

VERSE WISCONSIN

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FEATURES

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BY WENDY VARDAMAN

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MUSINGS OF AN ECO POET

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To those who'd deny that eco poems that tackle environmental issues are truly poems, I say: okay then, don't call them "poems." Maybe they're a new genre: eco-poetic wake-up calls. Whether you grant they're poems or not, they're saying something that urgently needs to be said: clearly, eloquently, powerfully, poetically.

—Jeff Poniewaz

The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is more than just a symbolic appointment. The poet laureate plays a crucial role in keeping the arts accessible and vital—to all age groups—and acts as a statewide emissary for poetry and creativity.

— Margaret Lewis

For me, what distinguishes ecopoetry from nature poetry is the embedded understanding of responsibility. Or response-ability, as I like to characterize it, so that the word suggests a relationship. That relationship involves a spiritual vision, being responsible by being engaged in the life processes.

— Kimberly Blaeser



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Editors' Notes

We were simultaneously humbled and buoyed to learn earlier this season of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets' vote to continue supporting *Verse Wisconsin* in our various endeavors. This continued financial gift means a very great deal to us, both from a business perspective and personally. And it got us thinking more about the nitty-gritty business side of things, and the very real benefits of partnerships.

No one gets into poetry publishing for the money. As you know, *Verse Wisconsin* has worked for the past two years to build the poetry community throughout the state, and beyond. To this end, we have managed to keep our subscriber base steady, while making sure that copies of *Verse Wisconsin* find their way to prisons, classrooms, festivals and conferences both around Wisconsin and further afield. For instance, we mailed 120 copies of the summer issue to the National Book Festival in Washington, DC, to be given away at the Wisconsin booth. More copies made their way to Reedsburg, Wisconsin to participate in the Fermentation Festival's "Farm Art DTour."

Though we fervently believe in sharing *Verse Wisconsin* at events such as these (and everything in between), it's true that no one pays for these free copies, nor the postage involved in shipping them. That is why a gift such as the WFOP's means so very much. It's this support that allows us to continue sharing the work of so many poets, so widely.

This past year, the Wisconsin Poet Laureate's funding was cut at the state level by Governor Scott Walker. For a while it was unclear what would happen to the position itself. Happily, the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters offered itself as a new home. Wisconsin will continue to have a Poet Laureate for the foreseeable future. We encourage you to support the Poet Laureate fund, and our homepage has the link to follow to make a contribution. (See pp. 20-21 for more on the Academy and the Poet Laureate.)

The short story? Nobody's got much money these days, and the arts often get depicted as an "extra," easy to cut. We're preaching to the choir when we say that there are many of us who know the value of a healthy, vibrant arts community. Economists can translate it into dollars, but we know the value of the arts goes beyond generated business, beyond attracting investments and workers. The arts encourage imagination, empathy, complex thinking. They take us out of our own mundane lives for a few minutes, an hour or an evening, restore something vital to our souls and remind us that we are, in the end, part of the larger picture, the infinitely vast fabric of life that has quilted this planet for millennia. Yup. That's what your ten or fifteen dollar donation—to us, to the PL fund, to your local theater troupe—does. Thank you.

Thanks to Judy Kolosso, CJ Muchhalo & Alice Pauser for volunteer proofreading help. Lingering errors are, of course, the responsibility of VW's editors.

Contact us: editors@versewisconsin.org.

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Printed by Thysse Printers, Inc., Madison, WI

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- Seth Abramson, *Northerners*, New Issues, Western Michigan U, 2011
Ellen Wade Beals, Ed., *Solace, in So Many Words*, Weighed Words, 2011
Richard Broderick, *Rain Dance*, Parallel Press, 2011
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Scott King, Ed., *Perfect Dragonfly, A Commonplace Book of Poems Celebrating a Decade & a Half of Printing & Publishing at Red Dragonfly Press*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2011
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Books Reviewed Online

- James Babbs, *Another Beautiful Night*, LuLu, 2010, by Ramona Davis
Linda Benninghoff, *Whose Cries Are Not Music*, Lummix Press, 2011, by Julie L. Moore
B.J. Best, *Birds of Wisconsin*, New Rivers Press, 2011 by Sarah Busse
Richard Broderick, *Rain Dance*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Judy Barisonzi
Julie Carr, *Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines*, Coffee House Press, 2010, by Sarah Busse
Camille T. Dungy (ed.), *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, University of Georgia Press, by Wendy Vardaman
Rebecca Dunham, *The Flight Cage*, Tupelo Press, 2010, Two
Reviews: by Linda Aschbrenner, and by Sarah Busse
Adam Halbur, *Poor Manners*, Ahadada Books, 2009, by Linda Aschbrenner
Shelly L. Hall, *Alum*, Popcorn Press, 2011, by Zara Raab
Tim Hunt, *Fault Lines*, The Backwaters Press, 2010, by Elmae Passineau
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Andrea Potos (ed.), *Love and Lust, an Anthology*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Zara Raab
Chuck Rybak, *Tongue and Groove*, Main Street Rag, 2007, by Sarah Busse
Edith Rylander, *Dance with the Darker Sister*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010, by Linda Aschbrenner
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by David Graham
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Paul Terranova, *This Small Breathing Coincidence*, Parallel Press, 2011, by Lisa Viros
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Tracy S. Youngblom, *Driving to Heaven*, Parallel Press, 2010, Two
Reviews: by Bobbi Altreuter, and by Linda Aschbrenner

Unexpected Shiny Things

by Wisconsin Poet Laureate

Bruce Dethlefsen

Sixty-one

monday I crossed off cowboy
tuesday fireman
wednesday president
thursday I couldn't find the list
friday my own fishing show
saturday catching for the cardinals
sunday I took a nap
sorry
I had to
the moons flew by too soon

Available Fall 2011



cowfeatherpress.org

Cowfeather Press PO Box 620216, Middleton, WI 53562

Books Received January-April 2011

Publisher & author links available online

- Sherry Chandler, *Weaving a New Eden*, Wind Publications, 2011
John Dubord, *The Marvelous Mister Toad* [children's book], Toadybooks Press, 2010
Dave Etter, *Dandelions*, Red Dragonfly Press, 2010
Eric Greinke, *Traveling Music*, Presa Press, 2011
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Christina Lloyd, *Territories*, Finishing Line Press, 2011
Dimitris Lyacos, trans. by Shorsha Sullivan, *Poena Damni Z213: Exit*, Shoestring Press, 2010
Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Marilyn L. Taylor, Denise Low, & Walter Bargen, (eds.), *An Endless Skyway, Poetry from the State Poets Laureate*, Ice Cube Books, 2011
Richard W. Moyer, *58 Collected Poems*, Infinity, 2010
Richard W. Moyer, *The Selected Poems*, Infinity, 2007
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Mishka Zakharin, *The Spleen of Fiery Dragons*, Infinity Publishing, 2010

Hear the Sea From an Ear

When the girl that longed
to go to the Ocean
While listening to a conch
hearing the sea
Went to the Ocean at last
and played on the beach
And swam all day
in the sound of the sounding surf
Later at home miles away
sound asleep on her bed
If her dog or cat lies next to her
and puts their ear near the girl's sleeping ear
Do they hear the sea? Do they fall asleep
near the sleeping girl's ear
Lullaby'd by echo of surf—
for aren't ears shells?
Isn't the inner ear
the same as the inner conch
The way it curls from pink to darkness
as it spirals around itself?
And when the girl puts her ear to the shell
and the echo of the sea from her ear
Meets the echo of the sea from the shell
do the two echoes become friends?

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

In a Rain I Hit Root

Sometimes I forget why I'm here,
it being, for one, to mop contents
of a newly bought bottle of Woolite—

its top not on tight—promptly dropped.
But all's right, far from life's last
mishap, groundwater no worse off

when, through a bit of ingenuity
and engineering on a shirt box,
I scraped, scooped, sent soap

on a slow though slick descent
to the wastewater treatment plant that,
as if studying a turned back clock,

I've thought about a lot of late,
thought on the walk I take
of a route I used to jog with the dog.

The dog's gone, wrapped in a green
fitted sheet three feet down
where near dawn in a rain I hit root.

Sometimes I remember why I'm here
when I'm there, mud up to my ankles,
just off the path back of the house,

seeing Wade, brow hidden by his bowed head,
shuffling toward, cradling that green bundle.
Surely it's not shame turning me again

from this recurring rain of grief,
but that morning we did not hug,
we did not touch, as though to do so

might undermine an unspoken belief
whatever a son is tall enough to carry
a father ought not but shallow bury.

—KARL ELDER, HOWARDS GROVE, WI

Conch Shell Filled With Snow

Little did the conch on the Ocean floor
Know or comprehend after its death
It'd be washed up on a shore
(never heard or saw one)
And have an echo
(never heard or saw one)
A human child would hear
(never heard or saw one)
On a terrestrial sphere
(never heard or saw one)
Where winter would come
and on a picnic table
on a cottage patio
facing Lake Michigan
it would rest
pink opening facing upward
completely filled with snow.
When you put your ear
to the conch filled with snow
you can still hear
the echo
filtered through the designs
of each flake.
Scatter purple thistle seeds
on the snow around the shell
and in the pink opening
so goldfinches come to feast
in the aura of the echo.
How many birds ever heard
the echo of the sea
from a conch shell
filled with snow?

—ANTLER, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Musings of an Eco Poet

by Jeff Poniewaz

I grew up on the working class South Side of Milwaukee on “a block where the sidewalk ends.” Right across the street from where I lived was a grimy building where trains underwent repair and maintenance. All through my childhood that building and an oil-marred parking lot for semis existed side-by-side with a field that ran along the top of bluffs overlooking what we kids called “the crick.”

I often went to the field alone and looked under rocks for grass snakes while grasshoppers hopped and dragonflies flew around me, and down to “the crick” to look for turtles or mudpuppies. Even then, the good smell of all the green growing from the field on down the bluffs became, as you got close to “the crick,” tainted with the combined smell of sewer gas and gasoline. A few years later I learned “the crick” was the Kinnickinnic River. In 1997 it was formally designated one of America’s most endangered rivers.

I wrote my first poem when I was 14. Titled “Escape,” it began with a series of observations of sad aspects of city life. Inspired by the wilds I glimpsed during my family’s annual August week vacation “up north” near Eagle River, my poem ended:

Distant valley and teeming streams
Pave the way for comely dreams
Of lands untarnished, free of stain,
That vanish thoughts of earthly gain.
In the midst a shout of glee:
“Here at last a place for me!”

This fledgling poem foreshadowed my eventual intense love of wilderness, and of Nature in general. “Pave” was the fledgling poet’s awkward word choice considering its steamroller connotation, but it ironically foreshadowed the fact that a year later my boyhood home was torn down to make way for the I-94 freeway.

My attraction to wild Nature really took off when I became friends with Antler, who also felt “the call of the wild.” Over the years we explored ever wilder wilds: from Kettle Moraine to Upper Peninsula Michigan to the Quetico canoe wilderness of Ontario to the mountains of Colorado and California. Our love of Nature grew alongside our love of Poetry. And so it was only natural that Nature figured frequently and prominently in the poems we loved by others as well as in the poems we ourselves came to write.

Nature and the environment loomed large in my Poets-in-the-Schools visits to high schools and junior highs across Wisconsin during the 1970s. A surefire way to coax kids into poetry was to read them a variety of animal poems by a variety of poets with a variety of styles and then ask them to write an animal poem of their own and bring it to our next day’s class meeting. I carried my poetry books and show-and-tell items from classroom to classroom in the same backpack I used on wilderness adventures.

I’m often referred to as an eco poet, but I write poems on all the other subjects poets write about and am open to whatever kind of poem wants me to write it. Eco poems just came to me with increasing frequency. All poets write about what they love and what interests them. Well, I dearly love and am completely fascinated by this planet and its plethora of life-sustaining biodiversity. The more I learned about the environment the more I became concerned about and focused on it—and the more eco poems I found myself writing, realizing this isn’t just another subject in the spectrum of subjects but rather an urgent planetary emergency situation.

By “eco poem” I mean any poem that honors, praises, celebrates, explores or enhances our appreciation of, some aspect(s) of the natural world or the natural world in general. “Eco poem” can also mean a poem that confronts some environmental problem or comes to the defense of some part of the natural world or the natural world in general. A good example of the first kind would be Wendell Berry’s “The Peace of Wild Things.” A good example of the second kind would be Allen Ginsberg’s “Friday the Thirteenth,” written a month before the first Earth Day:

What prayer restores freshness to eastern meadow, soil to
cindered acres, hemlock to rusty hillside,
transparency to Passaic streambed, Blue whale multitudes
to coral gulfs . . .
Earth pollution identical with Mind pollution,
consciousness pollution identical with filthy sky . . .
What can Poetry do . . . when 60% State Money goes to heaven
on gas clouds burning off War Machine Smokestacks?

Kinnickinnic River Elegy

Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart
sprung up along the Kinnickinnic River
I sprung up along in the post-war ‘40s.
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart
that killed the Kinnickinnic Riverbank wilderness
vestige I played in as a child and boy,
the field with creek cutting through it
across Chase Avenue from the field where
the carnival sprang up for a week each spring.
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart
that along with the Freeway and Freeway Industrial Park
hogtied and crucified the little that was left of
the wilderness that was this place, the K-Mart
that paved the banks of the Kinnickinnic River
so it wouldn’t flood the basements
of the built-too-near houses
of the workingclass South Side
and would more truly resemble
the open sewer it had become.
Behold the Kinnickinnic River K-Mart
I unthinkingly walked into this afternoon
(while my father waited for me in his car)
to buy myself blue flannel pajamas from China,
100% cotton for \$10.95, while mothers & fathers
half my age walk the aisles of merchandise
with little offshoots of themselves in tow,
loading them aboard the little endangered species
merry-go-round outside the K-Mart entrance.
Every item of merchandise inside that K-Mart,
including my pajamas from China, killed
the Kinnickinnic Riverbank ecosystem.
The whole planet fast turning into one vast K-Mart.

©JEFF PONIEWAZ, 1983

Message from the Deep

Strolling the shore of Lake Michigan
I discover a cuneiform tablet
hieroglyph'd with fossilized
remains of tiny lives, shell lives,
clams smaller than my little-finger nail
embedded side-by-side,
tossed up by Lake Michigan
knowing I needed it, some special miracle
to re-alert me to the miracle of Life,
this tablet the size of my hand
not "Thou Shalt Not's lightning'd
by biblical epic special effects,
this tablet written by the only God there is,
this tablet written in shell language
tinged with rust-color'd sand,
all-in-all in my hand, this gift from the Sea,
this sea-whispered-me geological whisper,
this whisper-echo of the eonie Earth,
this heirloom from greatgreatGrandmother Earth,
this oracular telegram from the Deep,
this Deep Image washed up to my feet
as if directed specifically to me,
this many-million-year memento
from the ocean that was here
before Lake Michigan existed,
this enigma this ancient rune
this cosmos mandala this inevitable whatever-it-is,
this rosetta-stone translating the past
into the present and present into the past,
this wordless dignity, this compact cemetery
of lives whose tombstones are more immortal
than the tombstones of humankind.

©JEFF PONIEWAZ, 1987

that tackles environmental issues on the grounds that poetry should be a process of discovering what words come through you, not of putting preconceived sentiments into words. Some even dismiss it as a form of propaganda, even though they may agree with the sentiments expressed. All I can say is: I don't start out wanting to write a poem on a particular aspect of the environmental crisis and then try to come up with words to express my feelings about it. I'm just intensely focused on environmental matters, and therefore such poems just come to me. When I write them down, I feel as much a rush of spontaneous inspiration as any poet feels writing about any other subject.

Then there's the charge of "preaching to the choir." Of course, ideally Nature poems would be heard/read by and beneficially affect those who don't love Nature, just as ideally poems in general would be heard/read by and beneficially affect those who don't love poetry. You just have to beam what you have to say in the best poetry the muses deign to bless you with and let those beams fall where they may. Besides, even if eco poems were only "preaching to the choir" (and I do think they're more than that), that's important too, because the choir needs its spirits lifted—needs anything that can cheer them up when they get discouraged because the transformation to an eco-friendly civilization isn't happening fast enough or sufficiently enough.

Some poetry aficionados begrudge the acceptability of the second kind of eco poem, dismiss such poems as polemical or, worse, sermonizing. Some of Allen's poems are sutras—the Buddhis word for sermon—as in his "Sunflower Sutra." As someone who sat through countless horribly boring sermons when I was growing up Catholic, I wish I had ever heard sermons as moving and beautiful as "Sunflower Sutra" and "Who Be Kind To."

Some object to eco poetry

Poets have been in the vanguard of every compassionate progressive enlightenment cause. They are catalysts of the positive evolution of human consciousness. Shelley said poets were the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," and I'd say they're doing a better job than the official legislators who court the bribes of lobbyists. Poets were in the vanguard of opposition to the Vietnam War. Any poem against war is an eco poem when you consider that war inflicts many of the most drastic environmental impacts. Poets were in the vanguard of eco-consciousness, and still are.

Beat poets were in the vanguard of cetacean appreciation. At the legendary 1955 Six Gallery reading at which Ginsberg read "Howl" for the first time, Michael McClure read his poem denouncing the machine-gunning of a hundred orcas by bored GIs stationed off the coast of Iceland. And amid his zany poem "Marriage," in his 1960 book *The Happy Birthday of Death*, Gregory Corso tossed off these lines:

And when the mayor comes to get my vote tell him
When are you going to stop people killing whales!

In 1974 Gary Snyder's Pulitzer Prize winning *Turtle Island* came out with many now classic eco poems, including "Prayer for the Great Family" and "Mother Earth, Her Whales." The latter, written while attending the UN Environmental Conference in Sweden in 1972, praised the whales:

The whales turn and glisten, plunge
and sound and rise again, ...
Flowing like breathing planets
in the sparkling whorls of
living light

but also indicted the rampaging human impact, not only on the whales but on the environment in general. He alluded to the mercury poisoning via fish eaten in the city of Minamata, which hit the news that same year, 1972:

And Japan quibbles for words on
what kinds of whales they can kill?
A once-great Buddhist nation
dribbles methyl mercury
like gonorrhea
in the sea.

Amid an old-age love poem he wrote to his wife titled "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," William Carlos Williams held a flower up to the atom bomb and later in the poem declared:

Every drill
driven into the earth
for oil enters my side
also.

How powerful and prophetic those words in the aftermath of the BP Gulf oil disaster, as they were after the Exxon-Valdez. Dr. Williams felt the wounds being inflicted on the planet, which were and still are far worse than the "pain at the pump" so bemoaned in the news nowadays. His empathy with the Earth foreshadowed a "Deep Ecology" concept expressed by Gary Snyder and others: the need to identify so closely with some wild place or species that one feels its suffering and becomes the voice of what is unable to speak on its own behalf in our legislatures and courts.

Williams' "Asphodel" poem was published in 1955, the year Ginsberg wrote "Howl" with its comparable confrontation of The Bomb and lines such as:

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood
is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! . . .
Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul
is electricity and banks! . . .
Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen!

To those who deny that rants can be great poetry, I say: tell it to Ginsberg's "Howl" and "America." "Howl" is the cry of our mammal soul caught in the steel-jaw trap of the military-industrial complex. Poets sometimes need to express themselves in outcries of outrage and not just in psalms of praise.

As Czeslaw Milosz said in a poem he wrote in Poland after World War II:

What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?
A connivance with official lies . . .

Somebody said that poetry doesn't save the world. I disagree. I think every poem saves the world to some extent. Milosz meant that among all the poems that all a nation's poets are writing, there ought to be some that respond to war and injustice in all their forms, whether between peoples or between humans and the rest of the Natural World. If it's okay for some poems to be frivolous or totally unintelligible, it's certainly okay for some poems to spring eloquently to the defense of what needs to be defended.

To those who object to "political poetry," I say: tell it to Lorca weeping over New York from the top of the Chrysler Building, lamenting the Hudson River "drunk on oil" seven decades before a hijacked plane full of jet fuel followed the Hudson to the World Trade Center. To those who'd deny that eco poems that tackle environmental issues are truly poems, I say: okay then, don't call them "poems." Maybe they're a new genre: eco-poetic wake-up calls. Whether you grant they're poems or not, they're saying something that urgently needs to be said: clearly, eloquently, powerfully, poetically. Such poems can be poorly

or well written, inspired or not, just like poems on any other subject or in any other mode.

Coming right after the poems in *Turtle Island* is Snyder's seminal eco-essay "Four Changes," which he had first published anonymously in 1969. In it he called for a "revolution of consciousness" which "will be won not by guns but by seizing the key images, myths, archetypes, eschatologies, and ecstasies so that life won't seem worth living unless one's on the transforming energy's side." What he invoked was a nonviolent Ecological Revolution that could provide an antidote to the malignant aspects of the Industrial Revolution. Thoreau fired the first nonviolent, non-gun shot of the Ecological Revolution, not on Concord Bridge but at Walden Pond. It burst into full flower with the first Earth Day in 1970, in the wake of which many dynamic environmental groups were formed.

John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson were catalysts of that revolutionary love of the Earth that could save the world. And so were many poets. Though I'm open to the full spectrum of possible subjects, as it becomes more and more urgent to respond to the environmental crisis, I'll never refuse the Eco Muse. May more and more poets help inspire the love of the Earth that could save the world! It was never more "now or never" than it is now, and it gets more "Now or Never!" with each passing day.



Between 1989 and 2009 Jeff Poniewaz taught a course he devised called "Literature of Ecological Vision" via UW-Milwaukee. His 1986 book *Dolphin Leaping in the Milky Way* won a PEN Discovery Award. Allen Ginsberg praised it for its "impassioned prescient ecological Whitmanesque/Thoreauvian verve and wit." "Message from the Deep" and "Kinnickinnic River Elegy" are included in Jeff's chapbook *Polish for Because*, which can be ordered for \$6 (plus \$2 postage & handling) made payable to Inland Ocean Books, P.O. Box 11502, Milwaukee, WI 53211.

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Instructions Found After the Flood

Let the red fox quicken the seasons.
Let the zebra buck and clatter in the cage of his skin.
Leave the glass lagoons to the blue heron, whose eye is steady.
Let jungles whisper jaguar, whose paw is velvet.
Let the worm explore the globe, his apple.
Let the spider embroider the air.
Let tongue and belly be called reptile.
Let the bat acrobats tumble till dawn.
Let the lowly slug pearl the footpaths of Asia Minor.
Let seagulls snow down the harbors of the East.
Let the panther surround the quiet panic she has made.
Let the hippos squat and the antelope lope.
Let the rhino bully the bush.
Let the turtle be.
Let the snail nod in the hush of her mushroom room.
Leave the deserts to the one- and the two-humped emperors.
Let the black kite brown the morning mustard fields.
Leave afternoons for music, the bees drilling in the lindens.
Let owls be your night lanterns, geese your compass,
skunks your caution.

—J. PATRICK LEWIS, WESTERVILLE, OH

Town Criers

In the evenings
the Town Criers gathered.
From their vantage points
concealed in wetlands,
ponds and marshes,
frogs and toads send shrill peeps,
gruff croaks and grunts
calling through the night.
They are the stewards of the land,
these amphibians,
whose piercing chorus splits the dark.

In the evenings,
new dwellers gather now
within a gated space.
From your vantage points
beside cemented pools
or on patios of country clubs,
when you hear only the surrounding silence,
will you know what it means?

—PEG SHERRY, MADISON, WI

The Prairie Tonight

I can feel it sighing from here—
collecting the rain like coins in a jar,
enjoying the delicate slapping on its leaves:
all black and orange
reflecting the light from windows nearby.

Trails melt back into the grasses,
tired of being penciled in.
Frogs restlessly bring the ponds to a boil:
tadpoles ripple beneath like drops of ink.

And from some unknown corner
my blue heron steps out, sliding his feet into the water,
shrugging his wings up around him like a trenchcoat.

—ELIZABETH COOK, MADISON, WI

Reappraisal

They say we have no view.
Assessors come in summer
when birch and beech
canopy the swamp below
and wetland beauties hide
from all but rugged hikers.
But each October when the leaves
let go, we see a high rim from our prow
of windows. The horizon spreads to hills
on either side of famed Niagara bluffs
that make a doorway in Lake Michigan.
Our land was once a bay
before the Great Lakes were named.
We know because the water left
its calling cards of caves and fossils.
Now it harbors only forest creatures,
teems with browns of bark and deer
greens of pine and hemlock,
greys of limestone
carved by water long ago
to form an ample bowl.
And having seen the winter rim,
we always feel the presence
of that long curve
beyond the trees.

—ESTELLA LAUTER, FISH CREEK, WI

Sitting at a Window on the Lakefront in December

Mendota's waves slush sluggishly by with the burden of ice.
Steam rises and runs over the water towards the shore,
like a marathon of ghosts that dissipates before the finish.
Time could be moving at a million miles a minute,
but not here, where it's run by the slow
hypnotic sway of the waves. The sky's deceptively blue.
A couple of seagulls struggle in the subzero winds.
They should've gotten out of here by now. I should've too.
A few brown leaves linger in the trees. Like them, I'm stuck,
late for work, because my car doors are frozen shut,
waiting for the starting gun of the rising sun
to go off and defrost.
I go to my car, prop the passenger door open,
slide to the driver's side, and turn the key. The car won't run.

—JOEY GOODALL, ST. PAUL, MN
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Bridge

Your river is wide and braided with sand,
isles and eagles, ice floes and snow—
and only one passage across.

I face you like a firing squad each night—
you with your cone of oncoming cars and massive trucks.
Whose unflinching wheel will I meet
halfway across?

But *you*, it is not you who chooses sides.
You hold both sides as best you can—green ribbon of steel,
unspooled across this wide expanse.

You are a fretwork of iron and grace,
so quietly here and becoming
only in solitude
a harp, a song, a swirled shell
in the wind's hand.

I think of this when your mouth
organ opens at the edge of the night,
when a train of cars behind me growls at my pace,
and I scan your current cargo for a truck.

It's then I try imagining your song,
ignoring that which lies behind, ahead, and noticing
only you. But there is no music yet.

You wait for the last car to disembark, to disappear.
You wait for the clear air and then you wait
for the emptiness between the stars: just space *now* and dark enough
to sing.

—MARY MERCIER, MADISON, WI

The Grip Of Snow And Ice

There are nine trumpeter swans persevering on a nearby pond.
In the bitter cold, I could freeze the image for later warmth.
A frozen lake lies on one side of the road,
spring fed open water on the other. I locate half
a parking spot, where winter drift conceals a sloping ditch.
I pull forward, sliding, to where snow and ice can claim me.

I don't like getting stuck. "Cars aren't always superior to sleds,"
I tell my freeloading dogs, half-wishing they could pull me free.
Rocking the car, teased by the frugality of motion, gives false hope.
A kind woman driving past stops and says,
"My daughter drove off this road into the lake.
Lucky it was frozen. The county should do something about it."

Stuck! I don't like getting stuck. Did I already say that?
The county should do something about it.
At least they could put up a sign.

CAUTION: DONT DRIVE INTO THE LAKE
But I need another kind of sign.
CAUTION: CLEAR THE COBWEBS OUT OF YOUR BRAIN
When I take my pictures, the snow white swans
are all gripped by the snow white ice.

It's like the cold air is pushing their long necks
and slender heads tight to the tops of their bodies.
**CAUTION: IF YOU ARE A SWAN, MAYBE YOU SHOULD
CONSIDER FLYING SOUTH FOR THE WINTER**
My hands were cold, the pictures without distinction.
CAUTION: NATURE MAY NOT PERFORM ON REQUEST

A good man with a pickup truck and chain
rescued me from my signless bog in the nick of time,
before I was forced to abandon my sled
and eat my dogs. I shook his hand a little too hard.
**CAUTION: A MAN WHO SHAKES YOUR HAND
TOO VIGOROUSLY MAYBE
SHAKING OFF THE GRIP OF SNOW AND ICE.**

The county would never put up that sign.
Way too many words. Someone might
drive into the lake just trying to read it.

—JIM PRICE, DRESSER, WI

Arabella at the Bird Mound

She nestles in the wing-curve
of the effigy mound
as twilight falls,
still as death
while her husband calls.

She'll answer soon
but not just yet.

Fireflies are flitting,
the grass is wet,
evening dew settling equally
on the ground, the ancient mound,
and on her.

If she could just drink a quench of dew,
salt her eyes with a sprinkle of stars,
inhale the exhalations of a mountain bog.

In her heart, the hubbub of the herony
at hatching time—
sea wrack and driftwood, frogs and toads,
voles and minnows,
dragonflies, jet-black crows.

She does not know why at dusk
the fibers of herself go so alarmingly slack.

Now he has a flashlight from the truck,
a beam of light piercing the dark,
a lighthouse beacon sweeping
the saltwater cove.

She rises, preens her dress's folds,
answers at last,
striding barefoot across
the cold, wet grass.

She is what he seeks;
he who she consoles,
confused and baffled in his bulk
of bone and flesh.

His arm around her,
a cloak, a curtain, a screen,
his muscles strong
as rope.

—TIMOTHY WALSH, MADISON, WI

Birds, Wintering

Fat breasted doves bob
on wires strung from yard to yard.
They teeter, tails up,
heads down, tails down, heads up,
until the lines are stilled.

Barred owls, wing shadows
circling wide and slow,
scour the soybean fields for mice.
All things colored in earth tones,
brown and rust, ochre and cream.

Frenzied starlings pluck
and swallow, ingest lipids
from dogwood berries,
food sought by migrating birds.
But starlings refuse to leave.

—ANNA BELLAMY LUCAS, MADISON, IN

Winter Crows

They are impatient, pacing
in their silken topcoats,
and eyeing the snow field
picked clean as a martyr's skull.

They've spent the brief winter day
discussing Lizzie Borden's funeral
arrangements, and now it is darkening.
But in July, the green corn

will be endless, and there will be only one
mad painter, with only one ear left,
to hear their wings
scythe the air.

—RICHARD HEDDERMAN, WAUWATOSA, WI

One... or The Other

Wait for Spring

In January the unburied dead
Stacked in their coffins
God knows where
Wait for spring.

So, don't hurry.
Watch the squirrels and the cardinal.
Let the aide wheel you down to the atrium
Where sun pours through high windows
And visitors come in, stomping off their boots.

Sip from your mug.
Breathe deeply.
Sleep soundly.
Call me daughter.
Wait for spring.

—ESTER PRUDLO, FITCHBURG, WI & MONTGOMERY, AL

Anyone who spends time around them knows how feisty and pugnacious hummingbirds are, and if they were much larger we'd probably be in trouble if we got in their way.
— Ohio Department of Natural Resources

One: Of hummingbirds,
loveliest of the summer,
beauty of the free
flying within the space
of their so little life,
I sing.

Wanderers of
the very clear, clean,
purpose of the
nature of themselves...

The Other: ... pugnacious wee ones,
battering and battling
down a course of sure intent
to displace, turf, and set upon,
launch against and fight,
no respite. If they were big
as life...

One: ... the very miracle
and mystery of it,
the perfect touch of
splendor upon the landscape life of it;
the glory burnished in
the zunzun flight of it...

The Other: ... the nastiness of beak,
the proboscis most ferocious,
the tune and tenor of a fractious flight
— all worthy of a bad child's
book of beasts.

In this our time,
they are a hot pepper warning
to our kind; nasty little warriors,
with their snarled habits
running down the heart's
cramped flow.

One: Come now.
Some things are better left
to the unspoken,
and to the forever caught
of the forever flying
in time's hover;

the way the hummer
stays itself in stilly flight,
a beauty—

Hummingbird

“... my child a gift, a grace of short measure.”

The large cage of my garage holds you puzzled.
Always before up has equaled out.
Again and again you bump your muzzled
will against the hard cloud of ceiling, route-

wrong, though my grief wills you home. A bouquet
meant for the guest room all I can think to try—
something of your world, scent and sway,
I hope will lead you past panic to your life.

Resting on wires for the electric
door opener are your precise, small parts:
folded parasol of wings, needle beak,
smallest motor of your heart.

So like the child once caught in a hospital
room. And for the next hour I move the vase
from car to garbage can to ladder's tall-
est tread because I could not save the baby.

My fear: so slight a life will spend all
its energy trying to get out. Then
after endless bumbling, you find the wall
of air and are gone for home again.

—PAULA SCHULZ, SLINGER, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

The Other: — or aggression's ugly truth.

—BARBARA LIGHTNER, MILWAUKEE, WI

Their season together

The pair of pelicans
swiftly skim the surface
of the calm Gulf seas,

holding their wingspans
rigidly horizontal,
as they soar along

in perfect sync with
each other in search for
fish for their offspring;

they rise up together
riding high
on the warm thermals,

the male of the two
dives down,
plunging into the water;

resurfacing to the top,
stuck in the muck
of our crude oil mess.

The female circles
around and around,
seeing the struggle below,

finally, she seals her fate
by diving down
to join her troubled mate.

—CHARLES PORTOLANO, FOUNTAIN HILLS, AZ

The eagle in the red pine watches

The eagle in the red pine watches
two fishermen on opposite sides
of the Rainbow Flowage feel a tug
on their lines
A thirty-inch Northern
its sides flashing in sunlight

They don't realize that they are fighting
the same fish
who leaps high above the roiling water
spits both hooks and disappears
into the rapids near the rocks

—ALAYNE PETERSON, GREENBUSH, WI

We Gave You to the Wind

You did not break the string
but when we let it run
you bounded for the clouds
with such joy we vowed
we would not reel you in,
you would not feel a tug.

We gave you to the wind,
Mother, let you soar—
stick, string, bones, flesh,
offered to a gust for ferrying
to where, presumably, your
life began and ran to.

We did not cling to you.
Would you have wanted
that? We each thought not,
your one foot always
stepping off the earth, the
other thinly rooted here.

I miss you, though it's hard
to grasp vapor. Sometimes,
briefly, I feel your hand on
my forehead. Rarely, you
call my name. Actually, that's
plenty, Mother. Thank you.

—GEORGIA RESSMEYER, SHEBOYGAN, WI
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History VI

wrens are kings
los hacendados
rule the woods
cardinals scarlet
knights slashing snow-
tapestries over pines
gone in the winds
no one knows
who I am
briefly
been

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

The Breath of Houses

The breath of houses is often sweet.
Sometimes, at dusk, they exhale

a waft of laundry, baking, woodsmoke.
A lone walker sees through their lit windows

a family at table, an old man reading,
a woman kneeling to lay logs in a fireplace,

a middle-schooler practicing the piano.
The walker sees her own breath on the air.

At nightfall other people's lives seem so inviting,
so untroubled, so secure. Although perhaps

the girl stumbling through a tinny "Für Elise"
is losing herself the only way she knows how.

The old man is reading his oncology report.
The woman kneeling has quarreled with her son

and has arthritis in her hands, which hurt.
The husband texted his lover before dinner.

Still, the central heating purrs. Meals occur.
There is milk. There are beds to sleep in

and clean clothes, in these our only,
our miraculous, our onion-scented homes.

—CATHERINE JAGOE, MADISON, WI

Home

is the next threshold
Useful for rotating art
For changing bathroom tiles
For constant cleaning

Evanescence four walls
and multiple beds
A storage place for memories
A haven of possibility
A faulty refuge from terror

It is a declaration
Permanent as a cloud
Swayable as subway straps
As grasping hands swing
at each stop or
sudden start.

—E. O. LIPCHIK, MILWAUKEE, WI

Birdbath

Tonight, you chat as you splash,
so pleased to break away,
away from the thicket,
beyond branches and brush,

far from the forest
and the tiresome back and forth,
to this basin. Your bib beads
with water, your black cap drips

as you dip, and while you bathe,
your body pitches with pleasure.
Dee-dee-dee, you whistle.
Your feathers flutter, carefree

you call, *chick-a-dee-dee-dee!*
Tonight, you escape
gaping beaks
for a moment or two.

—JEANNIE E. ROBERTS, CHIPPEWA FALLS, WI
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One Bird Flapping

One bird flapping outside the window
Of a high rise apartment
Music desperately contained in one room
Where nearby the train whistles
Restless in the morning sun rays
While cars crisscross the matrix of streets

I am not wrong.

It matters that I stand in relation to the prism
The city high in the air
The sky with fair weather
Coffee in my steady hand
Steam lifts the landscape
Busses are regular
Across the hills so green

While the sun glints the freeway
An immigrant is in his room
Noting the bronze décor
Slowly slips on a white sock on the left foot
The tea steams to hold up the morning air
Last night's mahjong game is still fresh in mind

Someone won, someone lost
Someone's room inflates, another's deflates

—KOON WOON, SEATTLE, WA
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Basket Case

She's going to hell
in a balloon of hot air, staring down
at the ants on the ground,
the pound of palms
on the edge of the basket.
Sandbags filled with bottles and pills
drag her down, up,
her heart on her tongue, with her fire
above, and her rapture beneath.

Aerial earthquakes shake
away her thoughts,
leaving the liquid thirsty in her head--
misplaced, this brain,
this crane, dominion.

—NICHOLE RUED, WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WI
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The Moth

And when we returned
And the dark and dank collided
With the timeless light of buzzing
Florescent tubes above honeycomb screens
Mottled by the litter of summer's excess

And when we returned to
Our unlit, unvented home
Stale with the garlic, onions, and curry
Last cooked the night before we left
And we left our home available
For an unexpected guest

And when we returned
And returned light and air
With a shuddering leap and frantic flight
Powder wings, sticky feet and all
Hurtled intermittently at you

Window Strike

I picked up another one, this time a Hermit Thrush
or was it a Wood? The dapples point to the first,
splotches of here and there that assist in survival

but not against
windows.

Not the first, nor the last. Soft in my hands, warmed by the sun
a loaf from the oven ready for the dinner table. No invitation necessary.
No formal attire, no knives or forks. Let the mandibles, the decomposing saliva
do their work. Free meal for heaven and earth.

The skulls of others rest on my cabinet, directly above mythology and fairy tales.
I just honored two more: a goldfinch and a redstart. Last year was a house sparrow who
now resides on an empty bottle of Amontillado.

The sizes of the skulls haunt me, splotches of here and there.

The thrush now rests, neck snapped and beak bloodied, under a cluster of shrubs.
She fades in recesses of the dying sunburst leaves, amongst the mandibles and decomposing saliva.

One eye shut, one open.

I felt it important to keep her open eye upward, black as pitch but reflecting what is above.
Time ticks past the wren, now the bluebird and blackbird
and onto meadowlark to complete the cycle.
The thrush is no longer keeping time.

She will join the mythology as winter approaches, after heaven and earth.

—JAMES REITTER, SHEBOYGAN, WI

And when I thought I had halted its flight
And signaled the all clear
And when we returned to our normal life
Out from the dust bunnies erupted our dun guest
Sputtering abruptly in an abortive leap
Landing quick in the dark beneath the chair

And when I went again to halt its life
And searched in the dark and shadow
Swatting bat blind with a hand towel
Stooped supplicant before the chair, a
Slight shadow arced fretfully behind

—SEAN BUTNER, GREEN BAY, WI
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On My Daughter Falling Asleep While Gripping My Shirt

Her fabric-filled hand holds fast
grasps the front of my shirt as she falls
into sleep. Why can't we leap into sleep?
Or climb and find ourselves
exposed on the great face of Everest
where I am the legendary Sherpa, Tenzig Norgay
lying alert at 29,000 oneiric feet?

Even in this thin breath
the central air (set in the seventies
for the summer) threatens to blow us off
the mattress—sheets, pillows, bedframe
crashing down toward base camp, a dream
avalanche smothering crampons and rope
house pets encased in gortex cocoons.

Extreme heights call for extreme care
an anchored heart keen to hang
upside down from the firmament
so when you save your little Edmund Hillary
she will glimpse your hands above her
reaching down, amazingly, *toward* the clouds
to pluck her from a crevasse of clamor, cold monsters.

I have things to do on the world's first floor—
write poems, read books, map out the treacherous terrain
professed to excess in my other life as a guide
pay bills, craft lists, check the silent boxscores of games
played in distant time zones, open my pores
to the news of men who leave other men
to die and petrify while racing to their own summits—

yet here, upstairs, sleeping child to my chest
high on the mountain of the east people
I am Tenzig Norgay, who at this height
ascends to patron saint of parenthood
moving wide awake through adult life at altitude
mere feet from a canopy of nightlight-cast galaxies
conqueror of bad dream edema.

The rewards of the summit come easy
but dropping down, the descent into nightmare
is a guide's true work, earned inch by shuffled inch
over archetypal fears deliberate as glaciers
in their upheaval. Child, you will lift the snow's eyelids
and walk into the pitched sleep of warm tents
you will dream the warm tea you have yet to taste.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI

A Watched Pot

At times I am an egg in a pot,
submerged in the screams of a child,
sometimes more than one child.

In the crying heat I feel
my agitated atoms begin to shake
their rattles at the wolves of wild fever,
the gargoyles of pus-pouring ears,
night terrors begetting terrors.

In the bubbling dark of steaming screams you
learn matter without mortar, what seemed
a sealed border, a wall, widens enough
for a legion of you's to file through,
armed to the clenched teeth in a lawless state.

There, boiling, the unthinkable
confides in you like an old friend,
borrows your voice to say I understand now
how a parent pounds their child, shaking
shut up I love you shut up I love you
until molecules hush.
Stable, cradled peace.

For a moment this all makes sense,
as clear as a commandment from the old God:
Thou shalt keep your children quiet.

But that is just the mind bouncing
in its thin shell, the jostle and tap
against the pot's conductive metal.
Minus all this meditation the physics are basic:
I boil quick and hard and through,
so when you peel my skin
I retain my human shape.

—CHUCK RYBAK, ONEIDA, WI

Air fern grows in glass
on laminated table
Dirt-stained green carpet

—ELLARAINIE LOCKIE, SUNNYVALE, CA
visit *VW Online* for audio by this author

Mountain Man

Hiding in the crags of my being,
warmed by the silt of its caves,
a new upheaval of raw earth unlikely
as a shadow crosses the face of the mountain
on her way to bed.

—TIM HAWKINS, ROCKFORD, MI

The Museum of Gradual Decay

Nobody comes to visit us
the way they used to,
to admire the great ruins of our kitchen table,
the fallen-down-at-the-center counters,
the ash of piano-competition smiles.
The black spot left by a dinner jacket,
the rubble of an early afternoon breeze,
the gray pebble that was once an anniversary—
all of them aching absent-mindedly, awaiting their patrons.

The Museum of Gradual Decay is open,
but even the press hardly bothers us anymore.
The roofless apartment blanched by the sun,
the couch weathered limp at its center,
the table where so many sat,
only wear their loss and shiver empty with the hours.
Echoes congregate with the wind.
Sometimes a stray visitor stops by
on his way to the Great Machine, or between shows,
to hear the old spectral aura, the particular silence
that can only exist in a place like this.
Today, a man in a gray trench coat:
his head lowers, filled just now
with a sorrow so big no poem can contain it.
He sits for a long time in the curtained dark;
emerges, as a moth beating out its bulk.
His features contort to a gambler's smile,
his arms ease as if sensing their weight.
This, he knows, is the way it's always been...
So he nods, slips in a few tattered bills.
Straightens his uniform, and returns to the warehouse.
He avoids the eyes of two women passing
as he descends the stairs.

That night, the stars are too noisy to sleep.
The windows of his room open up to an endless sun-drought,
which he enters—he winds out to the street.
Secretly taken, emptied out of words,
he goes barefoot into Prospect Park
where seagulls' wings beat their own small darkness
and the just-flood of Lake Michigan touches and leaves its sand.
For hours he waits there, unmoved
with the trial and rigor of daily expense,
or the movement of polities along its Ouija board,
or the sundry articles of self-perfection:
against it all, among so many absences,
a whole universe of lost and unfinished things,
how he wades out, knee-deep into the blankets of water,
and stares out long at the vacancy of the moon.
Comes back simply as a folk-song.

Walking blankly, light over the squares and cobbles—
he begins his song, of how everything goes.

—DAVID LURIE, MILWAUKEE, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Mutual

In a big muddy field two sorrel Belgian mares
stand shoulder to shoulder in early spring sun
the wind cold out of the northwest
great yellow teeth bared
clacking in time as each
scratches the other's
high withers
eyes closed
finds just
the right
spot

—ALAYNE PETERSON, GREENBUSH, WI

Strong Mustard

The sudden smoky burst
of bitter sweetness clarifies

my taste, for a believing
moment, the way our words

make dolphins happen
if we let them. One night

on the beach, they came
surprising, splashing in the sunset

waves. We couldn't hold them,
only watch; the sharp taste

of the sea opening our eyes,
so gladly burning.

—NORMAN LEER, MADISON, WI

No Slants of Light

So I have this friend
who thinks that windows
are morbid. She built
her house without any,
just lots of bare bulbs,
hanging like dejected suns
waiting for moths to kiss them
and flame out. I asked her
why once.
We aren't close, but she
still answered, said
she didn't like how
windows show that there is
so much more.

—CHLOE CLARK, NEW LISBON, WI

Sight Lines

Whenever we get together, my sister goes on
about the beauty of rapids, puddles, ripples. She speaks
of a thunderstorm that *announces a rainbow*
or of a *sprightly* trout run behind her barn. If a cold autumn
kills her young sycamore, it doesn't matter
because the stream remains a *fisherman's paradise*.
During droughts, the brook becomes a *rivulet* connected
to Lake Oneida, where she and her husband spend
the summer months. My sister welcomes
thaws as *water scrawls*, calls a drop of water
courageous for opening an ice dam to light.
She refers to hot springs as *vapor prayers*, to runnels
as *infant waterfalls*, and to a month of drizzle
as an *April shower*. Water-soaked Communion wafers
she describes as *doubly holy*. Lovely enough stuff,

while a few yards from my cabin on this slough of the Hudson
silt and slime and sludge congeal into a beige paste
that settles behind abandoned backwater shacks.
Last week I wrote my sister about the snapping turtle I found
upside-down at the edge of a jetty, claws gnawed, stomach
gutted by hovering buzzards. The odor of the swamp
across the road causes my eyes to water. Marsh grass
strangles lily pads that used to float on the surface.
Three miles north, the river unfolds into a pastel fan. But here
the channel narrows, slackens, spawns a greasy sheen.
Every Easter I vow to visit a pastor. Always, a sheath
of fog sets down, like a swarm of black flies.
I could drive through the darkness to Mass,
though, as I tell my sister, I never go. When she asks me why,
I remember the bloated carp in the shallows. *It's the things I see*, I say.

—RICHARD MERELMAN, MADISON, WI

Soul Pane

The window to his soul
is small, soot covered
and very hard to open.

Its counterweights broke long ago;
he meant to fix them but
it was easier to leave the window shut.

Every time someone opens it
they see the real him
so he slams it on their fingers.

The drapes are drawn
most of the time
shut to the sunlight of others.

His soul resents the isolation
and wishes a pane would break
or the drapes would catch fire.

—JIM LANDWEHR, WAUKESHA, WI

Personal Ads

I like people with scars,
she tells me, matter of fact

as one plus one. I
like people with half
moon flecks in their finger-
nails, I tell her, trying
to bluff with some
innocuous attraction.

She rolls her eyes,
vitamin deficiency is
so yesterday but scars are
forever like diamonds,
like dirt, like the edge
of the world in paintings.

—CHLOE CLARK, NEW LISBON, WI

Reparation

You owe me,
now that you're gone.
So I'm going to capture that day—
that hot afternoon we got lost
on a gravel county road
I couldn't find on any map.

When I'd given up all hope,
I looked over at you,
your face covered with a fine
powder of dust from the open window,
your hands slick with sweat as you clutched
the wheel. And just then

you gave in to
that surprising urge
to stop the car
to wander in some stranger's field
of sunflowers, ignoring black clouds
in the distance that soon
trapped us by the fence
with its rusty barbed wire—

In the end,
I'll shelter there
with you again
under the plum tree,
its late summer leaves
leaking rain in our hair.

—NANCY JESSE, MADISON, WI

To Market

A silver cattle rig, zephyr
out of November's darkness,
rolls quietly past my car,
belying squalls of fear churning
inside its captives.
The smell of manure
swells the air,
ends my hope
the transport is empty.

All the cattle I've ever known
and those who have graced my plate
begin to low into the night.
A raw wind rides in,
reduces me, once again,
to making solemn promises.

—JUDY KOLOSSO, SLINGER, WI

Lightning

Behind the eyes its lingering flash,
and on the arms small hairs
rising without permission.
The bowling ball bangs down
a dozen wooden steps, crashes
and something splits apart.
The grandfather pine sizzles now
in hard drops that fling themselves at us.
The ghost in the family tree, the rumors
the old fury searches us out again.
A siren winds itself up and unspools its long wail
along the hill toward that house that looks down
on the rest. Self-important small ideas
cross themselves out and my poise,
like an outfit brand new, falls away
as in one of those dreams where I show myself—
naked, tender, weak, mortified.

—GINNY LOWE CONNORS, WEST HARTFORD, CT
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Lushlife

*I need the old-time density...the dirt...
the noise through the floor.*

Robert Creeley

I'm accustomed to this life: skyscrapers,
rooftop ballrooms and cemeteries
full of gangsters and poets.
With all the beauty of the country—
alfalfa's greening breath, wheat's golden sash,
dawn—a blank canvas—
I'm too far gone. I need drawn boundaries:
war memorials, cheap cafeterias,
and smoke stacks from the iron works.

A quiet hush in late hours, I savor
all that background noise: the tired waitress
locking up for the night,
the welcome click of radiators,
the whir of electric fans,
the growl of gutters in a sudden storm.

And in winter, I expect soot,
grime, pink cinders on sidewalks,
cold engines warming in narrow garages,
streetlights outlining dreams
on frozen glass. Late, drifting to sleep,
I crave my torn shade,
the blue crunch of tires on snow.

—JEANINE STEVENS, SACRAMENTO, CA

Still

In a pottery class, a boy made a blue-green cup handle
without the cup.

Now I have it
in my kitchen to hold a cloth my cousin wove
from ruby-grass,
one lupine neatly shattered in.

How far our imaginations have taken us.

How far
the path of a bee from that of a search engine,
but still both as delicate as
unruly sparks in the brain.

history XXII, bearded in the mirror

on various occasions I've feared
I looked like Lenin or Tennyson
the grizzled Franz Hals
hoped maybe Monet
at best the anarchist-artist Pisarro
my grandson says Marx

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

How different would we be though
if each night we still had to light a lamp?
We might really be hungry,
and want to sketch in our journals
if we had to walk through the hemlock woods
to arrive at a little store.

☞ The Nightmare School Where You Taught

I would take notes in perfect penmanship: *When I was out collecting wildflowers to press, I saw the same indigo bunting I saw yesterday in my Emerson.*

I would know linotypes better than my nieces' names,
touch the paper as if I were
pouring flour back into a canister.

I think of poems
that can still be written, inventions near the greats,
like couplets with every other word as *leaf*,
or *violet* permeating each line, blossoming through the poem like ink
that once brimmed from our uncontrollable fountain pens.

But I still want stanzas that can be counted on,
that can not be removed easily. I feel
there is something like linen in the formal,
the long skirt barely touching the river.

I like the blurriness of the bathroom mirror
at my age, and its steam.

A girl in a painting class is burning her lines with a stick of incense
inside her still life.

—NANCY TAKACS, WELLINGTON, UT

The principal looked
like Alfred Hitchcock and the
Copenhagen Tobacco Factory
next door exported its heavy
cloying odor to every classroom
in the building. It was like going
to your grandmother's on
Sundays where your Uncle Phil
sat sunken on the couch with
doilies at the back of his head
puffing on a White Owl Cigar
sending rivers of curly smoke
rolling your way. He'd open
his cardboard cigar box, run

his fingers over his treasure
each with a paper band—an
owl printed on it—and there it
would be, the heavy, leafy,
sweet aroma that years later
you'd stumble into at the school
where every December the
factory sent over boxes of toys
and mothers stood in front
of the gym-turned-into-assembly
distributing dolls or model
airplane kits as if that would
make up for the lost cause of
taking a deep breath of clean air.

—KAREN LOEB, EAU CLAIRE, WI

Shiny Things

I hide coins for my son to find
drop nickels 'round the playground swing
seed quarters under sawdust by the slide
place dimes beside the whirlawheel
I act surprised when he discovers
a penny along the woodchip trail
delight in the excitement on his face
his lucky smile finding unexpected shiny things

I seek objects that shine
collect and hold them in my hands
assorted coins that shimmer
crows so bright they start
the fire burning in the sky
my son his brilliant eyes
I turn them in the light
then hide them in my heart

Missing a Spot

I wipe and dry the casserole dish
that fancy one with the see-through glass cover
and as I reach to put it in the cupboard
I discover I remember aunt nancy

now she's been gone forever
yet there she was
in the kitchen telling me
I missed a spot

they never really ever
go away do they

one touch recalls a thought
a thought a notion
the notion a feeling
the feeling an emotion

so then we cry or not or smile
mostly somewhere in between

and when you go
waterfall everything
will remind me of you

BRUCE DETHLEFSEN

WISCONSIN POET LAUREATE

Gone to Ground

it takes a patch of soil
some water and the sun
to raise a plant
you make decisions
how much this and that
you feed the youngster
clear the weeds
you tend to pay attention

now there he lies my son
fenced in and covered in the bed
his bandaged head
gauze white and crusted red
his eyes taped shut
a glut of tubes
around his nose and mouth

I make my three decisions
first no more resuscitations
save your breath stand down
go call the donor folks
it's almost harvest time
and last at ease
unplug all those machines
please stop that awful hissing sound
what's grown so loved is gone to ground

I try to find a place
a somewhere on his face
to plant my final kiss

Bruce Dethlefsen was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1948 and moved to Wisconsin in 1966. He is Wisconsin Poet Laureate for 2011/2012, under the sponsorship of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Bruce's poems have been featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac* and *Your Daily Poem*, where he was Poet-of-the-Month. Bruce also performs original music with Bill Orth as *Obvious Dog* on Cathryn Cofell's CD, *Lip*.

His new collection, *Unexpected Shiny Things*, is now available from Cowfeather Press (www.cowfeatherpress.org).

THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS & LETTERS

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters announced last summer that it will steward the Wisconsin Poet Laureate position and provide staff support for the Poet Laureate Commission. "The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is more than just a symbolic appointment," says Wisconsin Academy executive director Margaret Lewis. "The poet laureate plays a crucial role in keeping the arts accessible and vital—to all age groups—and acts as a statewide emissary for poetry and creativity. The Wisconsin Academy will support the Poet Laureate Commission for the foreseeable future in order to ensure the survival of this meaningful program." As part of the new stewardship arrangement, the Wisconsin Academy will provide space for Wisconsin Poets Laureate both past and present and related Poet Laureate Commission information on their website, provide publicity for the current poet laureate, and aid in the search and selection of future poets laureate. In addition the Wisconsin Academy will act as the Poet Laureate Commission's fiscal sponsor, accepting charitable contributions on behalf of the Commission in order to pay expenses related to Wisconsin Poet Laureate activities as well as to enhance the Commission's growing endowment. "The Poet Laureate Commission is extremely pleased that the highly respected Wisconsin Academy stepped forward as steward of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate program after Governor Walker discontinued the State's stewardship," says Poet Laureate Commission co-chair Jane Hamblen. "The program has selected four distinguished poets laureate over the last decade. The relationship with the Wisconsin Academy will allow this celebration of poetry and creativity in Wisconsin to continue for many years to come."

About the Wisconsin Academy: Founded in 1870, the Wisconsin Academy applies the sciences, arts, and letters to bring context, civilized discussion, and meaningful action to the most important issues and ideas of today. It creates spaces—public forums, art galleries, publications—where citizens join together to examine the challenges of our times, suggest solutions, and look at the world in new ways. It celebrates and preserves Wisconsin's human, cultural, and natural resources. In this way the Wisconsin Academy connects people and ideas for a better Wisconsin. Wisconsin Academy programs include the James Watrous Gallery at the Overture Center for the Arts, a gallery by and for Wisconsin artists; Wisconsin People & Ideas, a quarterly magazine about Wisconsin thought and culture; Academy Evenings, a statewide series of public forums; and the Wisconsin Idea, a public policy program—the most recent of which focuses on "The Future of Farming and Rural Life in Wisconsin." For more information on programs and events, or to become a member of the Wisconsin Academy, visit wisconsinacademy.org.

About the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission: The Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission is the volunteer selection and support body for the Wisconsin Poet Laureate. Governor Tommy Thompson created the commission on July 31, 2000, and Governor Jim Doyle renewed the Commission's charter during his term. Five statewide organizations—the Council for Wisconsin Writers, the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and the Wisconsin Arts Board—were directed to appoint members to the Poet Laureate Commission. The Commission's duties are to plan and conduct the poet laureate selection process, assign responsibilities to the new poet laureate, and assist that individual in performing official duties. The Wisconsin Poet Laureate is asked to contribute to the growth of poetry in this state, plan and attend at least four statewide literary events each year, and perform in at least four government, state, and civic events as requested by Wisconsin school systems, libraries, and literary organizations.

Anniversary

I punch in contacts
and dial up my dead
son's phone number
as I drive by
his house on admiral
where of course he doesn't
live there any more
but cell phones are after all
miraculous devices

I park my car
and admire the lawn
green smooth clean cut
mown grass the smell
of grass just mown
the phone rings and rings
the edges of the lawn
are perfectly trimmed
how neat
how awfully admirable

Wealthy

after my reading
a very serious sixth grade girl
asked me if I was wealthy
well I said I have twenty-two
dollars in my wallet right now
my purple truck has two hundred
and thirty-five thousand miles on it
I'm wearing clean and mended clothes
I'll sleep in a warm bed tonight
I've got my health my hands my eyes
my family and friends who love me
and I can come here to sennett middle school
to read poetry to you guys for free
so yes I'm very wealthy
wealthy indeed

Varanasi

1.

In the city of death
the smell of burning bodies
wasn't like I thought it would be—
not like burning flesh at all,
benign smoke.

Corpses sheathed in saffron shrouds burn
over the wood of mango trees,
sandalwood for the wealthy.

Those bodies from families who cannot afford the wood
burn only half way before they are slid into this river.

Pregnant women, lepers,
those bitten by snakes, do not
get burned at all—
their corpses weighted down by bricks,
are thrown into the Ganges—

The day we arrived we looked down the Ghats
and saw the multitude—
colors and shapes in the river,
splashing wildly, scrubbing vigorously,
rubbing holy water through their skin
into their blood.

2.

At the bus stop today
as I hunched over in the rain, a
taxi sped by and sent a wave of brown
gutter water crashing on me like a sea wall.
I did not move stunned, I looked over
and saw a father and daughter who were splashed too
Except they were laughing, so I laughed,
and I remembered,
 the ecstasy on the faces of those souls
as they were purified in impure waters.

—KELLY MCNERNEY, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

When the cracks become
so deep the earth splits in two,
we're no longer whole.

—LIZ RHODEBECK, PEWAUKEE, WI

Chronoscope 32: Wisconsin Lovesong

Birds dusk disappear.
My mailing address heart
lives somewhere remote,
not even on a rural route
where barbed wire horses
chew into the tall grass
burn marks and hoof patterns
like mathematical symbols
for processes yet discovered.

—JOHN WALSER, FOND DU LAC, WI

Treeless

You lied to me about trees...
now, no branch will hold me
the way it used to because I know
the brittleness of limbs, which was never
so clear before falling came true
and the snap of timber was heard.
Long before there was a break
and the tiniest crack of a twig
had gone unnoticed.

But I was already stranded by then,
perched high in this grace of leaves
deceptively sheltered, soon
to be shaken by the sound
of wind, unaware you were capable
of lying. Even the tree is feeling betrayed,
weakened by loss of trust in what
was never promised. A gaggle
of winged things is flying overhead...

I'm not sure but something you once
called a breeze is causing us to lean
ever so slightly.

—CAROL LYNN GRELLAS, EL DORADO HILLS, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Flophouse

Knowledge is a dangerous thing: like this morning—
when he heard the door slither open, only
the evil hiss of air behind her to

confirm another empty place
in his life.

He is that mansion with many rooms,
none of them occupied, each a mute
testimony to the guests who once
slept here.

—G. A. SCHEINOHA, EDEN, WI

Escape Artist

In mid-sentence, before she could finish, I stopped listening, my mother's rambling tale of where she had traveled since my last visit, her escape from air tainted by an odor of stale urine, faint as her memory, hanging between us, between this visit and last, her journey in a past that never existed, that she creates, as real as her paintings moldering in damp basement corners, as my desire for her to stop, wink an eye, and let me know she still controls these visions she creates.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

Anniversary Poem

Snaking in between the rocks with his family in a creek somewhere in Virginia, my office-mate let his hand drift, half-open, and the current pulled at it, so gently he didn't notice when his wedding ring dropped off, and he swam back upstream in consternation, peering into crevices, till finally, miraculously, he saw a glint, deep under the sparks and ripples of the surface, and what was effortlessly lost was found more easily than expected. I remember that day 7 years ago, and how we'd found it and lost it and found it many times already by then, and have done so many times since, sinuous and buoyant in the current and forgetful, the band gleaming in the water and waiting for us to see.

—MOLLY WEIGEL, PENNINGTON, NJ
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Winter Coat Heavy

Around the middle of November here where the pale sunshine makes the sky the color of Chinese pottery, willows, streams, weeping cranes

and the green grass gives way to the bend and swirl of deerhide water and exploded cattails – the upper Midwest, the place where waters meet –

we gird ourselves
(a funny word, gird, not that often used, especially in warm places):

thermal socks, longjohns, t-shirt, flannel shirt, sweatshirt, wool sweater, wool jacket, scarf, parka, headband, earmuffs, balaclava, scarf, mukluks –

when I was little, we put our feet in grocery bags inside our snowboots –

I was not sure why – so that we tromped with a plastic crinkle that muted the crunch of the snowcrust –

and it all weighs on us, like wet rooftop snow, the shovel, icicles as long as grown men, the sunset at four in the afternoon, the walk from closed space to closed space, until pink thighed

but at night it all comes off, naked to the steam of a shower, to the dry heat of a thermostat pegged high just so I can feel a little sweat, and like in April my body sloughs off in flakes, in pine needles and cedar boughs.

—JOHN WALSER, FOND DU LAC, WI

Gust of wind strips leaves
from ash tree in autumn
Third chemo treatment

—ELLARAINIE LOCKIE, SUNNYVALE, CA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Truth in the Night

Out from the laundry
of dreams—
tossed from the dirt
and gunk of all you think

you've known and done,
there it is—
flapping on the clothesline of your mind—
sun-tipped, whole.

—ANDREA POTOS, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Walter's Failing Memory

Looking for dolphin tracks high above Wellington Harbour
Walter remembers not the splashing humps of actual dolphins
spotted one morning years earlier in an arctic fjord,
but a drier flatter time in south London prior to that accidental sighting,
a time when young Walter played ball, closed pubs,
touched basketball hoops without using a step ladder.

There, Walter knew a woman who flirted with him shamelessly.
He, in turn, was appalled. She flirted at the gym,
and Walter was appalled. She flirted in sandwich bars
near Catford dog track, and Walter was appalled.
In restaurants by Elephant and Castle, at the Thames barrier,
cornering her MG on Kent country roads:
appalled, appalled, appalled. It was particularly appalling
when she flirted on her motorcycle, and Walter behind
held on round her waist smelling carefully the black
leather jacket she claimed to wear strictly for protection.

Puzzled by timing and place, Walter wonders
why on a hiking trail a half-globe away
he remembers this litany of London flirtation.
Sheer absence of dolphins fails
to explain it, and alone on these tree-covered cliffs
not a woman's in sight, not a hint of flirtation.
The air is clean and nothing in this steep rocky topography
or the climbing residential avenues of Wellington itself
recalls the warrens of Southwark and Lewisham streets
where Walter suffered chronic, long-term attention.
So like lemming migration or dinosaurs' fall,
dolphin speech and dance language of bees
the workings of memory puzzle Walter and elude understanding.

—THOMAS LAVELLE, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Not until these stars began to cluster

did the first heart stir —even now
the sky rising and falling
brushing against just my finger.
I almost start a fire, almost not.

To point has always been dangerous
—even the firing squad needs protection
and I cover your eyes
—already one star stopped moving
no longer passes through your heart
falling from one place another
backwards into how far everything is,

the glove is useless, not yet wet
or cold or the morning whose light
was once a seed deep inside the Earth
—one finger still remembers the North Star
the exact distance and from your eyes
their vague breeze still climbing
taking the stone away from your stone
till nothing is left but the darkness
that used to be the sky on fire

—more than ever now
I walk at night as if I could
with just a simple touch
and from your heart a great morning
—all these stars —in a pack
and from my hand the sun
lifting you into mountains, wolves, flesh.

It takes time. Winters.
And the glove I left for you
somehow is blowing away.
They take so much time.

—SIMON PERCHIK, EAST HAMPTON, NY

Truth Is Short

Truth is short.
It points the way
Through breakers into port.
The lie is lengthy, serpentine, jabbers and prattles all day.
Truth is short.

—Don Thackrey, Dexter, MI

Questions

Picked out by a bus driver in
the rain of Iceland
an emigrant from
Canada my God who
emigrates from Canada? we
a political Mecca
drove past Haldor Laxness' house
Nobel laureate

I wanted
to stop, see it, my
camera out of film couldn't even take a photo
*

what I cannot keep in my
head is better lost If I
cannot remember it I
should forget
*

drove to fields of geysers
woman in a screaming red dress
late back to
and we were on such a tight
*

I live my life like this
IrunIrunIrun
I can't see it all the time
is too
I will die
*

Be sure to order the lamb soup I
did, folks, the lamb soup
though I am more or less a vegetarian
But when in Iceland
was worth the, etc., headlong, headland,
ice, glaciers at a
distance
*

Back home: or in : I say
to the innkeeper Thorey Bjarnadottir isn't that a
he never talked about the glaciers
melting
I wanted to know
*

Perhaps because it is a sensitive subject, Thorey said.
*

There have been in my life
far too many
sensitive
too many questions not asked.

—MARIE SHEPPARD WILLIAMS, MINNEAPOLIS, MN
visit *VW Online* for more work by this author

Clouds Speak

Clouds speak to me,
a low murmur I am sure
others can hear, grumbling
about something I failed
to do long ago, a sound
of a ladder sliding across
a tin roof, down clapboard
siding, that tattered rumble
as two ends slip toward
coincidence while I watch
distant detail rise into
focus until I can almost
touch them, and then
nothing. I have been
falling ever since, listening
for messages from above.

—RICK DINGES, LINCOLN, NE

Memory

The moonlight, at dusk,
seeps out of the earth's lip
touching my empty fall field,
my feet stumble over
yellow stubs still holding
the crinkling sound of cornstalks
that stood tall in the summer heat.
I sidestep through soft manure
spring lambs gone to market
begin to play in my memory.

I rewind my inner camera.
Sounds buried beneath my feet
start to murmur inside my head;
I hear deer skin drums
beat out the dance of the hunt,
a thundering sound of giants
being felled with a logger's ax,
and the snap of the wet sheets hung
by the farm wife's red raw hands,
the images unfold slowly reel by reel.

—NANCY PETULLA, MERRILL, WI

Darkness

darkness
starts pouring in
through the hole
broken in the light
I hear the trees
shivering in the wind
imagine
hundreds of beautiful women
running naked in the night
their laughter
floating through the air
now
doesn't that sound
more interesting
than the man
sitting at his desk
staring at the phone
because
it shows him the time

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL

everasps (20)

another wing of light
hurls across potato field
that holds pinkness
of a busted up china set.
time falls flat
on quartz, showing how
simply moments can shred us,
once lasting so fervently in
the field of wont,
& we somehow can't acknowledge
the broad sense within
as the silver clock
brokers with time;
its spoon handles trembling,
yet consistent in
its measured beat.

—GUY R. BEINING, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA

October

I drank
cheap red wine
from a plastic cup
outside
near my front door and
I watched the dust
rising up
from the fields
harvest was over
all the crops were gone and
everything
had been plowed under
waiting now
for the first snow to fall
it was getting late and
I felt drunk
I shivered
because the wind was cold

—JAMES BABBS, STANFORD, IL

Visible to the Naked Eye

What I remember from
the night we looked,
searched, hunted the
October sky for Halley's
Comet was not disappointment
in the blanket of clouds
over the stars no telescope
could penetrate, not the
waste of time the drive
turned out to be coming
from our home in concrete
Milwaukee to farm country
which could've been Mars
for all we knew, or cared.

No, what sticks out is
when mom turned the dome
light on in our station
wagon, I realized that
outside our car we were
the outsiders, that night
time was live or die for
creatures out there
among the kettles & moraines,
that our annoying trip
would just remind them
of the road where you
could die or not trying
to cross.

That's all that mattered,
matters, out there.

—JOSEPH BRIGGS, MADISON, WI

October 22, just after dawn

wreaths of mist
over the Mississippi
slivers of river islands
pale yellow-leaved
black-boned trees on shore
steep dusty hill prairies
sheltered by wind-scarred boulders
where I want to plant a tent or hut
to watch the world
move
above
below

—ROBERT SCHULER, MENOMONIE, WI

The Hangers-on

Last apples cling to a hibernating tree,
nature's Christmas bulbs:
so round and red they'll burst.
They're pretty, but I worry.

Some will stick it out until they shrivel,
sweetness turning acrid,
fermenting, becoming ruddy and drunk.

But eventually, the angry little tipplers
will get bitter, lose their grip,

and fall.

—JOEY GOODALL, ST. PAUL, MN
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Mapmaking

This page, rough
and full of teeth,
collects our dust, our wisdom,
and like fools we trudge ahead,
blind lovers, led
by a fate
we can't quite give into.

I trace our path,
that crazy route that took us
into the depths, black
and full of scars. Scar tissue
doesn't give, you said,
we'll never tunnel through.

Looking back at the light,
our shadows led the way,
like the westward traveler
at seven a.m. on an early
June day. The water's
just ahead, we said, black
and full of scars. Scar tissue

floats, you said, and we built a raft
so no one could follow us.
We've left no tracks, and a page
shouldn't shimmer the way an ocean
does.
How can I map this, I ask.

—CHRISTA GAHLMAN, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

At the Vernal Equinox

For Robin

Winter's end. The time of year
when nearly everyone I know

is still going away: the Florida Keys,
Cancun, St. Bart's, Belize.

Places now warm
because of the pitch of the earth.

But I love the honey of you,
the bee-smoke of your skin,

and this equinox between us,
toward which we tilt and shudder.

—RICHARD HEDDERMAN, WAUWATOSA, WI

On the Road

the two of us
humming down
a wet road
first snow
falling
from
the dove
colored sky
Sibelius
adding
his melancholy
to the day
*what else
is there
to believe in?*

—SHARON AUBERLE,
SISTER BAY, WI

All this ocean and still more thirst

—the Earth longing for rain
the way trees have never forgotten
the sun wants its leaves returned

—it's natural you number these stones
to dampen your lips, count the nights
it did not rain —your fingers kept open

so
drop by drop in your small, red pail.

What you collect from this beach
surrounds the Earth that sees itself
in the rain still on its way
still further than the stars

—before the first rain
those stones already gathered
must have known their clouds
would settle on your lips
as drought :the dim breath
that welcomed you and season.

—SIMON PERCHIK, EAST HAMPTON, NY

Marilyn Hacker the Water-Carrier

All day, her head is full of thoughts of her,
spilling like nectar, pencils, papers, keys,
rolling like berries, neighborhood a blur
back of the idle window blinds. The bees,
as busy as they are, when polled, concur
a warmer spring is carried on her breeze
and sweeter flowers make her hive of rhyme.
Taste it now or in your own sweet time.

You write her. She writes you. Some thus and such
exchanged, until the emails reach an end.
For everything, you thank her very much.
It seems she isn't looking for a friend,
or misses what she cannot see and touch.
There are no sentiments you didn't send
(perhaps some foolishness that you'd take back)
where health and wealth crisscross in Zodiac.

—MARY MERIAM, EAGLE ROCK, MO

Judy Grahn the Goat

Slowly the hour hands begin to creep
to dike o'clock. The Queen of Wands awaits,
there where the lowly workers herd the sheep.
She taps each top and lets them through the gates,
there with the drinks of joke and coke. Then leap
to taxi-driving, streets of wheels and weights,
there where the hungry no ones wander past,
there where the lost in me finds you at last.

She who by the seaside did get smitten
rides a coded boat in sailor prose.
On every little fishy it is written
what every flying fisher lady knows:
if by a damsel dally you are bitten,
press daily with the petals of a rose.
Oh foolish common woman in the sky,
you are the Venus apple of my eye.

—MARY MERIAM, EAGLE ROCK, MO

The Dwindling Fish

A couple days ago when I was down
in the General Store buying an
overpriced diet Coke, Laura drew my
attention to the turtle tank stocked
with goldfish. I witnessed one of the snappers
in action, chomping off the tail
of an already injured fish. This
early evening I stopped again to
have a laugh with the pretty & good-natured
Laura. All afternoon she camps
out on the radiator in the window
working her number puzzles. Miscellaneous
young men come in to chat,
though she's made it known that
she has a boyfriend. The turtles
seem to be getting bigger.
The dwindling fish
huddle at one end under the lamp
supplying poor heat on this cold night.

—PETER J. GRIECO, BUFFALO, NY

Left Astray

today like rain, fell quiet and cold
again,
from first splinter of grey light
forging its way through dust-cracked window
to this moment unbalanced, where
we live between heart beats
restlessly searching the sounds of the day
for one that does not
stab or wound, but
is warm enough to hold
finding none “oh well” we say
and for an instant attempt to fool ourselves
into diets of sodium free thought
but it doesn’t work
anymore
than the scarecrow works
to save the cornfield from its sadness
and so we pause to count the droplets falling, and
with only our wet shadows watching
game birds take flight
and we are left astray

—JOE “PEPE” OULAHAN, MILWAUKEE, WI

December

days of wrapping each spoken word in twinkling white lights
every day a limited-time-only special-priced day, days that
crumble into the next gingerbread-squared day of the calendar
every day a shirt box day needing to be wrapped in
memories scented with cinnamon and cardamom
baked into our brains so that the days seem one brightly red
event day a gold bow day so snowflake-intricate and crisp, days
rolled into a yule tide log of tightly packed tightly packaged days

—CAROL BERG, GROTON, MA

The Time Comes

1

Opening your night shade,
you see the season's end
and your pulse quickens.

You feel your house,
cozy, clean, inviting
and you see the world
through sparkling windows.

A dour passerby
sees you and smiles.

November

Night-month, you are turning toward the solstice
of widening light. You, the month of disquieting
verbs. You, the flickering wish held then
exhaled. Your breath is a cinnamon
moment, a confection of witch hazel, pinch of
brambles. You the month of trembling
erasures, month of mourning trees.
Relentlessly, you let the days fall and fall.

—CAROL BERG, GROTON, MA

2

Your love is at your side,
children sleep upstairs,
the dog is in his house,
cats are on warm beds.

At a moment before sleep
you know what the day forgot.

3

A doctor says that
he has seen people
who know without grief or doubt
that the time has come
just before he knows.

—LENORE McCOMAS COBERLY, MADISON, WI

Fall Back, Fall's Back

There comes a day in autumn once each year
when we must take up every clock and watch,
recall the move's an hour to the rear,
and set their metacarpals back a notch.

The motive is to save the light of day,
resource the season lacks to some degree
(compared to sunny summer, anyway)
and short of which it's fairly hard to see.

The task is not a simple one; I mean,
with time displayed on every kitchen range,
each bedside table, wall, computer screen,
it takes concerted work to make the change.

And then before we know it—we're such sheep—
we'll have to deal with springtime's forward leap.

—EMERY CAMPBELL, LAWRENCEVILLE, GA

Found Poem

With a quarter cup
of cherry brandy,
a half cup
of peach schnapps,
a cup of banana liqueur,
and a jigger or two of Irish Mead,
Aunt Mary's *Fruitcake Surprise*
was mostly surprise.

—JANET LEAHY, NEW BERLIN, WI

Snail, Bird, and Worm

*Snail, snail, glister me forward,
Bird, soft-sigh me home,
Worm, be with me.
This is my hard time.* --Theodore Roethke

Snail, bird, and worm,
be my consorts, architects
of my tomorrow.

Guide me down
your trails of light and air,
open me to earth and sky.

This time, I will listen
not with my ears
but with my pores.

Sanctify my very life,
this ground of me
you care for.

—LISA VIHOS, SHEBOYGAN, WI

Oblivious

Up in the Great North Woods
They sat, engrossed, over
The PC Gamer magazine,
Discussing video drivers,
Quad-core processors, and
Raving over the graphics
In the latest video game,
How real the trees looked
Bending in the breeze.
All around them, birds sang,
Wind whispered through pines,
Sunlight glinted and
Sparkled on dewy grass.
Still they sat engrossed.

—HARLAN RICHARDS, STANLEY, WI

A City Wife Looks at a Country Churchyard

This sod is all so strange to me—
the rolling hills and monumental stones
are unfamiliar granite woods
that spring from bones long grown cold.

We will lie together here some day,
not like our marriage bed, cocoon
and warm, but separate in our quilts
of steel, over us new stones to spread
the forest growth.

—YVONNE YAHNKE, MADISON, WI

OBITUARY: BUCK, Bruiser B. *(For Bruce Foster)*

On November 21, first day of the Wisconsin deer season,
by a hit and run slug.

Longtime resident of Big Swamp.

Son of Big Buck and Sweet Ol' Doe.

Survived by wives: Doe, Doe-Doe, Doe Rae Me, Do-Si-Do, Doeminique, and Doe Hickey.

Offspring: Dough Boy, Buckaroo Two, Spikey, Four Point, Daisy, Doelanda, Doeta, Fawn Mae, Fawnsy, and Four-score more.

Mates: Racko, Stud, Points, Neck, Buckaroo, and Rutman.

Member: Loyal Order of Men, Homo Sapiens II, Stag Club, Hat Rack Society, Saltlickers of America, Does Forever!

Veteran of Deer Wars I, II & III, The Big Drive, I-94.

Bruiser was a loyal friend, awesome stud. He enjoyed pawing the ground, snorting, shadow boxing, alcoholic apples, playing chicken with semis, and staring into headlights with his pals.

He rubbed antlers with foreign dignitaries including Cow, Beefalo, and Longhorn.

His favorite song was "Blood on the Tracks" by B. Dylan.

He will be truly missed by all poor shots.

In lieu of cards, flowers, corn, apples are preferred.

May He Rut in Peace.

—RICK McMONAGLE, EUGENE, OR
visit VW Online for more work by this author

A Little Story of Death

The husband sits straight in the paisley chair,
neighbors hushed in the kitchen preparing the dishes
brought in for the relatives.

When the first guests come into the living room,
the man will stand and thank them and hope they disappear soon.
His voice is filled with all the despair he feels
in this third day without her.

A small cricket has come from behind the radiator
and sings his song to the husband who only hears his wife's voice
telling him they have to find the cricket
before it eats holes in his socks.

He smiles, a small grimace, as he remembers
how he chided her that crickets don't need to eat--
they live forever on the dust of the world. Now that she has become dust,
the irony of his words hangs in the air.

—JACKIE LANGETIEG, VERONA, WI
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Death

For life and death are one... Kahlil Gibran

She was a tree shedding
leaves, amber, bone, and rust
tall and short limbs
trembling with the wind
elbows and cheeks
rough bark and smooth
hair long, tied in back
knots throughout the wood
sad melodies in song books
buds burst into blooms

the tree transformed:
house, yachts, floors, bureaus,
shelves, boxes, books,

the girl in our thoughts--
a whistle, the wind, a recycled dress,
time shared, a song,
a mother's caress.

—MARYELLEN LETARTE, LUNENBURG, MA
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Listen,
when my brother and I were target-shooting in the woods,
we found the hole where the highway department dumped all the carcasses
they scraped off the roads. Mostly deer, their bodies an autumn brown,
bellies swollen, even the bucks looked ready to fawn. In the sky
turkey vultures swept a long, low arc, waiting
for us to leave. The air was thick with blue-bottle flies
like strings of lights in the sun, the constant din
of their eating and shitting and egg-laying in the paradise
of that hole. Before we left I tossed a few
good-size rocks into the pit. For a moment the deer
stirred, the thunk of the rock
knocking loose hundreds of maggots
that rose gently a few inches, then settled back down,
lovely like the snow
we were waiting for.

—C. KUBASTA, OSHKOSH, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Blood in the Treads

The squirrel doubled back,
a broken-field runner
juking first left, then right
to the end zone,
evading phantom tacklers,
dashing from the curb
back to the middle of the street.

I felt the crunch
under my left rear wheel;
nothing I could do about it,
even if I could stop,
traffic charging behind me
like a horde of linebackers.

I thought of the Jains,
their legendary remorse
for killing any living thing,
their holy men committing
the act of *salekhana*,
fasting to death,
literally not hurting a fly,
and I wondered
if I were too tender-hearted.

I also remembered
my colleague's pronouncements
about the Muslims:
“I say, kill them all
and let God sort them out.”

—CHARLES RAMMELKAMP, BALTIMORE, MD
visit VW Online for audio by this author

Stones and Poems Struggle to Agree

Scrambled out of backfield quarry and piled
By color texture and face
Arranged in patchwork walls by the mind's
ceaseless feng shui

Poor Herman! (Mrs. Melville said)
He wrote a book about fish no one wants to publish
Now he's gone back to poetry

What concern to a stone
The pencil lead's wet dirt smell
Its shifting point and its willingness
to give anything away

—DAVID STEINGASS, MADISON, WI
visit VW Online for more work by this author

Rhino Attack

Rhino –
land mammal, second in size to an elephant

Rhinovirus –
Picornaviridae family, thirty billionths of a metre long

Rhino –
five species with a 14 to 18-month gestation period
Rhinovirus –
101 serotypes with a one to three-day incubation period

Rhino –
found in certain areas of Africa and Asia

Rhinovirus –
resides and replicates in the respiratory tract

Rhino –
battles hyenas, lions and tigers
Rhinovirus –
assaults the immune system

Rhino –
produces one offspring at a time
Rhinovirus –
sheds 1,000,000 infectious virions / mL of nasal washings

Rhino –
one of the Earth's most endangered species
Rhinovirus –
causes the common cold; impossible to eradicate

Rhino –
its formidable physique inspires respect
Rhinovirus –
a nuisance that just makes you sick

Which rhino attack is worse?

—FERN G. Z. CARR, KELOWNA, BC, CANADA
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The Horror

Wong has enciphered "It's a Small World After All"...in a strand of DNA, inside a bacterium resistant to all kinds of inhospitable environments.

As if the ride weren't enervating enough, Disney can now inject the song into your veins. When you return to Boston, Meinz, Beijing it travels with you. Impervious to your desire to forget, it issues from your mouth at odd and inappropriate moments, at a business meeting, or when you are about to make love to your wife. Your dreams are overwhelmed by singing dolls.

You shoot them down like tin ducks at a carnival game, but they pop back up, smile-pasted mouths still singing about the shrinking earth, which you are convinced will implode any second, sucking you down into the black hole created when Walt Disney left the real world behind.

—LAWRENCE KESSENICH, BOSTON, MA
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Frank Hurley, Photographer of the Imperial Trans-Antarctica Expedition Shoots Shackleton's Men

near The Endurance ensconced just before the Final upheaval, the fatal resounding crack of boat crush, of drowned sailors released from frozen, open crypts; near the vise-gripped ghost ship, masts white-coated bone stripped of sails, riggings bare sinew exposed, ligaments frostbitten, immobile, unwavering as sculpted marble, polished stone, amid ice rock; near the ending, crew members skating on rudely fashioned blades, make-shift poles for hockey sticks, cask bungs for pucks, a rare moment of levity here, marooned perhaps for all time, games to be played to clear conclusions; this far from civilization and no clear way home, why not?

—ALAN CATLIN, SCHENECTADY, NY

On Not Writing Nature Poems

for Jonathan Liebson

Because I'm always wearing the wrong shoes, I rarely stray from the path.

There's *recollect*, there's *tranquility* and the way the trains punctuate each hour, shrill the shaken fields. Let's bide a bit here, thinking why we love them—the tracks, the transit, *a train's a metaphor for so many things in life* Like me, too busy eyeing up the buffet from the back of the line to consider a phalanx of phlox, the tabby stray cavorting in the hedge. I don't see a cow meadow as any kind of invocation. Am drawn to the satellite dish disrupting the view. To the one swatch of sky where the haze hangs. Because, truly, the one time I tried, the saddled mare extended an answer. The hoof on my foot a fine form. Because the genius of the place can drop a scroll of sycamore bark at my feet and I still can't translate his tongue. Slow study. What happens in the ditch, the dun. Because a cicada's buzz in the topmost branch is all the intel left to get, trilling, a telling: *here, here, I am here...*

—JANE SATTERFIELD, BALTIMORE, MD

Bovines on the Green

Cows, like statuary in the grass.

I love their faces.

The way they chew and switch their tails.

Their calves lay upon the sun-warmed earth like little nativity pieces, scattered across the field.

—ALICE PAUSER, FITCHBURG, WI

tampons

they are packed in their box like a rack
of fireworks, each ready to bloom red streamers
of light. or else they are mushrooms: strong stems,
spongy caps to sop up the spores. my wife

tells stories about tampons: the crimp
of a cramp, the creepiness of cotton, her life
and the rusty chains of its cycle. but it's not
a curse, she says, just like a drought

isn't a blessing. so i watch for other cycles:
cartwheeling cumulus, a swallow's flight
cut into arcs, the calendar's curious compartment
of days. then there's the way the moon

is white as a host overhead, but slowly
steeps in earth's blood as it sets.
you never want to run out of tampons, she says,
bringing home another carton for the cabinet,

like a box of matches i'm too blunderbussed to light.
but i like when the forecast for our bedroom
is sex, and the ninety percent chance of conception,
i like that, too—the fallen flowers of all those years

of tampons risen as the plastic-smooth skin
of a newborn, crying and petaled with blood.

—B.J. BEST, WEST BEND, WI

peeing

today, i stood at the edge of a rock and unzipped,
and suddenly, i was throwing my own party: a firework
of phosphates from that measly mortar, a confetti

of gemstones from a pummeled piñata. girls, we know,
do it differently: my mother's dog, for example,
squares her hips over a splotch of lawn,

but can't stop wagging because she's excited
to see me. sure, we all carry around our little pouches
of gold, but it's nothing to write home about,

especially when there's weather and women
and wine. but maybe i should do just that:
—dear mom, today i stood at the edge of a rock

and peed. thank you for teaching me the difference
between water and acid; thank you for saying
thunderstorms are not god's way of doing

his business. i have learned about clouds,
and the tannins of grapeskins, and how to love my wife:
thank you for teaching me the way to do right things.

—B. J. BEST, WEST BEND, WI

Kimberly Blaeser, a Professor at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, teaches Creative Writing, Native American Literature, and American Nature Writing. Her publications include three books of poetry: *Trailing You*, winner of the first book award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas, *Absentee Indians and Other Poems*, and *Apprenticed to Justice*. Her scholarly study, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, was the first native-authored book-length study of an Indigenous author. Of Anishinaabe ancestry and an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe who grew up on the White Earth Reservation, Blaeser is also the editor of *Stories Migrating Home: A Collection of Anishinaabe Prose and Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. Blaeser's current mixed genre project, which includes her nature and wildlife photography as well as poetry and creative nonfiction, explores intersecting ideas about Native place, nature, preservation, and spiritual sustenance.

WV: Tell me about ecopoetry. How is it different (or is it) from nature poetry?

KB: For me, what distinguishes ecopoetry from nature poetry is the embedded understanding of responsibility. Or response-ability, as I like to characterize it, so that the word suggests a relationship. That relationship involves a spiritual vision, being responsible by being engaged in the life processes. This aligns with a Native idea of reciprocity, a give and take relationship. And this active involvement with an alive world space—our responsive action, fuels our growth—our abilities. The more we pay attention to the natural world, the more we understand it; the more we understand it, the better able we are to act appropriately in a fashion that will help sustain all life. As fellow habitants of this world space, we live implicated in the state of the universe. A poetry that proceeds from or reflects this understanding is, in my view, ecopoetry. Now the poetry might be engaged in a simple act of attention or it might be involved in a more activist endeavor—critiquing dangerous practices or inciting involvement in political endeavors, but ecopoetry as I define it arises from an awareness of the entwined nature of all elements in our world, has as philosophical foundation an understanding of the interdependence of universal survival, and carries within it a sense of accountability.

And, of course, it alludes to or embodies this awareness through or within the aesthetically charged language of poetry.

WV: With respect to your own poetry, do you prefer the term *ecopoetry*, or are you writing *nature poems* or *post-pastoral* ones?

KB: Of course, not all my poetic work is of the same tenor, nor do the various pieces succeed to the same degree poetically. But I

Wendy Vardaman Interviews Kimberly Blaeser

do strive towards writing that voices respect for the natural world and that attempts to incite a similar response in the reader/listener. Although I don't weigh this in the writing of each poem, overall I think it fair to say I aspire to create poetry of spirit and witness, and many times the focus involves various kinds of survival, including ecological survival. On the journey toward that vision of sustainability, I think the writing wanders through several dimensions, crossing literary boundaries of what is being called post-pastoral, ecopoetry, and spiritual poetry (maybe also sharing some qualities of the contemporary metaphysical tradition).

WV: Do you think of ecopoetry as primarily an artistic/aesthetic movement, an ethical one, neither, or both? Does being an ecopoet require activism?

KB: Both/and. You knew it wouldn't be either/or! Seriously, coming out of a Native literary tradition which includes ceremonial songs and song poems, I always expect poetry to "matter." Indigenous literatures often have what I call "supra-literary intentions." The writers/performers want their works to come off the page and do something in the world. In articulating this aesthetic that involves both art and activism, I often invoke Seamus Heaney's discussion in *The Redress of Poetry* in which he claims a vision of poetry as both affective and effective, seeing it as "joy in being a process for language" as an "agent for proclaiming and correcting injustices." I also love Linda Hogan's expression of this duality in her poem "Neighbors" in which she writes both "This is the truth and not just a poem" and "This is a poem and not just the truth."

So I do think it involves activism. The range of what this might entail is vast. It could be demonstrating, cleaning up natural sites, doing animal rescue, writing letters, voting. And it is important to remember that in some circumstances even to speak is a revolutionary act. Indeed, writing political poetry in an environment that sees that as an anachronism might also be considered activism.

WV: Does ecopoetry demand activism from its readers, too?

KB: I think ecopoetry asks of its readers/listeners for change. Some works demand more specific or greater activism. Allison Hedge Coke's recent book *Blood Run* asks readers to participate in various ways in

protecting a snake effigy mound in South Dakota and a portion of the book proceeds go to the cause. Linda Hogan's work often rhetorically incites the readers in phrases such as "Get Up, Go AWOL!"

On the most basic level, I think all ecopoetry asks for change. Poetically it works to alter the reader's vision or understanding. Such heart change should bear fruit in attitude and action. I remember a poem by Mary Oliver called "Red." The poem is a simple narrative in which the speaker confesses her longing to see a gray fox. In separate incidents she

Angles of Being

It's all angle after all.
What we see
and miss.
The leaf bird
limed and shadowed
to match
every other
green upturned hand
blooming on the August tree.
Indecipherable
even when wings flutter
like leaves in breeze.
Or the silhouette
dark and curved
on the bare oak.
Beak,
parted tail,
each mistakable
for knot
branch
or twig.
Only if they exit the scene
unblend
isolate themselves
against too blue sky
does the game
of hidden pictures
end.
Ah, angles.
Tell all
or tell it slant.
What we
dream
appear
or inverted
seem to be.

encounters two, each hit by a car, each dying as cars continue to flood by. Hence the gray fox becomes the red of the title, red like the spilled blood of each. As the narrator witnesses the death of the fox, the reader witnesses her soul change—from one who desires to “collect” the experience of seeing a gray fox to one who mourns the callousness with which they are being destroyed.

So perhaps the poet becomes the “seer,” (and I mean that in both senses of the word).

Through the images and detail of the poetry we can see in all their wondrous beauty places, elements, cycles, and creatures of the natural world.

And the poet might also become the vehicle by which we can vicariously learn to see differently, they may become like the prophetic seer of ancient times who reveals, unveils, predicts, or even warns. Ecopoetry asks that readers take heed of the re-visioning they are offered.

WV: Are there particular themes or images that characterize ecopoetry? I’m thinking of the dissolution of boundaries and the permeability of boundaries, for instance, in much of what I’ve read—there’s a lot of transformation, as well as an exploration of the boundary between human and non-human.

KB: Thinking of this tradition in poetry, I believe the ideas of transcendence and transformation both play a key role in the philosophy. In my own work, the notion of correspondence is equally important as is the understanding of time as a limited linguistic construction. I think all of these suggest the permeability of boundaries you have alluded to. They suggest a comingling, and invoke or become a strategy or pathway for discovering the eternal, the ephemeral, the immaterial. And, although some works do set up a kind of human/non-human dichotomy, I most admire works that tend to undermine the supremacy of the egocentric and individualistic. I think of a slight poem by Chinese poet Li Po. In the translation I have, the title is “Zazen on the Mountain” and the last two lines read: “We sit together, the mountain and me, / until only the mountain remains.”

WV: Are there any forms, structures, or aesthetic elements that characterize ecopoetry? (The haiku, for instance, seems particularly important.)

KB: Just as in the Li Po poem the ego disappears, in haiku even the language of the poem dissolves into experience, or some would say into enlightenment. I have a great affinity for haiku and I love to write them, but I have to say—and this is not false modesty—I am by no means a master of the form. But because I am so enamored of the practice, I do often write haiku. Poetically, that striving after simple image is a wonderful

discipline; and the spiritual discipline of Zen often associated with haiku also enriches the haiku quest.

In regards to other themes and forms, I think the object poem and the ode have also been used to good effect by ecopoets. We find fruitful predecessors in some of Neruda’s odes, odes that center on the chestnut or a yellow bird but, in so doing, gesture to much beyond, to the order and chaos and larger beauty and mystery of the world, to the smallness of the chestnut, the bird, and, yes, to our own smallness. Other times (as in the “Red” poem mentioned above) the narrative form is used as the speaker of the poem relates an experience that leads to personal change. And I would point to similarities shared with naturalists or natural history writers. In this vein, the listing poem is sometimes employed, as a catalogue or accumulation of details provides, for example, a feeling for the essence of a particular place.

WV: A few of the names I often see mentioned in connection with ecopoetry nationally include Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, Joy Harjo, W.S. Merwin, Gary Snyder, Pattiann Rogers. Which poets do you think of or particularly enjoy, and who would you recommend to a reader that wants to get an idea of what ecopoetry is?

KB: I’m a bit eclectic in my gathering of poets. I am a great fan of Mary Oliver and Joy Harjo, both of whom you mention and

On Climbing Petroglyphs

I.

Newly twelve with size seven feet
dangling beside mine off the rock
ledge, legerdemain of self knowledge.
How do I say anything—magic
words you might need to hear?
With flute-playing, green-painted nails
your child’s fingers reach to span the range
of carmel-colored women in our past.
Innocently you hold those ghost hands:
each story a truce we’ve made with loss.
How can I tell you there were others?

Big-boned women who might try
to push out hips in your runner’s body.
Women who will betray you for men,
a bottle, or because they love you
love you, don’t want to see you disappointed
in life, so will hold you, hold you hostage
with words, words tangled around courage
duty or money. When should I show you
my own flesh cut and scarred on the barbs
of belonging and love’s oldest language?

II.

No, let us dangle here yet, dawdle
for an amber moment while notes shimmer
sweetly captured in turquoise flute songs—
the score of a past we mark together.
No words whispered yet beyond these painted
untainted rock images of ancients: sun, bird, hunter.
Spirit lines that copper us to an infinity.
Endurance. Your dangling. Mine.
Before the floor of our becoming.
Perhaps even poets must learn silence,
that innocence, that space before speaking.

whose styles differ quite dramatically. But I am entranced by both. Oliver’s *West Wind*, for example, blends so lovingly the intricacies of nature and the poetic calling, sometimes achingly and almost in the ecstatic tradition. Joy Harjo is often a poet of grit and, as she says, of “truth telling.” She is one of a handful of Native poets whose work has had an influence on the direction I’ve taken in my writing over the years. I don’t think I could aspire to the wild unfettered range of her imaginative vision, but I love the way she welcomes story and mythic reality into the everyday world, and the vigor with which she carries forth stories of injustice.

Dreams of Water Bodies

Muskrat—*Wazhashk*,
small whiskered swimmer,
you, a fluid arrow crossing waterways
with the simple determination
of one who has dived
purple deep into mythic quest.

Belittled or despised
as water rat on land;
hero of our Anishinaabeg people
in animal tales, creation stories
whose tellers open slowly,
magically like within a dream,
your tiny clenched fist
so all water tribes might believe.

See the small grains of sand—
Ah, only those poor few—
but they become our turtle island
this good and well-dreamed land
where we stand in this moment
on the edge of so many bodies of water
and watch *Wazhashk*, our brother,
slip through pools and streams and lakes
this marshland earth hallowed by
the memory
the telling
the hope
the dive
of sleek-whiskered-swimmers
who mark a dark path.

And sometimes in our water dreams
we pitiful land-dwellers
in longing
recall, and singing
make spirits ready
to follow:
bakobii.*

*Go down into the water.

Other poets: David Wagoner visited Notre Dame while I was a student there and I have been grateful to follow his fine work. I admire the writing of Linda Hogan in every genre in which she works. Her life and her creative work are both filled with a dedication to the earth and all its inhabitants. There is an attention to detail and an overriding awareness of timelessness that I appreciate in the writing of Robert Haas. Like many people, I am fascinated by Coleman Barks' translations (and performances) of the poetry of Rumi and much of this writing is filled

with a kind of spiritual search interwoven with an evocation of the lushness of nature.

Because poets tend to address multiple subjects, in addition to following the work of particular poets, I find it helpful to keep my eye out for thematic anthologies. One that I found and have used in teaching several times is *A Book of Luminous Things*, edited by Czeslaw Milosz (who I was also lucky enough to hear at Notre Dame). *Poetry Comes Up Where it Can*, edited by Brian Swann, is an anthology of works published first in *The Amicus Journal* and all the works deal with nature and the environment. Another anthology, *Poems to Live By In Uncertain Times*, edited by Joan Murray, includes among its larger gathering a couple of sections of works we could call ecopoetry.

WV: Does ecopoetry mean the same thing to a Native and a non-Native poet? Perhaps that's a too broad and binary way to frame the question, but I'm curious in general about the extent to which the interest in "eco" right now is driven by Native sensibilities, and whether it is a co-option of them in any way?

KB: I've partially characterized the Native understanding of ecology when I spoke about the philosophy of reciprocity and responsibility. Whether for some practitioners the current literary eco-trend involves any kind of "co-option" of Native sensibility or a stereotypic amalgamation of complex and varied tribally specific systems of beliefs, I think the more interesting tension involves a divergence in origin or function—the crossover between acts of resistance and the literature of resistance.

Let me elaborate. Because historically Native people have faced destruction of homelands, removal, and land theft, I think the undertones in Native works often involve conflict and loss. Also, given the ecological devastation witnessed over the years from clear-cutting of forests to the decimation of animal populations like the buffalo to the pollution caused on tribal lands by mining and industry, the inheritance of oppression has fueled the need to assume a role as defender of the earth and of sacred lands. It might be fair to suggest that the literary eco-tradition in Native communities has arisen largely from political need while the eco-tradition in non-Native communities originated more as an aesthetic movement. I believe the two have come closer together in recent years and that important alliances have formed. A recent multi-genre collection, *Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*, explores these separate and overlapping traditions and stories.

The published work of Native writers such as Marilou Awikta, Haunani Trask, and Elizabeth Woody includes examples of poetry that had its origin in ecological activism. In this complicated terrain, let me offer a specific instance of a poetic work that explores this eco-warrior stance as it pertains particularly to America, Native America, and the land that is home to both. *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land*, by Acoma writer Simon Ortiz, was published in commemoration of the Pueblo Revolt that took place 300 years earlier, but it also explicitly deals with uranium mining in the Grants region of New Mexico and the fallout from the atomic bomb detonation at White Sands. Although covering much other ground in these poems, Ortiz underscores the need for Native peoples to "fight / to show them" and for America to "give back" so "the land will regenerate."

Copper crane bodies ride impossible stilt legs through fields of June.

Ortiz underscores the need for Native peoples to "fight / to show them" and for America to "give back" so "the land will regenerate."

WV: Many of your poems about the natural world have strong narrative and spiritual components, and they tend to include people or animals that are sentient creatures. I'm thinking, for instance, of "Memories of Rock" or "Seasonal: Blue Winter, Kirkenes Fire." Is that a fair way to characterize your approach?

KB: Yes, that seems an accurate representation. I admit I find it hard to characterize my own approach, because as artists and spiritual beings, we are always in a process or search for insight. I may ask or imply a similar question across a range of several poems, not only because I want a reader to contemplate the philosophical territory, but because I am treading there beside you, wondering too.

One tack I do recognize is my attempt to break down various classic demarcations. For example, the class line between what is alive and what is supposedly inert matter. Even science no longer backs up the "dumb matter" assumptions.

Sometimes I use narrative in service of defamiliarization. Mythic depth or dimension allows us to imagine or admit an "other" range of realities. Perhaps it turns or changes the hierarchy, the power structure. Perhaps it allows for different ways of knowing, employs alternate languages, or dis-orders sense data. If we come back from such a linguistic journey with one small cog liberated from the "must-be machine" of our everyday, our experience of "reality" will change.

This is the beginning of Wendy Vardaman's interview of Kimberly Blaeser. Read the full interview & more poems at versewisconsin.org.

Kantele

kantele, n : a traditional Finnish zither originally having five strings but now having as many as thirty. —Merriam-Webster

Take the glitter on a snow bank.
Take a harp and take a mouth.
Shape a song far from the miters
and the masses of the south.

Glitters from no votive candles
light the day—and day is short,
briefly blinding, then the darkness
we expect.

The notes' retort,
sweet in riposte, like a flower
blooming in the melting frost
can't deny that life is frozen
on the whole, and quickly lost,
fading like a note's decaying
lost in sudden chill, and grace
stays unearned.

No sultry languor
touches melody or place—
here, the beauty's of December,
hope a ghost, the distant sun,
sheets of ice above a river,
though we guess the waters run
ceaselessly—where we can't see them.
We can't be the thing we're not.
Creation is both spring and winter.
Cold is lovelier than hot.

—QUINCY LEHR, BROOKLYN, NY

Gladness ☺

It's all about gladness,
while the stinkweed
keeps right on stinkin'
and being stinkweed

and the skunk cabbage
trundles on and on
as skunk cabbage

and we have always held
the pathways of our earth
in cupped palms,
passed from one
shaman and magician
to the next without
a drop of being lost.

—AYAZ DARYL NIELSEN, BOULDER, CO

Lake for All Seasons

The water doesn't care
Whether it's April, or August, or October—
So long as it isn't actually frozen,
And the sun is shining:
It sparkles, just the same.

—PHYLLIS ANN KARR, BARNES, WI

❖ The Peace of Neighbors

It happens many places, I guess.
A half moon hangs in the blue morning sky
and there, beyond the woods, cumulus rise
over the sea as fishermen finish untangling
rödspätta, flat sweet fish, from their nets.
At the *loppis*, the second hand store, Swedes
and one American sift respectfully through
relinquished treasures—a *keramik* tea service,
white with blue flowers and brick-red rim;
clear glass *äggkoppar* where quail wings
hold boiled eggs aloft; woolen *halsdukar*
to warm necks through winter; oriental
rugs for the feet. And in the east,
surely people look up at their own Iraqi
or Indonesian or Filipino skies and
similarly long for the peace of neighbors
shooting the breeze while listening
to their children play *fotboll*. These Swedes
know how good things are easily lost.
Every fall they wave goodbye to their sun,
live with daylight squeezed into a skinny
rectangle of hours. So when summer comes,
they say you should eat each meal
on your lawn or the outdoor patios of eateries
and pubs. Have *kaffe* parties, with no fewer
than seven sweets, under apple trees.
Every morning you should dip in the sea
with the ducks and terns. Even in winter's
thin sunlit hours it is best to bake in the sauna,
then drop buck-naked into stunning seas.
You must build for summer. Your heart must pound
and lungs burn for it. When those precious long days
come, you should sit with your back to the house,
maybe with good people, good friends,
lift your face sunward and absorb peace
right across your skin.

—MARY LINTON, FORT ATKINSON, WI
visit *VW Online* for more work by this author

Contributors' Notes

Antler, former poet laureate of Milwaukee, is the author of *Selected Poems, Ever-Expanding Wilderness, Deathrattles vs. Comecries, and Exclamation Points ad Infinitum!* His work appears in many recent anthologies including *Best Gay Poetry 2008* and *Wilderness Blessings*. p. 4

Besides poetry, photography and paper arts are **Sharon Auberle's** passions. She is the author of two books: *Saturday Nights at the Crystal Ball and Crow Ink*, and has recently recorded a CD of her poetry with some fine Door County musicians, entitled *Something After Burning*. p. 27

James Babbs is not a real writer but he plays one on TV. He thinks poets should be treated more like rock stars and have swarms of beautiful groupies chasing them wherever they go. His books are available from www.xlibris.com, www.lulu.com & www.interiornoisepress.com. p. 26

Guy R. Beining has had six poetry books and 25 chapbooks published over the years, and appeared in seven anthologies. Recent publications include *chain, epiphany, perspective* (Germany), *New Orleans Review, The New Review of Literature*. p. 26

Carol Berg has poems forthcoming or in *Fifth Wednesday Journal, Pebble Lake Review, Rhino, garrisiluni, Melusine*, and elsewhere. She has an MFA from Stonecoast and an MA in English Literature. p. 29

B.J. Best is the author of *Birds of Wisconsin* (New Rivers Press), *State Sonnets* (sunnyoutside), and three chapbooks from Centennial Press, most recently *Drag: Twenty Short Poems about Smoking*. He is related, distantly and through marriage, to the 1986 Miss Wisconsin. p. 33

Kimberly Blaeser is a Professor in the English Department at UW-Milwaukee. Her publications include three books of poetry: *Trailing You, Absentee Indians and Other Poems*, and *Apprenticed to Justice*, as well as the edited volume *Traces in Blood, Bone, and Stone: Contemporary Ojibwe Poetry*. pp. 34-6

Joseph Briggs has been on the Capitol tour seventeen times. Okay, it's more like five times. Ask him a Wisconsin question. He dares you. His poetry-only twitter feed is at <http://twitter.com/joewbriggs>. p. 26

Sean Butner currently lives with his wife and son in Oshkosh, Wisconsin where he is pursuing an M.A. in English. His work has appeared and is forthcoming in *nibble, vox poetica, Midwest Literary Magazine, Indigo Rising Magazine*. He maintains a blog at <http://seanbutner.blogspot.com/>. p. 14

Born in Monroe, **Emery Campbell** graduated from UW-Madison. He is the author of a book published in 2005 of his own poems plus translations of French classical poetry. In 2010, his second book came out: *Selected Fables and Poems in Translation* (La Fontaine, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud). p. 29

Fern G. Z. Carr is a member of The League of Canadian Poets, lawyer and teacher. She composes poetry in five languages and has been published extensively as far abroad as India, Finland, South Africa and New Zealand. For more information, please visit Carr's website at www.fernzcarr.com. p. 32

Alan Catlin has published over sixty chapbooks and full length books of poetry and prose. Among the more recent chapbooks are, *Deep Water Horizon* from Pygmy Forest Press and *Effects of Sunlight in the Fog* from Bright Hill Press. p. 32

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 a variety of publications including previous issues of *Verse Wisconsin*. She is the Assistant Editor-In-Chief of *Women in REDzine*. p. 17

Lenore McComas Coberly has served as President, Credentials Chair, and Calendar editor of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems have appeared in *The Sow's Ear, The Formalist, Wisconsin Academy Review, Nimrod*, and other publications and anthologies. p. 29

Ginny Lowe Connors is the author of *Barbarians in the Kitchen* (Antrim House Books, 2005) and a chapbook, *Under the Porch* (Hill-Stead Museum, 2010); the editor of three poetry collections, she has won the Atlanta Review's International Poetry Competition Prize and the 2010 Sunken Garden Poetry Prize. p. 18

Elizabeth Cook was born and raised in Madison, WI and cannot contemplate living in any other state. She went to Carroll College in Waukesha, WI where she discovered her love of poetry. She especially enjoys writing about the beautiful Wisconsin landscape. p. 8

Bruce Dethlefsen plays bass and sings in the musical duo *Obvious Dog*. He is the current Poet Laureate of Wisconsin. His new collection, *Unexpected Shiny Things*, is available from Cowfeather Press (www.cowfeatherpress.org). pp. 20-1

Rick Dinges has an MA in literary studies from University of Iowa and he manages business systems at an insurance company. *Tulane Review, Cortland Review, Barnwood, Roanoke Review, and Gihon River Review* have most recently accepted his poems for their publications. p. 25

Karl Elder is Poet in Residence at Lakeland College near Sheboygan, where he also facilitates Sheboygan County's Mead Public Library Poetry Circle. His series of essays in response to prompts from Creative Writing Now appear online at <http://www.creative-writing-now.com/language-poetry.html>. p. 4

Christa Gahlman was born and raised in rural Wisconsin with a great appreciation for the intimacy of the woods, wide landscapes, and textured fields. She is the mother of two incredible daughters and one amazing son. She now resides in the city of Madison, and writes...and writes. p. 27

Joey Goodall lives and works in St. Paul, Minnesota. Along with back-issues of *Verse Wisconsin*, his poetry can also be found in the *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, and he sometimes blogs about pop culture at joeygoodall.wordpress.com. p. 9, 27

Carol Lynn Grellas's most recent chapbooks are *Breakfast in Winter* (Flutter Press 2010) and *A Thousand Tiny Sorrows* (March Street Press 2010). She's also published two electronic chaps from Goldwake Press and Victorian Violet Press. Carol Lynn serves on the editorial panel for *Triggerfish Critical Review*. p. 22

Peter J. Grieco is a native of Buffalo, New York where he studies mathematics at Buffalo State College. His dear friend Sasha hails from Madison and is, of course, a Packers fan. p. 28

Tim Hawkins currently lives a short ferry trip away from the shores of Wisconsin. His writing has appeared most recently in *Four and Twenty, Iron Horse Literary Review, The Pedestal Magazine* and *Shot Glass Journal*, and is forthcoming in *Blueline, The Literary Bohemian*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. p. 15

Richard Hedderman's poems have appeared in *South Dakota Review, CutBank, Eclipse*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *The Discovery of Heaven* was published by Parallel Press in 2006. He is the Senior Educator at the Milwaukee Public Museum and a Lecturer in Theatre at UW-Milwaukee. p. 10, 27

Catherine Jagoe works as a translator. Poems from her chapbook *Casting Off* (Parallel Press, 2007) were featured on *The Writer's Almanac* and *Poetry Daily*. Her translations from Spanish include two novels, *That Bringas Woman* (1996) and *My Name Is Light* (2003). p. 13

Nancy Jesse grew up on a dairy farm in Barron County, Wisconsin. Creative writing became one of her favorite courses during a thirty-year career teaching English at Madison West High School. She has published both prose and poetry and lives with her husband Paul. p. 18

Phyllis Ann Karr moved with her parents to Wisconsin in 1977. She married a native Wisconsinite a decade later and moved farther north, to a lake in Bayfield County. p. 37

Lawrence Kessenich grew up in Wisconsin and still has a large extended family there. His poem "Angelus" won the Strokestown International Poetry Prize in Ireland in May 2010. And his essay about his Waunakee-bred father has just come out in the anthology *This I Believe: On Love*. p. 32

Judy Kolosso divides her time between a home in southeastern Wisconsin and the farm she grew up on in Neenah. She has been published in *Wisconsin People and Ideas, Echoes, Fox Cry Review*, and several anthologies. She has two books: *Aubade*, a chapbook, and a full-length collection, *In the First Place*. p. 18

C. Kubasta teaches literature and writing at Marian University and UW-Fox Valley. Her poems and translations have appeared in numerous journals, including *Stand, So To Speak*, and *The Spoon River Poetry Review*. She currently lives in Oshkosh with her partner John, cat Cliff and dog Ursula. p. 31

Jim Landwehr was born and raised in St. Paul, MN, and now lives and works in Waukesha as a Geographic Information Systems Analyst. Jim writes creative non-fiction, memoir, and poetry and is currently enrolled at AllWriters' Workplace and Workshop (www.allwriters.org). p. 17

Jackie Langetieg has three books of poems: *White Shoulders* (Cross+Roads Press), *Just What in Hell is a Stage of Grief*, and *Confetti in a Silent City* (Ghost Horse Press). She is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and regular contributor to the annual calendar. p. 31

Estella Lauter is Professor Emerita at UW-Oshkosh. Her first chapbook, *Pressing a Life Together By Hand* (2007) was nominated for two Pushcart prizes. Her poem "Gaza, January 2009" tied for first prize in the 2009 Barbara Mandingo Kelly Peace Poetry Contest; it appears on www.wagingpeace.org. p. 8

Tom Lavelle, a native of Pittsburgh, lived in Milwaukee between 1981 and 83. Since then he's visited sporadically. He lives today in Stockholm, where he teaches and writes as he has done since 1992. It's not colder than Wisconsin, but darker. p. 24

Janet Leahy is a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. Her poems have appeared in *The Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, in *Wisconsin People and Ideas, Verse Wisconsin*, in the anthology *Empty Shoes*, and other publications. She is a teacher in Milwaukee and lives in New Berlin. p. 29

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* and *Second Lining*, both from Mellen Poetry Press, 1992 and 1997 respectively. p. 16

Quincy R. Lehr's poetry and criticism have appeared in numerous journals and e-zines in the U.S., UK, Ireland, Australia, and the Czech Republic. His first book, *Across the Grid of Streets*, appeared in 2008, and his second, *Obscure Classics of English Progressive Rock*, will appear in 2011. p. 37

MaryEllen Letarte's father was born in Pepin, WI. MaryEllen lives and writes in Lunenburg, MA where she's developed and now directs the Louise Bogan Chapter of the Massachusetts State Poetry Society. p. 31

J. Patrick Lewis's first book of poems—*Gulls Hold Up the Sky*—has just been published by Laughing Fire Press. His poems have appeared in *Gettysburg Review, New England Review, New Letters*, and many others. He is the current Children's Poet Laureate of the United States. p. 8

Barbara Lightner has been published in works by Grey Fox Press, IOBA, Wisconsin Light and others; her poetry has appeared, or will appear, in the *Table Rock Review, New Verse News, Come Be a Memoirist*, the Zocala Press' chapbook series, and the feminist anthology *Letters to the World*. p. 11

Mary Linton lives in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. She is a wetland biologist and loves mucking about in Wisconsin's wonderful waters. Mary finds the combination of teaching, wetland research, and writing perfect for mental health. p. 37

E.O. Lipchik lives and writes in Milwaukee. p. 13

Ellaraine Lockie's chapbook, *Stroking David's Leg*, was awarded Best Individual Collection for 2010 from *Purple Patch* magazine in England, and her chapbook *Red for the Funeral*, won the 2010 San Gabriel Poetry Festival Chapbook Contest. Ellaraine serves as Poetry Editor for the lifestyles magazine, *Lilipoh*. p. 15, 23

Karen Loeb's writing has appeared in such places as *Phantasmagoria, Pinyon, Wisconsin People and Ideas*, the UK print journal *Flash*, and the on-line journals *New Works Review* and *Verbsap*. A collection of her stories, *Jump Rope Queen* won a Minnesota Voices award and was published by New Rivers Press. p. 19

Anna Bellamy Lucas is a member of Green River Writers, based in Louisville, KY, founded by her beloved mentor, Mary (Ernie) O'Dell. She and her husband once bought contraband cheese curds from a couple selling Wisconsin cheese out of the trunk of their car. **p. 10**

Though **David Lurie** grew up on the East Coast, he's spent the last three years bouncing between Milwaukee and Chicago. He's taught in two high-need Milwaukee Public Schools, taught test prep for wealthy Chicagoans, and sold fitness equipment, all while writing and making plans for PhD programs. **p. 16**

Rick McMonagle was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA. His parents honeymooned at Lake Geneva. He lived in the country outside of River Falls, WI from 1996 to 2008. His poetry lineage includes John Haag, his first poetry teacher at Penn State, and Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman at Naropa Institute. **p. 30**

Kelly McNeerney lives in San Francisco where she serves as Editor-in-Chief for *Fourteen Hills SFSU Review*. She is working on her MFA in Poetry at San Francisco State University, and just finished a collection of poems entitled *Peripheries*. Her work has appeared in *Red Wheelbarrow* and *Metonym*. **p. 22**

Mary Mercier, native to Milwaukee, now lives 77 miles west of that Cream City, with her husband and two wily cats. She is the author of one chapbook, *Small Acts* (Parallel Press). In 2005 her poem "Snow Geese" was included in Martha Glowacki's exhibition, *Starry Transit*, staged at the UW's Washburn Observatory. **p. 9**

Richard Merelman writes poems because language is the only medium through which he can hope to achieve beautiful expression. Recent poems have appeared in *Bumble Jacket Miscellany* and *Verse Wisconsin*. He taught political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison until 2001. **p. 17**

Mary Merriam's poems have appeared in the *NY Times*, *Poetry Foundation*, *American Life in Poetry*, and *Rhythm*. She's the author of *The Countess of Flatbroke* (Modern Metrics, 2006) and *The Poet's Zodiac* (Seven Kitchens, 2011), and editor of *Filled with Breath: 30 Sonnets by 30 Poets* (Exot, 2010) and *Lavender Review*. **p. 28**

Ayaz Daryl Nielsen attended Blair Public High School from '62 - '65, and earned a BA in English over a nine-year period from the U of WI - Eau Claire. **p. 37**

Joe "Pepe" Oulahan was born in Mexico City, raised in many different parts. Now he lives in Milwaukee with his wife, Chris. He has two beautiful, grown children—Amalia and Kylie. At the moment, he's very concerned about extreme right-wing agenda being played out in our nation. **p. 28**

Alice F. Pauser's inspiration is drawn from Nature and dream journaling. Her recent collection, *I Follow the Red Road* is based in the dreams of Ancient Shamanic Women. She hopes to publish the collection in 2012. Alice teaches dream journal writing and how to craft it into other genres. **p. 33**

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com. **p. 24, 27**

Alayne Peterson is an associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac. Her poetry has appeared in *The Front Range Review*, *INK*, *Into the Candy Shop*, and the *Hiram Arts Magazine*. She lives near a bend in the Ice Age Trail with her husband Tony and their two children. **p. 12, 16**

Nancy Petulla is a retired minister who lives in a 150-year-old farmhouse. She has lived there for 34 years. **p. 25**

Raised Catholic, **Jeff Poniewaz** now considers himself eco-spiritual like John Muir. His recent chapbook *Polish for Because—Meditations of a Former St. Josaphat Altar Boy* (available from Inland Ocean Books, P.O. Box 11502, Milwaukee 53211) traces his spiritual evolution. **pp. 5-7**

Charles Portolano started writing poetry 14 years ago to celebrate the birth of his daring, darling, daughter Valerie, and to preserve the memories. Valerie was born with many obstacles to overcome. Writing soon became his way of saving his sanity. Valerie is doing great now; she is quite the young writer. **p. 12**

Andrea Potos lives in Madison with her husband and daughter. She has a collection from Parallel Press titled *The Perfect Day*. Her book *Yaya's Cloth* won a 2008 Outstanding Achievement Award in Poetry from the Wisconsin Library Association. **p. 24**

Jim Price retired to Osceola Township in Wisconsin over a year ago, after a 30-year career in human services. He's written a lot of poetry over the years, and feels maybe it's time to share with a wider circle than friends and family. *Verse Wisconsin* #102 included his first published poem. **p. 9**

Ester Hauser Laurence Prudlo has lived away from the state for some 28 years, but she returned two years ago for summers. The author of three children's books, she has published a few poems. A retired counselor to soldiers and inmates, she is mother of 4, and grandmother of 4, and lives with her husband, Tony. **p. 11**

Charles Rammelkamp edits the online journal, *The Potomac*, <http://thepotomacjournal.com>, and has a chapbook of poems forthcoming from MuscleHead Press entitled *Mixed Signals*. **p. 31**

James Reitter earned his BA in Creative Writing, his MFA in Poetry, and his PhD in Folklore. He's spent the past four years as an Assistant Professor of English for UW-Sheboygan and lives in Sheboygan with his fiancée, two cats, and a bearded dragon. **p. 14**

Georgia Ressmeyer has twice won grants from the Wisconsin Arts Board, and is the author of two short novels. Her poetry has appeared widely in journals and magazines. Her chapbook, *Today I Threw My Watch Away* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), placed 2nd in the WFOP's 2011 chapbook contest. **p. 12**

Liz Rhodebeck is a poet and freelance writer from Pewaukee, where she is active in the local arts community and co-edits the project, "One Vision: A Fusion of Art and Poetry in Lake Country." She published her third chapbook, *What I Learned in Kansas* (Port Yonder Press, 2010). www.waterwriter.com. **p. 22**

Harlan Richards grew up on the west side of Madison and came late to his penchant for poetry, having not begun to write until his mid-50s. He has had poems accepted by *Love's Change Magazine*, *Shepherd*, *Samsara* and *Italian—Americana*. He is currently living in Wisconsin's Belly of the Beast. **p. 30**

Jeannie E. Roberts is an award-winning poet, a lifelong visual artist and the author and illustrator of *Let's Make Faces!*, a children's book (www.RhymeTheRoostBooks.com). Her poetry has appeared in *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, *Goose River Anthology* and elsewhere, including the mixed-media show *The Vision and the Word*. **p. 13**

Nichole Rued is a student at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Sheepshead Review*, *Underground Voices*, and *Verse Wisconsin*. **p. 14**

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. 15**

Jane Satterfield's most recent book, *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond* appeared from Demeter Press in 2009. Her second collection, *Assignation at Vanishing Point*, received the 2003 Elixir Press Poetry Prize. She's received an NEA Fellowship in Literature and three Maryland State Arts Council grants. **p. 33**

G. A. Scheinoha never imagined he'd follow in his father's tracks: a series of blue collar jobs. He's written 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*. **p. 23**

Wendy Schmidt is a Wisconsin native who has written short stories and poems for the last 10 years. She enjoys gardening, animals and collecting odds and ends. Cold weather survival supplies include a writing desk, computer and her mewing muse sleeping nearby. **p. 13**

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. **p. 12, 19, 26**

Paula Schulz teaches 20 Kindergarten students and writes at every opportunity. "Hummingbird" was written for her daughter, who died of an inherited illness. **p. 11**

Peg Sherry, a "closer" writer for years, invested her energies in family and academia: four children, Masters' degree, teaching regular and gifted students at all levels, including college. Her work is in local and state magazines and in her books of poems and essays. **p. 8**

David Steingass is the author of six books including *Fishing for Dynamite*, and *GreatPlains* (RedDragonfly Press, Redwing MN) which won the 2002 Posner Award from the Council of Wisconsin Writers. He is interested especially in technical and stylistic possibilities among lineated poems, prose poems, and flash fiction. Besides reading and writing at his Madison home, Steingass presents writing workshops and residencies in schools. **p. 32**

Jeanine Stevens has three Pushcart nominations and first place awards in poetry from the Stockton Arts Commission, the Mendocino Coast Writer's Conference Contest, and the Maggie H. Meyer, and Clifford Wolfe Awards. She has five chapbooks and her poems have appeared widely. **p. 18**

Nancy Takacs lives in Wellington, UT, and in Bayfield, WI. Her third book of poetry, *Juniper*, was published by Limberlost Press: www.limberlostpress.com A former wilderness studies instructor and creative writing professor, she has done poetry workshops in prisons, schools, and senior citizen centers. **p. 19**

Don Thackrey likes Wisconsin so much that he has asked his wife to launch his cremation ashes into the West Wind, which will carry him to, and sprinkle him over, that great state. **p. 24**

Wendy Vardaman, wendyvardaman.com, is a Co-Editor of *Verse Wisconsin*. **pp. 34-6**

Lisa Vihos's 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 *Stoneboat*. She resides in Sheboygan with her 13-year-old son. <http://www.lisapoemoftheweek.blogspot.com/>. **p. 30**

John Walser is an associate professor at Marian University in Fond du Lac. He is a founding member of the Foot of the Lake Poetry Collective (www.lakepoets.com). He has lived most of his adult life in the upper Midwest, where he has loved the fruits and flowers that grow in our backyards. **p. 22, 23**

Timothy Walsh's awards include the Grand Prize in the *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Competition. He authored *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. 10**

Molly Weigel is a previously unpublished poet and fairly widely published poetry translator with recent versions in the *Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry* and *S/N: New World Poetics*, among others. She also writes poetic essays that use floods as a central organizing principle or motif. **p. 23**

Marie Sheppard Williams's mentor for poetry is Thomas R. Smith, a WI poet and essayist. She has had poems published in *The Sun*, *Poetry East*, in Ted Kooser's newspaper column, and in another issue of *Verse Wisconsin*. She has published seven story collections, and has won the Pushcart Prize twice. **p. 25**

Koon Woon has published two full-length books of poems from Kaya press in New York, NY. He was born in China and has been an advocate of Seattle poetry since the 1980s. He was a frequent contributor to *Free Verse*. **p. 13**

Yvonne Yahnke has published two chapbooks with Fireweed press. Her poems have appeared in local publications and in almost all of the WFOP calendars. She is on the shady side of eighty and is constantly surprised that her heart still has something to say. **p. 30**



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