

# VERSE WISCONSIN

FOUNDED BY LINDA ASCHBRENNER AS FREE VERSE 1998

## FEATURES

**In the Beginning...Some Notes on Just That**  
by Sarah Busse

**The Cradle of American Haiku Festival**  
by Charlotte Digregorio

**Interview with Philip Dacey** by Karla Huston

**Nadine S. St. Louis** by Max Garland

**Tradition and the Individual Sonnet, or *Listen!***  
***Iambic Verse Has Variation*** by Wendy Vardaman

“There’s also a danger in dividing poets into free-versers and formalists for the reason that there exists an infinite series of possible gradations between, say, blank verse and free verse. One can operate in any particular poem in some borderland and carefully balance between the two modes; the choice of the poet needn’t be either/or.”

—**Philip Dacey**

“[Nadine] looked at the world with honesty and amusement, and found in verse, what so many have found, a voice of witness and transcendence, a way of saying something real and true, without asking for pity, and with a little wit and music thrown in for good measure.”

—**Max Garland**

“The beginning of a poem is inseparable, it seems, from the motion of the poem’s action. Maybe this is an essential difference between beginnings and endings? If a poem takes place through time, then the beginning of any poem is like the opening measures of a dance: it sets up a movement that will unfold as we read.”

—**Sarah Busse**

POETRY BY ✿ Guy R. Beining ✿ James Bettendorf ✿ Sue Blaustein ✿ Kosrof Chantikian ✿ Chloe Clark ✿ Naomi Cohn ✿ Geoff Collins ✿ Brendan Constantine ✿ Philip Dacey ✿ Elizabeth Devore ✿ CX Dillhunt ✿ Cathy Douglas ✿ James Finnegan ✿ Yvette Viets Flaten ✿ Taylor Graham ✿ Ray Greenblatt ✿ Greg Grube ✿ Shane D. Hanson ✿ Rebecca Hazelton ✿ Erin Keane ✿ Dion Kempthorne ✿ Michael Kriesel ✿ John Krumberger ✿ Norman Leer ✿ John Lehman ✿ Jef Leisgang ✿ Mitch L’Herault ✿ Lyn Lifshin ✿ Amit Majmudar ✿ Jesse Manser ✿ Linda Back McKay ✿ Gwyn McVay ✿ Richard W. Moyer ✿ W.J. Nunnery ✿ Mary O’Dell ✿ Helen Padway ✿ Jean Preston ✿ Harlan Richards ✿ Charles P. Ries ✿ Jenna Rindo ✿ Chuck Rybak ✿ Kay N. Sanders ✿ G.A. Scheinoha ✿ Robert Schuler ✿ Sheryl Slocum ✿ Kate Sontag ✿ Nadine S. St. Louis ✿ Chris Taylor ✿ Len Tews ✿ Jeanie Tomasko ✿ Lisa Vihos ✿ Timothy Walsh ✿ Marine Robert Warden ✿ Tad Phippen Wentz ✿ Lesley Wheeler ✿ Gail White ✿ Kelly White ✿ Marilyn Windau ✿ Judy Wucherer ✿ Charles Wyatt ✿

## ✧ Editors' Notes ✧

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WISCONSIN FELLOWSHIP OF POETS

With this issue, we begin our second year of publication at *Verse Wisconsin*. Appropriately, we're celebrating by partnering with Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf (PJOS) to introduce the Verse-O-Matic poetry vending machine. With PJOS, we sponsored a contest for poems around the theme "Luck of the Draw." The winning poems will be put into the Verse-O-Matic, available to general audiences throughout the year in a variety of venues. These poems will also be published in *VWOnline* this July.

We will be hosting three "Luck of the Draw" readings this spring: Avol's Books in Madison, April 1; Boswell Books, Milwaukee, April 28; and Windhover Center, Fond du Lac, May 10. You can find more information at our website: [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org). The Verse-O-Matic will also come with us to WFOP's April conference. (See [wfop.org](http://wfop.org) for more details!) Visit the website or our Facebook Page to find out more about another exciting project: "Poems About the Wisconsin Protests."

We'd like to welcome our new intern, Amanda Mae Brzenk. Mandy's a creative writing student at the University of Wisconsin whose main interest right now is poetry. She's helping out with proofreading, writing a few pieces for us to use in future issues as well as some possible marketing materials, and reading with us for our current online theme, "Earthworks" (November 2011). We're glad to have her on the team for the semester. We also send a big THANK YOU to all the volunteers who have pitched in this past year to help with proofreading both the print and the online issues. We couldn't do it without you.

Other than switching to a tri-quarterly publication schedule (March, July, November), one change you may notice is our expanded Advisory Board. Since it has become clear we won't pursue nonprofit status at this time, we saw no reason to continue the formality of an official Board. Our former "advisors at large" are also part of this group now. These nine are the people we email when we're looking for broad discussion around questions that arise occasionally over submission policy, financial matters, and other behind-the-scenes issues. We invite you to read all about these folks at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org). And even better, you'll soon be able to read some of their poems in our pages, as the advisory board members can now submit work just like anyone else. We thank each and every one of them for their help in our first year, and welcome them to the pages of *Verse Wisconsin* in upcoming issues. And of course, we always welcome comments, questions, and ideas from you, our readers, too!

**Thanks to CJ Muchhala & Melissa Lindstrum for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of VW's editors.**

Contact us: [editors@versewisconsin.org](mailto:editors@versewisconsin.org).

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## Books Received Fall 2010

*Publisher & author links available online*

**Elizabeth Alexander**, *Crave Radiance, New and Selected Poems 1990-2010*, Graywolf Press, 2010

**Elizabeth Austen, Andrea Bates, Carol Stevens Kaer & Sarah Suzor**, *Sightline*, Toadlily Press, 2010

**James Babbs**, *Another Beautiful Night*, Lulu Publishing, 2010

**James Babbs**, *things that aren't important happen all the time*, Interior Noise Press, 2010

**Julie Carr**, *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines*, Coffee House Press, 2010

**Rebecca Dunham**, *The Flight Cage*, Tupelo Press, 2010

**Thomas Sayers Ellis**, *Skin, Inc., Identity Repair Poems*, Graywolf Press, 2010

**Miriam Hall**, *Dreams of Movement*, Finishing Line Press, 2010

**Derrick Harriell**, *Cotton*, Willow Books/Aquarius Press, 2010

**Steve Healey**, *10 Mississippi*, Coffee House Press,

2010

**Tim Hunt**, *Fault Lines*, The Backwaters Press, 2010

**Deborah Jackman-Wilson**, *Walking Between Raindrops*, Xlibris, 2010

**Gary Jackson**, *Missing You*, Metropolis, Graywolf Press, 2010 [Winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize]

**Shane McCrae**, *In Canaan*, Rescue Press, 2010

**Ange Mlinko**, *Shoulder Season*, Coffee House Press, 2010

**Berywn Moore**, *O Body Swayed*, Cherry Grove Collections, 2010

**Ralph Murre**, *The Price of Gravity*, Auk Ward Editions, 2010

**Charles Nevsmall** (Ed), *Now Hear This: Voices of Urban Youth, Vol. Two*, Centennial Press (in cooperation with Lad Lake), 2010

**Georgia Resmeyer**, *Today I Threw My Watch Away*, Finishing Line Press, 2010

**Liz Rhodebeck**, *What I Learned in Kansas*, Port

Yonder Press, 2010

**W.R. Rodriguez**, *Concrete Pastures of the Beautiful Bronx*, zeugpress, 2008

**Lynn Shoemaker**, *A Catch in the Throat of Allah*, Parallel Press, 2010

**Robert Sonkowsky**, *Unsound Science*, Xlibris, 2010

**Sandy Stark**, *Counting on Birds*, Fireweed Press, 2010

**Alex Stolis**, *Li Po Comes to America*, Parallel Press, 2010

**David Young**, *Field of Light and Shadow, Selected and New Poems*, Alfred Knopf, 2010

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(Single Issue Rates)

Business card \$35

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Full page \$200

## Books Reviewed Online

**Ned Balbo**, *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems*, Story Line Press, 2010 by Estella Lauter.

**David R. Clowers**, *Shedding My Three Piece Birthday Suit*, Birchwinds Press, 2010 by Richard Swanson.

**Philip Dacey**, *Mosquito Operas: New and Selected Short Poems*, Rain Mountain Press, 2010 by Lisa Vihos.

**Alixia Doom**, *Cedar Crossings*, Blue Light Press, 2010 by Judith Barisonzi.

**R. Virgil Ellis**, *Recess*, Woodhenge Productions, 2009 by Judith Swann.

**Ed Galing**, *Sunrise, Sunset*, Peerless Press, 2010 by Lou Roach.

**Brent Goodman**, *The Brother Swimming Beneath Me*, Black Lawrence Press, 2009 by Noel Sloboda.

**David Gross**, *Pilgrimage*, Finishing Line Press, 2009 by Judith Barisonzi.

**Linda Lee**, *Celebrating the Heart-land*, Jericho Productions, 2009 by Linda Aschbrenner.

**Diane Lockward**, *Temptation by Water*, Wind Publications, 2010 by Moira Richards.

**Ralph Murre**, *The Price of Gravity*, Auk Ward Editions, 2010 by Lou Roach.

**Elizabeth Oakes**, *The Luminescence of All Things Emily*, Wind Publications, 2010 by Moira Richards.

**Patrick T. Randolph**, *Empty Shoes: Poems on the Hungry and the Homeless*, Popcorn Press, 2010 by Paul Julien.

**Richard Schuler**, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, MWPH Books, 2010 by Linda Aschbrenner.

**Seems (Issues 41, 42, 43-44)**, Karl Elder (ed.), Lakeland College, 2009-10 by Linda Aschbrenner.

**Sandy Stark**, *Counting on Birds*, Fireweed Press, 2010 by Richard Swanson.

**Katerina Stoykova**, *The Air Around the Butterfly*, Fakel Express, 2009 by Judith Swann.

**Katrin Talbot**, *St. Cecilia's Daze*, Parallel Press, 2010 by Bobbi Altreuter.

**Lesley Wheeler**, *Heterotopia*, Barrow Street Press, 2010, *Two Reviews*, by Kathleen Eull & by Julie L. Moore.

**Gail White**, *Easy Marks*, David Robert Books, 2008 by Judith Swann.

**Other Books Noted:** Oren Wagner, Kaveh Akbar, Steve Henn, David J. Thompson,

*Showstoppers: 20 Poems from the Midwest Poetry All-Stars*; Richard Kovac, *Untitled*; Joan Wiese Johannes, *Sensible Shoes*; *Rosebud* (Issue 45, Summer/Fall, 2009); Lester Smith (ed.), *Vampyr Verse*.

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## Books Received Summer 2010

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**Ned Balbo**, *The Trials of Edgar Poe and Other Poems*, Story Line Press, 2010

**Brian Kevin Beck**, *Poems*, Wonderside Productions, 2010

**Cathryn Cofell**, *Lip* (CD), music by Obvious Dog, [www.cathryncofell.com](http://www.cathryncofell.com), 2010

**Philip Dacey**, *Mosquito Operas, New and Selected Short Poems*, Rain Mountain Press, 2010

**Alixia Doom**, *Cedar Crossings*, Blue Light Press, 2010

**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*, 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. Cecilia's Daze*, Parallel Press, 2010

**Lesley Wheeler**, *Heterotopia*, Barrow Street Press, 2010

**Gail White**, *Easy Marks*, David Robert Books, 2008

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## A Button Fell Off

her blouse and she never  
seemed to notice her  
cleavage was showing

her husband didn't notice  
a man leaning on the door  
post was watching her

in his mind the leaning man  
broke a Commandment  
and coveted her

but he never approached her  
or said a word to her  
and the moment passed

as the woman walked away  
into another room  
and there was an unfinished tale

or a poem where a word or whole line  
is dropped by accident  
and the poem becomes better for it

—MARINE ROBERT WARDEN,  
RIVERSIDE, CA

how it is for other parents, but for me this fall has been like waking  
up out of an almost ten-year dream. Where am I? What's the game  
plan? When will the prize committee call?

Turns out I'm not nearly where I expected to be. I'm staring out the  
window, doodling with my thumbs, mulling how to begin writing  
about the beginnings of poems. I've made a few false starts.

First, I planned a parallel piece to the essay published in *Verse Wisconsin*  
104, on the endings of poems. Simple, I told Wendy. I'll look at two  
or three or four common failings, suggest some solutions, and wrap it  
up. No problem. Put me down for the spring issue. Sitting down to  
write, I slowly realized the flaw in this plan: beginnings aren't parallel  
to endings at all. They do their work much differently in the poem,  
and we approach them differently, as writers. The same sort of essay  
simply won't do.

Started in a second time, and got all twisted up by the definition of  
"beginning." Every poem starts somewhere in seed, with a writing  
exercise, journal twiddle, overheard remark, or other trick that gets us  
launched into the poem draft in the first place. That's not the point  
of this assignment, however. Some other article, some other issue, can  
cover that ground. Once again, I tossed out the opening paragraphs  
and returned to a blank screen.

Oh, beginnings, beginnings, I sing as I dance around my basement  
study, bending paperclips and reshelving books and trying to avoid  
the yawning computer screen. Such tentative, tricky, tender ground!

## In the Beginning...Some Notes on Just That

by Sarah Busse

You're reading this piece  
most likely in the spring,  
according to my editorial  
chart, when the snow  
is beginning to melt,  
crocuses beginning to  
poke above ground.  
Sandhill cranes fly north  
with their prehistoric,  
bell-like calling. Robert  
Creeley once again sees  
Kore emerge, surrounded  
by her goat-men, "O love,  
/ where are you / leading /  
me now?"

It's a different season  
for me as I write this  
between Halloween and  
Thanksgiving, one more  
traditionally associated  
with endings, although for  
me it's a beginning too—a  
few weeks ago I put my  
youngest child on the  
school bus, off to full-day  
kindergarten. I don't know

How do we know, as writers, what sort of beginning a poem needs?  
Trying to gain some clarity, I read over the poems in this issue of *Verse Wisconsin* to explore a few of the possibilities.

The first type of beginning I noticed, paging through, is what I call  
a "grand sweep." The  
poet starts with a wide  
angle lens. Look at  
W. J. Nunnery's "The  
Union." The poem  
begins slightly out of  
focus, then after a few  
lines the soundscape  
focuses in: "the twangy  
sound of an out-of-  
tune / soul." Visually,  
the poem takes even  
longer, until it finally  
locks in on the figure  
of the "old bald man."  
There it stays until the  
end. The general effect  
of the poem is of a  
spiraling in, towards the  
sweet spot represented  
by that "smile grabbing  
his face."

Strikingly similar  
in shape but almost  
completely opposite in  
tone is Ray Greenblatt's  
"Berryman's Bridge."

In this poem, the first  
stanza recounts, even  
a little prosaically, that  
he's walking home  
from seeing a play, and  
he saw a different play  
earlier in the week.  
The focus rivets in the  
second stanza, moving  
in closer and closer  
to follow finally "that  
black spot / in mid-air  
then a white spot / as it  
met the river."

Both of these poems  
illustrate how a poem  
can pull us in. The  
very opposite effect  
takes place in Marine  
Robert Warren's poem

### Home Health Nurse Visits Woman With Cancer

I told her husband I'd let the skunk out  
after he said it was in the trap  
instead of rabbits—

He called the sheriff  
who said to shoot it in the back  
of the head

fast and clean,  
*just don't say I said you could.*  
Call the DNR, I said

or, I'll do it, really,  
but he mentioned the garden  
the house, the smell.

I thought it would just run off  
into the woods, happy,  
grateful, even.

All the while she sat there  
she, with cancer  
who had told me

about the bones irradiated  
about the new lesion  
the pain

how they were afraid  
the neck  
might snap—

It was the morning after  
my friend died.  
Cancer. It was

the morning I understood  
maybe he just wanted to shoot,  
something.

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

## The Union

A collage of cacophony,  
bustling voices that swing lower  
than the sweetest chariot back and  
forth, colliding into a dissonant wash  
and, standing on a rickety wooden stage,  
the twangy sound of an out-of-tune  
soul, echoes passion, pulling whatever notes  
are left to be pulled from a cracked acoustic guitar,  
punk rock stickers peeling from its hollow body;  
sun setting melodies that stretch all the way  
to the room's back wall and an old bald man  
wearing Ron Dayne's red and white thirty-three  
stands up and he shouts: more beer,  
I need more beer, as though  
that was all that mattered,  
a smile grabbing his face like the moon  
in a black and childlike sky, unwilling  
to let go until tomorrow.

—W.J. NUNNERY, MADISON, WI

In all of the examples so far, the motion moves inward or outward but it  
does so in a relatively straight line. There are also poems which engage  
in trickier maneuvers. In John Krumberger's "Holy Family Cemetery,  
Racine, Wisconsin," his first stanza surveys his own extended family.  
With the second stanza, we swing to focus on the unknown grave of  
someone unrelated to anyone in the family, or the cemetery. A Jane  
Doe. The temptation, in a workshop setting, might be to suggest

### Berryman's Bridge

I was coming home from  
the Guthrie with a friend.  
Early in the week I had seen  
the frothy *Midsummer Night's Dream*  
feeling joy evolve out of sorrow  
tonight it was *Long Day's Journey into Night*  
where hope dissolves into tragedy.

My friend halted on the bridge  
saying this very place was where  
John Berryman had jumped.  
Also being a poet  
I could visualize  
from a distance that black spot  
in mid-air then a white spot  
as it met the river.

The moment closed in like ice  
I shoved hands into pockets  
and we began to walk again.

—RAY GREENBLATT, EXTON, PA

"A Button  
Fell Off."  
Here, the  
poem starts  
with an  
extremely  
close focus,  
the size of  
the gap in  
a woman's  
shirt, then  
slowly spins  
out, wider  
and wider  
until we're  
left at the  
end with  
an open-  
e n d e d  
sense of  
possibility,  
like ripples  
spreading  
across a still  
surface.

Something twisty also happens in "Home Health Nurse Visits  
Woman with Cancer," by Jeanie Tomasko.

At the start this poem feels quite safe, even gently comical. A man has  
trapped a skunk by accident and is debating what to do. Slowly, the  
focus shifts to his wife, dying of cancer. Another shift brings us to the  
speaker's friend's death, also cancer, and a new understanding of the  
emotional underpinning of the original conversation. We move in a  
slow spiral back to where we began, but we arrive with a difference.

In looking  
closely at  
these poems,  
what occurs  
to me now is  
how difficult  
it is to talk  
about, or  
think about,  
beginnings  
without also  
considering  
l a r g e r  
s t r u c t u r a l  
issues. The  
beginning  
of a poem is  
inseparable,  
it seems, from  
the motion  
of the poem's  
a c t i o n .  
Maybe this is  
an essential  
difference  
between  
beginnings  
and endings?  
If a poem  
takes place  
t h r o u g h  
time, then  
the beginning  
of any poem  
is like the  
s p e a k e r ' s  
awareness of  
dissimilarity.  
In a poem such  
as this, the  
end points us  
back around to  
the beginning  
again, which  
we read with  
an altered  
knowledge and  
vision.

### Holy Family Cemetery, Racine, Wisconsin

Here among the stories of my kin:  
the uncles who drank too much,  
the grandfather, a big soap box talker,  
the cousin too wild when he was young  
snuffed out before the age of thirty-one,  
and my father Henry the gentlest of men;

here in this meadow beneath maples, oaks and jays  
I see these trinkets: ribbons, stuffed animals  
and necklace carefully arranged  
into a shrine around her stone:  
*Jane Doe, June 12, 2000.*

Stranger found face down  
clothed in ditch water leaves  
who the police tried to find  
a family for and failed;  
someone should grieve for her,  
someone should write a poem for her,

even if it is only me  
and my words, too sentimental,  
are drowned by the drone of traffic  
from the highway, and the rain is bitter,  
and this world was never a home.

—JOHN KRUMBERGER, MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

measures of a dance: it sets up a movement that will unfold as we  
read. An ending, on the other hand, cuts off, and allows the white  
space to regain purchase.

I suspect a poem informs itself in reverse, in the writing of it. Work  
on the rest of your poem first. At the end, in the end, the beginning  
will become clear. As T.S. Eliot wrote in "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.



## Bathing with Mozart

What would Constanza say  
if she knew we were bathing,  
you and I together,  
me immersed in water,  
you inhabiting the air?  
I am glad your death has not come between us.

It is glorious, bathing at twilight,  
no light lit except the evening seeping in,  
a glow at the window  
purpling the porcelain fixtures  
and purpling the tile floor,  
balancing what you can see with what you cannot,  
the Piano Sonata in A infusing the air  
with shades of violet, rose, and jade,  
the bell-clear stream of notes purling round  
the shapes and shadows of the darkening room.

With each succeeding variation, I could wish  
the chain of variations might never end—  
yet there must be space for the sprightly Menuetto,  
and who'd dare erase the jaunty Turkish march?

Still, I will live within these variations while they play,  
sinking a little lower in the bathwater  
so the water laps almost to my ear,  
each new variation seeming to bring us closer  
to some brink or revelation,  
a giddy precipice receding playfully as we approach.

Now, even the purple light fades  
and becomes a wash of gray,  
the music darting and glinting off the fixtures.

With the Menuetto, I slide below to wet my hair,  
listening through the curtain of water  
to the muffled notes.

This, I think, this is how fish must hear Mozart.  
Yes, they would, they must, even without the luxury  
of ears.

Listening underwater, the music laving my skin,  
I squeeze the washcloth, a stream of black-tailed notes  
loosed from their staves,  
plashing and skirling into the bath.

As I shampoo my hair, soap my arms and neck,  
the Turkish march starts,  
an accelerating carousel shifting from major to minor,  
episodes of mild menace interspersing delight  
as we bob along on make-believe horses,  
vasting over furlongs with pretend strides.

Later, we shall share a glass of wine,  
mine savored on the tongue,  
yours evaporating on the air,

where you float, precocious even as a ghost,  
while we listen together for the thousandth time  
to *The Magic Flute*,  
the Queen of Night's arias the closest thing  
to sexual bliss  
beyond the realm of touch.

—TIMOTHY WALSH, MADISON, WI  
visit *VW Online* for more poetry by this author

## Red Scarf Jazz

Guess what Doctor Jazz has between his jaws now  
Pine branch boy, dead mouse prince, ice clown king  
Fetch'n carry goofball pup, dixie doggie on parade  
Drag it, wag it, leave it, retrieve it, soft mouth shimmy it

Pine branch boy, dead mouse prince, ice clown king  
*Red hot peppers* improv spaniel ready for spring  
Drag it, wag it, leave it, retrieve it, soft mouth shimmy it  
*Billy goat stomp* it on grass, *low gravy* it through mud

*Red hot peppers* improv spaniel ready for spring  
Whoa! whoa! don't let go of that *boogaboo* thing!  
*Billy goat stomp* it on grass, *low gravy* it through mud  
*Cannon ball blues* it uphill, *crazy chords* it back down

Whoa! whoa! don't let go of that *crazy chords* thing!  
Losers weepers finders keepers, know what I mean?  
*Cannon ball blues* it uphill, *crazy chords* it back down  
Question is whose is it, how and when did she lose it

Losers weepers finders keepers, know what I mean?  
I won't touch it, no not me, un-uh, leave it be  
Question is whose is it, how and when did she lose it  
Even Sister Sadie won't sashay it just for fun

I won't touch it, no not me, un-uh, leave it be  
Who knows where it's been, what it's seen  
Even Sister Sadie won't sashay it just for fun  
Ricochet squirrel play, marsh bird flush ballet

Who knows where it's been, what it's seen  
Winter velour, scarlet knit, go brother go  
Ricochet squirrel play, marsh bird flush ballet  
Sled fall? storm blown? lovers' quarrel? worse?

Winter velour, scarlet knit, go brother go  
Jellyroll that scarf along these melting park paths  
Sled fall? storm blown? lovers' quarrel? worse?  
Drape it on a boulder for her, bowtie it to a tree

Jellyroll that scarf along these melting park paths  
Fetch'n carry goofball pup, dixie doggie on parade  
Drape it on a boulder for her, bowtie it to a tree  
Guess what Doctor Jazz has between his jaws now

—KATE SONTAG, RIPON, WI  
visit *VW Online* for more poetry by this author

## Shadow

Most days you don't notice she's there  
even when the sun shines. You put her  
out of your mind, but she follows you,  
spilling the salt when you scramble eggs,  
overflowing the coffemaker, burning toast.

Sit down with a new book and she reads  
over your shoulder, loses your place  
when you get up to answer the phone.  
Say you're going for a walk, she'll hide  
your left shoe. Most of the time

you don't think to blame her, but somehow  
you know she's behind you. All you need  
is one suspect moment—a new twinge  
that repeats itself, a cough that holds on,  
ten pounds you didn't really try to lose—

and first, you think you hear her in the hall.  
Then you catch glimpses of a wraith  
at the edge of vision when you turn your head.  
Eventually she camps out at the foot  
of your bed watching you chase sleep.

By then even the cat notices.  
You begin to consider the odds  
you're joining the battle again.

## Post-Op

Ten days out and the nerves wake irritable  
as any sleeper roused too soon.  
What felt like a fine Victorian choker— wide  
black velvet, you were thinking, with a simple cameo  
or gold filigree— in breath morphs  
to fine barbed wire, and hot.  
You're walking in the garden now, relishing  
light that promises before long to falter and cool,  
reminding yourself to leave that nightshade  
that no fence holds back, for anyone else to pull,  
never mind its shallow root.  
You talk now and then to its cousin tomatoes,  
heavy and round and still bright green,  
coaxing a *carpe diem* before frost  
puts paid to summer's hope.  
You measure progress sun to sun, know only  
time and tempo, concentrate on slow  
breathing and quick senses, eyes open wide  
to this transitory cadence of days.

in the long conversation of that life, Dina St. Louis found a way to have the last word, or words, in the poetry she left for us.

# Nadine S. St. Louis

November 17, 1936 - September 29, 2010

## by Max Garland

Wisconsin poets and lovers of poetry, particularly those of us in the Chippewa Valley, said goodbye to a lovely writer, a good friend, a tireless worker in the arts community, and an all-around brave soul this past September. Nadine (Dina) St. Louis, the author of two books of poetry, *Weird Sisters* and *Zebra*, passed away after eight years of riding the various waves of neuroendocrine cancer. I've always disliked the phrase "battle with cancer," because we almost always

hear the word "lost" in there somewhere. I'd prefer to say Dina St. Louis waged an eight year "in-depth conversation" with illness, and one of the consolations is that Dina, though no longer with us, has definitely had the last word in that long conversation. That last word, or those last words, are in the poems she left behind, in which she observes with a keen eye and a pointed wit, the ups and downs of illness and health, and gives the testimony of a woman living fully, though faced with prognosis after prognosis announcing the end was near, and then, of course, six months later, or two years later, or three, or four, we'd watch Dina step up to the microphone to read her latest poems. After retiring from the English Department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in 2000, Dina spent her remaining years traveling with her husband Bob, enjoying her family, and supporting the local arts community, helping found and organize the Chippewa Valley Writing Festival, writing prolifically, attending literary workshops, and frequently reading her own poems throughout the state. Those of us who were friends and colleagues noticed as the years went by that though Dina's health was challenged, and certainly her body weakened, her poetry actually grew stronger. She looked at the world with honesty and amusement and found in verse what so many have found: a voice of witness and transcendence, a way of saying something real and true without asking for pity and with a little wit and music thrown in for good measure. Those who knew Dina, and many readers of this journal are among her friends and acquaintances, loved the grace of her language and the affirmation of her life, and are grateful to have known her, and grateful that

Smug, that's what it is, too used to driving its prey to the wall with a glare from that scorching eye.

You know you can't allow such easy victory, must turn back the monster on itself, so you raise your defiant glass to dampen the fire— My turn to name the poison, Beast. You speak the unspeakable, take rarity as a virtue. You drink deep.

Beast, what a big, red eye you have. The better to make you burn, my dear.

## This Says Boom

it is black, black night. nineteen-  
forty-four is ready to die.  
the father goes out in the cold  
with his shotgun, two shells. the mother  
starts at the slam of the door,  
stops baby's ears. she sighs.  
forever, this winter, this war  
have gone on. the father aims carefully  
down into dirt. at the gong  
that says midnight, he fires, one crisp  
ringing blast. then another. this says  
boom in your face, winter,  
boom in your face, two theaters  
of combat. here in west pittston  
it is unstoppable a new year.  
the father collects his spent shells  
as a good sportsman does. inside,  
his roughened hands will warm  
again as he sleeps. tomorrow  
will be the same, but new.

—GWYN McVAY, LANCASTER, PA

## Spring Tease

At the sidewalk's steepest summit before its long descent,  
the young man on the skateboard launches himself  
out into the slipstream of county highway twelve,  
sailing magisterially down the faded yellow ribbon,  
heavy industry flanking him on either side while  
chins turn parallel to shoulders with disbelief or delight

at this singular declaration of the soul, this strange  
being unencumbered by his own mortality,  
the board's rolling, tight slalom intact,  
a Midwestern surfer riding his asphalt wave  
in honor of this winsome afternoon,  
and maybe the gaggle of teenage girls who

spontaneously erupt with girlish *joie de vivre* when  
they notice him, the younger boys further on  
offering raucous encouragement before he veers off,  
disappearing into the vernal shimmer of light,  
the afternoon's warmth soon receding  
with the chill of oncoming night.

—JEF LEISGANG, CAMBRIDGE, WI

## Suitcase

Crystallized by the winter sunlight  
snow is no longer good for building figures.  
I am warm, inside, watching a brown oak leaf,  
tired of hanging on all winter, let go,  
tumble across the yard like a young girl  
on a dull white gymnastics mat.

Soon I'll walk the dog, bundled  
in wool against the chill, head bowed  
into the wind, missing the evening star.  
Pushing our pace, we might miss  
a pheasant, deer or coyote,  
snow will crunch loudly underfoot.

Just a short time ago,  
a man placed the last of his clothes  
in a suitcase, his heart in pieces  
on the kitchen floor, ground into the grit  
of dirty snow melt from black rubber  
boots and angry resolve.

His daughter sat on her bed  
alone, tears stained the pillow she held  
tightly on her lap. Cold seeped  
through the walls.

—JAMES BETTENDORF, BROOKLYN PARK, MN

## Valentine's Day

The sun's rotting the snow forts  
of the old regime—  
puddles run rebellious in the streets.

Although too early for tender grass  
we are at the start of winter's defeat.

The year's in kindergarten—  
peeps and tumblings  
of sparrows under the bird feeder.

Spring draws a yellow sun  
on a blue-paper afternoon.

It promises paper roses, lollipops  
and cut-out hearts with glued-on lace.

Even though I've seen this day many times  
my love affair with the world begins again.

Winter's come, and now it's going—  
it makes no difference.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

## March Mind

White flakes fall  
into cracks in the street.  
The auto skids  
from sidewalk to sidewalk.

—RICHARD MOYER, BERWYN, PA

## Shed

You walk the state loop, careful not to  
cross the border into *Private Land Ahead*.  
Your bones are honeycomb. Once you may  
have nursed three babies to plump cherub  
position, bald heads fragrant, legs creased  
sweet with rolls of flesh. You stride miles  
going nowhere. You suffer sadness of  
unknown origin. You walk to find forgiveness  
all the way back to Eve.

For years you bake cakes, weed gardens,  
scrub blood stains from sheets patterned  
in paisley or ticked with stripes in ice  
cold well water, then peg them to dry in the wind.  
You seed annuals, their bright colors a temporary  
vain. He plants red pines, blue spruce  
permanently rooted and evergreen.  
He times his orchard so there is fruit to eat,  
out of hand summer through late fall.  
Barren trees are culled, coddling moths are  
killed before the petals fall.  
After all, it's a myth that Eve ate an apple.

You walk a path, box elder branches and hickory  
hedge you in. A flash of white shines against  
the tawny neutral of canary grass. You can't help  
but touch it. Smooth and sturdy in your  
hand, contraband as ivory. You carry  
it home. The six tips are worn smooth by wind grit,  
the driving snow of Wisconsin winter.  
You finger the base ridged with russet,  
the bottom face, porous as pumice.  
The buck runs and rubs, seeks out significant  
friction to shed his rack, but the doe puts down placenta.  
Female mammals drip liquid into solid:  
the bones of vertebrates, the teeth of hungry  
fawns waiting to be weaned.

—JENNA RINDO, PICKETT, WI

## Ash Wednesday

As if we didn't already know from so long  
sitting in this bar that everything beautiful  
fades, you point out a hole in the shirt  
I just admired, which you rescued from  
a thrift store bin. A friend is in love and  
he couldn't have been happier to sit in rush-  
hour traffic to tell me. I wanted to tell him  
hungry moths have chomped my best wool,  
and soft cotton will wear thin, revealing  
the weave of threads—a stuttering cross-  
hatch, the frost pattern on a windshield—  
before breaking apart, cauterizing ends  
to form a circle: small at first, but rippling  
out each time you push a fingertip against  
the lip of the hole, tasting resistance. Add  
that to all we know: your case-less pillow,  
my busted banjo eyes. I wish him charms  
to ward off the rot: cedar chips, dry cleaning,  
humidifiers. I wish his far-off sweet girl  
sleepless nights, but the good kind. I wish  
a fresh twin of your shirt—same gentle riot  
of orange blooms—to materialize for you  
at the Goodwill racks. A dead ringer, your  
replacement: bright, whole, ready to wear.

—ERIN KEANE, LOUISVILLE, KY

## Wisconsin March

Winter lasts six months,  
a half a life spent in the  
dark. Wake up old man.

The sun is sliding  
through the bare limbs of the oak  
and the maple bleeds

its sweet blood. Drink. Let  
the daylight drip from your chin.  
Winter here lasts six

months: a half a life  
spent in the dark and cold. A  
flower behind a

window bends to the  
light. When the winds shift, and the  
daylight stretches past...

the yolk of the sun  
once again feeds the starving  
lost tribe of the north.

—SHANE D. HANSON, MERRILL, WI

## For Lost Fathers: Inauguration Day, 2009

Warning in music-words  
devout and large,  
that we are each other's  
harvest:  
we are each other's  
business:  
we are each other's  
magnitude and bond.

—Gwendolyn Brooks, "Paul Robeson"

1.  
Gwendolyn should have been here,  
and Paul Robeson and James Baldwin,

who wrote because his bitter father gnarled  
into himself, and Art Hodes, Woody Guthrie

and the Duke, and all the other  
jazz and bluesmen; Bessie, Billie,

banjo pickers, poets, all who wrote  
and sang and played their way

back and forth across the fault lines  
of our music and our history. Today

is their song; they have given us  
the harvest warnings, if we will but listen.

2.  
Barack Obama found his father in a dream  
that never was. Dreaming him

could almost turn the absence  
into what was lost; writing

slowly overcame the hole. The father  
whom he barely knew became

a vision of a world to leave  
his daughters and the rest of us.

I have also written down my father,  
imagined landscapes of connection

that we never saw, remembered  
trains moving between loss and loss.

Somewhere in our memories and history  
we are all seeking fathers, inventing better worlds.

3.  
The patchwork matters: all the people  
dancing on the Mall and in the parks,

their faces moving back and forth  
across the grass, touching and erasing

common tears. He, like us,  
is incomplete, needs our dancing

to begin the incarnation of his dreams,  
to make them ours. Acknowledging

this incompleteness, shared and sung  
together, we begin the harvest.

(January 20, 2009)

—NORMAN LEER, MADISON, WI

## To the Old Man in the Rhodes Café

I enter the small café in the early morning  
rain falling lightly.  
huddled together a dozen Greek men smoking their interminable  
cigarettes drinking coffee and cognac are talking loudly

old now from years of hard toil I can see the wrinkles and holes in  
their faces like cold sponges on the ocean floor and yet these old  
men I know their laughter. I know their laughter means this is the  
beginning of another day

would you relive your life? live it over to make sure your face  
had no holes or scars? you say you would if only you could have a  
face, new, as smooth and soft as sand on the beach. but how would  
you do it?

in the early morning rain these old men squeezed together between  
five small round tables sit with their legs crossed and watch each  
other smoke and talk and then laugh

how much is this laughter worth? the old man next to me orders a  
last coffee and cognac. he looks at me and waves asking me to join  
him. I cannot help feeling he has read my thoughts. I was thinking  
about his death thinking that he would die soon and how foolish  
some questions are. this old man is not going to relive his life. none  
of us will. in the end he had answered my question again

laughter was more than death. laughter was the beginning of each  
morning of each night, was the sky and slow falling rain.

I looked at the others and I saw countless cigarettes  
and then laughter overwhelm the quiet sky

—KOSROF CHANTIKIAN, LARKSPUR, CA  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Flight of Fancy

Somewhere above the earth,  
inside the vastness between Spokane  
and Minneapolis, on January's final frigid day,  
I momentarily convince myself that I'm sailing  
over North Africa rather than North Dakota,  
the moon so pearly full and white,  
the rim of sky so blue, the sun-burnished  
landscape like sand dunes mingled with the riverine  
tributaries of arteries in any human body,  
the heavenly bodies of you and our infant son  
in my mind, bursting through the static  
of businessmen who say things like  
*baked into the solution, clear your  
calendar, and I need to jump off now,*  
before being made to stow their electronic  
crackpipes and retreat back into their fevered  
brains for another hour or so, though they  
can hardly stand it, though they never notice  
the late afternoon moon or the frozen burn of  
ochre plains below—the blue line stretching  
on and on until we see Morocco, or Fargo.

—JEF LEISGANG, CAMBRIDGE, WI

## White Eyes

Black man looks at the world  
through white eyes.

With a sometimes rage  
baffling to others-not-colored.

White's eyes see a snow-colored  
world measured in brightness, and

Can't understand  
what makes a black man see with white eyes,

Can't see  
a world through black eyes,

Can't relate  
to the smoldering rage,

Can't feel  
the pain it causes.

Black man looks at the world  
through white eyes.

While white's eyes look at the world  
blindly.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, OREGON, WI

## Ranch Hand

When I was young he was a meadowlark  
who only wanted to cheer me up.

He sat on a fence post and sang his song  
that descended to a spring so young  
frost froze on winter's grass.

Now I'm old and here he is,  
an old ranch hand in Seattle.

He waits at the DON'T WALK sign  
raring to go because arthritis  
hardly leaves him time enough to cross.

He's duct-taped a little radio  
to his walker and everyone

a block around can hear the whine  
of country music as he, in boots and jeans,  
rolls his cage across the street.

*Do you like my music?* he asks cheerfully  
when I meet him halfway across.

The song's about some lost love.

Then the notes become silver coins  
dropping and rolling all over the street.

Everyone is picking them up  
*Yes, I like your music,* I answer

as I bend down and grab a silver dollar  
that's landed—a lucky heads.

But he doesn't stay. Suddenly flushed,  
he's off flying—boots, cage and all—

over roof-tops, singing  
and headed for the park.

I glimpsed his V-neck sweater—  
yellow, beneath a tweedy jacket.

—LEN TEWS, OSHKOSH, WI

## Safeguard

In each of the drawers of my father's dresser,  
an unwrapped bar of soap nestled among the  
neatly folded undershirts, underwear, and socks,  
suggesting a strange alchemy at work to an imaginative boy,  
but to my father, maybe the most sensible thing in the world.

I never learned the origins of this small extravagance  
of his—I only knew that when we put our arms around  
each other before he left for the plant each morning,  
he bore that faint perfume of those private wooden places,  
those contained spaces that lingered like  
a distant memory, woven into fabric.

—JEF LEISGANG, CAMBRIDGE, WI

## Know Your Neighbors

I.

Ms. Bunn’s age is old. She quit counting  
so she didn’t have to act her age. What’s important is  
she’s young enough to enjoy hot fudge cake  
when her alarm goes off before sunrise.  
She wears a feather boa and presides over the Methodist women  
and four grown children.  
“If everybody loved going to church and tithed,  
we’d all be happy campers.”  
God wants her to bake biscuits  
and give them away. She must give them away because once  
she enjoyed Elvis’ gyrations as much as his Gospel.

II.

The neighbors’ chow mix runs away  
to our backdoor the way their 8-year-old did  
when he lost track of his little brother. Manicotti with  
my instructions taped on top waits in the freezer  
while the neighbors wait in the oncologist’s office.  
After she gets the results, I wear pink for a week  
without realizing my wardrobe is a reminder  
she’d rather forget.

III.

The four-year-old girl climbing a bronze Galapagos tortoise  
doesn’t know a boy had to die in a fiery Suburban  
before these statues could be built.

Her mother doesn’t realize Miss Beth cries  
for the boy whose ABCs were animals, Boy Scouts, and Christ  
every time she drives Route 35.

They don’t notice the memorial plaque, but they honor Jackson  
with their laughter as they watch the monarchs feed on milkweed.

IV.

The Broncos will play in the State Championship on Saturday  
because Ben, Caleb, and Bradley painted themselves blue  
and yellow. Everyone else wore sweaters and blankets  
while the team blocked passes. An old blue and white school bus  
will take the team to Salem because the paper says,  
“Sometimes in football, heart out trumps reality.”  
But Coach gives the credit to God.

—ELIZABETH DEVORE, GENEVA, OH

## The Outpatient

The man shuffled under pretended warmth  
toward the hospital entrance, under  
quilted snowpants that hung like a black tent  
from the center pole of his body.  
Another man stopped him,  
an inpatient. Said:  
“Sorry, hate to ask, but  
you got a cigarette on you?”  
They hunched over gray sidewalk together  
and he pulled out tobacco to roll a couple smokes,  
paper folded over a puddle of brown shreds  
into a loose taco shape.  
The man’s weak, yellow hand  
lifted it to his weak, yellow lips,  
licking the dubious thing to seal it.  
Then they lit up together like confidential friends,  
two circles of fire against a gray morning,  
cigarettes crumbling in their fingers  
even as they burned.  
The man hitched his snowpants up  
and continued to the cancer ward,  
where other patients’ eyes  
were drawn to him, then averted,  
as if Death himself had arrived.

—CATHY DOUGLAS, MADISON, WI

## Predator

You’re a shark  
swimming among a school  
of thoughts,  
chewing up  
everything in  
your path,  
gobbling down  
ideas whole,  
regurgitating them  
into your  
stories  
and poems.  
Never resting,  
always plunging  
through literary seas.

—G. A. SCHEINOHA, EDEN, WI

## What We Believed

*Found a peanut, found a peanut, found a peanut just now...*

In fifth grade, we scoffed  
at the notion that a stepped-on crack  
would break your mother’s back;  
unlike those in first grade  
who believed anything they were told.

You’d see them making their way  
home from school, mindful  
of their mothers’ spines, debating  
the feasibility of Santa’s overnight  
journey and the going price of teeth.

We’d snicker. And yet, we were not  
above superstition. For us—older and so,  
that much closer to death—the specter  
of the rotten peanut loomed heavy.  
Was it being sung to *Clementine* that brought

this demon nut to bear so hard upon  
our psyches; made us wonder, could one  
ill-chosen, delicious treat really kill you?  
When I could have, should have, made  
a wiser choice, why did I ignore the signs?

And that doctor in the song, who said  
I wouldn’t die, but then, I died anyway  
and went to heaven to meet St. Peter  
in some versions. But there was always  
confusion here. No one could agree on the end.

So we’d punch each other in the shoulder,  
brush off death-by-peanut, purposely  
step on a crack or two, just for the hell of it.

—LISA VIHOS, SHEBOYGAN, WI

*visit VW Online for audio & more work by this author*

## Ghost at the Party

wanders through the rooms –  
dining, living,  
den and kitchen.

Small groups cemented  
in conversation, sealed  
by low laughter.

Anyone who has been a ghost  
has to learn how to put on  
flesh and be noticed.

—HELEN PADWAY, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Long in the Tooth

Upon discovering  
that it actually only meant that  
the gums recede with age  
I was disappointed,  
a little, that  
it wasn’t about how  
teeth might have kept  
growing imperceptibly  
until Grandmother could look  
up at the wolf and  
declare,  
in mild wonder,  
“My what  
big teeth we have.”

—CHLOE CLARK, MADISON, WI

## Grendel’s Live-in Girlfriend

Never bang together pots and pans after dark  
Nor steal his most beloved hen while she is laying  
Eggs of any substance, gold or not. Carry a sword in your jawline,  
And play ox-dumb at the riddle contest.  
Tread lightly as a flea’s eyelash. Do not suggest  
He does not love you, especially  
When he has anything weighty in his hand  
Or when he is eating. Or when he has just woken up.  
Or when he has come home from a long day of tyranny  
And just wants his dinner. Do not beat him  
At his own game. Your own game. Chess.  
Never tell him you are losing hope of ever  
Getting married. Cook his eggs with a little extra salt  
Even though his doctor has warned about blood pressure.  
And when he is meek and sorry and says his mother  
Drove him to it all those years, be wariest of all. Blink slow as molasses  
Dripping from the bottle. Say nothing. Back from the room  
With your head bowed low. Smile quite crooked, hum a lullaby,  
O! Cover your rattling heart with your palms.

—CHRIS TAYLOR, MADISON, WI

## Whopperland

The Country Buffet Bumble Bee walks from table to table  
a mascot for the over-achieving eater  
cheering us on just like the pro teams.

Plates piled high to the toppling tipping-over point,  
food jugglers return to their eating positions  
not dropping so much as a French fry.

Family style, blue collar, big hair, bargain shopper:  
America's new melting pot is a fondue.  
Immigrants enter the new world via buffet lines.

—CHARLES P. RIES, MILWAUKEE, WI

## At the Salon

I watch her hands  
on their fact-finding mission  
in his hair;

her fingers comb strands  
back from his ears  
four or five times,

feeling, I suppose,  
for qualities like curl,  
texture, body. . .

She lifts locks,  
smooths them into various places  
as he talks,

maybe trying different ways  
she might cut  
and style.

Her hands move  
to the back of his neck,  
ruffle and lift the hair,

linger. . .  
warming and being warmed  
at his nape.

I become aware  
of my eyes,

turn them back to my magazine—  
upside down, unreadable.

—SHERYL SLOCUM, MILWAUKEE, WI

## Heritage House Smorgasbord

The carpet is smooth like some special  
coal, and mildly rancid,  
touched with the feet  
and urine of mice and pressed with time.  
Grains of breading—cod and chicken—  
once oily enough to shine  
have fallen, then fused  
into the fibers.

The managers don't have taut arms,  
though they often open  
#10 cans, lifting tin circles  
that separate and tilt  
as they crank the table-mounted handles.  
They're big men—warm enough  
in short-sleeved shirts, this long Thursday  
February afternoon, when lunch,

the solstice and Christmas  
have all receded. It's their time to rest  
on break; to have butterscotch  
pudding. Their bellies curve to the table  
with the grace of circus Percherons—  
they're wheel horses,  
round as the earth, and modestly rewarded,  
for turning it,  
at the Heritage House each day.

—SUE BLAUSTEIN, MILWAUKEE, WI

## La Coiffure de Germaine

My French friend's mother  
was a woman of ample dimensions;  
a torso of *jambon* and *boeuf en croûte*  
roast lamb with flageolets shoulders, her  
shins were *deux pains*, nothing *baguette*  
about her, nothing *mince*.  
Germaine was *La Bonne Femme*. *Cassoulet*  
on a cold night, *salade vinaigrette* to cut richness.  
She chose the right cheese, right wine.  
The third year, I slept over. We giggled all  
night, my friend and I, until Germaine appeared  
in moonlight. "*Taisez-vous*," she whispered to us.  
"Quiet yourselves."  
Her hair was down. I had never seen it so.  
Bun unwound. Braid unplait. Three feet of  
silver threads, from brow to collar to hip.  
My mouth stopped. She stood in the milk flood,  
large and full, her hair so shockingly lush, I learned,  
*tout de suite*, that the night had oh, so many stories  
of its own.

—YVETTE VIETS FLATEN, EAU CLAIRE, WI

## i have a coupon

rumored: a kiosk  
in mayfair mall offers open heart surgeries  
so i go to investigate slightly apprehensive  
yet not completely since you can now suntan  
during the rinse cycle at the laundromat  
on farwell ave in tanning beds  
that strangely simultaneously  
smell of old underwear & old spice &  
it's mid-february  
& the geese still snack  
on the front lawn at the calatrava  
outlasting warhol's exhibit maybe knowing  
it's snowed on the panhandle & hawaii's  
just out of the question in a goosish way  
as i lie here looking leftward  
at a perfectly black man sweeping  
white dust in perfect rhythm  
to *like a virgin*  
which i can barely make out  
over the buzz of the bone saw.

—JESSE MANSER, MILWAUKEE, WI

## These Lovely People

My daughter and I have stopped at Frisch's.  
She orders a meal, I sip coffee  
and watch the players come and go:  
the fellow big-bellied and bald,  
in baggy shorts and wrinkled Hawaiian shirt:  
Himself, perfected. The elderly waitress,  
thin as a mantis, gray hair molded, each strand  
folded, immaculate, into the next.

I am at home in the midst of these, God's own.  
The man in the wheelchair, his bony forefinger  
on the control – see his lips move, practicing words  
he's sure he'll be able to say again someday.  
An awkward young server  
waiting to pass, watching the man  
though she doesn't want to, the shriveled wife  
trailing them both, hugging herself.

Each form is backlit, as if by starshine.  
Across the table, my daughter  
works at her dinner, her own flaws—injury,  
misalignment, melancholy—weighed deep  
in her bones. Out the window,  
blacktop's hot enough to fry a chop.  
Here where the Naugahyde  
is cool, we could stay forever.

—MARY O'DELL, LOUISVILLE, KY

## In the Kitchen With Alice Kirk Grierson

In her long flannel bathrobe, in the dim light  
of the stove, the woman sips warm chamomile tea.  
She checks the clock, her mind moving, as it does  
these days, from 3 a.m. in the quiet kitchen to noon  
in the Afghan desert. She imagines him thirsty  
and afraid. In place of sleep, she chooses distraction—  
a cookbook from a crowded shelf. She touches  
each spine, reads the titles to herself. *The New Joy  
of Cooking, Better Homes and Gardens, Betty Crocker's  
Cooking for Two*. Here, *The Congressional Club Cookbook*,  
leather-bound, red ribbon marker like a Bible. Algerian  
Couscous, Italian Osso Bucco, Bangladeshi Sweet  
and Sour Curry, exotic recipes, neatly placed  
on gold-edged pages, pictures so vibrant she can smell  
the spice, clear-cut directions promising perfection.  
She returns it to the shelf, takes to the table instead  
her favorite yard sale find, *An Army Wife's Cookbook  
with Household Hints and Home Remedies*, "Alice  
Kirk Grierson, Fort Riley, Kansas, 1868," in faded,  
hand-written script inside, yellowed, dog-eared pages,  
margin notes in Alice's hand— "add more flour  
on humid days," "Ben's favorite, fix often," "an extra  
pinch of salt if flat." Recipes simple, no illustrations—  
Meatless Tomato Soup, Mrs. Milner's Green Corn  
Omelet, Julia Buckmaster's Cake Without Eggs.  
Wandering with Alice through life-stained pages,  
the woman pictures Ben on patrol for weeks, Alice alone,  
boiling a batch of lye soap, picking pole beans in her  
kitchen garden. She sees Alice gather wild onions  
on the prairie, hears her long skirts rustle in the wind.  
The woman watches Alice in her cabin late at night,  
washing supper dishes, stirring the fire. With Alice,  
she pulls aside the curtain, feels the rough brown  
burlap rub the inside of her palm, looks with her  
across the empty prairie to the distant fort...waiting,  
waiting. The woman watches Alice soothe  
her hands with Indian meal, brighten her hair  
with strong black tea, fall asleep finally, the dog  
curled up on Ben's pillow by her side. Pouring out  
her now-cold tea, the woman rinses the cup, turns  
off the light—Alice's book left open on the table.

—JEAN PRESTON, KENOSHA, WI

# The Cradle of American Haiku Festival

by Charlotte Digregorio

“The Cradle of American Haiku Festival,” held Sept. 10-12, 2010, drew more than 60 poets from throughout the U.S. and Canada to Mineral Point, WI to pay tribute to Robert Spiess, long-time editor of *Modern Haiku* journal. Spiess, who lived in Middleton, WI, is credited with having nurtured many English language haiku poets from 1978-2002, during the time he edited the journal.

Haiku is now written in languages all over the world. It originated in Japan in the early 1600s. English has become the second most popular language for writing haiku. *Modern Haiku* is the oldest haiku journal outside of Japan. Spiess, the author of several haiku books, did much through the journal to bring attention to the form and style of today’s haiku in English.

Southern Wisconsin is “The Cradle of American Haiku.” Gayle Bull, owner of Foundry Books in Mineral Point, and her late husband, Jim, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, published *American Haiku*, the first American haiku journal in the early 1960s, and Robert Spiess’ poems appeared there. Spiess began publishing his haiku in 1949, and he is often considered “The Dean of American Haiku.” Today, Bull holds haiku readings and critique sessions at her bookstore, and she was one of the organizers of the Festival.

Just what is haiku in the English language? Many people seem to think haiku is just a pretty image with a nature reference written in three lines. However, it is much more than that.

Haiku (the word is both singular and plural) are written in simple, not flowery language. They most often have a reference to nature, evoking communion with it. Or they refer to a season. They are written in the present tense because that captures the moment. Successful haiku often have two strong juxtaposed images that, upon first reading, may seem unrelated. Together, these two images deepen the meaning. A successful haiku can often be interpreted on different levels, not just at face value.

Other typical elements include:

- one to three lines;
- sparing or no use of capitalization and punctuation;
- 18 or fewer syllables;
- no title;
- no rhyme;
- strong images that provoke emotion, without stating the emotion (e.g., sadness, happiness, humor).

This last point is important. Haiku, like any good poem, shows without telling. Poetry experts often argue whether haiku is a poem or just a thought. People who believe that haiku is poetry cite the above elements of style and form.

Some examples of Spiess’ haiku that were read at the Festival are from his books:

Wind-swept pine,—  
the simpleton laughs  
at the summer moon  
(from *The Shape of Water*, 1982)

Softly falling snow  
among the pines a hunter  
guts a deer  
(from *The Bold Silverfish and Tall River Junction*, 1986)

all the skaters gone:  
thinner now the midnight ice  
across the wide lake  
(from *The Heron’s Legs*, 1966)

Lee Gurga, another speaker, assumed the editorship of *Modern Haiku* from 2002 through 2006. He said Spiess “left us a legacy of haiku, with clear, concise image, transparency of language, and the haiku moment of realization.” In other words, the “aha” moment. Gurga advised that one should read haiku first with empathy, and then critically: “Enjoy the flower first, and then inspect the petals,” he said.

Many other speakers appeared at the festival, including Charles Trumbull of Santa Fe, current editor of *Modern Haiku*. Trumbull spoke on “Verbs in Haiku,” also noting that the trend of verbless haiku is growing. Most haiku with verbs are written with indicative ones, according to Trumbull. He said a lot of haikuists tend to avoid forms of the verb “to be.”

The weekend also featured one-on-one mini-conferences with award-winning poets, editors, and publishers of various Japanese poetic forms. In addition, there was “Hat Haiku,” a workshop by Francine Banwarth and the Dubuque Haiku group. Festival attendees wrote haiku, submitted them anonymously, and received critiques from the group. Haikuists were also treated to a kukei contest, a competition using the theme, “Transitions.”

The First Place Kukei Winner was Angela Terry for:

Bedside vigil—  
She asks me again  
If I watered her violets

Other festival highlights included a haibun workshop by Roberta Beary of Washington, D.C. Haibun originated in Japan and is a short prose piece followed by a haiku that relates to its theme. The form contains a title.

Unique features of the Festival included a workshop on KODO, Japanese incense, and a haiga workshop with instruction and a hands-on session. Haiga is a brush and ink painting accompanied by a haiku. The latter was taught by Lidia Rozmus, a Polish artist and haiku poet from Vernon Hills, IL. Further, there was a performance of Tai Chi by Jayne and Greg Miller of Dubuque, followed by a workshop. Tai Chi is dance choreography. It is a martial art of relaxation exercises set to music. “They loosen the body and mind, and then you empty your mind,” the Millers explained. Tai Chi, like haiku, allows you to live in the moment.

As with any genre of writing, the more haiku you read, the better you become at it. Besides *Modern Haiku*, you can read two other

well-known journals: *bottle rockets*, published in Windsor, CT, and *Frogpond*, the journal of the Haiku Society of America. Many haiku books will serve as a good introduction including:

- Bruce Ross (ed.), *Haiku Moment: An Anthology of Contemporary North America Haiku*. Boston and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1993.
- Bruce Ross, *How to Haiku: A Writer’s Guide to Haiku and Related Forms*. Boston: Tuttle, 2002.
- Cor Van den Heuvel (ed.), *The Haiku Anthology*, 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1999.

Beginning and advanced poets will learn to appreciate, write, and enhance their haiku skills, from 1 to 5:30 p.m., Saturday, May 7 at the Evanston Public Library, 1703 Orrington Ave., Evanston, IL. The event with lecture, discussion, and exhibition of poetry and art, is free and open to the public. It is co-sponsored by the Midwest Region of the Haiku Society of America and the Evanston Public library. Pre-registration is required.

To find out about the Haiku Society of America, visit [www.hsa-haiku.org](http://www.hsa-haiku.org).

## Visit VW Online to read more prose on poetic form!

I want to tell you what a prose poem is. I have several reasons, but perhaps it won’t lead to as clear a definition as you’d hoped for. It’s easy to say, “Oh, that’s the nature of the beast.” But, first, here are my reasons: I’m writing this because I’ve been told that I write prose poems and I believe that I write prose poems.

—CX Dillhunt, “Some Notes on the Art of Uncovering the Art of the Prose Poem or, Confessions of a Prose Poetry Writer”

To write a poem in form means accepting significant limits; the metrical requirements have to be met, as (in some cases) do the requirements of a rhyme pattern or a stanza form. To me, there are aesthetic benefits conferred by this acceptance, as I’ve mentioned, but these limits are also meaningful to me in other ways as well. The limits that go along with formal poetry can be seen—and I do see them, in all events, in this way—as emblematic of the limits of finite human existence. They are accordingly more or less constant reminders to me of the obstinate otherness of the world. They remind me that, in the making of a poem, I am not so much creating, in any fundamental sense, as I am trying to describe how it feels to live in the given world—and this, for the sake of companionship of the sort that poetry has always offered, companionship with readers who share that world and its limits with me.

— Charles Hughes, “Why I Write Poems in Form”

Haiku is what resonates between two images. It’s unlike other forms of poetry. Haiku dwells somewhere between the poem and the Zen koan. It’s closer to a meditative state than other types of writing. My mental state’s different when I’m writing haiku. It’s somewhere between the trance of chanting / meditation and the state of mind I occupy while writing “normal” poetry. I’d say there’s a connection between writing haiku and meditation. Certainly the latter enhances the former.

—Michael Kriesel, “Small Thoughts: Writing and Submitting Haiku”

The sonnet, in particular, seems to trigger something archaic in the brains of many otherwise normal, well-meaning poets—resulting in work that is almost comically out of date. My advice to anyone tackling a traditional form for the first time: write in the language you actually speak, slang and all! If you don’t, you are running the risk of coming across like your great-great-grandma’s grandma.

—Marilyn L. Taylor, “Interview & Poems in Form”

When I began writing poetry I did so in so-called “free-verse,” believing as did many young writers that the sonnet is where old poets go to die, a belief that at its essence I may still hold but with many modifications and for completely different reasons. I then assumed, as did many others, that the consternations of my times, never mind my completely unique adolescent slings and arrows, could not and would not fit into strictures of rhythm and rhyme. What I really meant, I know now, was that I wasn’t skilled enough yet at the craft.

— Bruce Taylor, “On a Double Reverse Sonnet”

Available at [www.versewisconsin.org](http://www.versewisconsin.org)

## The Man Who Bought a Poetry Book

was just walking through the Book Fair  
when he picked up a copy of  
*Sleeping with Octopi* (attracted by the cover),  
read a poem at random, just a small one,  
then took another, and another,  
then impulsively bought the whole book  
and read it in a fast-food restaurant,  
occasionally laughing out loud,  
not knowing what he had done:

First, raised the statistics on the number  
of people who read poetry by 1.5 per cent,  
then brightened the life  
of a small-press publisher, a woman  
who had almost lost faith in miracles,  
then sent a message to the poet  
that life was worth living after all,  
and finally, became the kind of man  
who reads the poems in the *New Yorker*  
and glances at poetry in the airport  
while other men read the *Times*,  
feeling smugly superior like  
a man at a dog show  
holding a Siamese cat.

—GAIL WHITE, BREAUX BRIDGE, LA  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

### romantic

out all night drunk  
stumbling down starpaths  
owlshit caked on my boots

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## If wishes

Call things what they are. A fish is a fish is a fish, is no metaphor, is not far-reaching or unfulfillable. It slithers through the water. Light moans and wriggles on its spine. A fish can be achieved by mundane efforts. Metal of the earth, and silk threads and pebbles of lead. Or perhaps, crocodiles. Lords of the belly and tooth.

Dear, I am no minnow, bellyup on the waterbed. When I thrash, it is not desperate, this hook of your finger—willingly swallowed. Call me woman, let us name these glistening things, which are real, which do not change shape when your back is turned.

—CHRIS TAYLOR, MADISON, WI

## Stripped

What if I write poetry,  
the extreme, the “ultimate fiction,”  
and you see me after all, disguised

with image and wild leapings,  
and you see me as I am,  
clear to the twisted core?

What if I unwrap the Victorian language—  
layer upon layer of petticoat,  
ruffled, pink edged, an eyelet embroidery—  
and you see me  
beneath all the hoopla, naked.

Do you see the extra rolls of flesh  
around my waist, the ones you can pinch  
between your fingers like fat ropes of pastry,  
the ones that angle from waist to crotch,  
the chevron that decorates the shoulder slid down  
to point to the most private part of me—  
do you see me naked, and lacking?

Go beyond that. Peel back  
the layers like a surgeon  
searching for some diseased part,  
inspect the bone of me,  
milk the marrow.

If you get that far, perhaps you’ll see  
what I see in you when I look  
out of the eyes of a doe

on the edge of a meadow  
as watchful for what is good in you  
as she for an enemy.

—KAY N. SANDERS, OSHKOSH, WI

## Palette

A large yellow tulip  
shines in the noonday sun.  
My cat naps  
under a green maple tree.  
My neighbor, Mrs. Ridgely,  
hums a merry tune while  
she waters her blue pansies.  
A man in a red hat  
sells chocolate ice cream  
from a white Dairy Queen.  
In the distance a black bird  
dives through the sky.  
I watch from my kitchen window,  
stir my coffee with a silver spoon.

—RICHARD W. MOYER, BERWYN, PA

## Kafka in the Garden

He tramples tulips, pisses on  
hostas, takes a dump by the  
ferns. An old dog, he knows:  
they will return. Beauty always  
haunts the damned.

—JOHN LEHMAN, ROCKDALE, WI

## A Sort of Salutation

To those collecting words like hollow shells  
and laying them out in code, then explaining  
their meaning as if they were ancient bones  
unearthed from the rusty hills of Wyoming.

To those still awake in the hungry night  
whispering chrome-plated follies in hollow  
voices, driving a long road skywards  
without knowing which star to follow.

To those who track each shining lure  
as it is reeled through the murky pond,  
who are fooled by the flash and wiggle  
the jingle, and the red-beaded eye.

To those who celebrate too long  
their winnings at the table in springtime,  
who still remember their flush in hearts  
when the cards no longer come.

To you I raise my sledge, an eight-pounder  
made to drive fenceposts in heavy clay.  
Our garden should grow in clear view.  
When do you think we can start?

—GEOFF COLLINS, MARSHALL, WI

## My Dog and I Are Retired

When those other dogs bound  
up the stairs for their walk, Kafka  
smiles, the smells of spring and  
a morning breeze fill his hair.  
It was fun. But enjoyment without  
effort is also nice we realize, and  
wonder what there is for lunch.

—JOHN LEHMAN, ROCKDALE, WI

**[The Robin is the One]**

The childhood I remember  
has never happened,  
elided as it is.

Rather than correct it, I  
obscure long stretches,  
bowdlerizing in particular  
instances of passion in my  
nascent adolescence.

It's how I can pretend away  
such a common beginning,  
tidy up the messy house I lived in,  
home it into something  
easy listening and gentle,  
obliterate the walls that hid  
nothing of my parents' rages.  
Erase the boys I kissed before you.

**[There is a Shame of Nobleness –]**

Tear down the horizon, he said, reveal it for sham.  
His was the hand longed for, so I  
emptied out the cabinets, row by  
row, of stars, folding  
each, and sorting them away.

I took a hammer to sky's baseboard,  
struggled with the earth but it wouldn't peel back.

*Allow me*, I panted, *just a moment longer*—but he was off  
seeking some other task to  
harry some new suitor.

Alone, once more, I strewed the folded stars along  
my bed, and laid myself among them. My  
eyes adjusted to the light, but not the singing.

Only the smallest had no song, though they hummed.  
For each star, a tune—requiem or pastoral— all cacophony.  
No matter my protestations, they persisted,

only letting me sleep when I sang a bar back, and  
between dreams petting me down with glowing hands,  
lacing my hair with glow. I sang, and the bed grew very far away.  
Even so I felt myself covered, a light like linens,  
not weightless, but  
enfolding me—and it seemed like

someone plucking at my corners, drawing me up,  
someone folding me into a square, someone laying me down.

# REBECCA HAZELTON

**[I had some things that I called mine – ]**

Into the garden, crushing snails in my shell-flecked hands,  
happy. All the rabbits shiver  
as I pass, stand to, salute my grave  
dominion; even the gate bows,  
solemn in my wake. To be a god is to take  
oars to land and row.

Mostly your grievance is with my step,  
edging your sorrow with sorrel—but I've the deed  
to your property, the key to your big lock.  
Hold fast,  
ink your titles, and put a flag to your  
possessions—  
no fence you stitch from eglantine can prick me out—  
glistening morning-glories,  
shaking out canticles and pollen,  
touch me, then retreat,  
hide their blossoms, shy their leaves.

A brute need blooms, too.  
These flames that paper my  
interior, like the fur that marks me monster,  
cage me in this shape

and all I see, until I am little more than the  
Latin caption, your name made mine.

Listen, I'm sorry for the mess I've made—  
except that it was fun—all  
done now—I'll slip into a collar so long as your  
mouth kisses the latch.  
I'll call it yours—you can  
name me  
Eve, again.

**[Their Height in Heaven comforts not—]**

This is the cheap pathos of Lost Dog  
(has you seen my dog? Runs not good. Foams.).  
Excise Lost Dog, and insert my gray hairs  
in the morning (has you seem agog?  
Runs unshod home.).

Heaven has a place, even for me,  
excluded from the glowering host.  
In my hand a flaming sword,  
golf cart my chariot,  
halleluiah  
trumpet,  
in tinny tiny key,  
no mute.

Heavy the sadness  
each wads into his sock-balled heart—  
all are wounded in  
vision, X'd out  
eyes, drunk or dead.

Now we are  
close to the sadness  
of a mockingbird waiting, its  
mate snared in lime or sodden, still on gutter's edge—  
For how long, Whitman, are we to sing,  
over what ocean?

Remember those gray hairs,  
tenacious and wiry, that  
she in the mirror grown older?

Not I. I has not seen her.  
Or her dog,  
trailing arabesque spume.

**Rebecca Hazelton** attended The University of Notre Dame for her MFA in poetry, and completed her Ph.D. at Florida State University, under the direction of David Kirby. She is the Jay C. and Ruth Hall Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Creative Writing Institute and teaches writing there. She has been nominated for a Pushcart and for *Best New Poets 2010*, and has been a finalist in several book prizes.

These five poems are acrostics based on lines from Emily Dickinson used as their titles.

**[The Voice that stands for Floods to me]**

The bride is two part  
hydrogen, one oxygen: burning and breathing, un-  
evenly yoked—

very very her hair, spun ribbons  
of sugar, varied her bridesmaids  
impatiently waiting,  
carrying her train like queen's attendants,  
enduring the humiliation of  
taffeta scroop.

Her steps are slow  
and measured to the music.  
The music is  
slow and measured because  
the bride is an uncut blossom,  
and therefore trembling  
naif, inclined to the existential:

*Do I do, and*  
*so knot myself in contract?*  
forgetting the foregone of the caterers' deposit.

Of a holy subject today we  
roofbeam our gaze,  
rah rah as the appointed holy

lets loose the vows,

*O, my spouse, thy lips drop as the honeycomb* (louder)

O beloved,  
draw her down to the shore's edge, to the waves never  
sated, where  
the tide pulls at the sand like  
orchestra, where her garment descends in one

movement like honey,  
eager and slow is the sweetness.

## Plum Cantata

1.  
Their ripeness masked in milky blush, they jostle skin to skin. Cloud-wrapped clusters freight the boughs.

Ten years the gardener wrapped tender trunks against Leipzig winters. Each year he took more parchment from his shed, a dank supply pilfered off an old composer's desk. Ten winters' inky sweetness praising Luther's god seeped into heartwood. Each fall he wrapped the slender tree, the clefs and staves spiraling up the trunk. Each winter ink wept into the tree; each spring it dripped into the thawing earth.

Ten winters' discarded cantatas swaddled the tree. Ten summers' sun muscled through the leaves.

2.  
The burgher's wife looks out over the walled garden to the orchard beyond. Such a soprano sweetness from that small twisted tree, each fruit's melody sung over a tannic bass continuo. She holds a pit, sucked clean, a long time in her mouth. She eats in silence.

—NAOMI COHN, ST. PAUL, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Legend

*Korea, 1442*

In winter's darkness, King Sejong sips barley tea. He shivers despite the wood heaped on the fire. In his haste to be warm, he scalds his tongue. The king opens his mouth to receive the ice his servant brings from the pond and thinks, moving his wounded tongue from ice to teeth to palate. Quiet, he thinks for a long time, then commands invention of a new alphabet.

Scholars scurry to form characters, each shorthand for how the body forms sound. The alphabet mimics mouths, tongues, throats in their work of making language. The king thanks his wise men. He hides the beautiful alphabet in his royal palace. He eats scallion pancakes, lets the steam of barley tea warm his face, waits for spring. He does not order his subjects to use the new alphabet; he knows they will not obey. He does not call the executioner with his chains and long sword; instead, come spring, the king orders a flask of sugar water. With a brush he traces his characters on the new green leaves of trees.

Caterpillars crawl to his graffiti and eat away pieces of green. Soon his alphabet hangs in the trees. His subjects look up and point to strange forms nibbled into the leaves and the king says, "Look at this divine new language." The people praise god, pluck the alphabet from the trees, and begin writing.

—NAOMI COHN, ST. PAUL, MN  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*

## Midwest Nocturne

She whispered, under the rain  
"Whose wind chimes are those?"

Out by the goatsbeard where  
the last of the snow retreats

I whispered, "sounds oriental"  
Kabuki on a transistor radio.

"Why did the Buddha lose his head?"  
"Probably the long winter, honey."

"It's so quiet tonight, not a breath"  
I wrapped my arm close around her.

—MITCH L'HERAULT, VERONA, WI

## Five-Seven-Five

Consider the haiku in your bones,  
consider that all we need  
is September's bowl of apples

to lift us toward our open selves,  
toward the one truth,  
the impossible grail.

Years ago I signed on for that ride,  
but the bus was late  
and I would not go in the VW Rabbit

my lover had parked in the drive.  
The poor man's nose  
was pointy like a possum's.

Now, I have not a thing against possums.  
My current man grows his garden  
for possums alone,

them and the random rabbit that passes  
at dusk. My boy is roguish  
like that — the best ones are.

Hand me my pen and an apple, please.  
And toss out the others  
for possums and hares.

From this bliss  
I'll scratch out a pliable life  
in seventeen syllables, more or less.

—MARY O'DELL, LOUISVILLE, KY

## Amaranthine

*Alonzo King's Lines Ballet, Wisconsin Union Theatre, February 6th, 2010*

in the wings, we wait to aggregate.

the lights flare and we burgeon, curl into the glint that is deep and surreptitious.

if the stage is night, and it always is, then we take sky for our sanctuary:

always disembarking, lifted and lowered, made, by design, to understand the scattering.

stand center and the bifurcation is ceaseless, the intersect dense as the thread continues passage.

when shared, the circuit fires. there are no endpoints. nothing is simulated.

everything we are, we own: blossom of the hand, the arm's bailiwick, how a shoulder smiles and breathes.

coupling the ground beneath our arched feet, currents race, upwelling into the throat as we arch back devoted.

our imperatives are brief: swift lunge to gather the remains; look before leaping; leave nothing to waste.

strangers to the indelicate, skirting the precise with our inviolate skin:

tendrils at the end of every line, each tangent sublated, nomadic, smooth blending of memory and abandon.

the thrill of the deposed and unfounded. beyond the happenstance of the curtain.

delivering the fix. signs written in reverse. imploding the vertical.

mentioning everything, blessing everything,

coming together, falling apart:

close to the seraphic, beguiled and faceless.

—GREG GRUBE, MADISON, WI

## revolving

1.  
woof loth had traveled  
the lawn too long  
forming a vision which he  
tucked under his tongue.  
he felt the divide of clover;  
the sharp edges of shade  
that was brought down by  
oak trees that lined the area.  
he wanted to kick in  
the haiku man's face  
like a door & unscrew  
the rosy knob of his nose.  
he finally settled down  
under high yellow sawdust  
which stood below the hill.

2.  
woof loth tore into a medley  
with a strange trot for  
he had become vaudevillian  
& made a habit of  
hiding behind an umbrella  
while he danced.  
& then he stood with the haiku man  
next to a sticky wall.  
both their voices strained  
in shimmering light.  
their teeth moved as quickly  
as tap dancers feet.

4.  
the haiku man divided his part  
as witness to the collapse  
of language & so it was with a  
slow bit of deconstruction  
that he held bits of rosy light  
around shrine as he tied up  
woof loth into a string of lies.  
he could have been a  
comic strip blonde, gagged,  
tied up & left in  
the luggage compartment  
of a visual poem.

—GUY R. BEINING, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

## Letter Of Recommendation For Max Kaisler

To Whom It Most Concerns,

It is thrilling to write to you on behalf of Max Kaisler. No, disorienting; the smell of new money, phosphorus abloom in a buried skull, a marlin with postage stamp eyes, is what it's like.

I first met Ms. Kaisler in 2005 when she enrolled in my Industrial Poetry class, before she was a glove of bees, and I can say, without

hesitation, my fondness for her has continued to grow like a shotgun wound.

Ms. Kaisler has a rare ability to bring people together, to interchange their limbs, and create new life forms suited to exotic environments. She doesn't have to be told.

This is a very motivated young artist.

Probably the greatest help to a teacher of poetry—besides a talking lamb—is a student willing to fail publicly. Such students can inspire entire classrooms.

I once saw a man fire himself out of a cannon over a pool of sharks. He landed in the boiler room of a children's hospital, touching off a blaze which consumed the entire block.

I believe Ms. Kaisler possesses that kind of enthusiasm. I believe she will readily embrace the challenges of student life at your impossible school. I believe

life on other planets can be contacted by waving vigorously. And I suspect my mother didn't know she was ovulating.

For these reasons & four others, I am confident Ms. Kaisler's approach to any creative study plan will be healthy and inflamed.

I recommend her to you with my arms.

—BRENDAN CONSTANTINE, LOS ANGELES, CA  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

## Red Recipe

wild raspberries I'm straining raspberry seeds

mom taught me raspberry seeds in my teeth

seven days floating blue Pyrex bowl all that's left

tumbling in vodka future hangover of our talk

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

## What We Do

Here's what we do: we talk through each other's movies[1]. We've got explaining to undo, a New Year's Unevening[2]. We sit on the edges of things: the bed, the bar, the Olympic pool, reading aloud homemade maps of the sea[3]. We suit ourselves. Who was the genius that came up with 'True.' Who thought a round window made the ocean[4] easier to cross. We call each other over each other, say we never call[5]; we rest each other's case. The oldest joke is the one where life begins at the muddy bottom of the water. Then it decides it doesn't like mud or seafood. We love that one[6]. If there's a plot, we can't wait for the epilogue; we're hopefully unromantic: our lobster bibs tied into blindfolds[7], our ransom notes[8] printed in First Class menus, our two nights passing in a ship[9].

[1] What did the Captain just say?

Did he whisper?

[2] We should've hired sailors to keep us sailing.

[3] Here there be monsters, they know what we treasure.

[4] Listen to their backstroke song,  
"It's here your true wait loves for you"

[5] Ahoy, there! Ahoy!

[6] This is where we get into trouble

[7] we light candles on a paper cruise

[8] we ask the band to come closer

[9] we dance divinely overboard

—BRENDAN CONSTANTINE, LOS ANGELES, CA  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

## A Proper Noun

Trying to understand  
what it was you said,  
nouncing and verbing  
the ditch line of grammar,  
picking through the trash

of dependent clauses,  
I discover you are  
nothing but your name,  
the word for you unmodifiable,  
the subject lost in the verbiage,

kicked up like a gold band  
among empties tossed from  
speeding windows, thrown,  
or slipped off, lost by accident,  
the ringing of your name.

—DION KEMPTHORNE, RICHLAND CENTER, WI

## Sixth Grade Class

A boy reads loudly through his braces.  
A girl reads about the boy who is thin as a toothpick.  
It is April and the girl loves the boy with her poem about seasons

and loss and her eyes know these things.  
Another girl reads about her courageous fake arm,  
adjusting it without a flinch as she shifts her pen from wood to flesh.

The teacher was invited from the city  
to unveil or impart something she can barely fathom.  
She chews on her lip and finds herself fragmented and shrinking

and the students aren't even sorry and  
the whole class laughs, boys and girls alike as the  
miniature teacher stands as tall as she can on a school chair while

she continues to shrink. A quiet boy  
from the back of the room hands the teacher a paper  
on which three poems are printed in block letters: Dolphin. Eternity.

Sunlight. When the teacher disappears,  
there, on the rickety school chair, a larger  
than life raspberry muffin that casts a fragrant pink and white shadow.

—LINDA BACK MCKAY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank the clouds for last night,  
and rain and eager ripeness  
straining against the garden fence.

I would just like to say thank you  
for the hopeful quality of sunset,  
how it hints pink for tomorrow,

and to my shovel and the tools  
that work in my moraine of  
a brain and dear Mrs. Sullivan,

thank you for teaching me how  
to spell and diagram a sentence.  
My hat's off to black dirt, earth

worms, my mother and father  
for getting me here. For the pleated  
skirt, the blue shirt and barely

nothing of a breeze, the rustling paper  
leaves, the visiting monarchs, like  
paper themselves as they float

among rickety zinnias, blurred-faced  
coneflowers, benign bumble bees,  
river and land mass and this is just the short list.

And finally, thank you, veins and sinew, delicate  
orbs, newest of fruits and the juices within.  
None of this could have been possible without you.

—LINDA BACK MCKAY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

## Since

i sing better since my mom died

my mother could sing

perhaps she gave me  
her voice  
when she left

slipped it under

my pillow

and i swallowed it

in a breath

—TAD PHIPPEN WENTE, PORT WASHINGTON, WI

## Salted Crow

If I told you  
I like meat medium  
rare, would you pluck  
fowl from the air  
and roast them  
with your breath?  
If you served my words  
on a silver platter,  
repaid all this  
thoughtless,  
idle chatter,  
would I have  
to beg  
for salt?

—G. A. SCHEINOHA, EDEN, WI

## You May Now Move Freely About the Cabin

Waving at airplanes five miles  
overhead I know it's a foolish  
way to meet people  
but I do it anyhow  
from wherever I happen to be  
from the worn step of my back porch  
from my dense woods sitting on a stump  
from my empty field grooming a horse  
while ambling back up my dusty lane  
with the mail I do it

I just reach my hand sometimes both  
high into the air and wave  
thinking someday somebody up  
there in a window seat  
will be looking down as lonely  
as I am looking up and  
will see me waving to her and  
will leap out of her seat and  
will seize the flight attendant's hand  
will whisper stop this plane stop it  
stop it right now land it right here  
will cry are you blind can't you see  
the only one I will ever

love is down there  
waving to me saying  
come back to earth to me  
jump if you have to.

—DION KEMPTHORNE, RICHLAND CENTER, WI

## To Poem, Or, Today You're Like a Phone I Almost Didn't Answer

21 feet high in  
Philadelphia, the  
no poem deep  
quiet, the  
February snow  
peeling away. I'm  
sitting near glass  
pulled into sun, into  
this poem  
somehow far

off, un  
real like those  
roofs down there, the  
small cars. Poem,  
you're like a  
phone I almost  
don't answer

putting its mouth  
on me, a  
voice I'd been  
looking for and then  
half avoided

Meet me in an hour

It's always yes

—LYN LIFSHIN, VIENNA, VA

## My Sister's Diaries

she spreads them  
around her bed like  
a moat, ditch to  
keep some raging  
forest fire from  
enough so the red  
doesn't touch  
her. The verbs  
unwind, a film  
going backward fast  
sweeping the woman  
who goes from 38 to  
16 then to  
10 back, a tidal wave  
slamming houses.  
She reads every  
page of what was to  
be before it  
was, takes those  
words like a clover  
with 4 leaves or  
rose pressed in an  
amulet toward where  
nothing is written

—LYN LIFSHIN, VIENNA, VA

## The Story of the Kentucky Derby

My mother's not dying as quickly as predicted. I have all of her poems, stories, letters, journals, scrapbooks in boxes on shelves in my basement. I am afraid to read them too soon, if you know what I mean. She used to ask for her embroidery and sometimes wondered where her letters were and once she asked about a painting by her uncle which we hung the next day in her room at Odd Fellow. Leon, I think.

She's happy enough I say when someone asks. Sometimes I tell the story of my mother telling me the story of the Kentucky Derby, how she's there in her wheelchair, how they let her sit up close, next to the stands, almost on the race track, so she can see, and how her face now is watching me as she catches herself rolls herself out of the Derby, changes the subject, something about the trees, wonders about lunch.

Later she tells me she remembers going to the Derby right after she was married, with my father's brother, who knew someone at the bank where he worked who got them tickets, how much fun it was to walk up high into those white stands, almost to the top, not the best seats, but I was there, she says, a sunny day, and I've always wanted to go again—and she sees I believe her follow her the words racing there around the track.

And I remember now, how my mother's eyes say, I'm sorry, sometimes I forget I've not been in this wheelchair forever and when she says I wish I knew which horse won or the jockey and if your father was there—I tell her I'll find out, she doesn't believe me, but we have learned to go on like that, my father no longer here, me the new rememberer, my mother the last storyteller trotting word after word to the next.

—CX DILLHUNT, MADISON, WI

*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

## God App

Thus far over 400 million people have downloaded the God App. You can choose various icons for the God App, like a burning bush or a cloud shot through with light. The God App doesn't really do anything. It's just there on your screen should you need it. If you touch it, it asks: "Do you want to pray now?" After a few seconds you are prompted, FINISH & SEND? Once sent, the word RECEIVED comes back as confirmation, which is comforting. They say the app was developed by a company called primemover.com, a virtual company of no fixed address. I think that residing where it does, on a server farm somewhere, the God App must feel almost omniscient. I'm certain it can hear a billion voices all at once, and yet parse each sentence down to syllable, unto bit. And it always knows where it is because, unlike GPS, it's everywhere all at once, a compass rose window, visionary, locked into the Hubble as it hovers without horizons above the earth. I have noticed, too, that sometimes my phone seems to come on all by itself, sitting there in the dark on the bedside table. When I reach for it, it flashes, and the screen goes dark.

—JAMES FINNEGAN, WEST HARTFORD, CT

## God

I am divinely distant sometimes, and cool as a figment. Being a great patriarch in heaven, I neglect to return your call, gossip about you with my angels, shirk conflict though I've caused it. You'll never know whether I love, pity, forget or despise you, and our last supper will always gnaw your conscience with what ifs. I need my space, I have earned the right to insist, and you won't ever be sure what lives behind the door. Get used to it. Pray, worship all you want, sacrifice a virgin. Your fix is dire: yes, your parents helped to cook your head, but I am the best bad idea you ever had.

—LESLEY WHEELER, LEXINGTON, VA  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

## The White Witch

Turkish Delight is useful on sleigh rides. White-garbed patricians are not skilled with children. Do not neglect the statuary. All roads, especially those that climb to thrones, run through a well-equipped wardrobe. These tips and more at bargain prices in my book—call this number now. Do not think I stoop here to mere Christian commerce or balk at parley with minions: I am a teacher. I once was cold and ran with wolves, I confess, but now I desire a legacy. Torture is a fading art. My golden foe confuses you. Learn that he is the misanthropic metaphor, not I. Study my biopic.

—LESLEY WHEELER, LEXINGTON, VA  
*visit VW Online for audio & more work by this author*

## Navigation

Won't be much longer now before the art  
Of talking someone through to where they've got  
To get is lost. No one is going back,  
What with the navigation in the dash.  
Main problem was, its audience didn't want it:  
Needing it was a sign of weakness, rolling  
The window down and waving your directions,  
That penciled list of missed turns your white flag.  
Then to be told you should have swung that left,  
Or no, it's *Statler Road*, not *Tatter Road*,  
Or that you've got a *ways* to go (meanwhile  
The niece's flute recital you had sworn  
To show for enters its adagio),  
Or *First you got to get back on the highway....*

But how they loved it—everyone you asked—  
The navigators, the natives who knew  
The way and took its telling seriously.  
They'd hurry over from their stroll and hear  
Your problem like a doctor, maybe take  
The paper off your hands. The face would go  
Dreamy a moment, gazing down the street.  
They accessed all their years, the hourglass  
Turning and turning there on the mind's screen.  
These were the streets they biked as kids and drove  
To work each morning. Every inward map  
(In a way, a map of the interior)  
Came with its own highlighted landmarks. One  
Might place your left turn by the corner Shell,  
Another tell you it was past the Walgreens—  
Whichever sign they stared at every day,  
Waiting out the long red. They would unroll  
The whole remembered layout of their worlds  
And measure it for you in traffic lights,  
Drive in their minds the whole way with you  
And warn you, in advance, of all the tempting  
Wrong turns, of all the places you would have to pass up  
Before you saw it on your left—can't miss it.  
Until you took that first turn, safely on  
Your way, they wouldn't turn back to their lives.  
They stood like parents on the sidewalk, watching.

—AMIT MAJMUDAR, DUBLIN, OH  
*visit VW Online for audio & more work by this author*

## Crusin'

Slits of split screen  
scenery seep through  
rain stained windowpane,  
tall buildings that converse  
with cloudless skies about  
who's seen and  
heard more, lights that beam  
like stars, motionless, locked  
in a dueler's standstill,  
each one begging for some artificial  
wish and forming new constellations  
that flicker.  
We whizz by  
going 65, 70, paying little attention.  
Underneath us, the bridge is a Freddie  
Freeloading kind of blue,  
humming silent oceans,  
bodiless misunderstandings,  
that escape unnoticed  
and an old gray-haired angel  
with arthritic wings,  
overhears our straying thoughts  
and thinks, maybe,  
just maybe, they will be  
his way back home.

—W.J. NUNNERY, MADISON, WI

## Jesus Never Fails

over the Whosoever Gospel Mission.  
The Drive-thru's open til 4 a. m.  
The drive-bys go on all night. Super  
Chinese Hot Wok never closes, cops  
are leaning in the doorway. The Thrift  
Shop's shuttered up now. The bread  
line forms at six.

—KELLEY WHITE, GILFORD, NH

# Tradition and the Individual Sonnet, or *Listen! Iambic Verse Has Variation*

by Wendy Vardaman

[The poet] *is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.* —T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Poet”

*Shut up. Shut up, shut up, shut up. Okay?*—Marilyn L. Taylor, “The Seven Very Liberal Arts: A Crown of Sonnets”

1.

I wrote my first clumsy sonnet more than fifteen years ago after rereading T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Poet.” That essay broke open a creative channel for me and gave me license to stop worrying about “originality”—a relief after a graduate education in postmodernism, theory, and contemporary memoir. Sonnets in particular became a lifeline for my writing as an at-home parent of three small children. After a little practice, I could hole up for an hour or so and crank out a first draft. Once when my husband was out of the country and out of contact, I set myself the task (inspired by John Berryman) of writing 77 poems in 2 weeks. My sonnets were not about an extra-marital affair but, instead, what consumed me: children, chores, the chats I’d have had with my husband were he home. Only three of those poems have ever been published, but they kept me sane and gave me something to think about besides the kids, even though, ironically, ostensibly, I was writing about them. Since getting hooked on the sonnet, I’ve written seven different all-sonnet manuscripts, all unpublished. (About seventy of the individual poems have appeared in various journals and anthologies.)

The wheels I reinvented during the early years, having read broadly in English and American poetry, but knowing very little about contemporary formal poetry or much about the possibilities of prosody (the study of meter and rhyme), could have outfitted a pioneer’s coast-to-coast caravan. What I learned from that experience can be collapsed into two obvious, though hardly simple or easy, pieces of advice: 1) read contemporary writers of form; and 2) read historically so that you understand both the tradition and the innovation that is already possible within it: what is, in T.S. Eliot’s eloquent statement, already living. Fortunately, there are poets among us who live both in the present, as well as in the present moment of the past, and Part 2 of this essay outlines some of the marvelous metrical variation that occurs in a few memorable contemporary sonnets. Although it can be a fine line, for the sake of brevity, I look only at variation that takes place in the context of regularly metered, iambic pentameter sonnets, as opposed to variation that occurs either in the context of irregular meter (e.g., William Carlos Williams’s “variable feet” or

Gerard Manley Hopkins’ and Robert Bridges’ “sprung rhythm”), or in the context of boundary-stretching, is-it-really-a-sonnet? sonnets, or in hybrid sonnets that include regular lines mixed with irregular ones; that’s a fascinating topic, too, and critical to my own poetry, but it’s a different essay for another time.

For the purpose of this discussion, you need to know that a traditional sonnet usually has 14 iambic pentameter lines; these lines are typically divided into 8 and 6 (the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet), or 4, 4, 4 & 2 (the English or Shakespearian sonnet). The rhyming patterns differ; between that and the different architecture created by 2 longer or 4 rather whirlwind parts with their potentially thudding final couplet, the kind of poem you will or can write within each form differs surprisingly. You’ll know that’s true if you’ve written a few dozen sonnets that include the two types (and their variations). But it’s the sonnet’s “iambic pentameter” rhythm that I’m primarily interested in here, and, to some extent, how rhythm and rhyme can work together or be in tension with each other in the contemporary sonnet. For that, you just need to know that iambic pentameter means a five-foot line of poetry, where each usually two-syllable “foot” has a “duh-DUM” beat. When critics “scan” lines of poetry to determine their rhythm, they typically use these three marks (or similar ones): “˘”(for an unaccented syllable), “/” (for an accent), and “|” to indicate the end of a foot. (More complicated systems of marking and weighing accents exist, but we’ll stick to the simplest one here.) Imagine that epigraph from Marilyn L. Taylor:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /  
Shut up.| Shut up,| shut up,| shut up.| Okay?|

Perfect iambic pentameter, right? (And one of my favorite lines of iambic pentameter in contemporary poetry.) But wait. Don’t you sometimes yell at, or at least say forcefully, to your kids or barking dog, SHUT UP? And don’t you also, sometimes say angrily or sarcastically, OKAY?

That’s a “spondee” in prosody speak. Both syllables have an accent. And what if one of those “shut ups” was murmured under your breath, preparatory to hurling a “SHUT UP” or “OKAY” at the offender? Then it might look like this:

/ / / / / /  
Shut up.| Shut up,| shut up,| shut up.| Okay?|

Then “shut up” in the fourth foot is a “pyrrhic”—a foot in which neither syllable is accented. A pyrrhic foot can have the effect of emphasizing what follows even more and often comes after or proceeds a spondee. It can also seem lighter and faster than a regular iamb, and certainly than a spondee. Poets have traditionally balanced their use of these two types of variations within a line.

How do you hear Taylor’s line in your head? Is it completely regular?

/ / / / / /  
Shut up.| Shut up,| shut up,| shut up.| Okay?|

Maybe. What that suggests to me is a character, a persona, who is near hysteria, at their wit’s end and rather obsessively trying to get through to the person they’re talking to, perhaps without a lot of hope of

doing that. I even picture the character’s body rocking rhythmically when she says it. But what if it’s like this:

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / / /  
Shut up.| Shut up,| shut up,| shut up.| Okay?|  
Or  
˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ / / /  
Shut up.| Shut up,| shut up,| shut up.| Okay?|

The first to me suggests a character who is talking to someone, not getting their attention, then getting really angry. The second suggests someone who is talking to herself rather quickly and working up the courage to finally blurt out at the end something that’s been bottled up, maybe for a long time. The possibilities for scanning this line are surprisingly many, if not unlimited, and each suggests a subtle, or not-so-subtle, difference in the character. How would you scan and read this line out loud? The one kind of rhythmic variation I don’t think we can attribute to this line is a trochee, SHÚT up (or Ókay). I just can’t hear that in how I imagine a real person saying these words, but maybe you can.

In any case, with the regular iamb (duh DÚM), the three possible variations with two syllables—spondee, pyrrhic, and trochee—are the basic concepts you need to know to begin scanning and understanding the nuances of writing “iambic pentameter” verse. You also need to know that no one, certainly not Shakespeare or Milton, ever wrote every line of every iambic pentameter sonnet in unvaried iambic pentameter. Carefully crafted variation is, in fact, key to the success of their poetry. This is a vast subject about which libraries of books and articles have been written. (The most common of their variations is an initial trochee; the least common, a final trochee.) And there are other variations they commonly use, too: an extra unstressed syllable at the end of a line (the “feminine” ending); an extra unstressed syllable at the end of a medial iamb, followed by a punctuated pause (the “epic caesura”); a six-foot line or pair of lines (an “alexandrine”); expansion (drawing out the pronunciation of certain words for the sake of meter); elision (contracting words for the sake of meter); and, more occasionally, having fewer than five feet per line. If you want to dig into prosody, you should read a good introduction to the subject, like Paul Fussell’s *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*.

We wouldn’t understand so much about the variation and the purpose of variation, in metrical verse, however, if the majority of it wasn’t regular. If you read metered sonnets by Shakespeare and Milton, you’ll see that although the majority of the lines have no variation, a surprising number include variation for a purpose. Here’s one example from Shakespeare’s Sonnet XXIX to show you what I’m talking about:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,  
I all alone beweepe my outcast state.

Imagine reading that in exactly regular, unvaried iambic pentameter, and do it out loud with some exaggeration, please. Now think about how you might read it to convey its emotional nuance. *Out loud again, please!* How would you scan that opening? Here’s how I said it:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ ˘ / /  
When, in| disgrace| with for|tune and| men’s eyes,|

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / / /  
I all| alone|beweepe| my out|cast state.|

You probably did it differently than I did, but one thing is for sure: if you take this sonnet off your shelf or read it online, even if you know where to expand and contract the words properly based on likely Elizabethan pronunciation, and you try to turn that sonnet into pure iambic pentameter, you’ll be saying silly things like feaTUR’D, wishING, hapLY, as well as emphasizing unimportant words. And you’ll miss the point entirely: Shakespeare, like many good contemporary poets, used metrical variation both so as not to put the reader to sleep and also to draw attention to the content. A trochee is disruptive: it makes you notice particular words and creates a break (there are numerous trochees in this sonnet, mostly at the beginning of lines). Spondees tend to create heaviness, to slow down a line, and are often made out of two one-syllable words put together in a foot. Pyrrhics create speed and can help emphasize a word or pair of words that follow.

These are some of the most basic tools to create rhythmic effects within a sonnet (or any other metered form or line of verse). Complex interplay among rhythm, sounds, repetition of sounds and words, and diction create even more advanced effects. While formal innovation within the sonnet and among sonnets is certainly possible, I would encourage sonneteers to explore the enormous variation and effects that a deeper knowledge of prosody make available already. These possibilities have fascinated English-language poets for over 500 years—it’s the “already living” in our poetry. ☀

2.

If we look at a sonnet each by Marilyn Taylor, Ronald Wallace, and John Murillo, all adept in the form, it’s clear that they use rhythmic variation in the context of a fairly regular sonnet with deliberate care and craft....

## Part 2 of this article can be found at VWOnline.

I gratefully acknowledge the overall influence of Richard DiPrima, Director/ Founder of The Young Shakespeare Players, Madison, WI, and author of *The Actor’s (and Intelligent Reader’s) Guide to the Language of Shakespeare* (2010) on my overall knowledge and understanding of prosody, especially the relationship of verse as it is written and performed.

**More Reading** (not exhaustive, just suggestions of where to begin):

Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop*. Basic Civitas Books, 2009.

Philip Dacey and David Jauss, *Strong Measures: Contemporary American Poetry In Traditional Form*. Longman, 1997.

Annie Finch, “Bibliography: ‘Some of My Favorite Books About Prosody’” <http://usm.maine.edu/~afinch/ProsodyBibliography.htm>

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Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. McGraw Hill, 1965, revised 1979.

Timothy Steele, *All the Fun’s in How You Say a Thing*. Ohio University Press, 1999.

Phyllis Levin (Ed.), *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet: 500 Years of a Classic Tradition in English*. Penguin, 2001.

Lewis Turco, *The New Book of Forms*. UPNE (3rd Edition), 2000.



## Must Everyone Write a Poem Subtitled *After Dean Young*?

*After Dean Young*

My daughter peed in her bed then cried  
like she'd needlessly broken  
a peace treaty with Otto von Bismarck  
whose centripetal mustache implies  
your days of empire are quantified.  
Geese explode in the microwave sky,  
unless folded in tinfoil,  
in which case the sky explodes.  
Don't ever grow up.  
I'd prefer you mummify right here  
in my heart, a pyramid preserving  
stories of the girl Queen's golden authority  
over systole and syzygy.  
I do not understand  
the poem I just read.  
It fell out of a book and bounced  
like a superball off some highbrow wall.  
NASA says the sun will extinguish  
when every superball is contained  
by a human pocket. But hey,  
I just love language and the sounds  
of words so much! The words are like turds  
shat by birds on everything  
from prologue to afterwards.  
My feet hurt from jogging  
so I purchased a pair of Wikipedic shoes.  
Now strangers edit my running route  
in real time, falsify my shorts,  
decide whether or not I've ever run  
marathons coursed in pentagons.  
I am a waste of global positioning,  
of 3G technology, plodding  
beneath a crow's nest with its own IP address.  
But my daughter. I washed her back  
and legs with clean rectangles,  
four 90° angles of freshness.  
Princesses flee Disney palaces  
because all they really desire are tacos,  
royalty heat lamping past midnight  
in establishments packed  
with enough busy humanity  
for a Breughel painting.  
This has to be forever. This is a poem  
that makes sense. Your bladder is drained,  
so sleep deep and dream thirsty  
frontiersmen who drink from the bladders  
of bucolic animals. I don't know jack  
about Tycho Brahe but wow,  
the sound of his name turns every gear  
in my brain's serotonin diorama.  
I have outsourced my status updates

to India. The birds retweet  
the songs of other trees  
and those trees trend beautifully.  
Whose poem is this?  
Must everyone write a poem  
subtitled *After Dean Young*?  
What comes after Dean Young?  
Logos, pathos, and ethos  
triangulate and calculate  
that this is not that poem.  
My daughter is in my arms, dry,  
triumphantly returning to sleep and dreams  
like MacArthur returned to the Philippines.  
Good night. Please do not age  
and leave me without someone to clean  
in the middle of the night. My mind is slowing  
beneath the speed limit,  
though the police car did pull out  
behind me for an occipital glide,  
for a fifty-five-mile-an-hour  
rearview-mirror staredown.  
It is late on the great socialist Interstate.  
We are all entitled to one warning.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI  
*visit VW Online for audio by this author*



awakening  
each thing in each day  
is thick with strangeness  
quidditas the blackfeathers of ferns  
rising out of wind-raked snowbanks  
the fire-red-headed woodpeckers  
the oak branches intaglioed  
over the windows irised with ice

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

## The Air Around Me

*for Shelly*

I was trying not to write about your  
passing but how can I say nothing  
about the woods yesterday, the heavy

shade, the bright wind, all those veerys  
singing down their spiraled songs  
from hiding places high in the leaves,

the emerald-winged damselfly, the  
shining neon beetle. As a child  
I killed ants. Covered them with

my small hands, fingers so tight  
there were no cracks. Eyes closed,  
I tried to feel for the brush of their

souls pushing to get through.  
I keep trying to feel you. I want  
you to speak to me in the songs

of birds, summer's wind, the electric  
green insects, and not, dear soul  
have slipped through, unable

to reach me with a touch as light,  
as light as a dragonfly's lace wing.

—JEANIE TOMASKO, MIDDLETON, WI

## Massed Clouds

Are these my  
thoughts, my face, dry  
as wine? I can do  
no other than lift,  
lift again, my hands,  
examine them often  
as if to offer them away  
but not before I make  
sure they still have value.

—GWYN McVAY, LANCASTER, PA

## Spa Nights

The blue tightens.  
The green exfoliates.  
The pink rejuvenates.  
The white moisturizes.  
The black enriches.  
The bare frightens.  
Masque it.

—MARILYN WINDAU,  
SHEBOYGAN FALLS, WI

## White and Black

A day in May is  
made for promises –  
to have, to hold,  
palpable, yet illusory.  
When we married I wore  
white and what seemed a  
heartbeat  
later at the funeral as well.  
It seemed appropriate,  
somehow even  
audacious.

Your white face  
quiescent  
inert and unresponsive;  
my hands grasping at the black  
circlet of death that wound  
around us both  
agonizing  
over our transient tale,  
inexplicably adrift  
in a darkness so total  
it should have  
swallowed the world.

—JUDY WUCHERER, MENOMONEE FALLS, WI

## Seated Old Woman, in a Large Head-dress

*After the Rembrandt drawing by the same name,  
c. 1643 (black chalk)*

There's something like a hayrick covering her,  
but it's cloth – the folds reveal as much –  
and it rests upon her shoulders like a leopard  
insouciantly sleeping in a tree.

She's half-length, turned to the right,  
and the lower part of her is the tree  
that leopard climbed, all brush and limbs,  
but framed in the shadow of her head-dress.

Her face is stern, watching another watching eye.  
What time has wasted, he wastes no time to see.  
Perhaps he has said something careless.  
Perhaps she feels the chalk has moved too fast.

It broke – that's it, and he flung it away  
without breaking his concentrated gaze,  
and she does not approve of this, her eyes dark,  
her lips pinched – on the floor, a splinter of chalk.

—CHARLES WYATT, NASHVILLE, TN

## The Widower

*After the Rembrandt drawing by the same name, c. 1643*

In short, a man is feeding a child  
whose face has turned away  
from the spoon, and the bowl  
seems to begin to tip in his hand

which must also hold the child  
who is sitting on his knee.

Rembrandt has drawn the same child  
in the margin, once crying and once  
preparing to accept the spoon.  
All over the drawing are spots,

perhaps some kind of aging –  
This is a study, abandoned probably.

There is something wrong  
in the length of the upper arm  
of the hand which holds the spoon –  
Too short, but the head is right,

bent down in concentration, and  
it's certain now the bowl will spill.

—CHARLES WYATT, NASHVILLE, TN

## Past Prologue

The sign for Acme Funeral & Tax Services  
stares down on a repertory company  
passing in caravan, traveling to the next county  
fairgrounds where they'll recite their sweet  
tempest of words to summer's audience.

No. Surely that's not what the sign says.  
Shadows, a flight of crows as the troupe  
rumbles through, drivers humming  
the sunshine of eternal roads while a near-  
drowned king (it is, after all, *The Tempest*)

mumbles his lines in the back of a van.  
A king who makes his living out of make-  
believe. Financial & Tax Services, is that  
what the sign says? Nothing is certain.  
This traveling troupe, these hawkers of words,

do they pay taxes? Five acts, they're gone.  
The king of mock-pearl eyes swims with  
imaginary fishes, looks for signs in the heavens.  
It's August, thunder-weather, and a sign  
says whatever you think it does.

—TAYLOR GRAHAM, PLACERVILLE, CA  
*visit VW Online for more poetry by this author*

## Bagatelles

### 1. Portrait

Bedside, on the floor,  
books scattered like stepping stones—  
such fear of water!

### 2. The Poet's Lament

I confess: of everything, this burned  
the most—that all my blurbs to promote  
the work of other writers earned  
more praise than any poem I wrote.

### 3. Cinquain

Goodnight,  
Radiator.  
Thanks for the company  
of your hisses and knocks this long  
winter.

### 4. Pissing in the Cemetery

The dead don't mind, though  
they are a little jealous.  
Still, they say, "Enjoy."

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

Philip Dacey is the author of eleven full-length books of poems, the latest being *The Mosquito Operas: New and Selected Poems*, (Rain Mountain Press, 2010), *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2009) and *The New York Postcard Sonnets: A Midwesterner Moves to Manhattan* (Rain Mountain Press, 2007), as well as numerous chapbooks.

Born in St. Louis, Dacey has received many awards, including three Pushcart Prizes, a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA's Poetry Center, prizes from numerous magazines (*The Ledge*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Yankee*, *Free Lunch*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Nebraska Review*, and others), and various fellowships (among them a Fulbright to Yugoslavia, a Woodrow Wilson to Stanford, and two in creative writing from the National Endowment for the Arts). He moved in 2004 from Minnesota, where he taught for years at the state university in Marshall, to Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Dacey doesn't consider himself "a 'formalist' any more than a carpenter who sometimes uses a hammer calls himself a 'hammerist.'" Yet he has written hundreds of poems in form, and even his free verse owes its music to traditional rhythms.

## Karla Huston Interviews

# Philip Dacey

KH: Neruda says in his poem "Poetry": "And it was at that age ... Poetry arrived / in search of me." How did you come to poetry? Was poetry, like Neruda, searching for you?

PD: I began writing poetry at a time of personal and professional drift and uncertainty or worse, had just dropped out of grad school at Stanford, in my twenties, deciding to pick up a Master's there instead of continuing in the Ph.D. program. My Master's thesis was on James Dickey; so I was not totally innocent about poetry but also had no intention of pursuing the craft, didn't know what I was going to do except maybe find a teaching job with that Master's and write the Great American Novel. But I remember the very moment when I began writing a poem, which turned into my first poetry publication, in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. I had a menial job in the Stanford library and was looking at a fascinating medieval print when I had the urge to describe it, in verse, in lines arranged like some of Dickey's, in, say, "The Heaven of Animals." Thus did my decades as a scribbler of lines begin. In my mythologizing of that moment, I imagine the Angel of Poetry tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "Hey, Phil, you're one seriously lost soul. Pick up a pen and write what I tell you. I've come here to save you." In short, I'm grateful to poetry for giving me the life I've had, and if I've worked hard at it over the years, it's out of that gratitude, out of a wish to serve the art. Although my self-deprecating joke (but not entirely a joke) is that if I really cared about poetry, I'd quit writing it and just spend the rest of my life reading the poetry of the dead greats, who never have enough readers.

***Discoveries can be made  
while working with  
traditional forms, as the  
forms act as collaborators  
with the poets; there's a  
give and take.***

American poems in traditional form?

PD: After I received my MFA from the Iowa Workshop in 1970 and began teaching in Minnesota at the state university in Marshall, I realized, before long, that I was feeling a little cheated, as formalist poetry was not fashionable in the late Sixties, and

there was actually zero instruction at Iowa in using traditional forms. But I figured that if such forms were good enough for the vast majority of poets, including the great ones, who preceded me, they were certainly good enough for me. Who was I to jettison such means? So I decided that my apprenticeship should encompass those means, and in the mid-70s I took my family, wife and two sons, to Spain for a six-month hiatus, during which, besides our holidaying, I set for myself a six-month course of study and practice in traditional forms.

So that was the background for *Strong Measures*, but the immediate trigger was a comment made by a friend's question: "Why don't poets ever use rhyme and meter anymore?" Of course I knew the work of current poet after current poet who worked wonderfully in the tradition (Wilbur, Hecht, early Kinnell, Kumin, Starbuck, Van Duyn, etc.), but free verse and the Deep Imagists and the Black Mountain gang and others were the big guns getting the headlines; the formalists were in the shadows, quietly working away. Bly snarled things like, "Sonnets are where old professors go to die." A funny line, but it steered countless young writers away from the challenges and pleasures of traditional verse. (Of course, Bly later changed his tune somewhat and started patting himself on the back for counting syllables or rhyming a word now and then.) So I knew, given my friend's remark, that the folks still using traditional forms needed a platform that would highlight them. Thus began the anthology, which may

not have been completed or, if completed, certainly would not have been a n y w h e r e nearly as good and successful as it turned out to be if David Jauss, a one-time student of mine, hadn't signed on and agreed to be my co-editor. His

help and hard work were invaluable.

KH: Your anthology was published in 1986. It is still mentioned by practitioners of traditional forms and in critical essays and articles as a quintessential text. Are you surprised by its success and longevity?

PD: Not surprised really when I consider the great input owed to Jauss. (Ode to Jauss?) Folks say they find it user-friendly, given the ease of identifying the forms used or finding examples of forms one might be interested in. By the way, my two sons and I formed a rock 'n' roll poetry trio in the early '90s and named ourselves Strong Measures.

KH: Can you tell me about why you became a writer of formal verse, a poet who has certainly dedicated a lot of ink to traditional forms?

PD: Maybe blame the Jesuits, who taught me Latin and Greek and had me reading Virgil and Homer in the original. One picks up a sense of tradition from doing so. But let me be quick to add, as Jauss and I say in our introduction to *Strong Measures*, that formal verse is not superior to free verse. A good free verse poem is better than a bad triolet. The tools don't dictate the quality of the final product.

KH: I've been told by poets who write formal verse that learning to do so, to work within the container of form, within the requirements of rhyme, meter, rhythm will improve their free verse. Is this true and why?

PD: I'd say sure, simply because any kind of serious work with language will have a spillover into one's other writing, but there

### The Whitcombs: A Portrait

In old age they play chess at lunch each day, the long-married couple. What's there to say?

With "check" and "checkmate" their most frequent words, they watch their lives like pawns move one way—forward.

They make moves quickly, keep the game a game. Why get too serious? There isn't time.

Their hands stay busy: now a bite of food and now a well-worn handcarved piece of wood.

(He wipes his right hand clean after each bite; she makes moves with her left, eats with her right.)

For years, they gave and gave, and now it's take—her bishop with his pawn, his knight with her rook.

"Does it always have to be at lunch?" "Ritual," she says, "keeps change at bay, at least for awhile."

Someday, solitaire chess. Or, better, sweep the board clean. Let the king and queen sleep.

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

are plenty of other ways to improve one's free verse, including simply extensive reading and regular, disciplined writing—or call it practice, how to get to Carnegie Hall. Maybe the worst way to teach someone to write a sonnet, though, is to shove one at him or her and say, "Now you write one." That's like throwing a non-swimmer into the deep end of the pool and shouting, "Swim." As a teacher, I preferred to break the process into a dozen or so smaller steps, not learning everything at once—so, for example, one step would be writing iambic, nonsense prose paragraphs; another would be having the class hold conversations entirely in iambics; only later would things like the pentameter or rhyme or metrical substitutions or variations be added to the mix one at a time. The students appreciated that step-by-step approach.

KH: Recent Poet Laureate of Wisconsin (and someone who also writes in form) Marilyn Taylor says, "A significant feature of the formal poem is that it can provide a vessel, a container, even a 'capsule' to fill with material that might be too volatile—too scary, too close to you—to become a poem instead of an emotional cloudburst."

PD: I'd say yes indeed. It's like handling radioactive material with special gloves. At the same time, one should stress the possibility that the formal means can stimulate the material—help develop it, push the writer forward into territory not imagined or planned—rather than simply containing it or making it safe. Discoveries can be made while working with traditional forms, as the forms act as collaborators with the poets; there's a give and take. The forms are not passive receptacles that we simply pour pre-cooked material into. Formal means can release as much as restrict, and do both at the same time. It's like gravity, a restriction that frees us to dance.

KH: Can you give me an example of how a poem was pushed into a new territory by the form that contained it?

PD: In virtually any poem that uses rhyme or meter (including a simple syllabic meter), something like that has to happen. Sometimes you may not know until you're into a free verse

poem that it wants to be more formal, but sometimes you begin a poem knowing right off that you want to apply formal pressure on the material. In either case, you obviously can't know in advance what words you're going to use in what order to accommodate the form, since, for example, we don't think in rhyming stanzas. Therefore the formal requirements lead you (by the ear, as it were) to discover what both satisfies them but also is consonant with or unpredictably and positively extends the material.

In my book *The Deathbed Playboy*, "Eskimo Joe," about my father, employs Tennyson's "In Memoriam" stanza, abba iambic tetrameter, as a base from which to operate. I say "base" because the metrical poet can be like a jazz musician, always cognizant of the beat but sometimes playing off it and around it. That would be analogous to off-rhyming. There's a special pleasure to be had in those slight differences, distances—like glancing blows. The story about my father which explains the title would have been told very differently if I had written it in prose or free verse. Numerous details (his second wife's perfume, the abandoned dream, the frozen river, the final affirmation, and others) only appeared in the story because of the rhyme scheme. Following a rhyme scheme can lead to bad writing as well as to felicities. The reader is the final judge as to which is present in any rhymed poem.

KH: Are some forms more popular than others? Are there forms you choose more often than others? You have entire books dedicated to sonnets, like *The New York Postcard Sonnets* or *The Vertebrae Rosaries*, for example.

PD: Blank verse (a term sometimes mistakenly thought to be synonymous with free verse) is, of course, a basic—the go-to—English form, thanks to Shakespeare and others. Unrhymed iambic pentameter has been a workhorse of the poet writing in English for centuries, and I've used it countless times. "Difficult Corners" would be an example from *The Deathbed Playboy*. For someone learning the forms, blank verse is a good place to start because iambic pentameter can be employed in other, more complicated forms, like the sonnet. The fact that two of my books in a row featured sonnets was something of an accident—the latter brought together poems from several decades and the former naturally happened to coincide with my stay in Manhattan. So I don't think sonnets are a special favorite of mine. I've a fondness for villanelles, too, and written lots of them—like "Macaroons" in *Deathbed*. I should say that I write and publish far more poems than get into my books and that would be true of my villanelles as well.

KH: Are you a purist, expecting sonnets or other forms to march to traditional drums, or

are you more free with your design a la Gerald Stern's *American Sonnets*, which are 16 to 20 lines long instead of the traditional 14?

PD: I am definitely more of a purist—or more conservative or less nervy—than Stern, though even Stern looks more conservative than Ted Berrigan (my teacher at Iowa) in his *The Sonnets*. But some reviewers have nevertheless chided me for taking some of the liberties I do with the form. My position is that a poem should be judged on not how closely it adheres to a particular form but by the quality of the whole final product. A tennis player who holds the racquet unconventionally is nevertheless judged by his performance on the court.

KH: I'm reminded of Ronald Wallace writing a sonnet-a-day for a year and the essay he wrote to describe it—and the book that resulted: *The Uses of Adversity*. Have you ever been tempted to do something like this? Is there value in it or is just a personal quest?

PD: The closest I came (not very close) was typing out a well-known poem a day for a year, my first year in New York, one of my projects. A way to get further inside poems I'd been familiar with, but from a new angle, almost as if I were "writing" them. And as I said I did assign myself a long list of forms I wrote in while in Spain for those six months. Wallace's year of sonnets confirms what I, and others, have said about "just doing it." Butt in chair and write. I'd argue it's almost the opposite of a "personal quest," as it seems to me he's chastening the personal self, submitting it to an impersonal and universal discipline.

KH: Have you created a form, like Billy Collins' Parallele? For example, are your 5x5 poems (5 stanzas of 5 lines each) a form you invented?

PD: No, I haven't followed Collins' example. I believe my 5x5 poems sprang from James Dickey's "Heaven of Animals." It had more than five stanzas, but all but one of them had five lines, with no particular metric governing any line. Actually Wallace Stevens' poem "The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage" is a 5x5, but I can't claim that as a precedent. I frequently return to that form—or maybe format is a better word. I've published two chapbooks of them already and would like someday to publish a full-length collection of the best of that sort; I've published many more than appear in the chapbooks.

KH: I was surprised to find when looking through your books that you do, indeed, write in free verse. What prompts a free verse poem for you?

PD: I don't consider myself a "formalist" any more than a carpenter who sometimes uses

a hammer calls himself a "hammerist." The term "New Formalists" smacks of exclusivity and clubbiness. I object to it because, as *Strong Measures* shows, the practice of formal poems has been continuous, if in some ways underground (note the irony: the underground is usually associated with radicalism, but the conservative practice of formal writing was underground for a stretch—or at least overshadowed by various free verse movements).

There's also a danger in dividing poets into free-versers and formalists for the reason that there exists an infinite series of possible gradations between, say, blank verse and free verse. One can operate in any particular poem in some borderland and carefully balance between the two modes; the choice of the poet needn't be either/or. Finally, can New Formalists ever write in free verse, or can a free verse poet ever write a sestina? The question underlines the silliness of the label.

KH: You've spoken about teaching sonnets, for example, by asking writers to create an iambic paragraph—unlined, like prose. What other suggestions might you have for writers wanting to experiment in forms?

PD: One assignment, for the purpose of practice, was an iambic pentameter—blank verse—letter, with content, tone, and addressee wide open. For example: "Dear Santa, won't you please bring me a bag / Of answers I can give to questions asked / by Karla Huston, cross-examiner / par excellence, so I seem less a dunce?"

KH: Do you have advice for anyone interested in trying his or her hand at writing formal poetry?

PD: I'd say definitely go for it if you're inclined. If you approach the challenge right, you won't regret it. Why deny

### Choreographing Whitman: Cento for Dance

How many heavens do we get? Here's one: a crowded cocktail party, full of dance folk, tongues loosened by champagne. I wander in and through, weave an adagio, to hear the talk:

"All dances"—it's Doris Humphrey!—"are too long."  
"Unless dance is religious"—now Isadora!—"it's merchandise." And here's even—"Steps, boring"—Balanchine! "In dance, there are no sisters-in-law."

"Dance and bank robbers both need"—Twyla Tharp!—"perfect timing." "Dance is food for the eye"—natch, near Twyla there's Paul Taylor—"so up with dance, down with choreography."

Do the voices or the drink make my head spin?  
"Nureyev?" George again! "Ballet's Liberace."  
"In dance"—Graham, finally—"freedom means discipline."  
"Pretty's not pretty"—that hair! Mark Morris!—"to me."

Someone's just miming drinking. Of course, Charles Weidman:  
"Martha kept us a whole year on the floor."  
"All real ballets"—dear Auden!—"take place in Eden."  
And once more, Mr. B—he's everywhere:

"My Muse, bless her, works only on union time."  
"La danse? Ecriture"—Mallarme?—"corporelle."  
Yes, but who's that with him? Merce Cunningham:  
"Words about dance are Jell-O nailed to the wall."

And the old man? Whitman! In his hand a glass of champagne, which he loved to indulge in once he reached old age. But why's he here? Ah, yes—he's quoting his poem "The Sleepers"—"I am a dance."

—PHILIP DACEY, NEW YORK, NY

to experiment in

yourself pleasures and experiences so many outstanding poets have had in the past? Read, besides the McAuley book I mentioned earlier, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* by Paul Fussell. I know there's been a proliferation of similar books that are helpful, but I haven't kept up with them. Take it slow. Be patient. Maybe it's like a relationship that can be difficult but rewarding—enjoy the partnering with the chosen form; negotiate; give and take; listen to it and learn; find out where it's leading you. Don't feel you're just "filling in the blanks." Rather, you're being given an opportunity to write outside the box you're used to and discover a personal capacity for expression you didn't know you had.

*This is an excerpt from Karla Huston's interview of Philip Dacey. Read the full interview at [versewisconsin.org](http://versewisconsin.org).*

## Contributors’ Notes

**Guy R. Beining** has had six poetry books and 25 chapbooks published over the years, and appeared in seven anthologies. He is in the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography series*, Vol. 30, 1998 (Gale Research). He is also in the *Dictionary of the Avant Gardes*, 2nd Ed., 2000. Recent publications include *chain*, *epiphany*, *perspective* (Germany), *New Orleans Review*, and *The New Review of Literature*. p. 23

**James Bettendorf** is a retired math teacher who has written poetry for years. His poems have appeared in various places, including *Free Verse*. His other Wisconsin connection is a sister who lives in Amery. p. 8

**Sue Blaustein** works as a food safety inspector. Her writing has appeared in *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, *New Delta Review* and *Isotope - A Journal of Literary Nature and Science Writing*. She is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and has been a featured reader at Woodland Pattern. p. 15

**Sarah Busse** is a co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. Her chapbook, *Gaugin in California*, came out from Desperado Press in 2011. pp. 4-5

**Kosrof Chantikian** is the author of two books of poems—*Prophecies & Transformations* and *Imaginations & Self-Discoveries*, and the editor of *Octavio Paz: Homage to the Poet*, and *The Other Shore: 100 Poems by Rafael Alberti*. He was poet-in-residence at the San Francisco Public Library, and the editor of *KOSMOS: A Journal of Poetry*, and was general editor of the *KOSMOS Modern Poets in Translation Series*. He’s received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the San Francisco Foundation. *The Future Overthrown*, a new collection of his poems, is in process. p. 10

**Chloe Clark** grew up in north central Wisconsin and is currently a creative writing major at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She’s had poems published in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Sliver of Stone*, and a previous issue of *Verse Wisconsin*. p. 13

**Naomi Cohn**’s writing has appeared in *Water-Stone*, *Fourth River*, *Disclosure*, *Fish Stories*, and around St. Paul, Minnesota, as part of that city’s sidewalk poetry project. Recognition of her work includes grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and VSA Arts Minnesota, as well as numerous residencies, including one at Edenfred in Madison in 2009. p. 22

**Geoff Collins** tries to write the types of poems he likes to read, poems that are understandable, have decent rhythm and sound, and aren’t afraid of meaning and emotion. Recently his poems have appeared in *Blue Earth Review*, *Whitefish Review*, and *Tigers Eye Journal*. p. 19

**Brendan Constantine**’s work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Field*, *Rattle* and other journals. His second collection of poems, *Birthday Girl (With Possum)*, is forthcoming from Write Bloody Press. He is poet in residence at The Windward School and Loyola Marymount University Extension. In addition to this, he regularly offers workshops in hospitals, foster & eldercare centers, and shelters for the homeless. p. 24

**Philip Dacey** is the author of eleven full-length books of poems, the latest *Mosquito Operas: New and Selected Short Poems* (Rain Mountain Press, 2010). His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA’s Poetry Center, and various fellowships. His website is www.philipdacey.com. Over the years, he has given readings of his work in many places/schools in Wisconsin, most recently at the Great Lakes Writers Festival at Lakeland College. He lived for 35 years across the border in Minnesota before moving to New York City in 2004. pp. 35-37

**Elizabeth Devore** is an English professor at Kent State University Ashtabula with an M.A. from New Mexico Highlands University. Until she was 15, she spent occasional summers visiting family in Wisconsin. The most memorable summers involved playing hide and seek in her great-grandmother’s corn fields and exploring the swallow-filled barn at her great aunt Ruthie’s house. p. 12

**Charlotte Digregorio** has published over 250 poems in various forms. Her work has been translated into four languages and exhibited in public places including Cornell University’s Mann Library. She is the author of four non-fiction books. pp. 16-17

**CX Dillhunt** was born in Green Bay and grew up in De Pere in a big house on the Fox River as one of twelve children. His mother was a great letter writer; it’s still one of his favorite forms. Currently he’s an assistant editor for *Hummingbird: Magazine of the Short Poem*, and he served as co-editor of the *Wisconsin Poets’ Calendar: 2006*. He teaches elementary school writer’s workshops and is the lead instructor for Elderhostel’s The Writer in You at Green Lake. He has a first-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. p. 26

**Cathy Douglas** was born in California but has lived in Madison for the last twenty years. She works in a metaphysical shop near campus and owns a house on the east side, where she keeps her husband, two sons and three cats. She’s pretty well adjusted, other than a writing habit and a craving for kumquats. p. 12

**James Finnegan** has published poems in *Ploughshares*, *Poetry East*, *The Southern Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review* & other literary magazines. In 2001 he started an internet discussion list called New-Poetry. He blogs aphoristic ars poetica at ursprache (http://ursprache.blogspot.com). p. 28

**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. 15

**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. 7

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the California Sierra. Her poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. Her latest book *Walking with Elihu: poems on Elihu Burritt, the Learned Blacksmith* is available on Amazon. Connection to Wisconsin: a cousin in Wonnewoc, and in 1989 she helped instruct at a SAR dog school in Osceola. p. 34

**Ray Greenblatt** lives and writes in Exton, Pennsylvania. p. 5

**Greg Grube** is a writer and dancer living in Madison, WI. Apart from being a flamboyant Aries, working itinerantly as a Pilates teacher, and lusting after notions of contemporaneity, he is the proud owner of Vladimir Blue, a rambunctious Brittany Spaniel. p. 23

**Shane D. Hanson** is a life-long Wisconsin resident. He currently works in the insurance field. p. 9

**Rebecca Hazelton** attended The University of Notre Dame for her MFA in poetry, and completed her PhD at Florida State University, under the direction of David Kirby. She is the Jay C. and Ruth Hall Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Creative Writing Institute and teaches writing there. She has been nominated for a Pushcart and for Best New Poets 2010, and has been a finalist in several book prizes. pp. 20-21

**Karla Huston** is the author of six chapbooks of poetry, most recently, *An Inventory of Lost Things* (Centennial Press, 2009). Her poems, reviews and interviews have been published widely. pp. 35-37

**Erin Keane** has strained her eyes to see Wisconsin from the Michigan side of the great lake. In high school, she visited Milwaukee on a school trip and learned how warm and delicious Miller beer can smell during the brewing phase. She lives in Louisville, where she writes for *The Courier-Journal* and teaches in the National University MFA program.She is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Gravity Soundtrack* and *Death-Defying Acts*. p. 9

**Dion Kempthorne** was once a linebacker on Wisconsin’s 1963 Rose Bowl team. After serving as professor of English in the UW Colleges and CEO/Dean at UW-Richland, he has retired to the woods of Richland County, where he spends his days reading, writing, and making firewood. His poems have appeared in the *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, *Verbatim*, *The Capitola Review*, and other places. pp. 25, 27

**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. 24

**John Krumberger**’s first collection of poems was published in 2008 by Backwaters Press, titled *The Language of Rain and Wind*. He lives in Minneapolis with his wife and works as a psychologist in private practice in St. Paul. p. 5

**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. 10

**John Lehman** is the founder of *Rosebud* magazine and the literary editor of *Wisconsin People & Ideas*. p. 19

**Jef Leisang** writes poetry and fiction, and currently helps out editor Rod Clark with special acquisitions at *Rosebud Magazine*. He manages a bookstore in Madison, is the father of two wonderful children, Chance and Gemma, and is the spouse of one lovely editor, Nancy. pp. 8, 11

**Mitch L’Herault** is a musician and writer and has lived in Verona for the last 30 years. His wife and two children sit comfortably atop his priority list, followed in no particular order by: music, reading, writing, politics, upland game birds, cooking for friends, mastering the button accordion and locally brewed Wisconsin ales. Mitch admires writing that embodies a love of place. His place is a small cottage on a little lake in the big woods of northern Wisconsin. p. 22

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**Lyn Lifshin** has published over 120 books and edited four anthologies. Her most recent books include *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* (Texas Review Press), *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* (Black Sparrow, Godine), and *Cold Comfort*. Her web site is www.lynlifshin.com. p. 27

**Amit Majmudar**’s first book, *0°,0° [Zero Degrees, Zero Degrees]*, (Northwestern University Press/TriQuarterly Books, 2009) was a finalist for the Norma Farber First Book Award. His second manuscript, *Heaven and Earth*, won the 2011 Donald Justice Award. His first novella, *Azazel*, was serialized recently in *The Kenyon Review* over three issues. His first novel, *Partitions*, will be published by Henry Holt/Metropolitan in 2011. His poetry has been featured on *Poetry Daily* several times and has appeared in *Poetry Magazine* and *The Best American Poetry 2007*. p. 29

**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 his poetry published in *Verse Wisconsin*. Other work of his can be found at the *Shepherd Express* online poetry column, available at www.expressmilwaukee.com. p. 15

Wisconsin has always been special to **Linda Back McKay**. When she was little, there were all those glorious summers at Uncle Albert’s farm in Chippewa Falls. Now it’s riding a red (the color of roses and fine cabernets) Harley-Davidson along the river through Stockholm, Maiden Rock and Pepin. She is author of several poetry collections and the groundbreaking book, *Shadow Mothers: Stories of Adoption and Reunion*, which was inspiration for the play, *Watermelon Hill*, produced by a professional theater. p. 25

**Gwyn McVay** grew up on the Northern Great Plains and has actually seen the mating dance of the Greater Prairie-chicken, which oddly makes no appearance in her two chapbooks of poems or full-length collection, *Ordinary Beans* (Pecan Grove Press, 2007). Recent essays and reviews have turned up in *Gently Read Literature* and *Wild Violet*. She currently teaches writing at Temple University. pp. 8, 33

**Richard W. Moyer** is 78 years old. He obtained his AB in English at Harvard College in 1953; his 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 one chapbook and one book of selected poems to his credit. pp. 9, 19

**W.J. Nunnery** was born in Madison and has lived there his entire life. His work has appeared in *The North Central Review*, *Xenith Online* and *Postcard Shorts*. Currently he is a creative writing student at Concordia University St. Paul. pp. 5, 29

**Mary O’Dell**’s knowledge of Wisconsin consists merely of her best friend’s husband’s dentist, who lives somewhere there, and whom they visited some years ago. But it does sound like a lovely, clean place to live. pp. 15, 22

With brief sojourns in other places **Helen Padway**’s first act and more than likely her last will be in Wisconsin. Second act involved writing and acting in television and radio productions, with intermission for marriage and children. Act three is sheer poetry—writing and reading. She is part of the cast of “The Sparks” and the “Hartford Avenue Poets,” both critiquing groups provide support and wisdom. p. 13

Transplanted from Cincinnati over 30 years ago, **Jean Preston** lives with her husband, Tom, and her Scottish Terrier, Maggie. She holds an MFA from the Stonecoast Writing Program. By day, she directs the Writing Center at Carthage College and teaches as an adjunct professor. By night, she writes and performs with a duo called Women of an UN-Certain Age. She has been published in *Centrique*, *Pleiades*, and *The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*. p. 14

**Harlan Richards** grew up on the west side of Madison and earned his bachelors degree in business administration from UW Platteville. He has had poems accepted for publication in *Love’s Chance Magazine* and *Shepherd*. He currently lives in the Great North Woods. p. 11

**Charles P. Ries**’s narrative poems, short stories, interviews, and reviews have appeared in over two hundred print and electronic publications. He has received four Pushcart Prize nominations. He is a founding member of the Lake Shore Surf Club, the oldest fresh water surfing club on the Great Lakes. Most recently he was interviewed by Jane Crown for Blog Radio (www.janecrown.com—click on archived shows at the bottom of the page). http://www.literati.net/Ries/ p. 14

**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. 9

**Chuck Rybak** is a professor of creative writing and literature at UW-Green Bay. He is the author of three collections of poetry, the most recent being *Tongue and Groove* which was published by *Main Street Rag*. Chuck lives in Green Bay with his wife and two daughters. p. 32

**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. 18

**G. A. Scheinoha** thought about becoming a private detective, later, a bounty hunter. He never imagined he’d follow in his father’s tracks: a series of blue collar jobs. Where their lives differed was instead of marriage and family, he wrote a million words over

thirty years, some of which have recently appeared in *Avocet*, *Bellowing Ark*, *Bracelet Charm*, *Echoes*, *Floyd County Moonshine* and *Verse Wisconsin*. pp. 12, 26

**Robert Schuler** has been trying to write for fifty years. His fifteenth collection of poems, *The Book of Jeweled Visions*, has recently been published by Tom Montag’s *MWPH Books*, PO Box 8, Fairwater, WI 53931. Price: \$12.50 plus \$1.50 postage. pp. 18, 32

**Sheryl Slocum** lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she teaches English as a Second Language, studies linguistics, and writes-reads-hears poetry as often as possible. p. 14

**Kate Sontag**’s recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *Seattle Review*, *Verse Wisconsin*, EXPRESS milwaukee.com, and Snakeskin Poetry Web Zine. 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. 6

**Nadine S. St. Louis**, Eau Claire, authored two books, *Zebra* (Marsh River Editions, 2008) and *Weird Sisters* (Wolfsong, 2000). Her poems appeared in journals and anthologies, including *ByLine*, *Free Verse*, *Kalliope*, and *A Peace of the Valley*, and in collaborative shows, including Wisconsin’s Epidemic Peace Imagery Exhibit. She was one of the founders of the Chippewa Valley Book Festival, just completing its 10th year. p. 7

**Chris Taylor** is a technical writer in Madison, Wisconsin, where she was born and never quite escaped. Her poems have appeared in *elimae*, *The Madison Review*, *DoubleShiny*, and *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, among others. pp. 13, 18

**Len Tews** was a biology professor in 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. pp. 8, 11

**Janie Tomasko** is a home health nurse who loves to write, take walks, and birdwatch and thinks everything is prettier in Fall. She is the author of a forthcoming chapbook, *Tricks of Light*, (Parallel Press, 2011). pp. 4, 33

**Wendy Vardaman** author of *Obstructed View* (Fireweed Press 2009), is co-editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. Visit wendyvardaman.com. pp. 30-31

**Lisa Vihos** worked for twenty years as an art museum educator and is now the Director of Alumni Relations at Lakeland College. Her poems have appeared previously in *Verse Wisconsin*, and in *Free Verse*, *Lakefire*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, *Seems*, and *Big Muddy*. She is an associate editor of a new literary journal, *Stoneboat*, which made its debut in October, 2010. She resides in Sheboygan with her 12-year-old son and maintains a weekly poetry blog, http://www.lisapoemoftheweek.blogspot.com/. p. 13

**Timothy Walsh**’s awards include the Grand Prize in the Atlanta Review International Poetry Competition and the Kurt Vonnegut Fiction Prize from *North American Review*. He authored a book of literary criticism, *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature* and two chapbooks, *Wild Apples* (Parallel) and *Blue Lace Colander* (Marsh River). He is an Assistant Dean at UW-Madison. p. 6

**Marine Robert Warden** is a retired physician. His most recent publications are *Canticle III* and *Finding Beauty* (both Bellowing Ark Press) and *Beyond the Straits* (Presa Press, 2010, 2nd ed.). p. 4

**Tad Hippen Wente** lives with her surfer husband and teaches creative writing at The Étude High School in Sheboygan. Her work has been animated for Poetry Everywhere and also appears in *Wisconsin Poets’ Calendar: 2010*. p. 26

**Lesley Wheeler**’s new collection, *Heterotopia*, won the 2010 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize. Other books include *Heathen*(C&R, 2009) and *Voicing American Poetry* (Cornell, 2008), and poems appear in *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Slate*, and elsewhere. She teaches at Washington and Lee University, but she knows several cool people from Wisconsin. Once she visited Madison, where her eyelashes promptly froze. p. 28

**Gail White** is the author of *Easy Marks* (David Robert Books), a finalist for the Poets’ Prize in 2008. She coedited the anthology *The Muse Strikes Back*, which has been reissued by Story Line Press. She is also the subject of Julie Kane’s essay “Getting Serious About Gail White’s Light Verse,” which appeared in an early issue of *Mezzo Cammin*. She has visited Sheboygan, the Bratwurst Capital of the World. p. 18

**Kelley White**’s work has been widely published in numerous journals including *Exquisite Corpse*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *Rattle* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and in chapbooks and full-length collections, most recently *Toxic Environment* from Boston Poet Press. She has also received several honors, including a 2008 grant for poetry from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. p. 29

**Marilyn Windau** was nurtured on Big Bend farms, in raspberry patches in Fremont, by blue gills from Green Lake and books in Madison. Graduating from UW- Madison, she married a civil engineer from Wauwatosa and raised three daughters in Appleton and Sheboygan Falls. She teaches art to elementary school children in Oostburg. p. 33

**Judy Wucherer** has had poems published in WFOP calendars and Museletters and recently was honored to be chosen to be a part of the One Vision Event, a celebration of “ekphrastic” poetry and art, held at the Oconomowoc Art Center. p. 33

**Charles Wyatt** has poems recently in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. He was also principal flutist in the Peninsula Music Festival in Door County for 25 years. p. 34



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