

**Ambidextrous**

We rise with signs—*Kill the Bill, Save Our Rights*,  
 picket in protest, sometimes loud, sometimes  
 noise-less.

Passion takes form in chant-rants  
 birthed from (oh!) pressed chests,  
 Egypt on the right,

Wisconsin on the left,  
 the water cleft now

s  
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 d

shut,  
 a piercing needle of common theme  
 pricking holes so little  
 it hardly seems visible—  
 but when the craft is complete,  
 multitudes bleed, sporting bright red tees,

standing straight in the knees, spines strong,  
 backtoback  
 on the

s  
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 s

of leaders' fallacies.



*Nichole Rued is a creative writing student at  
 UW-Green Bay.*

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**from The Book of Walker—**

—Blessed are they who do make it more costly for the  
 sick to be healed, the blind to see, the lame to walk  
 uprightly.

—Blessed are the nine in-state billionaires, for their  
 portion of tax shall not be increased, and they shall  
 sitteth at the head of the table, and the front of the bus.

—Blessed are the out-of-state billionaires, for they shall  
 inherit Wisconsin.

—Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst to deny the  
 rights of the worker, for they shall be called Americans  
 for Prosperity.

—Blessed are ye who seeketh to plant trouble-makers  
 among the peaceful, for ye shall be called Governor.

—Blessed are ye who accept lavish vacations in  
 California from the one ye believeth to be the richest of  
 the rich, for ye likewise shall be known as Governor.

—Blessed are the backroom deal makers, faith-breakers,  
 takers from the poor and middle-class to replenish the  
 coffers of the rich.

—Blessed are they who do vilify and demean the people  
 of learning, for they shall be known as the legislative  
 majority.

—Blessed are ye who traceth not the names of corporate  
 donors.

—Blessed are they who do bar the doors of the common  
 meeting place of the people, for they shall be called the  
 children of Koch.

—Blessed are the de-funders of art, for they shall  
 diminish the beautiful and true.

—Blessed is he who turneth his ear from the pleas of the  
 prison guard, the nurse, the minister, the priest, the  
 rabbi, the keeper of the peace, the fighter of the fire,  
 the driver of the plow, for he hath already received his  
 earthly reward, even one-hundredfold and more.

—Blessed are the mighty.

—*Scott—3:16-28*



*Max Garland lives in Eau Claire.*

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## Relying on Your Imagination to Discern the Question, a Prose Sonnet

(at the Capitol, 2/25/11)

Because what's the point if you're not enjoying your life. Because neither of us is getting any younger. Because it is an unseasonably warm February day in Wisconsin. Because it is an unpleasantly seasonable February day in Wisconsin. Because my children are with me. Because who needs all this stuff this house these plates this bed these chairs. Because it all comes down to backstory: who we & why we. Because there is free Ian's pizza from Finland and Arkansas at the top of the hill where we listen to Rabbi Biatch.

Because you can read the news on Avol's Bookstore windows and on Facebook and in poems and on people's faces. Because Tammy Baldwin, my congresswoman, and Beth Kiser, my children's grade school cello teacher stand on either side of me. Because "ROTC Kills." Because my husband writes *Solidarity* on his sign in seven languages while my teenagers get out their magic markers. Because poetry and plays come from one place, and theatrical gestures aren't *stunts* or *tricks* or *mere* or even *just*. Because 14 senators are just enough to make a sonnet, if you're careful, and I am letting go of perfect all the time and sometimes the performance *is* the poetry.



Wendy Vardaman works at a theater company in Madison  
& co-edits *Verse Wisconsin*.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: WENDY VARDAMAN

## The Children Must Learn to Read by Third Grade

The children must learn  
to read by third grade.  
Those words aren't going to read themselves!

Or do much else for our economy.  
The prisoners must lead  
the third graders who can't be trusted

who can't be invested  
like money can be in greeding.  
And what about the money?

The teachers have hidden it  
where no one will look—  
inside the prisons, inside the books.



Jill Stukenberg is a writer in Wausau.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests:  
JILL STUKENBERG

## To the New Student Protesters

*(Wisconsin protests of February, 2011)*

Best of all is to see the young  
and meditate on the law of unintended  
consequences: the Governor's  
hardline arrogance mobilizing

a new generation to learn one of  
democracy's most glorious lessons:  
that there is not only duty  
but joy in the combining of voices.

Though now we're grey and you're  
the vivid ones, every cell in us  
resonates to your bullhorn.  
Standing today less for ourselves

than for you, we lean easier  
into aging bodies and visions,  
loving the early spring wind wafted  
by your lithe, shining spirits.

Our old romance with hope  
stirs again, that we might yet  
establish the Beautiful Community,  
and that you may still lift the dream

forward to places we've only imagined,  
greyhairs, who like Moses, won't live  
to see the Promised Land but will be carried  
in your hearts toward that fulfillment.



*Thomas R. Smith is a poet and teacher  
living in River Falls.*

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## Before Unions

Grandpa showed me his crooked hands  
that he said were from playing baseball  
without a mitt, but I think it was from  
all the hard work.

He showed me the B B  
under the skin of the meat of his left thumb  
that he got during a hunting accident.  
"Still there,"  
he said.  
He let me feel it myself and roll it around.

When I sat on his lap  
he would let me listen  
to his Hamilton railroad watch  
"It's the most accurate watch there is,"  
he bragged. And I guessed it was.

Then he took down his small cap  
with a candle holder on the front:  
"It was about eighteen eighty-six  
I wore this cap in Hurley when I was twelve.  
to climb down ladders hundreds of feet  
into the dark iron mine.  
All I had for light was a candle,"  
he stated without self-pity or boast.  
"I never went to school, I couldn't understand  
English, and Ma and Pa needed my earnings."



*Len Tews is a retired biology professor  
at UW-Oshkosh.*

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## Steam

I am not political, but even  
the Capitol's bathroom windows  
are bolted shut. I wish this were  
a metaphor. One in, one out,  
no signs, flags, or books.  
The officials I didn't vote for  
access the people's house through  
a secret tunnel system  
once only rumored to exist.



*Brent Goodman is a  
copywriter in Rhineland.*

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## There's an Immediacy in the Situation That Prevents Us From Perfection

*[Author's note: the title is taken verbatim from an email message to VW Feb. 21, from Madison poet Gillian Nevers, thanking us for the poems we've been publishing and commenting on the rawness and subsequent power of the drafts. As I am a writer who usually strives for perfection, or close to it, her words sparked my imagination.]*

Yes. There's an immediacy for  
almost a week now, here in my living room,  
two kids home from school because the teachers  
the teachers are marching and there's an immediacy.  
"Why aren't the teachers at school?" Because  
the governor is trying to take away their voice.

Even in my armchair, humming  
to facebook, /post/ to the Ed Show / link/  
to Youtube / share/ and the various emails from neighbors and  
friends / reply/  
/ reply / reply /

There's an immediacy, and I hear there's pizza from Ian's.  
There's an immediacy to this, this need to be heard.  
Won't you listen, you on the other side? And damn  
my binary thinking, why

do I think there are only two sides? Think of a pizza,  
round or wedge like, depending on  
the angle of your vision, your experience.  
There could be more than two sides.  
There could be a circle?

There could be a circle here but we

we are prevented from perfection, by our need

and we need  
to share our words, to share our experiences, our voices.  
This is a poetry flip cam, not a documentary. /share/ / link / / heart /  
Our chants may sound silly, years or even days from now.  
Our poems, drafted in heat, may fall flat.  
Are they worse for that?  
What do we require of them?  
What is required of us?  
We are prevented from perfection. We are human.  
There's an immediacy in the situation.

*Sarah Busse is a homemaker and co-editor  
of Verse Wisconsin. She lives in Madison.*

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: SARAH BUSSE

## Cahoots: Wisconsin Makes a House Call

We enter the brawl of voices, a mob of signs  
the cameras flare, the sirens thrum and  
howl around the press of people--

It's a clumsy chore of taking it to the streets  
leaning against the beaten door of arson  
or the plate glass of breaking and entering  
and then prepare for what's ahead: joining  
the stream of total strangers, we are in cahoots  
with a common indignation, a despair  
we declare as our own, climbing step and  
stair to wait, we aim to find a place  
to stand together for days if we must.

And you. While you memorize your lines,  
and a smug buttress of millionaires  
smoke fat cigars and reassure you,  
we jam the corridors and crawl through  
windows. We don't ask for the man  
of the house, we don't leave when  
told to go. By now, this much you must know:  
We are coming in.

But this is not the house of corrections  
where we surrender ourselves,  
this is not the house of striking out,  
this is not the house of bums,  
of aimless punks, or derelict junkies  
tying off on the marble floors  
amidst high-collared, learned men. No.

This is the house that we have built  
and come to declare our own this time  
each stone and stair, each frame and border  
Whose house? Our house? And we expect  
the doors to open to the glare of hunger  
to the bone-struck wind of resistance  
to the change in furious weather now--

And you over there? Pull up a chair  
it's time we had this talk.

*Denise Sweet is an Anishinaabe poet [White  
Earth] and former WI Poet Laureate.*

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: DENISE SWEET

## Spring Tease

*Feb 16, 2011*

The birds were twittering again at first light today, and you were out there floating in the early clouds of morning, doing a backstroke. I believe, through the pale skies of this February mourning: The bells up high in the campus carillon rang out with such exuberance that the notes of their song tumbled like somersaults down a green hillside or the colors in the dryer at the laundromat, the one with the round window set in front. The crowds in the State Capitol chanting the mantras of democracy swarmed like Sulis in a kaleidoscope or a mandala swirled in tinted sand on a windswept Tibetan mountaintop. Spring is not ours yet, but she did let show the lace of her prettiest petticoat as she swirled by in the clouds today, in the clouds in the crowds past the crowned heads and clowns, past the crowsfeet and the cloned sheep of our daily visions. One barely notices that the hem of her well-worn wintry gown is stained with road salt and deicing agents, as well as the toll of sweat and blood and tears this endless winter has extracted and exacted. And then some unknown schoolchild who has slipped one hand into yours uninvited, tugs at your overcoat sleeve and asks you Why is that cloud up there naked? Whereupon you glance at the sky then me before you say with just the slight arch of one of your perfect eyebrows, "Shouldn't we go home together now?" and I say, "Yes, please."

## 14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: SUSAN HERING

*Susan Hering works in the Econ  
Department UW-Madison.*



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## In a Wisconsin Public Market

3/9/11

Socrates, teacher, take up your toga hem.  
Sit at the foot of marble capitals  
on the stone ledge  
in the agora.  
Question and debate  
with your followers,  
your students,  
so eager for your next word.

Amidst shouts of sardine sales,  
olive oil reservoir bargains,  
impart knowledge  
not to five but to the forty- five,  
who come now to your class  
with thoughts of suicide,  
with knowledge of abuse,  
with shakes of epilepsy,  
with allergies to peanuts,  
chocolate, test taking,  
with knives, handguns concealed,  
with latent anger, and muscle memories  
of drive-by, trigger finger power.

Socrates, teacher, in this age of reason,  
see through faulty argument  
to truth, to right, to justice.  
Your time again has come  
to make a difference in education,  
in civilization.  
Wisconsin, in its void, beckons.

*Marlyn Windau teaches art to elementary  
school children in Oosburg.*



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## 14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: MARILYN WINDAU

## Supporting the Troops

We support you,  
our heroes on the front line  
we, who cannot be there daily  
who cannot brave the cold and snow  
who cannot spend the night on marble floors  
protecting the rights of us all.

We will shovel your walks  
water your plants  
feed your animals.

We will watch your children  
read them stories of your bravery and resolve  
tell them their mothers are heroes  
defending our freedoms.

We will post and re-post your messages  
your videos, your letters,  
your first-hand accounts  
your stories that don't make the corporate news.

We will feed you with pizza from down the street  
ordered for you from around the world.

We will write poetry and music in your honor.

And when we can  
as soon as we can  
every time that we can  
we will be there in our thousands  
reinforcing you  
warming you with our warm bodies  
and our love.

*Ed Werstein is an employment counselor  
in Milwaukee.*

## 14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: ED WERSTEIN



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## Dancing with Liberty

(Madison, Wisconsin, February 19, 2011)

My friend called to say, "I'm waiting  
at the top of State," but I was across

the square, so I kept walking with the crowd  
past the media stands where a few angry

men screamed through bullhorns while  
we answered the call: *Show me what*

*Democracy looks like*, singing back over  
and over, *This is what Democracy*

*looks like*, the marchers slowing to let  
parents with strollers cross to the Capital,

past the costumed onlookers, past the sax  
player giving us "Solidarity Forever,"

past the Harley-jacketed family, past  
"Queers from Chicago" with raised fists,

*Show me what Democracy looks like—*  
*This is what Democracy looks like—*

but at the top of State, amid thousands  
of marchers, my friend and I could not

find each other, so I called and told her,  
"Look for the man dressed as Liberty,"

and cut through the crowd to stand  
beside a young black man in green silk

and a plastic-foam Lady Liberty crown—  
*Show me what Democracy looks like—*

*This is what Democracy looks like—*  
and he told me he was from Milwaukee,

and that his mother was a teacher,  
and I told him I was from Alaska

and my father was in the service,  
and all the while music was pounding

out from the Capital steps, and after  
a few minutes we were dancing to

Michael Jackson, swaying and pumping  
our arms, *Show me what Democracy*

*looks like—This is what Democracy*  
*looks like—and somehow, my friend*

never did find me, and none of us  
who are hoping for justice know

whether we will find it, now or soon  
or never, but what the heck, my friends,

isn't this what Democracy looks like:  
each of us, all of us, dancing with Liberty?



*Patricia Monaghan is a writer, teacher, and  
tender of vineyards who lives in Black Earth.*

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## From the Principal's Desk

bullies are unhappy people  
they come from sad and sometimes violent families  
where the rules change all the time  
here's how to deal with bullies

ignore them go about your business  
don't feed into their unhappiness  
if that doesn't work tell someone in charge  
if that doesn't work travel in twos  
become a friend to make a friend  
if that doesn't work stand up taller  
be as big as you can  
bullies are cowards  
holler no in their face  
the bully will get smaller

respect yourself and never use violence  
bullies end up lonely and alone  
they'll hang around their own kind  
until even they can't stand themselves  
can't stand themselves

okay then welcome back to school  
it's going to be a wonderful year you'll see  
with new hopes and new friends and dreams  
so hey say hi to me in the hallways  
and always remember the principal is your pal



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*Bruce Dethlefsen is Wisconsin's  
Poet Laureate. He lives in Westfield.*