thick pane of glass the heart becomes
exponential. There must be an offset, some
other world they get to step into like silver,

one that would spit us out. Are they looking
back from a great distance and past us as we
spin at our posts? I know what country

I live in and whose hands I live off of
and all I know to say is *go, god, go,*
get what is yours if it buries us.



When I wake neither music nor milk fills the hollow. At the clinic,
they *say you're grown now—no more fear.* It's not the waking life
that sneaks, it's the resting one, coiled like a snake in the dark
grass. What's past is not past. I don't wake from nightmares—I
wake from the need to piss, and only while flushing do I remember
I was back in the chambers, one leading into the other with no way
out. All of us stripped guests. I might have met you there, your ribs
being slipped in and out of your body like bows over a violin's tight
bridge. You could not close your legs. Death isn't something to
fear. Death is the threshold that failed us.



This gun is stronger than any man's arm,
and my own are easy against my body,
finger couched on the trigger,

elbow cradling the butt.
My face is gold like any boy you'd see
heading a ball towards its goal.

My mother made me, I will break her,
her brokenness breaks me again. That I
should be fresh in this world is laughable.

My cheek is filled with the spit of someone
who knows both immortal and mortal:
first, the superhero, second, my brother

who is blown as he picks up
what looks like a yellow
toy from this long stretch of war.



Girl leans against
a gravestone taller than her,

hand pressed to the shine
of marble. Something will always
hold us up. Something will always
be stolen from us, some singular
kindness, tamped just out
of reach, under the skin.



We file past our dead:
one reception line of living,

one of glass-top coffins,

facing off, unsure
(as you are on a train
looking out at another train)
which of us is moving.

When my grandfather's casket passes
we catch eyes, his saying
go slower, my heart is big
as the earth, you rest in it
mine saying

I remember
the sound of deep water.

God, let me off
the spinning world.
Or let me forget
our first, bluest
garden, and I will
pretend the tight
heart is a muscle.



Hands that feed a gun's chamber hold
a baby's cool feet before leaving home.

Part for luck, part for love.
In the beginning, willing this small thing

to grow is why we take to the fields,
stare another man down with the barrel.

Even in first light, shadow
is a product of something as simple

as where we stand.
In the beginning, before we are

permanent monsters,
we fight for small things.

MARYANN CORBETT

To the Statue of F. Scott Fitzgerald in Rice Park, Seen from the 53B

Saint Paul, Minnesota

In a December morning's stingy light,
you look, from where I sit, like one of us—
one more commuter, if a bit abstracted,
staring off to the south, the river bluffs.
It's only your intensity of stillness
that tips us off: an art work, not a man.
That, and the fact that in subzero windchill
your head is bare. Fedora in your hand,
overcoat draped serenely on an arm,
up to the middle of your calves in snow,
snow in the crease of your Jazz Age center part,
a dapper sort of derelict, you're too
exposed for these hard times.

It looks like penance,
like something we've condemned you to, this state
of stolid dailiness, feet on the ground.
No plinth, no pedestal, no sort of height.
Just one of us again, as plain as that.
Nothing like the shine of your first great run,
you and Zelda blazing across the tabloids
looking "as though they'd stepped out of the sun."
No grander than your normal human size
in life. This makes you "accessible," we say.

But could we possibly be any crueler?
Library and theater, Hill and Ordway,
we've thrown them in your face: old family money,
the Summit greatness that you were (you said)
shut out of and obsessed with. Yes, that's us:
vindictive. We waited till they all were dead
to raise this statue—the crone who'd been your neighbor
and had her fill of late-night drunken shouting,
the people who recalled the White Bear Yacht Club
rooms you trashed the season before leaving
for good, sniffing that you no more belonged
here than the Riviera.

All the same,
you're here, because we had the final say.
Our sour old moral sense sat on your heart
all of the years you drank and binged and spent
and wrote how people send themselves to hell,
watching the glitter as it crashed away,

dying for one more story that would sell.
That made you send Nick back to the Midwest.
It stares down evil through a billboard's eye
in the book we make our children read before
—or maybe not before—they tear away.
Look at those titles: *paradise* and *damned*.
Those short stories, *atonement*, *benediction*....

Green light; we move. The park and Landmark Center
fade to the rear. I haul my mind from fiction
into the day's flat facts. You will remain
by the park path, kept to the straight and narrow,
eyes on the river's distance, toward *away*.
A sign of contradiction. *Ciao*. Tomorrow.

A Choral Service for All Souls

Tomás Luis de Victoria, 1603

Needle-lace of sound,
bright mesh drawn taut by death, enclosing
Requiem's plain ground,
damask patterns in lament
that thin or open, here, or here, exposing
each line's luminous ornament—

Or should we say the death-melisma winds
among these glitterings of spark,
a thorn-and-briar stem?
Or grows its bones inside the moving limbs,
memento mori stiffening them?

Either way, what drives this is the dark:

the mezzo voices' *cantus* line.
The plaint of plainsong, keening under all.
While dissonances shift, evolve,
around the straight tone's subtly bending spine,

it stands. We feel the major chords resolve.
The hands fall.

KARL ELDER

Housefly on Mirror

I sha'nt sugarcoat it.
I can't say this fly
like a circus flea
clings in a gravity defying
fling with its sweetie,

when around here
the world is far
from a ball,
is flat, domestic—hardly,
in a word, unparalleled.

Still, clung to the fly,
the eye seems to deny
that a sour face
abides, peripherally,
in place of space, in that

the fly on the other side,
being its own fly,
also buzzes
an interior, flies off
wherever would honey

be—my doppelganger
and me shy of any—
over a shoulder,
around a corner toward
a common cupboard

made not of wood but words.

The Philosopher's Fireplace

What we have here's theatre.
Observe, please, that character

to the rear who, in truth, doesn't
dance so much as dies. Wasn't

that a wing it suddenly
became to magically

disappear and reappear
as another wing? What fear

might drive our affection from
the Devil's proscenium

if not the numb sensation
of having seen the whole run

in a single scene for which
the phoenix flies to then ditch

to fly again? That's its Karma.
Ours is this curtain on La-La

Land, from CNN to chain mail mesh,
before which we sit, we watch,

feel it fail to wash away
the cold hard facts of the day:

to rise is another death,
to lie is another birth;

to be unborn is the life when
to die is to drop the knife.

Splace

a neologism

Where if not cyberspace—
this scene that surfaces
like an immigrant's name
through a misstroke of keys,
typo no less—no more—
splice without artifice,
form less “ness,” there being
first of all no prefix
and in the second case
no genuine suffix
since *ace*, *lace*, or *place*—
while each with history—
cannot be said to mean
“state or condition of”
even to a gambler,
bride, cartographer, or
poet, who won't erase
mistake from memory—
though knowing the odds,
vowing to be true, and
adhering to the rule—
to put space in its place.

MAX GARLAND

Remembering Grace

You recited grace
through the sharp steam
of supper bowls—Kentucky Wonders
laced with bacon fat, potatoes beaten
to a goodly froth.

And you received grace
through the brief death of God
back in Bible days

before the holiness in things
grew silent. A cloud might call
your name back then. An ordinary bush.
The average dream of the pure in heart
was thick with articulate angels.

You bore disappointment and defeat
with the grace of a good cowboy.
Grace was the scored and painted
sunset you rode all loss toward.

Manners and clean hands
were first cousins of grace.

Singing a third above another voice
created a brief tremor of grace,
a vibration—part meekness,
part peril, like a dog trotting
over a bridge.

Grace was more than the sum
of its parts. Grace was not
what you deserved

given the rickety village
you'd constructed inside,
the one you knew
yourself to be.

You could fall from grace
a long dark way
and land in a place
where the cruelest thing

was not what you endured
or even imagined

but what you remembered
of grace—the steam
and the rising appetite,
the tremor in the skull.

Selected Sermons of the Lower Ohio Valley

At least the least have less to lose.
At least the lowly fall more lightly.
At least the lamb has fleece
to wear to the swinging away
of the sun. At least the worm
is wrapped in the flung world already.

At least the poor have their pockets,
the lame their faithful limps.
At least the dark is obedient
to the blind. At least the Lord
is somewhere, strewn among
the notes of hymns, strung up
in the clouds spelling rain
on the just and the fatally jaded.

At least the just have rain.
At least our Lord the rain
taps one last time, lightly
on the brow bone, or bow
of the heart, that even
the least may listen.

Keep in Touch

The gulls glide in and out of heaven,
though each time they swallow the key.
You can't get in by merely looking.

Every year a little more I believed
has settled to the bottom, silt of faith
down where the catfish stir.

Young as I was, wisdom was younger,
cheap as minnows. Beetles and striders
walked right across the surface.

I prayed to the beard of Moses in the clouds.
Every dove was slightly Jesus. Every
meadowlark's breast was Mary's own.

It's strange to lose a thing the size of a god
but not his blessings. Like no hard feelings.

You knock— and only knuckle bones.
You seek— and only glitter falls
like the light on this river.

Bee balm, milkweed, canary grass
move in the afternoon wind. Blue sky.
Keep in touch.

SHELLY L. HALL

Alum

In water treatment, alum is used as a coagulant, which binds together very fine suspended particles into larger particles that can be removed by settling and filtration. In this way, objectionable color and turbidity (cloudiness), as well as the aluminum itself, are removed from the drinking water. <http://www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Water/watersystem/chemicals.htm> (Retrieved 14Jan10)

1.
Schoolday remembered is a dawn
delicately flamed, patina'd humane
as a black-and-white photograph
decades in the attic as though time is
being drawn a different direction.
Not exactly backwards but crosswise,
towards a destination that is only now
achieving you here as your fingers
mouthing these letters on this paper.
Though in themselves not at all
like that earliest morning sun, still
the words draw together—here
now—the same way that quietcy
of first light would loose itself into ivory,
into haze, into the sleek cars full of
the latest Bluenote and Motown crooning
between the newsweather&sports
as though daily clarity was their work.

2.
From the self-consciously new red brick
of the Phyllis Wheatley Day Care, to which
you are driven each weekday morning,
you walk to George Washington Carver Elementary.
Your school is a one-story poor relation
to cathedrals, is cavernous halls of high-gloss tile,
glass doors at all ends, the outdoor light
always pressing against them.
It is a place where what is learned for keeps
is what comes in “despite,” beams through
the doorglass, down the deepest halls, just for you,
as a fond delight, renders the corridors
an endlessly cradling shade in which can be
perfectly seen the pure contrast of ceiling
and floor, of color and shape, of outside and in.

3.
The field-trip to the water-treatment plant is caverns
of pipe, cloistering shadow, rows of processing vats
each with its proper portion of Lake Erie, its own stage
of purification. The one that fills still your mind's eye,
(a tall clear glass from which you occasionally sip),
is the tank where the raw water is deposited for de-
sedimentation by addition of powdered alum.
Explaining the process, your guide hands you a rock
of the mineral to examine, touch with just the tip
of the tongue. Part chalk it is, and part strong citrus—
both the juice and the rind. You can still feel how
even the least brush of flavor causes the mouth to pull
in on itself, makes it self-evident how alum can draw
all the opaque unpotables down, leaving the water
buoyant above, and lightened enough to discern
the sediment now quietly yellowed on the bottom,
to reveal the faint ivory haze of clarity still to come.

02:27:09

This is not the hand that inquires
after meaning
but the one that leads you

to a fallowed plot
demands you get to the raw
dirt of the thing, the stuff

that coats skin, shirt, hair
as though you were a seed
unsure which direction to send

its roots
Relax

No matter where
you reach, how far you extend
the hope of your need,
you are remembered

10:17:08

Only in your mind, your grief
is there sense enough to trust

there is at least one thing
about you that can be gift, teeth

unclenching just before the wounds
mortal, while there is still breath

enough for air, tears enough to
tide you out under the undulate

belly of heady horizoning wind—
then return you to that shore

with at least as much cradled
in your mouth as leaving tore away

My friend and fellow poet Shelly Hall passed away on Sunday, June 13, 2010, a victim of pancreatic cancer. She was 52 years old. If you ever heard Shelly read, you know what a joy it was, how her genuine, unaffected delivery carried the music of her words. She had a knack for sizing up an audience, gauging her own mood, and choosing a poem on the spot to best match the two, then delivering that selection flawlessly, buoying her listeners on the current of her art.

I originally met Shelly at the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' spring 2005 conference. It was her first WFOP conference, my second, and she and Mary Ann Mitchell suggested that we form a poetry critique group. We began meeting two to four times a month after work, road-tripped to conferences and readings together, celebrated one another's publications and awards, and generally supported each other in our lives as well as our art. We called ourselves Poetryst.

About a year ago, after her cancer diagnosis, Shelly turned her attention to finishing a major book of poetry entitled *Alum*. Sensing her mortality, she intended it as a magnum opus. As Poetryst, we completed the editorial work on that book a few weeks before Shelly died. I'm honored to have been a part of that effort with her and Mary Ann, to publish the collection through Popcorn Press this September, and to share a handful of poems with you here.

—Lester Smith

More poems from Alum available at VWOnline

DERRICK HARRIELL

Recapping Ali Frazier I: As Told by Ringside Journalist

*Madison Square Garden
March 8th, 1971*

Ladies and gentlemen,
it was billed as the fight,
the holy war, Allah versus Christ,
butterfly lips colliding with fists.
It didn't disappoint.
As Hollywood selected sides,
Ali turned the ring ice,
orbiting Frazier like an angry satellite,
crimson fists moving fast
like airborne comets.

Joe battled,
a determined lumberjack
stalking a tree,
a pissed off bull seeing blood,
a big bad wolf blowing ardently.
Ali's kidney's turned coma
toward later rounds,
asked to see a priest
in round fifteen, drank coffee
with Frazier's broken jaw
in a hospital cafeteria
the following morning.

Ali Frazier II: Ali's Gloves Deliver Punch line

*Madison Square Garden
January 28th, 1974*

Two boxers walk into a ring,
one, a dancing Adonis,
the other, an awkward Neanderthal.
An appetizer of hate
feeds the Garden before the bell
foreshadows the pending ass whooping.

Sportsmanship had been discarded
several black eyes ago,
decency hid its head in a dark hole.
Frazier had been tired of our shit
and game planned a funeral for Ali's mouth,
marched in the ring with flowers in his gloves.
But Joe forgot the one about the angry nigger
with the flat nose, the one that takes twelve rounds
and a lot of blood to hash out.

Lipstick Gloves: Frazier Dreams in Blues

Lipstick gloves
like shrike missiles
flickering around a bass guitar.
Music notes
chain the ankles
of my thoughts,
paralyze the congas
inside me.

Ali a colorful dashiki
draping my shoulders,
a monkey I wear
as I wander a field
of cracked fists.

Heaven a ring
of clouded ropes,
a upside harmonica
moaning like a ex-wife
in heat.

I'm a silhouette
in prayer position,
a prisoner blowing kisses,
a fool seducing Father Time.

Mistress in Manila: Veronica Porche Testifies

September, 1975

Manila is an endless Sam Cooke number
where Muhammad is the record
and I the needle.
Our inappropriate tune
posed like mannequins in storefront windows,
our love, burning spectacle
like crosses in Alabama, in Georgia,
in Mississippi.

We honeymooned
before crossing the broom, I in yellow,
prettier than a virgin canary,
a halo atop Ali's afro,
a sin pinned against his dimples,
a strongbox for abandoned poems.

He never believed Frazier to be a gorilla
or incompetent.
Nor was the Uncle Tom remark
made sincerely.
It all was a speed bag for a lethargic marriage.
A knock knock crack
with a straight right punch line.

Belinda hated his jokes as well,
and after networks fed our presidential visit
to TV's back home,
she grew wings and flew here,
focused as a fighter pilot,
more formidable than Frazier.

THOMAS R. SMITH

Pastor Bob

So skinny you could almost hear
his belt buckle scrape his backbone,
he was one of those funny little men
you meet in the city, from the look of them
wonder how they stay alive.
His emaciated, thin-bearded face
cracked in half with a smile
whenever we'd meet him in the hallway.

For years, as a volunteer, he tended
the chapel in the nursing home where
my mother-in-law lived her last six years.
Definitely an odd duck, I'd think, but nice
He'd exclaim with genuine conviction,
"God loves you," or "It's a blessed day."
Darting, mercurial, he never faltered
in his kindness, cordiality, morale.

Pastor Bob died the night after
my mother-in-law passed away.
The receptionist told us, "Bad lungs.
He knew he wasn't going to get better."
In the Sixties, Pastor Bob had a congregation in Watts.
Pastor Bob marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Pastor Bob died alone by choice in a room
with only a bed and a poster of Bobby Kennedy.

Why do we learn these things so late?
Pastor Bob, one of those funny little men you meet in the city,
definitely an odd duck,
maybe a crazed saint.

This Sunset

In memoriam

I'm driving west on Summit Avenue
when suddenly the sky goes glamorous,
the clouds hike up their plum-colored velvet
and radiance of sun-flesh floods through—

golden the navel-knot on the horizon,
golden the balconies of the oaks' theater,
golden the cooling cheeks of the river,
golden even the sorrow I still taste

from yesterday's memorial observance.
Oh Tamara! You've gone on alone now,
I understand what you're missing,
starting with this voluptuous sunset.

We mourn, believing the dead have no need
to mourn us —they're someplace we've never
left, still together, the circle unbroken.
Only we, here, come and go one at a time,

we the living, left here to embrace each sunset
given us, agreeing to walk in a straight
line while the sun turns under, all of us
agreeing we do not know what we know.

Prayer

Sometimes in the middle of the night
the only thing that will get you back
inside sleep's room is to name in the dark
those with troubles worse than your own,
lit by that candle of benediction, Bless.

Not knowing whether the universe
buckles for any plea, still you hold for an
instant the sick, the dying, the stuck
one in your regard, and hope that this
holding can be part of the way God heals.

For all that, your prayer is no less a self-
baptism in faith's water that reflects
a sourceless light when sleep has locked
its door and left you outside among
the sick, the dying, the stuck, the hopeless.

KATE SONTAG

Waging Peace

I've done nothing to wage peace all day,
nothing but strip leftover turkey bones
for soup, wash the dogs who smelled bad
after rolling in remains, send photographs
from a college reunion to a sick friend.
I've done little more than grab buttery
crumbs from the pie plate each time
I pass the kitchen, lounging all day
the way Thanksgiving flowers
lounged in the mirror, drop petals,
wait. I've done nothing to fight
against the war each hour but google
recipes for leftovers, wash my hands
and apply cream, my fingertips
all pitter patter at the computer
revising poems. See how they flinch
at the dusky firing of gunshots--
the words *marsh, farm, woods, blood*
darkening into starless tracks
on the screen. I give up
and up and up, having joined
no peace vigil this evening,
my blaze orange heavy-booted
husband fresh from his deer stand
a mere 150 yards from our house,
climbing the stairs, filling me in.
I don't know whether to celebrate
or mourn the hawk flying toward him
black against the sun as if it might land
on his lap, turning a corner to settle
instead in a cluster of birches
while he did nothing but return
the shadowy gesture as our
unfriendly neighbors to the north
drove by in their pickup and waved,
a buck in the bed, a doe on the roof,
all those perfect near misses
piling up and up and up
until this first snow reminds us
we are equally thankful and sorrowful
the war is a world away, and we
nervous as animals
hiding in our own backyards.

Divining the Impossible

While neighbors disassemble
Christmas trees one glass-blown
globe at a time, drag them still

tinted across ice chiseled earth
like banished corpses to the curb
for trash collection, we, too, wait

until the bitter brown end to take
our peace wreath down, climb
the cranky ladder above the garage

doors to disconnect green wires,
unhook and toss into the woodpile
our spruced up generation's

trademark sign that illuminated
looked more like a celestial
blue asterisk or footnote

plea this season than outspoken
symbol divining the impossible.
As consolation after dinner,

for fossilized closure, we retrieve
on the kitchen sill a wishbone
saved from our holiday turkey,

hold our breaths the way
we used to as kids,
on the count of three

feel its splintery snap, the long
and short ends buried
in the palms of our hands.

Harvesting Light

Captaining a mower on a soccer field's sea,
I leave an emerald swath of sculpted sward behind me

twelve feet wide. Like writing my name in ammonia,
signing a fresh sheet of snow as a boy. Same as God's

signature under a clover in Eden's least corner,
small as a rabbit's pink bead of an eye.

I start going blind. The scoreboard is blank
as a teacher's summer calendar. *How I spent my summer:*

circling a baseball field three times a week, harvesting myself.
Underground sprinklers rise each night, resurrect the grass.

One eye blurry, I become my soul's meat-puppet.
Cut-rate harvest king. One-eyed kings are wild in cards.

I won the eyeball lottery. The VA gave me eye
drops and a magnet with a toll-free number on it.

Floaters swarm like noseceums against blue emptiness.
I hear the buzz of atoms big as bees behind the sky's wallpaper.

At least glaucoma's treatable, although what light I've lost
is gone, and over time my eyes may fall from blue

into loam brown—a side effect, along with longer, thicker lashes.
I go back to writing poems and eating ice cream cones,

living in the land of *May Cause Drowsiness*.
Beats shopping for a bottle and a gun.

I could live with one eye. Just no eye patch.
Like Jerry Seinfeld, I don't want to be a pirate.

Odin sacrificed an eye for wisdom, swapping sight for vision.
Maybe the wisdom's in sacrifice. Maybe I'll get ravens, like Odin.

Instead of thought and memory, Hugin and Munin,
I'll name mine Heckle and Jeckle, past and future

perching on my shoulders while I mow a JV softball field.
Toward the end of my grandfather's life I came over

Saturdays to mow. He had a pair of John Deere riders,
both of us working our way from the road to the barn

while the silo's shadow fell across the lawn.
Later, we'd have a few beers in the kitchen. I'd listen to him

reinvent his life: *I could've been an auctioneer...
but the cows were always there, needing to be milked.*

Now it's my turn to remember he made nineteen cents an hour
canning string beans in a factory in Tigerton, Wisconsin.

Like driving a tractor, I loop at the end of each row.
A crow hauls ass. Craning my neck to follow its path

my blind spot gets in the way, and for a few seconds
that section of sky is bleached. I rub my eyes and see

my soul's albino crow, and for a while attain salvation.

—MIKE KRIESEL, ANIWA, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

OME

O me
of little faith

O me O my
of little faith

doubting thomas of
my own inner jesus

doubting
the living be-jesus
out of me

lest others
flout the lout in me
I vow
to resurrect the christ in me
to buddy up to the buddha in me
to hejira to the allah in me
to mooses me out of the desert in me
to ever so subtly flaunt
the blue-hued fluteplayer in me
to let blessings flow through me
to let there be light in me

—JEFF PONIEWAZ, MILWAUKEE
visit VW Online for more by this author

Still Small Voice: a Meditation on Faith and Poesy

by Charles Nevsimal

Unless in the first waking moments of the day you learn to fling the door wide back and let God in, you will work on the wrong level all day; but swing the door wide open and pray to your Father in secret, and every public thing will be stamped with the presence of God. —Oswald Chambers

Last night, I listened to the concordant thrum of 12 A.M. frogs, orating beneath our primordial moon—all waning and gibbous and glorious—Jupiter nesting in its nape. The two orbs surfing the spillway of the ecliptic, slaking my eyes, which peered through the aperture of high-powered binoculars, surveying the heavens for God ...

Four thousand years ago, a single photon left the surface of its star. Born of nuclear fusion occurring in its core, the photon ambled one hundred thousand years before it reached the star's surface and escaped, only to then swim through space nearly six trillion miles—without detour, without obstruction—until coming to rest at its final destination: my eye, at midnight, looking up ...

This morning at 6 A.M., in her crib, my daughter awoke from dream, the essence of which no grown man—least of all her father—can comprehend. I heard her sigh. I heard her sit up. I heard her announce her restiveness ...

“Dada,” she said.

And I saw God there in my daughter's call. I saw Him in the stars. I saw Him in the moon and the frogs and in that Jovian pinprick of light. Everywhere I look, there He is: The God of Creation, staring back at me, reveling infinitely at the colossal elegance of the cosmos He created, and equally at the infinitesimally small whatsit, tucked away unseen inside a fold where humankind will never deem to look. I see Him this very moment, sown inside my computer screen, here in the words I am writing now.

I see Him everywhere. And that's all He ever asks of me ... to look for Him. And so I do.



Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. There were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed, and he will reign forever and ever.' —Revelation 11:15

In college, during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years, a friend visited one night, and the two of us stayed up late reading from the book of Revelation.

On my ceiling glowed the viridescence of two dozen false constellations fashioned from a box of glow-in-the-dark stars: a manmade universe lionized by the hushaby herald of John Coltrane's “A Love Supreme.”

We passed my Bible back and forth, reading aloud, alternating chapters until we'd made it the whole way through.

The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

My friend sat up, gathered his thoughts, and pronounced his incredulosity over what we'd just read. All of it.

“I think I have to see something with my own eyes before I can believe in it,” he said.

To this day, I can't help but feel at least partly responsible for his atheism.



With Christians, a poetical view of things is a duty. We are bid to color all things with hues of faith, to see a divine meaning in every event.

—Cardinal John Henry Newman

“When I was a boy, the only God I knew was summertime,” begins the second section of my long poem, “Risen,” which I composed over the course of seven months, tracing my walk of faith. It was published in 2007 by Desperado Press as a single chapbook, and honestly, I was a bit uncertain about how the poetry community at large would receive it. A devout Catholic, I've encountered a fair share of resistance—often, outright rebuttal—in response to my faith over the years, from unbelievers and persons of other denominations alike. To my surprise, however, the poem was showered with accolades—and not just from likeminded believers but agnostics and atheists as well, all of whom applauded my honesty and courage, having penned such a poem for publication—and the book, I'm happy to report, has nearly sold out of its initial print run.

Here's how I came to write it: Prior to its creation, I received a letter from a friend, in which he revealed a disconcerting distaste for much of the poetry I'd recently sent him for critique—poetry in whose caliber I felt rather confident. “There's too much of the word *whiskey*,” he wrote, “and not enough of the word *holy*. I miss the Charles Nevsimal of old.” (The Charles Nevsimal of old used the word *holy* as a crutch.)

So there it was.

I'd been writing too many “bar” poems; though, admittedly, I had a purpose. I'd been fleshing out a manuscript entitled *Barstool Nights* for the better part of a year (a manuscript, incidentally, that remains unpublished), swimming through a Marlboro haze, sipping inspiration from a snifter. My friend's comments ignited a dormant desire to return to that “Charles Nevsimal of old.” So I sat down at my Olympia one night, and out flowed *Risen*:

Tuesday night and this is nothing but
Tuesday night and Thursday is Thursday
And every Sunday I rise like every morning otherwise
And drive half-conscious to church, which taught me to kneel

Like a broken beggar with Styrofoam cup coffeeless and coinless
Begging for mercy beneath a mockery of buildings
Where businessmen earn dollars coated in the dust of clandestine
castles
Whose bricks are manifest destiny puzzle pieces
Placed one atop another by countrymen
Poor as peasants erecting kingdoms believing in another morning
Like Sunday morning when I rise to church to kneel knowing
The dollars I give are coated in dust
and unto dust I shall return
Yet rise do I, do we, must rise ...

It poured out of me as if I were a medium drunk on Eucharistic wine,
divining verse after verse, rapt in ecstatic reverie.

My tryst with barstools had ended. The time had come for me to rise.



Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives ...
— Blessed Josemaria Escriva

Andre Dubus, an author I greatly admire, lost the use of his legs in an accident that occurred in July 1986. He was hit by a passing automobile after he'd stopped to help two disabled motorists stranded on the side of the road. Confined to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life, the accident initiated a long drought in his fiction writing but conversely catalyzed a strong non-fiction phase.

In "Sacraments," an essay from his book, *Meditations From A Movable Chair*, Dubus reflects upon being spiritually enriched by simple tasks: making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for his young daughters. He writes:

... I must try to know the spiritual essence of what I am doing.
On Tuesdays when I make lunches for my girls, I focus on this:
the sandwiches are sacraments.

This type of quantifying the quotidian resounded in the life of one of my favorite saints, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who said, "Each small task of everyday life is part of the harmony of the universe." Of Thérèse was born "the little way," by which she manifested her love for God and others in the fulfillment of menial tasks. Or, to put it plainly, she decided the best way she could love God was to serve Him in "little" ways. To see Him everywhere. (Even in the making of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.)



The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot. —St. Augustine of Hippo

Writing poetry has become something of a "little way" for me since *Risen*. What I mean is, writing poetry is my humble attempt to try to better understand God and His creation. And to serve Him.

I prefer to employ poetry as a means of communicating my utter reverence for all things ordinary and sublime. Certainly, not everything I write is about God. But God is in everything I write.

In this way, faith is not so much a leitmotif I avail myself of, but rather a worldview I surrender myself to. My Catholicism informs the way I view the world, acting as a lens that colors everything in hues of *holy*.

In this way, faith is not so much a leitmotif I avail myself of, but rather a worldview I surrender myself to. My Catholicism informs the way I view the world, acting as a lens that colors everything in hues of holy.



We are the Easter people and Hallelujah is our song. —Pope John Paul II

I am interested in the holiness of everything. I am interested in the benediction of banality. I am interested in the hosannahs between hellos, the incense of inhalation, the supplication of sublimity. I am interested in the consecration of every cacophonous experience in the conglomerate of my life.

I am interested in translating the secret language of all things, and in so doing, trying to fathom precisely how everything unites in communion with the one true eternal Word.

But most of all, dear reader, I am interested in sharing a glint of this spark with you. And if I am allowed one prayer, let it be this: that you find inherent within your heart a sudden desire to discern all things holy with newly anointed eyes.

And so, with this simple recitation of prayer, even my meager meditation on faith and poesy has undergone a felicitous ordination. Which means, we shall conclude as all things holy ought:

With an affirmation ... with a fiat ... with a yes ...

With *Amen*. 

Prod

From boyhood on,
we knew this made me
somehow different,
part of a
minority,
flotsam floating
in a sea
of Catholicism.
Who could grasp
faith suspended
from a string
of beads, the
constant *Hail Marys*
or crossing
oneself?
Strange rituals,
a study in contrasts
that always
fell like
a stained glass
hurdle
between us.

—G. A. SCHEINOHA, EDEN, WI

Visit *VW Online* to read more articles you won't want to miss including...

Wisconsin Forms & Formalists

by Michael Kriesel

Wisconsin's thriving poetry community is in the middle of a renaissance, as poets kiss new life into traditional forms. Conversational sonnets and dialogs in haiku between pairs of poets enliven the pages of journals statewide. New forms have sprung up as well: the Threesome, which presents multiple views of a single event, and the Wisconsin justified prose poem, which captures the mood of a place the way haiku and watercolor do.

Genre poems have gained in popularity as well, at the same time, with poets often combining a specific form and a specific theme or tone. Wisconsin justified poems have a noir feel. Madison poet F.J. Bergmann's science fiction poems serve as pithy vehicles for social comment. My own free verse swarms with zombies and Spiderman, Popeye and Bat Boy. I've also written a series of occult-themed abecedariums. At a recent writing conference, Milwaukee publisher/poet Charles Nevsimal handed me his latest chapbook, *Misadventures of the Paisley Cowboy*. Another new paring is haiku and vampires (vaiku?), in a recent Popcorn Press anthology, *Vampyr Verse*. The

press's publisher, Lester Smith, lives in Elkhorn, WI, and also serves as President of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets.

Why the interest in forms and genre poems? Mostly, because it's fun. And for the challenge. It also helps you write better free verse, according to prominent Wisconsin poet Karl Elder and current state Poet Laureate Marilyn L. Taylor.

Forms and genre poems are spreading through the Internet, through the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and via *Verse Wisconsin*—the state's major poetry forum. Our poetry scene's reaching critical mass, as the number of poets doing new things and forming connections continues to snowball. We're inspiring each other.

Read more than a dozen different examples of form by Wisconsin poets online, and respond to our challenge to write in and about form for the next online issue!

Beyond Ekphrasis: Collaboration as a Journey

by Sara Parrell

Sometimes it's as easy as driving down a street you haven't cruised for over a year, a street you love because it skirts the blue of Lake Monona, and you are paying attention as if it was the first time. You slow down as you near the house of an old friend, and glimpse him in the bricked back yard, working on a new piece. And although you are already late for a gathering across the Yahara, you ease to the curb, slide it into park, and walk down his driveway to say hello. "I was thinking of you recently." Fifteen minutes later, it's in motion. His photographic portraits, the poetry you and your fellow poet friends will write in response to his work, and the art that is born from this.

Collaboration between poets and artists, and poets and photographers in particular, is not a novel idea. In the 1950s and 60s at the New York School, painters and poets shared a social scene and a community, appearing frequently in each other's work and letters, reading together, working on literary journals, and becoming champions of each other's poetry and artwork. On a recent exploration of the three-story Renaissance Book Shop in Milwaukee I discovered *Adventures in Value* printed in 1962, a collaboration between E.E. Cummings and his photographer wife, Marion Morehouse, a synthesis of the personal expressions of two artists. In 1967, Pablo Neruda invited social documentary photographer Milton Rogovin to Chile to collaborate on a project that resulted in the book *Windows That Open Inward* where Neruda honored the photographer's desire to "photograph the truth" with his responsive poems. More recently, poet C.D. Wright and photographer Deborah Luster documented the experience of incarceration in the book and traveling exhibition *One*

Big Self: Prisoners of Louisiana. As Wright offers, "collaboration is the buzz these days," and there are growing examples of photographers and poets attempting to listen to each other deeply, search for their twin sensibilities, and in that process produce a work that is more than the sum of their efforts.

"Borderland" evolved from that spring-of-2009-patio-chat between two friends, photographer Thomas Ferrella and me. We had collaborated previously on a project, "Nocturne," wedding his videography and ambient sound shapes with the works of three poets. Now he'd hatched the idea of pairing his unmanipulated digital photographic portraits with poetry for the annual fundraiser for the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, an organization located in his neighborhood. Poems written in response to his work would be brailled onto the print, blending his images, which already straddled the line between seeing and feeling, with touchable words. "I'm a sensualist at heart, so why not use touch as part of that? Why ignore touch?" I was eager to accept his invitation to be involved, and suggested that other poets in my writing group, Lake Effect, would likely be enthused about the concept and willing to participate. During that fifteen minute conversation, something akin to a chemical reaction was initiated, a physical sense of excitement, a tuning-into the synchrony and connection possible in this world...

Read the complete article, view the brailled photographs, & listen to the Lake Effect poets read at *VW Online*.

Borderland Exhibit: The Overture Galleries, Madison, Oct 25, 2010-Jan 9, 2011— Opening Reception November 5, 6-8 PM, & Reading

VERSEWISCONSIN.ORG 19

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Pale Babylon

We stalked the stainless Aphrodite of
New York, but what we really wanted was
a night or two of unrequited love
to set our clocks back, all of this because

the cup was empty – empty, not half full
or anything like that, but simply empty.
Since we were eager to maintain our cool,
a modest prospect such as this was tempting,

to say the least. We packed our bags and took
a bus to Newark, hoping to explore
the city’s underside and maybe book
a reservation with the fabled whore

who worked the Jersey coast. Atlantic City
was where our gamble paid a dividend,
for it was there we found her, less than pretty,
but pretty willing to effect the end

we had in mind. Her stockings were a maze
of runs, her shoes were scuffed and much too tight,
the dress she wore had seen some better days,
and her complexion couldn’t’ve stood the light

of morning. Even so, we all confessed
desire to storm her port in any storm,
and though not one of us has once undressed
her, thoughts of doing so still keep us warm.

—C. B. ANDERSON, MAYNARD, MA

In the Red 

In an attempt to make everyone feel better about themselves, I rolled a red carpet
out on interstate forty a distance of one hundred and fifty-three miles. I realize the
highway goes east-west and I unrolled the red carpet only on the westbound lanes,
but I figured I can catch some of the people going and some of the people coming
and they will feel like their travel must be pretty special.

I view the drivers on interstate twenty-five as going up or down, not north or
south, and that they’ve made their life choices and realized the consequences, both
intended and unintended, of their actions.

There is no telling what my red carpet does for the color blind.

And, for me, it matters not at all, as I ride a bicycle on the frontage road not worried
about time or distance or anything, except how far to the next stop where I may refill
my water bottles.

—KENNETH P. GURNEY, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Driving to Eden, Wisconsin

for a fresh turkey for our table,
for this is less a sin
than frozen, swallowing
the apple cleverly disguised
inside, a Saver recipe,
no guarantee it’s free range,
but from the Midwest somewhere,
which comforts; we’ll eat our own
pesticides, thank you, no
cross country bird for us,
no maltreated fowl who’s man-
handled just before death,
no carbon footprint, just
the desperate message scratched
in some local soil in script
we don’t understand.

On the way to the rural meat market
my husband hits a deer, his first doe,
he jokes with the sheriff, as hunting
season is upon us. The sheriff
offers him the deer, but no matter
how you dress it, no man in Armani
and sent-out shirts would
have a place to store it.
The sheriff’s friend comes right away,
shoulders that wild carcass, hauls
it to his truck before the flatbed driver
arranges our crinkled car like so much
garnish on a shallow roasting pan.

—PAULA SERGI, FOND DU LAC, WI

 **Slick Surfaces—Caution Advised**

Peering into the fading light
I guide my car over
the highway, note the suspicious
dark spot up ahead, ease up
on the accelerator to avoid
skidding off the road;
I navigate closer to my daughter
but not too fast; shorten the
miles between us an inch
at a time as weather permits
the snow lessening now
the stars sharp points in the night,
hoping tomorrow’s promised sun
will melt the thin film of ice
loosen her silence,
warm her distant eyes.

—LIZ RHODEBECK, PEWAUKEE, WI

Travelling in a Direction Between NE and E, One Passes Through a Country Inhabited by Ascetics

After Nora Sturges' painting; an entry in Marco Polo's journal

Reader, if you could strip away all falsehood
from a nation's land and populace,
all rivalries and inessential labors
that becloud the vision of the weak

and not-so-weak, what country would be left?
Reader, if you could strip away all falsehood
and behold the world anew—pure streams,
lush foliage that, to a beginner's mind,

exist right now, inseparable from us—
would you—could you—if you foresaw the price
of doing so was to renounce as falsehood
silken sheets, your incense-bearing trees

and royal guard, the pleasures of the flesh?
If so, only one country would be left:
a nation where your wives, the sons you fathered,
trail away like smoke, where falsehood founders

on the Noble Truths, and bamboo huts—
concentric, hive-like—hold unshaved ascetics
luminous in solitude, minds clear,
dazzled by lute-song, love....A country yours,

Reader, if you could clear your eyes of falsehood.

—NED BALBO, BALTIMORE, MD

Whitman in McDonald's

He squeezes the armrest as we pass
the mall. A sign says
“When only a diamond will do.”

Do what, he asks, eyeing a guy
with a backwards cap. When
we arrive, I offer him

the drive-through or the sit-down.
A bee, he wants to enter
the flower. I rave about the fries,
but he won't eat, hopes
a farm will pop out of the kitchen.

Did Lincoln die for this, he asks,
heading to the car, a sugar packet
stuck to his shoe.

—KEN POBO, MEDIA, PA

Greyhound to Nowhere

She just wants a lipstick
that won't bleed,
a fresh easy haircut,
a bra that feels good.

She's tired of stray
chin hairs and
toenails thick
as a road-map.

Just once she'd like to
read the morning paper
before it's crumpled
and splattered with jam.

She'd trade waiting tables
at the Bob-O-Link
for one-way bus fare.

—BARB McMAKIN, CRESTWOOD, KY

Apostles of the Interstate

On the tenth day of Christmas
south of the interstate, mist
halos the ground. A dozen
illuminated cherrypickers,
back hoes and cranes
reverently cluster
a large metal storage shed—
adoration of the machine Christ,
21st century manger scene.

Our car hums hymns, wipers
clicking hallelujah, hallelujah.
Despite inclement weather,
we sit comfortably as the miles
slip by. What star is this?
A new cell phone tower
blinks warning to planes
straying from local flight lanes.
We are apostles of the interstate;
our Acts of Acceleration
taking us home.

—SANDRA LINDOW, MENOMONIE, WI

It's Best for Me to Stay Alive

When I die, will anything be left behind?
Existence seems to me what I supply,
And thus I dread imperiling mankind
When I die.

My pastor, therapist, and loved ones sigh
And watch in apprehension while my mind
Engages with these qualms they classify

As solipsism, but dear ones, you're blind
To what I see. We need to say goodbye
Before the end of earth and humankind
When I die.

—DON THACKREY, DEXTER, MI

Copernicus Only Partly Right

Copernicus figured out that Earth was not
The center of the solar system. He
Was right thus far. His other stuff was rot.
His math could never find true center —Me.

—DON THACKREY, DEXTER, MI

Three Dimensional Mourning

The couple wanders “The Cemetery of Peace”
constructing some proof, seeking historical perspective
in archaic names and the vacant eyes of chiseled cherubs.
Angels etched with acid rain, point toward an irrational heaven.
Distorted and expanded with her forty week gestation
she stoops to finger slopes of eroded baby stones.

Here are four siblings lost in a sequence:
Karl, Friedrich, and Oscar gone in their first year.
Never to toe the muck under puddles, toss rocks
into water to stare as circles spread the surface.
Now a fistful of bone pebbles, some baptismal lace
in petite measured coffins.

Then Esther, their first girl, born in mild May.
She thrived for three years until some summer fever
proved terminal. How did one couple survive such
preternatural death? Did they turn to each other
angling together, longing for a new form
to take shape from their geometric grief?

—JENNA RINDO, PICKETT, WI

Receiver

Autumn arrived today via UPS, two days late
in a 14x12x10 barely sealed box; weigh
count: 4,999 maple-red leaves, one leaf less
than ordered. Item number: 802103-001.
Bin location: F-65. Status: hot.
I am required to e-mail everyone; management,
planners, stock room, buyers, assemblers, sales,
shipping, but I like the idea of being
the only one who knows autumn is here; I can
stand on the open dock, gaze past the parking lot
into the wood and watch a hawk scour
humid sky for hawk-hued perch; I can hope
someday poetry will pay minimum wage.

PAUL J. ENEA, MILWAUKEE, WI

Taking the Measure of Things

The Stanley No. 346 measuring tape
fits in my pocket, so I carry it
to the furniture store to check out
a foot stool for the rocking chair,
write down the height and width
of the book case I want some day.
The Stanley is handy, out in a flash,
makes me look serious.

I took it car shopping this spring.
Saw the cars, went for a spin,
got brochures. Then I whipped out
the Stanley to note the distance
from rocker panels to pavement.
Have to clear my driveway, I said.

Some days I just measure things at home—
how far the feeder is from the window,
how high the bird house needs to be,
how much new screening to buy.
And there's the measuring for fun:
the spring growth of the prairie garden,
each year's growth of the crab apple tree.

I'd be lost without my Stanley 346.
I could worry about what this means
but I don't. Stanley and I have bonded:
he likes the attention; I need the dimensions.
I really don't have to do the math.

—SANDY STARK, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

The Flight

It snowed for three days.
On the fourth it stopped
and the sun shown on a white world
where the holy family on the road
to Egypt ceased their flight,
the angel departing for heaven
not caring for this earthly weather;
snow on Alexandrian palms;
ice on the Nile,
and the Pharaoh shivering
on his cold divan.

It snowed for three days.
On the fourth day in every park,
in every small market place was found
Mary and Joseph and the babe,
their hair white, and
the shepherds' hair
as white as their lambs,
dead in the snow, hard as stone, splashed
by slush from a thousand chariot wheels.

—PEG LAUBER, EAU CLAIRE, WI

Holiday Greetings

It's the day after the argument,
three days before Thanksgiving.
I'm inside the shiny mall, inside
the piped holiday Muzak, inside
Marshall Field's. A painted clerk
smiles and asks if she can help.

I want to say, "I'm looking for
just the right gift, for her." Instead
I ask, "What do women like?"

"Well, that's a big order,
but may I suggest perfume or a gold
bracelet." I'm already walking, her

retail face is running. I don't have
a woman. I end up in Sears,
buying myself socks to put into
what she always referred to as
my cardboard dresser. Its sits next
to the mattress on the floor. I am
a selfish bastard.

—JOHN SIERPINSKI, FRANKLIN, WI

Truman

he was 91 when he died
in the same year
I graduated from high school
I remember him
always with a cane
always wearing sweaters
even in the summer time
for Halloween he handed out dimes
dropping them into our sacks
when we came to his door
yelling trick or treat
at the end of the night we found them
as we sifted through our candy
picking out the best pieces
and laughing about
what we were going to buy
my father coming in to tell us
how Truman was an old man
even when he was a boy
and a dime was probably a lot of money
when Truman was a kid

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL

Assurances

We have all these assurances.
But you know,
when it comes right down to it
dying is like a Lebanese groom
on the day before his wedding
who has never seen his bride.

He has reports
from his grandmother
who has seen her in the public baths
and says she was beautiful.

Still he worries—
Grandma can't see very well
and her taste in women is unreliable.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

Psalm on a Theme by Dean Young and a Somewhat Similar Theme by Allen Ginsberg

When I die, Lord, I want to come back
as a cloud an airplane passes through
just before the crash,
lit up by blazing sunset
and just freed of a heavy cleansing rain—
a cloud gifted with speech
enough to say *Change your course, pilot.*
I want to change, cloudlike,
into the sort of person who finds a wallet
and an abandoned infant and knows which to keep,
which to return, and does it. Sometimes I lose myself
in a crowd. Sometimes I find myself
in a cloud. Sometimes I want to die, Lord,
from embarrassment. That's just an expression
like *I'm falling apart* and *I love you to pieces*
are expressions but if I do fall apart
I do want you to love me to pieces, Lord.
It is written in a Dean Young poem,
"The mind is a tiny island you've washed upon."
Is that true, Lord? About me, not you, I mean.
Dean Young the poet, not Dean Young the creator
of the comic strip, *Blondie*, I mean.
It is written in an Allen Ginsberg poem,
"I'm sick of my own mind."
Give me just a little piece of yours, Lord.
I'm going to give you a piece of my mind
is an expression, but I mean it literally.
I feel like a sandwich is an expression
meaning I crave bread and cheese
with ham and lettuce and mustard if you please,
but sometimes I really feel like a sandwich, Lord,
and at these times I feel like Dagwood has his eyes
then his hands then his drooling mouth on me
and I feel like I know how Blondie must feel.
These times are clarifying times.
They make me realize I don't want to die.
I've wandered for forty years through the desert
of my mind, Lord. I want you to fill my mouth
with water and prayer and maybe a jagged little song.

—TOM C. HUNLEY, BOWLING GREEN, KY

December Dreams

Maybe someday a great-grandchild
will be named after me. An old man
at a desk writing poems in winter
sounds romantic, if you don't have to
deal with him.

—JOHN LEHMAN, ROCKDALE, WI

Phantom Limb Pain

Sleepless, watching late night re-runs
of the Andy Griffith show,
your hand caresses me with severed fingers.
Aunt Bee
seems to ache, deeply, emotionally,
phantom limb pain
in the vacuum where the heart ought to be.
Why have I not noticed this profound pathos
in Aunt Bee before?
Was I preoccupied with my torn
rain coat in the monsoon of you?
She so devoutly yearns to comfort those near her
with deception
and narrowness that rides with relentless conformity.
With these television tears
come the visions
of moonlit shadows, carnal cocaine on a cool
September night,
our opening of the flower of affection.
Then Andy shatters
once again the vulnerable bubble, helium floating in
my chest,
with the knowing kindness
of his gap-toothed grin.
He could forgive Satan himself,
so I am sure it is within me
to un-weld the passion and the pain of you,
who, in your own way, are no more pathetic
than the dead screen writer
who has wrenched my heart tonight.

—BOBBY STEVE BAKER, LEXINGTON, KY

Insomnia

Chocolate coated vowels in four letter verbs
traipse across my bedroom ceiling, Gaelic
conjugations, St. Michael with muddy feet.
With my eyes closed it's so quiet I hear
my soft slippers whispering to sandals
under my bed, KEENS itching for a walk.
They swap the smell of their souls, tongues
flap behind loose laced lips, tread rugs,
carpet, and ceramic tile where their steps
leave tracks on abrasive roads, trace
rubber and leather, one by man, one by God.
Y does a melt-down miffed at not being
chosen the sixth vowel, streaking the wall
in sticky, dark chocolate, words reading,
"Get up, grab pad n' pencil, jot this down."

—JOHN L. CAMPBELL, BROOKFIELD, WI

Osiris As Oceangoing Vessel: An Elegy

Worthy Osiris, you anchored Egyptian mythology, wise judge,
Mummified once, then reborn. Businessmen prey on your fame,

Praying your name and divinity harbor the power of deeds done
Dynasties, kingdoms ago. You were the god who would choose

Those of the dead who'd escape from the Underworld. Lord of the plow, too:
Famine or plenty; the Nile gushing or stuck in its bed.

Now you're *Osiris*, eponymous hulk of a hunk in the bleak bay
India uses to break ships. You're a casualty, true;

Yet you're a thousands-ton tanker the length of four average ball fields,
Double tight bottoms to haul oil from the East to the West.

Amoco's version of noble largess, you'd been playing your old role
Showering bounties and fat profits. But such an expense:

Caulking your bilges, refitting your bridge, blowtorching the bow rust.
Worse: in the Caucasus, pipe lines. You've been junked near a reef

Next to *Odysseus*; celestial derelicts prone on a mud flat.
Dying for rupees, the child laborers shoulder their tools.

Hung from your hull or ascending like gnats on a ladder, they drill, maul.
Fastened like magnets, they pry metal from stairs and from rails.

Ritual cannibalism? But nobody's munching a cold lunch
Laced with asbestos and lead paint. In a sense, you're a waste,

Cut into chunks for the crane to deposit in diesels or dump trucks.
Skeletal Spectacle, have hope. Though they sell you for scrap

Even this late your beneficence pays at the rate of a day's wage.
Listen, for destiny bears weight. You are loaded with grace.

—RICHARD MERELMAN, MADISON, WI

Reminiscence on a Sunday Afternoon

One sunny fall afternoon I, a man with no name, step out onto the deck to relax. It is an exceptionally quiet day, except for the birds that begin their birdsong without hesitation: I become their audience. After an unknown time there in my trance-like state, I realize that my coming out today was purpose-driven, that my left hand still clutches the garage door opener I had picked up on the way out. I give it a click. As the door grindingly opens, it does so with a screeching sound reminiscent of, as best as I can tell, Ennio Morricone's score for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*; I am suddenly under the rich blue Almerian sky in Spain where Sergio Leone cranked out that Spaghetti western circa 1966. Silence...no bird song. Just the man with no name now transported to the mesquite plains of Almeria, dressed in cowboy garb atop my stallion next to another pale-faced rider—Clint Eastwood—who, with piercing blue eyes and a small cigar between his lips, glances over to this man with no name and says, "Sorry mister, I gotta get going...Ya coming with?" For unknown reasons, I stay put as Clint rides off down the dusty road, his six-shooter's blue metal glistening under the Spanish sun. Black out...return to my backyard birdsong, I with no name am seated exactly where I was before, garage opener in hand. The uncertain fate of my garage door is seriously pondered. I pause a moment, but then I click the opener impulsively so I can hear Morricone at least one more time.

—STEPHEN ANDERSON, SHOREWOOD, WI, *visit VW Online for audio by this author*

The Angelic Brewing Company Closes in Madison

"The Angelic, which stopped brewing its own beer awhile back,
closed its doors for good."
The Isthmus, Madison, Wisconsin, December 26, 2008

Everytime we passed, you waved
lovingly, a private joke, almost a talisman

between us. The building stumpy
like an old garage, comfortless,

with Goodyear Tires painted on its side.
Still, Clarence, we decided from the sign

above the door, had settled there,
an angel nursing hot mulled wine,

and making gifts for you to find
of pennies on the sidewalks.

God, our name for how we touch
the shapeless fingerprints of light,

can better be imagined or embraced
in comic underwear, his shirt tied

with a bow. Now the paper says
the brewery has closed. The days are numb

with snow; darkened nations bomb again,
their faces closed, their voices dumb

with rage. Everywhere, the winter trembles
huddling its wings. And while I know

that shapelessness can never disappear,
I will miss your waving.

—NORMAN LEER, MADISON, WI

Drowning Weather

It's November and Kentucky's wedged
between a gray roof and a brown bed,
propping the way for perishing white
gusting to churn wet on its way south.

Slippery slates of streets, like plates
of armor tangled in a museum's flooded storage,
confuse traffic, a father on his phone signals

and cuts right into a display window,
every third car skids to the river, and can't escape it,
over the shoulder or glaring off the hood it
twinges brown light from its dimples and ripples.

You follow the road home, which turns
to a glide on gravel and you can't remember
if it was paved this morning. When it chunks
out to ravine, than creek, you know you're not

home, but follow anyway, until the water's
past the wheels, and you bail ship and find
this is how you'd expected each drive
homeward to end. Your breath is white,

a white sack that fills with winter grain,
sinks and vanishes. You step on a deflated
something, you can feel how it would fill.
Somehow it's like the failure from which

your first true love refused to recover.
Can you strip it to sap and call it true?
On the bank that's leavened like bread
but was cliff

you find a bolt and know
that though it's drowning weather
the bolt with its block head and dulled thread
is so cold that when you cup it

and kiss it your lips will chap back like bark
off a log in the heart of a fire that started in half a storm—
and the lightning sounded off drums
and the thunder groaned like a cold tree—

the storm didn't choose itself and won't end,
and its fire drifts, blowing through
without touching everything it burns.

—JOSH ENGLISH, LOUISVILLE, KY

What goes down must come up

The day ends like the last power chord of a rock ballad,
the Frigidaire screams freeze to the leftover
asparagus spears, and the owl's mousse
has nearly digested. Time for bed.

Because you don't own a knife is one reason
to buy the pre-cubed cantaloupe and this consideration
is a dream because you're asleep now
and the muses often get tangled in
the fiber optics of a dream as delicate
as frozen spider webs. That's pretty deep
for simply melon even though it symbolizes
an embedded memory trying to make itself
less repressed. Call it a faulty hippocampus,
soggy froot loops, an obsidian arrow jammed
into the porcelain gears of the head. Something pretty
breaking something pretty. Seeing only a foot
in the fountain, knowing it belongs to an old girlfriend
by the way it swirls the water. How adorable a
baby looks in a bunny onesie and how ugly
bawling at Appleby's.

Wake up sweetheart
but not yet.

My cousin Matthew cried all through
our grandfather's funeral after seeing the urn, knowing
grandpa was somewhere else. That night I prayed
he'd dream where. One day I'll ask him.

Perhaps he'll point to a budding begonia
and say "there,"
or to a symphonic orange sunset and say "there."
A thunderclap, a chirping bird, a barking dog
wakes us from sleep. It begins.

—JESSE MANSER, MILWAUKEE, WI

House Warming

What a find
a recently discarded cardboard box

Someone in the apartment building
must have a new refrigerator
It'd be good to be able to stand upright again
If he had some Scotch tape he could hang up
his little girl's picture
on the wall of his new home.

—IDELLA ANACKER, PORTAGE, WI

**On the 80th Floor (Mid-America Club
Chicago, IL)**

Blue Tree

I did not know
when I set up
my easel and paints
about the hunter
in the thick woods
where this tree
I painted quickly
stood. I did not know
how loud a gun sounds
going off or how
the paintbrush jumps
at each gunshot, or
that I would think of
the blue sky I could not see
through the thicket
and paint my tree this
solid blessed safe
just in case, color.

—MELISSA CROGHAN, WEST SIMSBURY, CT
*visit VW Online for audio by this author,
as well as her original painting of the same title*

A high-up window view
displays Chicago's street-level
as endless lines and dots
embedded within
a distant microchip grid
that fires up at sunset
and glows in muted shades
of yellow, orange, or white,
then fades
along Lake Michigan's
shadowed crescent edge.

But we feel grounded at the bar
where wine, beer, and spirits
flow to an air-rush swish
of popping corks
or open taps,
the gentle thud
of glass placed
upon monogrammed napkins
under dimmed lights
and surrounded by
white chairs
traced in chestnut.

—MARIE LOEFFLER, WAUKESHA, WI

Blind-sided 

Winter rain, globules in the trees,
the old snow turning to slush.
And though it's warm enough,
I forego my morning walk
and sit like a lump on the couch
and stare out at the barren sky
and wallow in self-pity and cliché.
For I am turned sixty, and feeling
like life has passed me by
on its way to the land of the living
which is no country for poor old me.
*Ah think ah'll go up Echo Mountain
and crah!*, quoting a poem that,
like everything else, I seem
to have forgotten the gist of.
Outside, a blind man walks by
in the rain, tethered tight to his
seeing-eye dog. *Oh, woe is me*,
I cry, as, God!, I watch him go.

—RON WALLACE, MADISON, WI

 **On Learning the Diagnosis Is Leukemia**
for Scott

I want to make light of it: Say,
Oh, didn't I order that once
in Greek Town. Or, Wasn't that
the name of that rancid aperitif?
My other hemisphere corrects me: No,
surely it's that jewel of an island where
they all dance like fools claspng napkins
and everyone has a moustache of some sort.
Or: maybe it is the name of the ferry boat,
name of the tour guide, name of the hotel
perched on a bee-hived bake-oven hillside?
I search my library, hoping it's a goddess. Benign,
yielding to good-natured support of one side
or the other. Or perhaps, it's a constellation.
An order of butterflies, a description of sea shells.

—YVETTE VIETS FLATEN, EAU CLAIRE, WI,
visit VW Online for more by this author

Ripgut

“After it was clear-cut to build prairie towns and cities across the plains, the north woods were opened to settlement. I don’t know how many folks lived in tarpaper shacks with hardly no place for a garden and only bird and venison for meat. I strongly suspect some didn’t. The only patches of grass grew at random through the tag alders, willows, birch and brush. They ranged from bluejoint, a leafy grass about as good as timothy, to ripgut, a vigorous sawtooth that cut your leg so easily you didn’t notice, but then burned like all get-out and healed dead slow. There were no fences, so I was made cowboy spring through fall and guided the cattle back to the barn by evening or when they got thirsty. I was out in the wild all day and saw things others never get to. One spring thaw, I found several frozen sharp-tailed grouse that had plunged into the snow in an ice storm. Winters were hard. There were some when there was no hay left and no money to buy it even if there were some to buy. We cut aspen branches so the cattle could eat the buds and twigs to stay alive — some didn’t. One farmer lost six to eight cows in ’32. He piled them up, threw on some old stumps and brush, and touched it off. The fire got loose and burned hard, including some of the peat basins down to the mud. Most of the land took two, three, sometimes four years to green again. A lot came up in clover, making for great cow pasture and unbelievable deer hunting, and the grouse really took off. One year, I was walking with an old-timer carrying a .22 auto-load when a string of sharptails went up. He shot four out of ten and then remarked on how they fly straight with a flap-flap, cackle-cackle, and glide.”

—ADAM HALBUR, LA CROSSE, WI
visit VW Online for audio & an essay by this author

Sculptor Rot

Softened wood on the deck just beneath the drip line
Means edge repair required, new
Planks need sawing to proper length —to the nearest quarter-inch,
Then bolting to the unrotted beams jutted out.
I’m glad that strong cedar comes out the house ready to hold
Up what needs suspending over the leaf-strewn yard.
I cut off rotted ends with their unpredicted curves and cavities,
That suggest how resultant sculptures might form
Differently from how remnant cedar might otherwise have stood:
Water, rotten chance, the sculptors.

—RUSSELL GARDNER, JR., MADISON, WI

Shall We Gather at the River?

I’m supposed to be in church this morning
or at least in Sunday School but my dog
and I hang at the creek behind St. Paul’s.
I baptize my feet while Caesar splashes
and sniffs at what he churns up. This is church
too, I think. I even say it. Caesar

wags his tail—he thinks I’m talking to him,
I guess. I’m not sure whom I’m talking to
but it’s good to be more than just me
and maybe that more is God and if not
God then Nature and if not Nature then

what else is left? I can hear the choir sing
Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Cool.
I don’t doubt it. God bless ‘em all. I’m right

there with ‘em, in spirit, but they should be
out here. It’s too nice a day for indoors.
I rise and shake the dust of water off
my feet. In a few minutes of June sun
they’re dry enough for my socks and shoes. Church

is letting out and I’d better beat it
home. I can walk there in ten minutes but
I always go slower when I’m coming
here, where people seem to think that God
lives more than He does anywhere else and
yet they say He’s everywhere—He’s just here
more, and especially on Sunday. Well,
He’s God, so I guess I shouldn’t doubt it.

I fish my clip-on tie from the pocket
of my coat and fasten it back, can’t see
where I’m putting my fingers to my throat
so I lean over the bank of the creek
where Nature holds its mirror up to me.
The water’s wavy and so am I but
I think I’ve got it right. Let’s go, Caesar,
I say, and he leaps ashore and we start home
after he stops to shake himself from nose
to tail and throw off all that cleanliness,
some of it on me. By the time we’re home

we’re both dry. Father and Mother don’t go
to church anymore but I have to—It’s
good for you, they say. They’re having their lunch
when I walk into the kitchen. Hello,
Preacher, Father says—what was the sermon
for today? The usual, I answer.
Can you be more precise, Mother asks. Sure,
I say. Shall we gather at the river?

—GALE ACUFF, LINHAI, ZHEJIANG,
PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Moon & Owl

) oh! (
what is seizing
the moon, a she
of vehement freak report

what body sounds

through which the owl whoops nooses
his head is a soft revolution

moon & owl
(= *maul*), “of
imitative origin,”
an in-
appeasable object

the white diver plundering
some dun thing

) oh! (

cried Mouse, a she
in the field,
am I being petted or killed?
Is heaven, then, come
to touch at my back?

—JENNY MUELLER, ST. LOUIS, MO

Street Musician

Black coat like typewriter ribbon,
spots rubbed to glossy moons
flung on the hard night sky;
Face sleep swollen and the fist
of nails you were so proud of
broken dark, on the dense blue
poetry of the strings.

Music from a window,
a mother singing
to her child, the notes
robust as wren-song
from a rain-soaked nest.

You set down your guitar
and listen.
Blindness isn't your problem,
or the war,
or the cost of an addiction,
only how to take more of this inside.

—DANIEL BACHHUBER, ST. PAUL, MN
visit VW Online for more by this author

Mediation, Light and Dark

August, and the old lull
back again, the old grace
calling. The barefoot day
drawing us out
early, the sun's
floor show lighting
gradually on the world
held still never.

In a month, we'll
juice blackberries for winter,
key note of what's to come, but
longing never stalls
make-believe, summer
nearly overturning us,
oaring to lotus land the way we do,
partly crazy in star spray,

quadrant slice of night sky.
Reckoning why
summer has to end,
tossed and
unblessed winter
veering the hemisphere.
We need to be
xenophiles of sleep,

year's natural sink to
zero.

—CARMEN GERMAIN, PORT ANGELES, WA

Song

anise star apple star mole-nosed
star
backward cackling pond
around
around around
starbark
starburrow

western slender
eastern glass star
worm star
coachwhip
hognose over pine
loosened garter
king star

—JENNY MUELLER, ST. LOUIS, MO

Beyond *Happily Ever After*: Working at the Endings of Our Poems

by Sarah Busse

As a poet, occasionally I have been gifted with the last line of a poem dropped into my head...with the challenge being, to write backwards from there. Much more often, endings of poems can be some of the trickiest territory. When—and how—should I wrap this one up? How do I get out gracefully?

Reading over submissions as an editor, my suspicions are confirmed: endings give many of us trouble. Here are three common pitfalls I see poets fall into at the very end of what may otherwise be a fine poem. Note: I am guilty of at least most of these (and more) myself, at various times, in various drafts. I speak from experience. And to prove it, I've included a few examples from my own poems and early drafts, since I'm the only poet whose failures I have general access to (with one very notable exception below); I ask your indulgence.

The "E-puff-any"

My first teacher in graduate school, Ed Ochester, gifted me with this great word when he was critiquing my first poem on my first day of my first graduate workshop. Although it wasn't easy to hear at the time, he was right. The draft I had brought in did try too hard at the very end. I wanted it to lift into some sort of numinous resonance and glitter that the rest of the poem just couldn't support. It's tempting to pan the camera angle out right at the end, towards sun sparkling off leaves, birds flying across the horizon, stars wheeling overhead...but a lot of poems can't hold up to that sort of burden. Look over your draft, and if you notice the focus changes right at the last few lines, ask yourself if that last parting shot is really necessary.

This was especially risky for me in a poem I wanted to write for an old boyfriend who was ill. So help me, the idea came to me one morning, looking up from the harrowing email update of his travails to find an absolutely stunning sunrise. How could there be such a gift in the world, when there was so much pain as well? Yes, I know, an age-old question. Still worth a poem, I thought. Here's how I wound up a very early draft:

...If we build God between us
Then here is one more brick, rose pink,
To lift, a two-minutes' airy gift.

Declaration, Black Earth Farm

Fierce, barking like feral dogs,
they hooked trotters over the half-door
of their shed if we got too close.
As if to say hog meant more than smut
of shit on a snout. More than the pink,
hairless belly, the smoke of cooking meat.
As if to declare in the swill of making-do,
we, unspeakable, speak.

—CARMEN GERMAIN, PORT ANGELES, WA

Well, I was a religion major in school. Old habits die hard. I worked on this one for two years. In my final draft, I decided to leave whatever gods might be in attendance unspoken, and to deliberately turn the volume down at the end:

But that was in the middle
of your long dying, not at the end

and now that I've managed
to write it down you're dead.
(from "No Title Here")

The Moral

Maybe you have a great poem, and you want to make sure the reader "gets it." So, you restate in the last stanza or the last few lines the point of the whole poem. Oops. The reader will get it all right, like a 2x4. Although it's tempting to make sure our points get across, a good poem will do this work without us having to repeat ourselves at the end. This sort of summation effectively tells the reader you don't trust him to be smart enough to get the poem, and (worse) you don't trust your own poem to do the work of communicating.

We can see a real master struggling with this very issue in one of Emily Dickinson's poems. Here is a version from 1859:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
Untouched by Morning
And untouched by Noon—
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection—
Rafter of satin,
And Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her Castle above them—
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
Pipe the Sweet Birds in ignorant cadence—
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

Did you feel that little moral in the last line hammer you over the head? Apparently Emily did too. A version from a couple of years later:

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—
Untouched by Morning—
And untouched by Noon—
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection—
Rafter of Satin—and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years—in the Crescent—above them—
Worlds scoop their Arcs—
And Firmaments—row—
Diadems—drop—and Doges—surrender—
Soundless as dots—on a Disc of Snow—

Interestingly, not only did she (happily) erase the moral, she increased the scope of her second stanza, thereby going for something more complex and rewarding than the easy sentiment of the first version.

Now, instead of a happy little nature scene, we have the wheeling of planets, the surrender of kings, and all “Soundless as dots”... May all our rewrites be so successful.

The Joke

Sometimes poets will undercut a fine poem by ending on a joke-y note. There’s nothing wrong with humor in poems—in fact, I love to see a truly funny poem come our way. It wakes up the pulse. Like a sudden breeze in spring, it lightens us. But it’s rare for a poem to work as a “serious” poem, and then end with a joke in the final lines. It suggests the writer isn’t completely comfortable with herself.

What if you recognize something in those three all too clearly—what do you do about it? Here are a few suggestions to try when revising.

1. *Chop it*

I remember the editor of *North American Review*, Vince Gotera, once told a room full of poets that the best advice he could give them would be to cut off the last half of their poem. Most of us have the tendency to go on too long, it seems. If it’s too hard for you to scratch out the last stanza with your pen, get out your scissors and literally cut it off—a pair of scissors can be a very liberating revision tool.

2. *Remember that camera reference?*

I believe it was another teacher, David Mason, who posited that poems actually have a lot in common with movies—in some ways more than novels do. Novels get bogged down in narrative. The text has to get us through a scene, show us the characters moving and thinking and progressing. A poem can cut quickly and sharply, like a film. So think like a film editor and think about camera angle throughout your poem. Up close? Pan out? Sweep over the vista or focus in? As I said before, it can be a flag if you notice your poem trying something new only at the very end.

3. *Punch up the language*

If you’re worried the reader won’t get it without you restating your point at the poem’s close, consider your verbs and nouns carefully. Have you said it strongly, or exactly, enough in the first place? If every line is honed and every gesture counts, the reader should be able to follow you through the poem just fine. And don’t think it’s a problem if the end of your poem deliberately sends the reader back to the

beginning. One of the pleasures of reading a good poem is to loop around at the end, to see, now that we know the end, how the poem starts. Have you ever read the first chapter of a novel over again, just to see what clues the writer was dropping that you didn’t pick up the first time through? Which great writer was it that said, the dangerous man is not the man who has never read the classics, but the man who has read them once, and believes he has read them?

But what if you really, really, love that ending, even if you suspect it’s not working for you? Try putting it at the front of the poem instead. It will cast the whole draft in a new light and, who knows, it may work better. An early draft of my poem “After a Piano Recital” ended with these lines:

We have been transported, now are—where?
What are coffee, cookies, now?
I’m one of the first to leave, as we disperse
into the cold twilit November of a tattered year.
Something will—does—endure.

In later versions, I knocked off the statement of faith—maybe I’d lost it? Or maybe I thought the poem could carry the message. I still liked those two active lines in the middle, but realized the poem would be better off opening with them. With that move, I found the voice of the poem:

I’m one of the first to leave as we disperse
into the cold twilight of a tattered year.
Beethoven walks beside me in the furious
arpeggiated passions of his score....

I started a poem with him, but for this article I like ending with that figure of Beethoven walking beside us, in all his refusal to compromise. Be ruthless with your drafts. Do whatever it takes: risk raggedness, risk sincerity, risk the small gesture. Risk.



Nothing Is Ever Tidy

Taking down the garden,
raking up debris,
putting away supports—
but nothing, it seems,
ever actually ends,
always a carry-over,
even death.

The funeral, the final
so-it-seems tasks
of tidying up—
but nothing
is ever tidy, nothing
really ends,
always this carry-over

like a spent bouquet
in a vase that leaves
murky water,
stains to be scrubbed,
scent of memory lingering
long after petals have fallen,
stems returned to earth.

—KAY SANDERS, OSHKOSH, WI



Augury

Better keep my eyes on the traffic
streaming towards Newburyport and resist
the scrappy drama of red-winged blackbirds
harassing a crow, that sacker of nests.
Yet how splendid the torment as they dart in
low above the marshes
to peck his mean feet. I slow down,
shift to the right lane, follow the scuffling birds
as if they were an augury
Homer would describe in assiduous detail,
introducing the seer to render its meaning,
the lives of the birds foretelling his hero's destiny,
the clash between peoples, the vicious conflict.
Blackbirds flash scarlet epaulets; the crow banks
and turns, flummoxed. Today the only seer available
is navigating the road, cursing a truck
that looms up, blocking my view. It is something
to witness the crow getting his due, something
to wonder at nature be it bird, sky, marshes.
What augury, then, in the Gulf? from the depths
of the earth a maelstrom of oil so powerful
it blackens the ocean itself, coats the turtles
and pelicans in gummy sludge, seeps
into the Mississippi marshes,
fouling the beaches, invading ocean currents
and our worst nightmares
like a relentless curse, like revenge.

—CLAIRE KEYES, MARBLEHEAD, MA
visit VW Online for more by this author

Graveside

. . . how typical of her:
a mean wind and sleet—too nasty
to hang around any longer. . .
she never met an idea she liked . . .
lost her knack for cooking years ago. . .
sculpture left her suddenly, too . . .
she never wrote a truly good poem . . .
ran through three husbands . . .
good thing she had no kids . . .
a stone in everyone's shoe . . .
I wonder—did she suffer?
I dunno—she deserved to . . .

—BARB CRANFORD, HANCOCK, WI

Morning Whispers to Oma and God

The morning light unfurls
across the low horizon: a secret
nod to beauty,

to speaking in splashes
of color, saying now is never
a bad time to shine.

Every morning we wake
in this body of glass, buoyed
on breath and light.

One look skyward and I know
everything
is going to be alright for us.

From the porch I watch Oma
genuflect and fall to her knees,
a linoleum communion,

praying for good meat and men.
I wait for the thud that comes.
Oma closing The Bible

and morning. She doesn't hear
how I whisper alongside her
tossing thanks to the late April

air—the lakefront breeze now
perfumed with lilacs. Mouthing
one prayer we all know by heart:

Thank You, God.
Thank you, God.

—AMYLIA GRACE, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more by this author

Ghosts

My old dog whines to go out, to come
in, to go out, as I realize my brother died
at the age I'll soon be.

Perhaps he's here—amused I see only
the living—while he, no longer bothered
by doors, is free.

—JOHN LEHMAN, ROCKDALE, WI

Old Uncle Walter's Daily Walks

Old Uncle Walter's thin German legs waltz
To the pub on the corner of 9th street
At 10:00 a.m. to have his daily dose
Of morning bliss in the form of brandy.
A small, dark glass of joy shared with good friends.

After twelve Walter leaves his humble shrine,
Slowly shuffles home to our Aunt Ruby—
Taking each step with utmost precaution.
His dear wife always waiting—like a saint,
Her firm smile at the cool screen door greets his
Aging look of fear and desperation.

“Ya, I got ta valk fast near dat damn olt
White funeral home on da hill, Ruby.
I gotta valk so fast to stay alive.
Dat undertaker is a scary ghoul.
By Got, dat man is just waitin' fur me
Ta stumble and fall, he'll come runnin' out
And put me in a pine coffin, ya know.”
Ruby laughs at her ancient husband's eyes,
“Sweetheart, don't be a fool, he won't hurt cha.”

Old Walter goes inside, gently lies down
On the small, white-cream living room sofa
And dreams of the farming days in his youth:
The smell of freshly cut hay, the cow barn,
The feel of the sickle in his strong hands,
Crisp taste of apples in the autumn air,
The sound of crickets soaked in rustling leaves,
Slow moving clouds walking in the deep blue.

He yells in his sleep, his voice young again,
“Hay bales cooming up, vatch yourselves, you guyz!
Keep it moving, ya! Here comes anoder!”
He tosses up a bale on the wagon,
Feels his muscles relax in the August sun.

Then he dreams of that damn funeral home,
And how the undertaker almost caught
Him when he fell last winter on a
Small patch of clear ice the color of sky.
“By Got!” he screams his skinny self awake,
Then calls out, “Ruby, ya dere, ya dere, love?”

—PATRICK T. RANDOLPH, MURPHYSBORO, IL
visit VW Online for more by this author

The Last Leaves of Autumn

Torn from their branches
by fierce wind,
like people made homeless
by a hurricane.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

Falling

I'm sifting through fifteen inches of snow
in my garden, looking for a jack-o-lantern
I tossed here just a few days ago, his

mouth cracked and drawn, eyes sagged,
the inside of his skull charred and sloughing,
time to return him to the good earth, now

I must have a heart-to-heart with him,
like father to son, and there is little time —
my son and granddaughter will wake soon,

want to go sledding, build a snowman.
At last I've found him, his stare hollower
than ever before, as if even the want inside

has died. But what about your little pumpkin,
she needs protection, how can you go back
like so many abused spouses do —

what is there about an abusive, delusional,
border-line psychotic wife who blames
everyone else and refuses psychiatric help
that makes you think it can work?

I jostle him a little, dead set on squeezing
logic through that crumbling shell as
new flakes come falling down.

—KEN TENNESSEN, WAUTOMA, WI

Autumn Afternoon on Block Island Overlooking New Harbor

A late afternoon migration
of crows circle, then alight

in cemetery tree borders,
stragglers perch in lone ever

green tree on downward slope
overlooking the harbor; soon

the sun setting shadows
on still water.

—ALAN CATLIN, SCHENECTADY, NY

John Koethe author of *Ninety-fifth Street*

John Koethe is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *North Point North: New and Selected Poems*, *Sally's Hair*, and *Ninety-fifth Street*, all published by Harper Collins. *Ninety-Fifth Street* is the winner of this year's Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets. He is also the author of *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought*, *Scepticism, Knowledge, and Forms of Reasoning*, and *Poetry at One Remove: Essays*. The recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, he is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and lives in Milwaukee.

WV: Place seems to figure more and more prominently in your work. In *Ninety-fifth Street* it is everywhere—the California of your childhood, New York City, Boston where you went to grad school, Milwaukee, Europe. How do you use place? For its own sake? Metaphorically?

JK: In several ways. First, I have a natural tendency to write abstractly, and tying a poem to an actual place helps counterbalance this a bit. And second, one of the pervasive themes of my work is the romantic opposition between the individual subjective consciousness and its external objective setting in the world, which is what all those places represent. Beyond this, *Ninety-fifth Street* is really a book about cities. In addition to the ones you mention, there are also Berlin, Venice, Cincinnati and Lagos.

WV: Has your use of place changed over time? It seems to me, for instance, that a poem like "The Late Wisconsin Spring" feels much more like a traditional, even Wordsworthian, lyric, whereas the more recent poem, "The Menomonee Valley" is looser, more conversational, more pessimistic—it's about collapse, rather than expansion. Is that a trend in your work, or just the difference between two poems?

JK: I don't think of my work as pessimistic, but rather as disillusioned. I think we're drawn to romantic illusions even though we know perfectly well they're illusory. I think "The Late Wisconsin Spring," as well as "In the Park" from the same book, indulge those lyric illusions a bit more than much of my later work, though ultimately those poems undercut them too.

WV: What role has Wisconsin played in your poetry? And I don't mean metaphorically. Do you feel it's been a disadvantage to live in the Midwest, as opposed to New York City, where the title poem of your new book is set?

JK: It's sort of a trade-off. On the one hand you forego a lot of the networking and career opportunities of living, say, in New York (I was quite conscious of this when I spent last semester at Princeton). On the other hand, I intensely dislike schools of poetry and thinking of poetry as a job or career you're pursuing, and the relative isolation of living in Milwaukee, which I like very much, helps protect me from this.

WV: I read that you only write poems during the spring and summer? Why do it that way?

JK: While I was teaching I'd work on philosophical writing in the fall and winter, and then shift to poetry sometime in the spring. I have a feeling that lying fallow half a year made my poetry feel fresh when I returned to it.

WV: The sense of time in your work is unhurried, not frenetic, very different from many contemporary poets. The pacing of many of the poems underscores that, too, and they often unfold in a leisurely way, reading as though they were composed slowly and with great care. How long do you typically write at the first draft of a poem? How much time do you spend revising work?

JK: I think your observation about the pace of my work is quite accurate. I write slowly, in small bits, in the morning, with lots of revising and then more revising in the evening. Then the same thing the next day until the poem is finished. I rarely complete

a full draft of a poem, but rather build it up by accretion. I usually have a sort of architecture in mind for the poem, but not too much of its contents. It's exciting to me to fill it in, to discover, as it were, what the poem is about. This was especially true of a long poem I wrote in the 1980s, "The Constructor," in which I started with the last line and then worked backwards to the beginning.

WV: Do your poems ever involve research?

JK: No, not that I can think of.

WV: You retired in January from the Philosophy Dept. at UW-Milwaukee—congratulations. What are your plans for retirement, and how might more time affect your writing? Will you stay in Milwaukee?

JK: Well, I plan to continue working on poetry, and also making use of a house I just built in southwest Wisconsin, in the driftless region (it's the house I was imagining at the end of "Ninety-fifth Street"). I do plan to stay in Milwaukee, a city of which I'm very fond. I toyed with moving to New York for a bit, but it's too expensive—who wants to retire and go back to living like a graduate student? Better to live in Milwaukee and go to New York a lot.

WV: I want to know more about your dual life as a philosopher and a poet. Poets who know your work know you are a philosopher, but do philosophers know you're a poet? How do they respond to that?

JK: I think a fair number of philosophers know I'm a poet—there are really only

I don't think of my work as pessimistic, but rather as disillusioned. I think we're drawn to romantic illusions even though we know perfectly well they're illusory.

one or two other philosopher poets that I know of. My colleagues in the philosophy department were very accommodating and generous in recognizing and allowing me to pursue my poetry. Of course, I kept up my end of the bargain by

writing a reasonable amount of philosophy too.

WV: Philosophy is a major source of themes, of ideas in your poems. Has it affected your poetry in other ways?

JK: I think the abstract, discursive rhetoric of philosophy has influenced the way I write poetry. I know that lots of people

associated with poetry hate that kind of language and think poets should avoid it, but I think it opens up all sorts of possibilities it's foolish to ignore. You can see this sort of rhetorical influence in T.S. Eliot's work, especially in "Four Quartets," a poem a lot of the "no ideas but in things" people loathe. It's no accident that Eliot was trained as a philosopher—unlike Wallace Stevens, say, another philosophical sounding poet who never seems quite at home with the idiom as Eliot. There's a popular stereotype of philosophical writing as murky and unintelligible, but actually just the opposite is true of good philosophical writing.

WV: In "Moore's Paradox," *North Point North*, you write, perhaps ironically or facetiously, about a dislike of poems about philosophy, and yet your poems are always about major philosophical problems: identity, memory, belief, God, time, perception, the mind, epistemology...though not, it seems to me, ethics. Are the beliefs in your poems your beliefs, or do they belong to a persona?

Persistent Feelings

Sometimes I'm driving, and the highway
Fades into the sky, into the music I've got on
—Mark Knopfler or the *Quine Tapes*—
And the earth becomes a planet, and a funny spell
Falls over me, a bittersweet, unfocused thrill.
And sometimes here at home I feel it too,
Although less vividly: a calm elation tintured with
A sense of loss—not because someone left
Or died, or someone wasn't loved,
Hard as those things are, but simply at having lived
For now, and only for now. The light is golden
And the lawns are green. The street hides its mysteries
From time's deflating gaze: clear-eyed and free,
Emotionless, yet filled with feelings of a deeper kind,
Ones that flow without saying. The afternoon
Is full of memories and silent passions,
Though there's nothing in particular to see:
No children in the leaves, no faces hidden in the trees
Or signs to show the presence or the absence of the gods.
Feelings should be personal, though they needn't be:
Besides the mild disappointments and the ordinary pleasures
Each day brings, the hurt time heals, there's the wonder
That this life exists at all, that something as familiar as the sky
Could persist in my absence, that the present is the limit of the life
In which I find myself and feel, deep inside a space
Filled with my own breath, the exhilaration and unspoken
Sadness of a world—my world, the only world—
Held together by memory, that ends at death.

©John Koethe, *Ninety-fifth Street*. NY: Harper Perennial, 2009.

JK: You're right—ethics isn't much reflected either in my poetry or in my professional philosophical work. What I meant by that somewhat facetious line is that I don't like poems that present themselves as vehicles for conveying or doing philosophy, as some (though not all) language poems do. The themes you mention are ones I think philosophy and poetry share at some deep level, but they approach and develop them very differently. Philosophy is subject to severe constraints of consistency, coherence, argumentative rigor, addressing of objections and so on, with the aim of arriving at the truth of the matter. Poetry isn't subject to these constraints, but is free to inhabit and explore ideas and themes without worrying too much about their correctness, as long as they feel sufficiently powerful to move us. Another way to put it is that I try to put myself, through an act of the imagination, in the position of someone who does believe them, and to discover what that's like. I tried to spell this out in a recent essay called "Poetry and Truth." So I'm not sure you could call them beliefs, but whatever they are they don't belong to a persona.

WV: At the end of the poem "Ninety-fifth Street," you talk about "two versions of myself/ And of the people that we knew, each one an other/ To the other, yet both indelibly there: the twit of twenty/ And the aging child of sixty-two, still separate." So there's that question of whether we are the same person over the course of a lifetime and in what sense, and although you simplify it here to a dualism, twenty or sixty-two, those lines imply a calculus of endless other selves spilling across time. Philosophically speaking, where, if anywhere, do you locate identity? Is that different when you think poetically?

JK: It's a question that obsesses me, but to which I don't know the answer. At one extreme the self is a real thing existing throughout a person's lifetime (or afterlifetime if there were such a thing). At the other it's fleeting and momentary, or not even real at all. The first is probably a deep and inescapable illusion, while something like the latter is probably true but unbelievable. I sort of oscillate between them in my poetry, taking them up and inhabiting them as I described earlier.

WV: Writing about the "regret/And disappointment" that hangs over your poetic landscape, you say "The happy and unhappy man inhabit different worlds,/ One still would want to know which world this is," which reminds me somehow of William James's essay, "The Will to Believe." Do we have the capacity to choose which world to occupy? To exercise belief rather than doubt?

JK: "The happy and unhappy man inhabit difference worlds" is a quotation from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* which has always puzzled me. He can't mean it literally, given what he means by "world." In any case, I don't think belief can be voluntary. I think we're often drawn to believe things we know at a higher level to be false. My favorite example of this is philosophical dualism, the idea that the mind or self is something real and distinct from the physical body. I think it's deeply embedded in our self-experience, even though we know it can't be true.

WV: In the interview you did of John Ashbery (1983), you asked him about the changed poetry landscape from the 50s to the present—I'd like to ask you the same question. How has the poetry world changed since you began publishing in the 60s to now?

JK: Well, the most obvious change has been the explosion of writing programs and the resultant great increase in the number of poets and books. While there are many very strong poets writing, I keep thinking that poetry is becoming more of a craft like ceramics, something you can just take up and learn if it appeals to you (which isn't to say that there aren't great ceramicists). One result of this proliferation is that there's not much consensus on whom the important poets are now. Another change that strikes me is in the kind of ambitions poets have. When I was teaching the seminar on the New York School at Princeton last semester I was struck by how the original members of that school (which really wasn't a school) aspired to and attained, I believe, a kind

This Morning

To see things as they are is hard,
But leaving them alone is harder:
Snow in patches in the yard,
The vacuum in the sky, and in the soul
The movements of temptation and refusal.
I felt a day break. Nothing happened.
The windows gave upon a street
Where cars drove by as usual to the faint,
Unearthly measures of a music
Whose evasions struggled to conceal a
Disappointment all the deeper that the
Hope was for a thing I knew to be unreal.
I can't do it yet. Perhaps no one can do it yet.
The unconstructed gaze is still a fiction
Of the heart, a hope that hides
The boring truth of life within the limits
Of the real, a life whose only heaven
Is the surface of a slowly turning globe.
Yet still I want to think I woke one day to—
To *what?* The crystal trees, an earthly silence
And the white, unbroken snow of a first morning?

©John Koethe, *Sally's Hair*. NY: Harper Perennial, 2006.

of greatness and a transcending of their influences, whereas the New York poets that followed them didn't seem to have that sort of ambition (I'd make an exception for Douglas Crase).

WV: Could you comment on the nature of Ashbery's influence on the current poetic landscape and on your work specifically? Where would you say you part company, poetically speaking?

JK: Ashbery's work divides into a number of phases, consisting roughly of the books before and after *Flow Chart*. His work in the second phase, while still quite wonderful, is more aesthetic than meditative and quite influential on a sort of generic poem a lot of younger poets seem to be writing. The most important phase of his work for me is the period from *Rivers and Mountains* through *A Wave*, in which he wrote some of the greatest meditative American poems of the twentieth century. I think his main influence on me was stylistic—the long, supple sentences with lots of clauses and qualifications, the meandering way a poem can progress, the sense of an abstract and indefinite landscape or atmosphere. A main difference is that Ashbery is more interested in creating the sensation of thought, whereas I'm willing to go along with some actual thought (which I'm not saying is a virtue).

WV: One of the last images in *Ninety-fifth Street* is of Ashbery "whenever I look up I think I see him/Floating in the sky like the Cheshire Cat," (79) a grin, perhaps, without the cat. You begin the book with a poem about Chester, a cat who very definitely does not have a smile, and I'm wondering—a round about way to ask you about your own sense of humor—which image you'd prefer someone to associate with you? Do you think of your poetry as humorous?

JK: I'm certainly not a comic poet, but I do think there's quite a bit of subdued humor in my poems—reflected in a certain casual, throw-away manner, for instance. The critic and poet James Longenbach told me that when he teaches my work to his students at Rochester, he tells them that the humor in a Koethe poem is like the vermouth in a dry martini, which seems pretty accurate to me.

WV: Besides modernist poets like Eliot and Stevens and then Ashbery, or a novelist like Proust, what writers, artists, or philosophers have influenced your poetry? Do you have new influences as you get older, or is that more part of being a young writer?

JK: I think most of your formative influences are encountered when you're young, though I did find myself responding to Phillip Larkin as I got older. Besides the writers you mentioned, I'd include Elizabeth Bishop, James Schuyler, E. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Pynchon, F.T. Prince and Kenneth Koch in his late elegiac mode. I'm sure there are others, but those come to mind. And Ludwig Wittgenstein has certainly influenced me both intellectually and stylistically.

WV: Are there any contemporary poets you particularly enjoy reading?

JK: Quite a few, including Frank Bidart, Henri Cole, Douglas Crase, Mark Strand and Susan Stewart.

WV: You've spoken previously about the fact that you don't write for an audience. Was that a conscious choice on your part, or something you drifted toward naturally? What do you think about poetry that is consciously written for a reader?

JK: I think I've always thought of poetry as a kind of inner soliloquy, reflecting the capacity for self-consciousness that makes us human. But I wouldn't want to be essentialistic about poetry. If someone thinks about an audience and writes poems directed at it, that's fine, though such poems aren't likely to lodge themselves in my mind.

WV: Your voice has a characteristic minimalism when it comes to rhetorical device, rhyme, sound play. It seems very pure and mostly devoid of ornament, sculptural almost. Is that a fair characterization?

JK: I think so, though there's quite a bit of assonance and internal rhyme and half-rhyme I rely on to hold things together. But I do try to avoid highly charged rhetoric and figurative, poetic language, and usually look for a lower-keyed alternative.

WV: You also sometimes speak about your writing using architectural metaphors—*building* and *blocks* for instance—could you comment on your approach to the process of assembling a poem?

JK: I usually start with an idea of the poems' architecture, by which I mean an abstract image of what it's going to look and feel like—length, stanza structure or lack of it, longer or shorter lines, the kinds of rhythms

I know my work has a reputation for being somewhat cerebral, and while I suppose it can be, I think the most important thing about it is its emotional intensity.

and cadences involved, emotional intensity, density of language, formal or colloquial diction, in fact almost everything but the content, though I'll

usually have at least a vague idea of that too. Then I start to fill it in, usually at the beginning of the poem, though not always. I'm heavily dependent on the shower and shaving, when I get my ideas for anywhere from one to about ten lines, which I'll then write up and work on. I look at them again before and after dinner, and fiddle with them some more, and then repeat the process each day until the poem is done. Then I'll keep going over it until I'm satisfied with it.

Contributors' Notes

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *Ohio Journal*, *Florida Review*, *Poem*, and many other journals, and is the author of three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008). p. 28

Idella Anacker is a retired Preschool/Kindergarten teacher. Her book *Show and Tell* shares her experiences with four and five year olds for over twenty-five years. She enjoys writing children's stories as well as poetry and light verse. p. 26

C.B. Anderson was the longtime gardener for the PBS television series, *The Victory Garden*, where he went by his nickname, Kip. At the very moment he types this, he is housesitting for Michael Weishan, former host of the TV show mentioned above, who is currently visiting his mother in Milwaukee. His poems have appeared in print and electronic journals in North America, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and India. p. 20

Stephen Anderson was the First Place winner of the Kay Saunders Memorial New Poet Award in the 2005 WFOP Triad Contest. His work has appeared in *Southwest Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Harvests of New Millennium*, *Free Verse*, *Foundling Review*, *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, *Fox Cry Review*, and elsewhere. His chapbook is *The Silent Tango of Dreams* (Pudding House Publications 2006). He lives with his wife in Shorewood, Wisconsin. p. 25

Antler, former poet laureate of Milwaukee, is the author of *Selected Poems*, *Ever-Expanding Wilderness*, *Deathrattles vs. Comecries*, and *Exclamation Points ad Infinitum!* His work appears in the recent anthologies *Poets Against the War*; *Poetic Voices Without Borders 2*; *Best Gay Poetry 2008*; *Comeback Wolves: Welcoming the Wolf Home* and *Wilderness Blessings*. p. 5

James Babbs lives and dies a little each day in the small town where he grew up. He works for the government but doesn't like to talk about it. He likes getting drunk and writing and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference because both of them can be very intoxicating. Recent poems have appeared in *Gutter Eloquence*, *Fight These Bastards*, and *Song of the San Joaquin Quarterly*. p. 23

Daniel Bachhuber is a Montessori elementary teacher in the St. Paul Public Schools. He has published poetry in the *Iowa Review*, *Poetry East*, *The Southern Poetry Review*, and many others, as well as a book, *Mozart's Carriage*, from New Rivers Press, 2003. He was born and raised in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin and attended Marquette High School and Marquette University. p. 29

Bobby Steve Baker is a cosmetic surgeon soon to complete the MFA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at National University. His poems have appeared in more than 20 journals including *The Ann Arbor Review*, *Grey Sparrow*, and *Boston Literary Magazine*. p. 24

Ned Balbo's most recent book, *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems* (Story Line Press/WCU Poetry Center), received the 2010 Donald Justice Prize. His previous collection, *Lives of the Sleepers* (University of Notre Dame Press), received the Ernest Sandeen Poetry Prize and a ForeWord Book of the Year Award. Recent poems are out or forthcoming in print or on-line at *The Hopkins Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere. More Marco Polo poems may be found at *Unsplendid* and *The Nepotist*. p. 21

Laurel Bastian is the current recipient of the Halls Emerging Artist Fellowship and her work can be found in *Margie*, *Cream City Review*, *Nimrod*, *Puerto del*

Sol, *Tar River Poetry*, *Anderbo* and other journals. She runs a creative writing program in a men's correctional facility near Madison, Wisconsin. "Songs for Small Arms" was inspired by photographer Michael Kienitz's exhibit, "Small Arms: Children of Conflict." pp. 6-7

Sarah Busse is a co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. Her chapbook, *Given These Magics*, is out from Finishing Line Press in 2010. pp. 30-1

John L. Campbell started free-lance writing for business and trade magazines in 1995. His book, *Writing in Retirement*, explains his evolution into fiction and poetry along with the profiles of thirteen other writers-in-retirement. His latest poetry chapbook is entitled *Backstreet Voyeur*. p. 24

Alan Catlin lives in Schenectady, NY. p. 33

Cathryn Cofell is the author of five chapbooks, most recently *Kamikaze Commotion* (Parallel Press, 2008). Her latest project is a CD called *Lip*, poems set to the music of Obvious Dog. Her poetry can be found in places like *MARGIE*, *Oranges & Sardines*, *NY Quarterly* and *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, where she was selected for the 2008 John Lehman Poetry Award. She is currently on the Advisory Board of *Verse Wisconsin*. Visit her at www.cathryncofell.com. p. 4

Maryann Corbett's work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Measure*, *Christianity and Literature*, and many other journals in print and online. It has received the Lyric Memorial Award and the 2009 Willis Barnstone Translation Prize. *Gardening in a Time of War* was published by Pudding House Press and another chapbook, *Dissonance*, is just out from Scierter Press. For her, Wisconsin is the place just over the river, where colleagues live and friends teach, the first place she crosses when she's outward bound and the last stretch when she returns. p. 8

Barb Cranford was an assistant editor at Britannica Junior, a poet, a sculptor and a gallery owner in Chicago. She has seven books and a Pushcart nomination, holds poetry workshops in her Central Wisconsin home in the woods, and writes poems when she feels like it. p. 32

While working as a poet, novelist, memoirist, and visual artist, **Melissa Croghan** spends many summers staring over the wide waters of the Great Lakes that connect Michigan to Wisconsin. Her poems are published widely, from *Voices in Michigan* to *The Massachusetts Review*. Her artwork is recently included in a permanent hospital collection for healing, alongside the work of Alexander Calder and Sol Witt. Find her paintings at melissacroghan.com. p. 27

Karl Elder's tenth collection of verse is *The Houdini Monologues* from Word of Mouth Books, the imprint of his magazine, *Seems*. His ninth collection, *Gilgamesh at the Bellagio*, recently won publication in The National Poetry Review Award Book Series. Among his honors are a Pushcart Prize; two appearances in *The Best American Poetry*; several appearances on *Poetry Daily* and *Verse Daily*; and the Chad Walsh, Lorine Niendecker, and Lucien Stryk Awards. Mr. Elder is the Jacob and Lucile Fessler Professor of Creative Writing and Poet in Residence at Lakeland College. p. 9

Paul J. Enea's poetry has appeared in *Riverwest Review*, *Porcupine Magazine*, and in a chapbook published by Blue Canary Press. He grew up on Milwaukee's east side, in Riverside Park, and began writing poems seventeen years ago. He feels as if he's just getting started. p. 22

WV: Your poems are written sometimes in free verse, but they are often quietly metered, or in syllabics. "The Distinguished Thing" in *Ninety-fifth Street* goes back and forth between prose and verse. There's occasional, but generally not regular, rhyme, which reminds me of Eliot's practice. How do you decide to use rhyme on the occasions that you do? Does the idea of working with traditional forms, such as the sonnet, interest you? What about prose poems?

JK: Sometimes I'll just feel like writing a poem in rhyme, like "What the Stars Meant" in *The Constructor*, a poem I'm quite fond of. Or sometimes a variable rhyme scheme is a way of holding a long poem written in sections together, as in "The Secret Amplitude" in *Falling Water* and "The Unlasting" in *Sally's Hair*.

Traditional forms like sonnets don't appeal to me much, though I do write short, sonnet-like poems. Often when I write in forms, they're of my own devising. As for prose poems, I usually don't care for them because of their soft surrealist connotations. But as you noted, I did use prose in "The Distinguished Thing," and I recently wrote a poem in prose called "Like Gods," which is probably the only explicitly philosophical poem I've ever written. But it might be better to call it a poetic essay than a prose poem.

WV: Is there anything in particular you would like readers to notice about your poetry that they generally don't?

JK: Well, I know my work has a reputation for being somewhat cerebral, and while I suppose it can be, I think the most important thing about it is its emotional intensity. Eliot said somewhere that what is sometimes regarded as a capacity for abstract thought in a poet is actually a capacity for abstract feeling. I'm not entirely sure what he had in mind, but I think it applies to my own work.

This is an excerpt from Wendy Vardaman's interview with John Koethe. Read the full interview at versewisconsin.org as well as a review-essay of Koethe's Ninety-fifth Street and Edward Hirsch's The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems.

Josh English is 25. He lives and works in Louisville, KY. He received his BA in English from Ripon College. In addition to four years of college in Wisconsin, he hitchhiked up to Fond du Lac one time last year. This is his first poem to appear in print. p. 26

Susan Firer's most recent book is *Milwaukee Does Strange Things to People: New & Selected Poems 1979-2007*. Awards include the Cleveland State University Poetry Center Prize, the Posner Award, the Backwaters Prize, a Wisconsin Arts Board Fellowship, and the Lorine Niedecker Award. The Poetry Foundation has included her poem "Call Me Pier" in its Poetry Everywhere animated poem series, available for viewing on YouTube or through the Foundation. Her poems, "The Beautiful Pain of Too Much" and "Call Me Pier," have been choreographed by Janet Lilly. She was the Poet Laureate of Milwaukee, 2008-10. She edits the Shepherd Express online poetry column, available at MilwaukeeExpress.com. p. 10

Yvette Viets Flaten's great-grandfather homesteaded in Barron County, Wisconsin in the years immediately following the Civil War, and those roots have proven fascinatingly strong as she researches the location of his 160 acres. p. 27

Russell Gardner, Jr. grew up on a central WI farm, lived in many states as an adult, and is back in Wisconsin. Writing poetry (and prose) since college, he also does mixed media visual art and helped originate and then coordinate the Epidemic Peace Imagery project featured in *Free Verse* #99/100. p. 28

Max Garland is a former rural letter carrier from western Kentucky, and the author of two books of poetry, *The Postal Confessions*, winner of the Juniper Prize for Poetry, and *Hunger Wide as Heaven*, which won the Cleveland State Poetry Center Open Competition in 2006. His poems and stories have appeared widely. He has received an NEA Fellowship for Poetry, a Michener Fiction Fellowship, a Bush Literary Fellowship, and fellowships from the Wisconsin Arts Board in both poetry and fiction. He lives and teaches in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. p. 11

Carmen Germain grew up a free-range child in rural Wisconsin. Cherry Grove published *These Things I Will Take With Me* in 2008. *New Poets of the American West* has published her poem about the harrowing experience of sharing Wisconsin roads with deer at dawn and dusk. p. 29, 30

Amylia Grace is a native Wisconsinite living in Milwaukee. A former MPS teacher, she's now a student, poet and health columnist completing her M.F.A. in Creative Writing. Her poetry has been published worldwide in *WordRiot*, *Conversations Poetry Quarterly*, *The GNU*, *Facets Literary Magazine* and *tinfoildresses*. Find more at amyliagrace.blogspot.com. p. 32

Kenneth P. Gurney, a former Shorewood, WI resident, is a Brewers baseball fan and has worshiped at the frozen tundra of Lambeau Field on an offseason Sunday. His poetry appears mostly on the web as he prefers to spend SASE and reading fee monies on pumpkin spice cookies for his Dianne. His latest book of poems is *Fluid Shape of an Empty Womb*. To learn more about Kenneth, visit <http://www.kpogurney.me/Poet/Welcome.html>. p. 20

For his first book of poems, *Poor Manners* (Ahadada Books, 2009), **Adam Halbur** was chosen the 2010 resident poet of The Frost Place, the Robert Frost homestead in Franconia, New Hampshire. His work has also appeared in the anthology *Never Before: Poems about First Experiences* (Four Way Books, 2005), as well as in various journals. p. 28

Shelly L. Hall (1958-2010) lived and worked in Waukesha, WI, teaching for local colleges. Her interests included the intersections between music, divination traditions, and poetics. Her third book, *Alum*, will be published by Popcorn Press in the fall of 2010. p. 12

Derrick Harriell received an MFA in Creative-Writing from Chicago State University and is currently a dissertator in English at the UW-Milwaukee

MISSION STATEMENT

Verse Wisconsin publishes poetry and serves the community of poets in Wisconsin and beyond. In fulfilling our mission we:

- showcase the excellence and diversity of poetry rooted in or related to Wisconsin
- connect Wisconsin's poets to each other and to the larger literary world
- foster critical conversations about poetry
- build and invigorate the audience for poetry

where he teaches creative writing. His poems have appeared in various journals, including *The Cream City Review*, *Reverie*, and *Lamplighter Review* and are forthcoming *Main Street Rag*. He is a poetry editor for *The Cream City Review*. His first collection of poems, *Cotton*, is scheduled for publication (Willow Books- Aquarius Press) in the Fall of 2010. p. 13

Tom C. Hunley is an associate professor of English at Western Kentucky University and the director of Steel Toe Books. Among his books are *Tom C. Hunley Greatest Hits* (Pudding House, 2010), *Octopus* (Logan House, 2008, Winner of the Holland Prize), *Teaching Poetry Writing: A Five-Canon Approach* (Multilingual Matters LTD., 2007, New Writing Viewpoints Series), and *My Life as a Minor Character* (Pecan Grove, 2005). He divides his time between Kansas and Oz. p. 24

Claire Keyes is the author of *The Question of Rapture*, a collection of poems. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Calyx*, *The Valparaiso Review*, and *The Women's Review of Books*, among others. Although a resident of Marblehead, Massachusetts, she took a memorable drive through lake-filled Wisconsin in the first car she ever owned. p. 32

John Koethe is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *North Point North: New and Selected Poems*, *Sally's Hair*, and *Ninety-Fifth Street*, all published by Harper Collins. *Ninety-fifth Street* is the winner of this year's Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets. He is also the author of *The Continuity of Wittgenstein's Thought*, *Scepticism, Knowledge, and Forms of Reasoning*, and *Poetry at One Remove: Essays*. The recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, he is Distinguished Professor Emeritus of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and lives in Milwaukee. p. 34-37

Michael Kriesel is a poetry reviewer for *Small Press Review* and his reviews have appeared in *Library Journal*. He has won both the WFOP Muse Prize and the Lorine Niedecker Award from the Council for Wisconsin Writers. He's been nominated for nine Pushcart Prizes. Books include *Chasing Saturday Night* (Marsh River Editions); *Feeding My Heart To The Wind and Moths Mail The House* (sunnyoutside press); and *Soul Noir* (Platonic 3way Press). p. 4, 16, 19

Peg Lauber divides her time and activities between Eau Claire and New Orleans. She and Sandy Lindow edited the 2011 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*. p. 23

Norman Leer is professor emeritus of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago. He has published a critical study of the novels of Ford Madox Ford, a chapbook and two books of his own poetry: *I Dream My Father in a Song* (Mellen Poetry Press, 1992) and *Second Lining* (Mellen Poetry Press, 1997). His poems and articles have appeared widely. He retired to Madison with his wife in 2007. p. 25

John Lehman is the founder of *Rosebud* magazine and the literary editor of *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. p. 24, 33

Sandra Lindow is glad she has finished editing the 2011 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*. She lives on a hilltop where she teaches, writes, and edits. Presently she is hoping to teach rambling roses to ramble only in designated places. p. 21

Marie Loeffler is a Wisconsin poet, violinist, and private violin instructor who spends most of her free time practicing, writing, reading, and creating. Her poetry publications are current or forthcoming in *Echoes*, the WFOP Spring 2010 *Museletter*, and the 2011 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*. Her poetry was first published in *Verse Wisconsin* #102. p. 27

Jesse Manser grew up in Middleton, attended UW-Milwaukee, recently graduating with a degree in Journalism, and continues to work, write and live on the city's eastside. He is grateful and honored to have a poem published in print for the first time. Other work of his can be found at the Shepherd Express online poetry column, available at www.expressmilwaukee.com. p. 26

Barb McMakin writes with Green River Writers. Although she doesn't get out much, she ate some cheese once. Barb's first chapbook, *Digging Bones*, is scheduled for publication (Finishing Line Press) in September 2010. She is employed by the Oldham County Public Library. p. 21

Richard Merelman took up poetry writing in 2001. Previously, he taught political science at UW-Madison. He was born and grew up in Washington, D.C., and has lived in Madison on and off since 1969. His poems have appeared in journals such as *California Quarterly*, *Free Verse*, *Measure*, and *Wisconsin Academy Review*, among others. p. 25

Richard W. Moyer is 79 years old. He obtained his AB in English at Harvard College in 1953, an MH from University of Richmond in 1976, and an MA in English from Temple University in 2000. His poems are widely published,

and he has two books, *The Selected Poems of Richard W. Moyer* and *The Collected Poems of Richard W. Moyer*. p. 32

Jenny Mueller lives in St. Louis and teaches at nearby McKendree University. Her first book, *Bonneville*, was published by Elixir. p. 29

Charles Nevsimal is publisher and editor of Centennial Press, which he proudly runs with his wife, Deborah. Together they adopted the amazing Gianna Mia Rose, who's been with them since her 2008 birth. Charles has received two Pushcart nominations for his poetry and is author of two chapbooks: *Risen* and *The Misadventures of the Paisley Cowboy* (both from Desperado Press). His favorite star is V838 Mon. pp. 17-8

Kenneth Pobo has a new online chapbook called *Fitting Parts* (Philistine Press). A second chapbook, *Tea on Burning Glass*, will soon be published by Tandava Poetry Press. He lived in Wisconsin for six years as a graduate student attending the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Now, he and his partner vacation in Wisconsin's Vilas County every spring. p. 21

Raised Catholic, **Jeff Poniewaz** now considers himself eco-spiritual like John Muir. His recent chapbook *Polish for Because—Meditations of a Former St. Joseph Altar Boy* (available for \$8 postpaid from Inland Ocean Books, P.O. Box 11502, Milwaukee 53211) traces his spiritual evolution. p. 16

Patrick T. Randolph and his soul-expanding wife, Gamze, live in the southern regions of the Midwest. Recently he published his second book of poems, *Empty Shoes: Poems on the Hungry and the Homeless*. All proceeds from this book go to benefit food pantries and homeless shelters across the country. p. 33

Liz Rhodebeck is a poet and freelance writer from Pewaukee. She is co-editor of the project, "One Vision: A Fusion of Art and Poetry." Liz has recently published her third chapbook *What I Learned in Kansas* with Port Yonder Press. p. 20

Jenna Rindo lives with her husband, five children, a flock of Shetland Sheep, Rhode Island Red hens and other less domesticated creatures in rural WI. She teaches English to Hmong, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic students. Her poems have recently appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Wisconsin Poets Calendar* and the *American Journal of Nursing*. p. 22

Kay N. Sanders' work has appeared in *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Free Verse*, *Fox Cry Review* and in a number of local, regional and national church venues. Her chapbook, *That Red Dirt Road*, was published by Parallel Press in 2010. She lives in Oshkosh, where she draws inspiration from her own backyard at the edge of the woods. p. 31

G. A. Scheinoha dislikes bio notes precisely because they are pretentious. Maybe this comes from a grounded Wisconsin background. Or just his view: the writer isn't as important as the poem. Still, if you must have his curriculum vitae, recent bylines include *Avocet*, *Conceit*, *Echoes*, *Fox Cry Review* and *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar* 2010. p. 18

Paula Sergi is connected to Wisconsin through fields of common, orange day lilies; lakes formed during the Ice Age; unrelenting humidity; cold beer; and hidden baby teeth. Most of this she learned during her childhood and surprisingly, not all that much has changed since then. p. 20

John Sierpinski grew up in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. He has lived in Wisconsin for all of his life except for a couple of years in California. He currently resides in Franklin, Wisconsin with his wife, Lynn. Recent poetry is published in *California Quarterly*, *North Coast Review*, *Icon*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, and the anthology *Echoes and Waves* (Woodland Pattern Press). p. 23

Thomas R. Smith lives in River Falls, Wisconsin, and is a Master Track

instructor in poetry at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. His most recent collections are *Kinnickinnic* (Parallel Press), and a new book, *The Foot of the Rainbow*, now available from Red Dragonfly Press. He posts blogs and poems on his web site at www.thomasrsmithpoet.com. p. 14

Kate Sontag's recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *Seattle Review*, *Versé Wisconsin*, and *EXPRESS milwaukee.com*. Her work has been featured in *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and appeared in anthologies such as *Boomer Girls, Are You Experienced?*, and *Sweeping Beauty* (U. of Iowa). She is co-editor of *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography* (Graywolf) and teaches at Ripon College. p. 15

Sandy Stark came to Madison in 1969 and found friends, Lake Wingra, the farmers' market, and birding local woods just too good to leave. Finding a community of poets sealed the deal. A book of poems, *Counting on Birds*, is forthcoming from Fireweed Press. p. 22

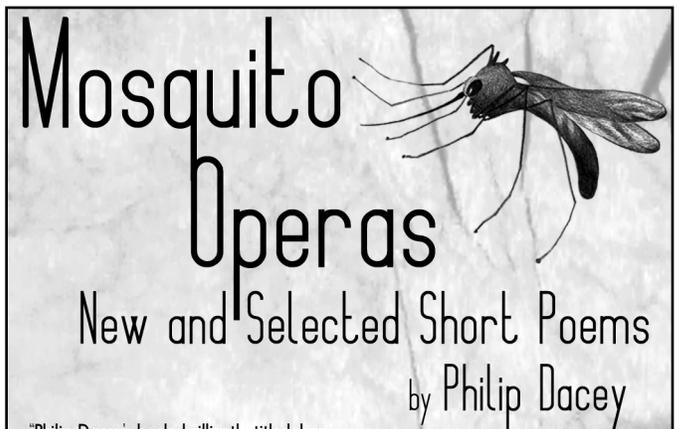
Ken Tennesen lives in a corner house around which many poems pass but few are latched onto. An entomologist, poet, Vietnam veteran, whittler, daydreamer, Tennesen explores the hidden relationships between living things and their struggles with the natural world. His poems have appeared in *Free Verse*, *Arbor Vitae*, *WFOP Museletter*, and various newsletters and technical journals. p. 33

Len Tews was a biology professor at UW-Oshkosh for 32 years. Upon retirement, he moved to Seattle for 12 years. In the past two years he has moved back to Wisconsin. His poetry has been published widely. p. 23

Don Thackrey is retired from the University of Michigan. He has published a book on Emily Dickinson and verse in a number of journals and anthologies. He roots for the University of Wisconsin football team every time it plays the University of Michigan team and he eats cheese and drinks beer—all from Wisconsin. p. 22

Wendy Vardaman, author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press 2009), is a co-editor of *Versé Wisconsin*. Visit wendyvardaman.com. pp. 34-37

Ron Wallace's most recent poetry collections are *For a Limited Time Only* (2008) and *Long for This World: New and Selected Poems* (2003), both from the University of Pittsburgh Press. He co-directs the creative writing program at UW-Madison and serves as poetry editor for the Brittingham and Pollak prize competition. He divides his time between Madison and a forty-acre farm in Bear Valley, WI. p. 4, 27



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