

Ambidextrous

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

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

Wisconsin on the left,
 the water cleft now

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

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

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of leaders' fallacies.



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

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from The Book of Walker—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Blessed are the mighty.

—*Scott—3:16-28*



Max Garland lives in Eau Claire.

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

(at the Capitol, 2/25/11)

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

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



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

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: WENDY VARDAMAN

The Children Must Learn to Read by Third Grade

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

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

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

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



Jill Stukenberg is a writer in Wausau.

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests:
JILL STUKENBERG

To the New Student Protesters

(Wisconsin protests of February, 2011)

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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Before Unions

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

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

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

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



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

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Steam

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



*Brent Goodman is a
copywriter in Rhineland.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

There could be a circle here but we

we are prevented from perfection, by our need

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

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

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: SARAH BUSSE

Cahoots: Wisconsin Makes a House Call

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: DENISE SWEET

Spring Tease

Feb 16, 2011

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

14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: SUSAN HERING

In a Wisconsin Public Market

3/9/11

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

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

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

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

14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: MARLYN WINDAU

Supporting the Troops

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

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

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

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

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

We will write poetry and music in your honor.

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

*Ed Weinstein is an employment counselor
in Milwaukee.*

14 Poems About the Wisconsin Protests: ED WEINSTEIN



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



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Dancing with Liberty*(Madison, Wisconsin, February 19, 2011)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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From the Principal's Desk

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

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

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

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



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