

The Orchards

Poetry Journal

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Inspired by the small plot of apple trees near Cambridge,
England, where writers have gathered for years with their
books and pens, we welcome you to pull up a chair
and enjoy poetry in the orchard.



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Marriage of Many Years

Dana Gioia

Most of what happens happens beyond words.
The lexicon of lip and fingertip
defies translation into common speech.
I recognize the musk of your dark hair.
It always thrills me, though I can't describe it.
My finger on your thigh does not touch skin—
it touches *your* skin warming to my touch.
You are a language I have learned by heart.

This intimate patois will vanish with us,
its only native speakers. Does it matter?
Our tribal chants, our dances round the fire
performed the sorcery we most required.
They bound us in a spell time could not break.
Let the young vaunt their ecstasy. We keep
our tribe of two in sovereign secrecy.
What must be lost was never lost on us.

The Night-Birds' Asylum

Jay Hopler and Kimberly Johnson

A high pine, twisted, bent,
Listens at the cliff, its limbs
Taut, intent as a crossbow's.

The night-birds' asylum,
It thrums at high midnight,
With the beat of swift wings.

My heart, too, has its nest.
A voice hanging in the dark.
It too, is listening: the night.

Translated from the Italian

Rifugio D' Uccelli Notturni

Salvatore Quasimodo

In alto c'è un pino distorto;
sta intento ed ascolta l'abisso
col fusto piegato a balestra.

Rifugio d'uccelli notturni,
nell'ora più alta risuona
d'un battere d'ali veloce.

Ha pure un suo nido il mio cuore
sospeso nel buio, una voce;
sta pure in ascolto, la notte.

Barn Jamboree, Rosine, Kentucky

Justin Hamm

Sunset slants its salmon light
through the open doors.
A man, whom we're told
has recently (and only just barely)
survived the bypassing
of multiple arterial blockages
by a hotshot surgeon
down in Bowling Green,
accepts a battered house Martin,
takes the stage to perform here
for the first time in many months.

He adjusts the microphone,
toys with the tuners,
glances around the twilit barn nervously,
finally nodding at the audience
seated on long benches like church pews.
But before he can begin
a lovely woman about his age
sidles up from the side, surprising him.
She gives him a look that seems to ask
if there's any chance of a duet,
and you don't have to be local
to work out that there's been
some history between them.

Enough so that when he picks
out the first notes
and begins to strum "Waltz Across Texas,"
their voices entwine, naturally,
like the fingers of the old
couples who stand and press close
and sway together
only a little more carefully
than they must have fifty-odd years ago

when this song and their love
were both newborn to the world.

Joy is a complicated matter;
it almost never arrives crystalline.
I have seen it bloom
even on the faces of broken men
buying cheap beer on the odd
Tuesday in November,
unmistakable but muddied up always,
mixed with a hint of guilt or resignation.
The singing man's face is like that.
So is the lady's.
You can see they are doing something
they once believed
they might never do again
and now must consider
what other dreamghosts
they might yet sing life into.

The tune is like any other tune,
and soon enough it shuffles toward an end.
But her fingers find his shoulder,
and a silent conspiracy ensues
to strum on and reprise the chorus
once, and then twice more,
as if they are terribly afraid
for the sound to stop,
afraid to step out from behind
the sweet safety of perhaps.

And then they must, and do.

The bow, the wave, the decision:
all arrive together in an instant.
She leaves him with a kiss on the cheek
that brings high color to his face,
floats out with the applause
into the soft Kentucky twilight.

The rest of the evening he can be seen
slouching, exhausted, near the back
entrance to the barn
as the regular band swings, western-style.
Every so often he runs his hand
absently over the area of his chest
where beneath his plaid shirt I imagine
must live one hell of a scar
from all this business with his heart.

Revisitation

Catherine Chandler

Two Thomases, a father and his son,
lie in a cemetery on a hill
that overlooks the Susquehanna. One,
a gunner with a young man's iron will
to live, bailed from his doomed B-24,
endured Camp Shumen's beatings, moldy bread,
survivor guilt, the aftershocks of war,
a rough divorce; yet worse times lay ahead.
The Army CNO. The folded flag.
The Valium. The oceans of Jim Beam.
The names imprinted on a metal tag.
The little boy in the recurrent dream.
I used to fear him. Now I realize
the sense behind his reek and glassy eyes.

Valediction

Catherine Chandler

He hopped a Greyhound forty years ago.
Though never squeaky-clean, Elmira's gone
ramshackle bad. The litter and the pawn
shops lie along both Main Street and skid row.
It never made a comeback from the flood.
Walmart's pocket Schrades are under lock
and key, while pigeons, pimps and hookers flock
to Wisner Park. The Mayor is a dud.

Still, when he has the urge and time, he scours
the online *Star-Gazette*. This justifies
his flight from hometown ho-hum to the glitz
he's come to take for granted and despise;
but fails to quell his grief for glorious hours
gone unrecorded in today's obits.

Ruts

Elijah Burrell

He drove across the alfalfa field
out back when he left Mom and me.
We didn't have a driveway, to speak of,
and he dug ruts since it had poured
three days straight. The creek rose and drank
its own banks, hail made war on the tin roof.
And not once did Daddy's lights
hug their way back over the hill;
through the window, reflect in the mirror
above my toy box.

first published in *Muscle and Blood*

Hologram

Eli Burrell

This cornfield is dried coral, my skin stung
with tiny cuts as I pass among its rows.
The wind is barnyards, dusting tussock sedge,
which bends like seaweed in slow waves.
I should've been born on the sand, my subjects sculpting
castles in celebration of my arrival.
A babe swaddled in kelp and pearls.
Instead I creak in an old inapt rocker
by an open window. The rusty smell
of a screen. The sky releases like a pregnant
grain silo. There's salty rain in my veins.

first published in *The Country Dog Review*

Demolition Derby

William Baer

Why am I out here getting smacked and slammed
in a useless Corvair with a busted accelerator,
endlessly pummeled and illegally rammed
by her Chrysler Imperial “Devastator”?
As you smash me back-and-forth, and crash,
again and again, my tin-can outer shell,
until there’s nothing more of me to smash.
Then you drive away to some other guy’s demo hell.
And *no one* who really knew us back in the day,
who’d witnessed the slash-and-burn, the hit-and-run,
would read this demo-analogy and say
that it’s unfair, “too much,” or over-done.
Even today, I drive with indecision,
fully expecting another blind-side collision.

Bobblehead

William Baer

Last week, I made a bobblehead of you.
Your head's, of course, too big, but all the rest
is you: honey-blond hair, eyes of blue,
even the pink Armani dress you like the best.
“Would you,” I ask, “like to stroll around the lake?
And could we lie together all night long?
Could I make you breakfast whenever you wake,
and rub your feet, and hum your favorite song?
Could you love me till the stars go dead?
And will you meet me *anywhere* in town?”
Ever so gently, I touch the top of your head,
which bobbles up, then down, then up, then down,
as, over and over, you happily acquiesce,
smiling and nodding: yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Wife of My Late Years

Don Thackrey

For years, I worked the farm alone, depressed.
No Eden this. Often I'd thought to leave,
Drift East like Cain—yet stayed on and was blessed
One evening when God said "This is your Eve."
In waning light she came to me as wife,
And Adam surely would have understood
How second gifts enhance that first one, life.
She's been the spring that makes a winter good.

At leisure now, we're but one combined self,
Paired versions of a poem not finished quite,
Not closed up in the volumes on God's shelf,
Still building metered lines to fence out night
And quite contented now as we spend time
To help each other make the couplet rhyme.

Surviving Frost

Don Thackrey

If these shoots grow that have survived the frost,
Though all else die that I set out this spring,
I shall not count my labor wholly lost.

Like them, I yearn for warmth but have not crossed
The bridge from death to life and cannot fling
Despair aside and thus survive the frost.

I crave the garden work that helps exhaust
A grieving mind so I can dully bring
Myself to trust my labor is not lost.

My daughter lives no more; dare I accost
The One who claimed her as a garden thing,
Deciding she should not survive the frost?

Her narrow plot of ground here lies crisscrossed
With shoots I tend while I attempt to sing
To ward off fears my labor has been lost.

Spring thaw has come; we can assess the cost,
Seedlings and I, of braving winter's sting.
If these green shoots help me survive my frost,
I shall not count my labor wholly lost.

Moonshine

John Whitworth

Moon in the water and a sleeping swan,
It's beautiful, you say, and I agree.
It's surely beautiful, and so are we.
And so are we. Quick now, before it's gone,
Let's catch it with a kiss, let's seal it on
Our beating hearts, let's carve it on a tree.
Do you feel it? Yes surely you do. Do you see?
Let's write it in the scattering stars that shone
When life was but a dream and earth a crust
A billion, zillion years before this night.
We love not as we would but as we must;
We know it's beautiful; we know it's right.
Those stars shine still when we are dead and dust.
Whoever loved who loved not at first sight.

Tent Revival

Justin Hamm

The crimsonfaced pastor howls
a river of crooked creekbabble,
and I find myself drifting
toward the altar yet again,
whole galaxies of inevitability
unwinding in my chest
as the red throat in me
spreads wide its dove wings
and I am made into all matter
between blood and electricity.

Sparks leap the black gap
between bottom and top teeth,
that necessary separating, that opening
up of the birth canal for the coming
of God's own spontaneous trill.
Now the arms extend, ascend
without my consent, waving,
reaching at unreachables high
in the starry-smear'd evening.

I used to believe something grand
could've happened there
in the middle of golden October,
but for my tongue, that sleeping
serpent who remained always my own.
Cynical, stubborn and sullen—
and still too much made
out of low terrestrial gravies
to ever sing the celestial song.

Birdwatching

Sally Nacker

for Dan

In autumn rains, a flash of red
darts amid the busy sparrows
casting seed shells from my feeder.

Cooing, three mourning doves peck
fallen seed. Higher up, in misty
crowns of golds and browns, melodies

repeat, quick and throaty. You write
your landlady agrees to put
a feeder in her garden near

your window, that each day in this,
your final year, you will hear tunes
incomprehensible, yet heart-

clear. If birds carry our souls, when
you are released from pain, will yours
flit past my window, and again

like a refrain? Or pause lightly
on my sill? And what form will you
take? Scarlet tanager, robin,

the common crow? I do not know
if birds do carry our souls.
When faced with death, I find faith hard

to navigate. On losing you,
I may not want to look at birds,
their singing might become too hard

to listen to. Beauty takes on
a sour tinge during sorrow.
But even during your long years

of cancer you have never flinched.
You speak of blessings in the birds—
“feel their joy, friend, it is all true.”

Vireo

Sally Nacker

for my mother, 1933-2012

Those two playful birds we watched that spring,
tiny, olive-green, gliding through air,

open bills quivering, throats loosing a
lively, repetitive song, unrelenting,

melodious—"with great volubility"—
perhaps were not vireos. The vireo

weaves its cupped, hanging nest snugly onto
a fork in a slender branch and does not

nest in a birdhouse, does not feed on
seed, but seeks fruit and insects. At the time,

we looked no further than a photograph
in a field guide. The bird we found was green

and white with a contrasting blue-gray crown.
Its thin blue feet clasped a leafy branch. Poised,

eyes bright, it warbled "a monotonous
series of short abrupt phrases." Our needs

were met. We had not seen the species in
your garden before. The close-knit pair flitted

in and out of the wooden birdhouse on
your lantern. We thought they were nesting.

Remember the day I tried, but failed to
see inside? Out flicked one of them past me.

The birds hovered around the feeder, too.
If not vireos, what were they? Today

I learned that the red-eyed vireo feeds
her young for weeks after they leave her nest.

The affectionate parents guide their chicks
“through the woods,” uttering “querulous notes”

at the least “sign of danger”—for a long time,
their little family keeps together.

For five weeks last summer, I held your frail
hand in the hospital, watching doctors

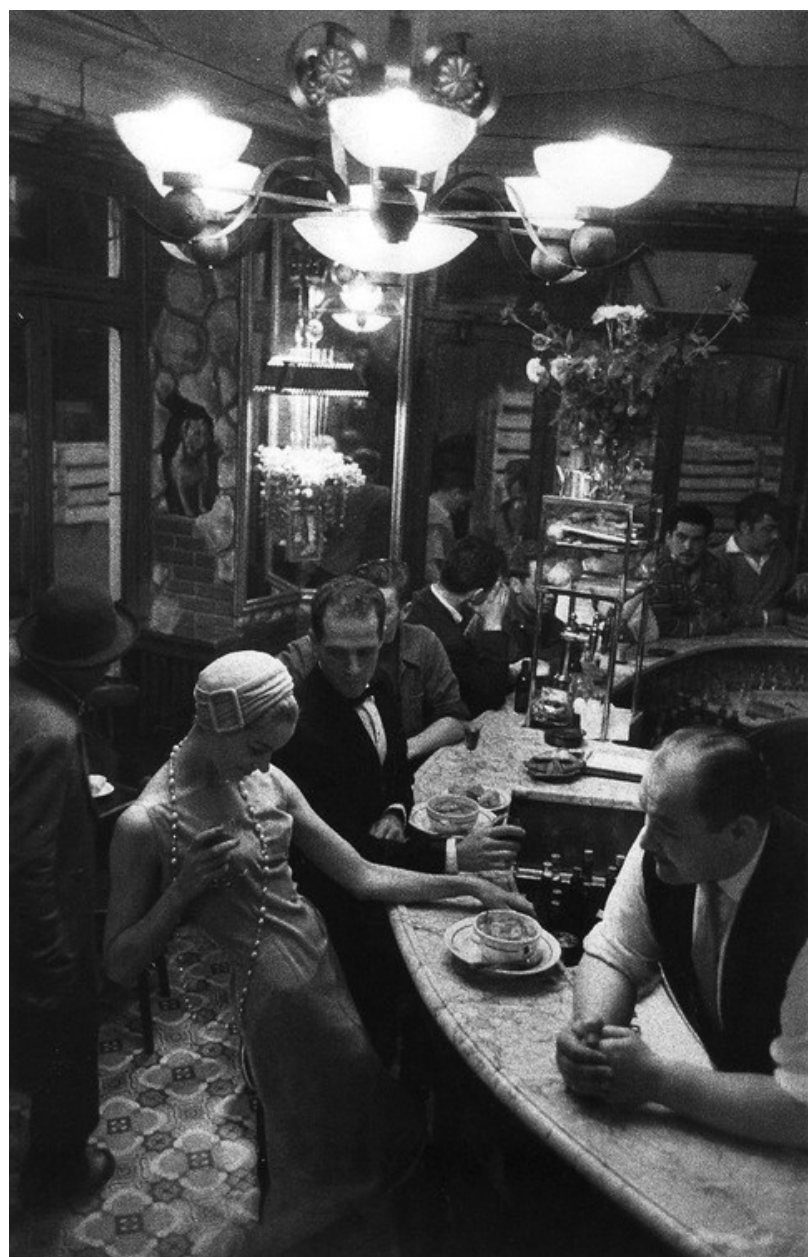
struggle to save you. Knowing that you were
dying, I walked the long, white halls, crying—

wishing you would get better so that I
could once more send you a letter home.

Now, both houses are hollow. If we have
mistaken a bird’s nesting habits, and

on what it feeds, what does it matter? Side
by side at your picture window, we took delight

in watching a pair of vireos seize
flight after a hop through the plum trees.



Les Halles, 1957

David Landrum

from a photograph by Frank Horvat

He wears a tux. She wears a close-fit dress
(probably pink—it seems—the photograph
is black and white, so we can only guess).
The bartender looks bored. His hands are clasped,
his eyes half-closed. The young woman leans, bent
toward the tux man in a posture of delight,
smiling, perhaps responding to the scent
of the latte he has bought for her. The night
is lit by blazing lamps hung from the ceiling.
Two men sit side by side down at the end
of the bar. The one with a mustache is stealing
a glance at the girl and at her well-dressed friend.
A shabby man wearing a bolder hat
is shuffling in, as furtive as a cat.

Deadeye: A Photo of Myself, Age Five

Mary Makofske

Except for one stray lock, the girl
has tucked her hair beneath the cowboy hat
and stands face front to the camera,
her legs spread slightly, feet
in her Roy Rogers boots toed out.
Hands on hips, she stares straight at me,
squints one eye as if taking a bead
even before she whips the six-gun
from its holster. Deadeye,
her father called her. That loaded
gaze which says, *There's not room
in this town for both of us*. She looks
invincible, bound to increase her legend.

Once at naptime she left her sleeping
mother, pulled a dining room chair
to the door, and still unable to reach
the three chain locks, piled telephone books
slippery back to back to hoist herself up.
An outlaw of bone and wiry muscle,
they can't make her eat, not even
her mother's famous fried chicken,
except for the golden crisp crust.

She knows what whets her own
appetite, wants to dig her spurs
into the world's curved side
and break it. *Clear out by sundown*,
those eyes warn me. Nothing symmetrical

about her, all odd angles and furious
intention. The near-smile cocked
and boasting, *I see right through you*,
though she can't, of course, see me
at all, my sardonic smile, my squint
at her threat: *You'll never get away with this.*

Safety

David Landrum

I listen to a CD of a show
Hank Williams did in 1938.
The way he talks reminds me of the way
my uncles used to talk—and yet I know
that nasal-twang speech is starting to go
even down in the South. There'll come a day
when no one has that accent or will say
words with that sound, that cadence, and that flow.

And much more too: Aunt Jessie's pecan pies,
old piety, the gentlemanly style
of my grandfather; outhouse and wood pile;
mule teams. It's true that everybody dies,
but *everything* dies too. After a while
the world remakes itself to our good-byes.

Kat Ashley, First Lady of the Bedchamber,
Reveals the Queen's Condition in a
Letter to Her Beloved

Myrna Stone

Hampton Court, England, November, 1562

Only to you, dear husband, do I dare
speak of her with such unsubtle frankness,
for you, John, above all others, are aware
that I tender her greater love than goodness
requires. When she arose early this morn
from her bath, she tried to conceal the scars
the pox has inflicted, and in her most forlorn
voice bemoaned her nose's recurring catarrh
and its flux. . . . I fear her spirit weakens
anew, and may soon succumb to melancholy.
She is no longer young, and what wakens
or sleeps within her seems but reckless folly.
She agrees to wed, but denies princes
from every able realm. Thus her favorite,
Dudley, finding her talk capricious, presses
her with increasing fervor. And still she flits
from yes to no like a wayward child. I bade
her to temper her sentiments with reason,
and dressed her, lacking Ann or Letty's aid.
Past noon it was before the task was done
and the last thimble-full of Dr. Huick's
orange-flower water cast about as vapor.
Now, her mood unleavened, she is fixed
on sleep tonight, though there is no leisure
for me, awake in my bed at the foot of hers.
Tomorrow, I shall offer her a goose confit
and candied plums to break her fast, a furz-
petal decoction, and much motherly heat.

John Ashley, Master of the Queen's Jewels,
in a Letter To His Still-Absent Wife
Myrna Stone

The Jewel House, London, England, May, 1563

Sweet heart, I am afflicted here, though not from ills occasioned by plague. I am fraught by lack of any intercourse with you. How doth our noble Bess deprive us from plying our troth without a whit of conscience? . . . Ah, I hear it, that familiar plea you oftentimes make for grit in the face of duty, so without ado I surrender to your wishes. A sound kiss you will tender me, lady, when next we meet . . . On this eve at my desk, I curtail with your implied leave an already much pared-down correspondence, for I must check the stacks of silver plate once more, then dispatch strands of Bess's pearls for the Swedish ambassador's fête. Her furled coils of Indian rubies, of diamonds, amethysts, and the gold upon which they glitter and twist, I would enlace you with, love, if I but dared. Such is the daftness I indulge since she pried us apart! Still, in my leisure, I have again begun to study the patterns I perceive in a horse's run when at its fullest gallop, though my investigation pales when I think of you. Our Queen and nation we will serve first—but O, dear Kat, dear wife, how I long for the pleasures of a homelier life.

Jane Austen's Confinement

Janet Kenny

Jane Austen wrote at home with simple tools.
No personal computer helped her write
forensic demolition jobs of fools,
or silly girls who later were contrite.

And should a hapless character be taught
a lesson, when they chose a wicked path,
Jane guided them to do the things they ought
and often gave them holidays in Bath.

A little table saw these puppets grow
as far from gentle Jane tormented all
the characters in turn, and made them show
inevitably pride precedes the fall.

That tiny corner table bore the strain
of all the horrid birth pangs felt by Jane.

Art Museums

Janet Kenny

Strong strokes, flat areas of light,
big darks, broad horizontal bands,
down-sweeping lines from certain hands
that could not stand the weak and slight,
impatient of the too polite.

A tide that smashes on the land
where shells, translucent in the sun,
dance delicate and finely spun
against the wet of coal black sand.

Perception got from ancient minds,
interpreted through time by sight
and sound in vaulted halls, refined
by long apprenticeship with pain
hard weathered in the blizzard's bite,
and toughened in the winter rain.

In rooms that echo distant doors,
we store the monuments to keep
our treasured secret dreams and show
our lying selves the truth we know.

Endings

Mark Belair

With the farm stand closing, we
hurriedly sniff and squeeze and tumble
late August tomatoes into a paper sack, strip
back the squeaky tops of ears of corn and roll them
into a thin plastic bag, select and slide a flat of petunias into the
car then load ourselves, finally, into our house just before the rain

unloads thunderously into the surprisingly early dark, lightning
backlighting our pine trees into church steeples rising
in praise of this declining summer, the rain hushing
to an elegy, the porch door ghosting
open in a cool fall breeze.

Currents

Mark Belair

I turn under
a line of shade trees
and the summer air cools
as if I've waded
back into one of the spring-fed
lake currents
I remember as a boy, currents
I tried to map
over the course
of a long, idle summer.

But the underwater streams
kept swerving, making
my bare legs
troll for patterns, note nuances, collect clues
I could track to possible
veins of cool
while my gaze met
the flat, glossy water surface
that presented
no evidence of the currents
I felt—only my
floating face.

A Daughter Prepares to Leave for College

Jean Kreiling

She's packing boxes, loading up our car,
and emptying our nest—the old cliché—
she's ready, and she's braver than we are.

We've raised her well, she's been our shining star,
but we admit that our mood's dark today,
as she packs boxes and loads up our car.

Four hours down the road is much too far;
we tell her we'll be just a call away,
and hope she's really braver than we are.

She's taking stuffed bears, high heels, her guitar,
and half our hearts. Though we wish she could stay,
we help her pack a box and load the car.

She'll open new doors. Will she leave ajar
the door through which we've watched her grow and play?
She's ready to move on. How brave we are

to nod and smile as pride and sorrow spar:
we wish her well, we wish for some delay.
She's loaded one last box into our car;
she's ready, and she's braver than we are.

Patty Hearst Sonnet

Kim Bridgford

*Tell everybody that I'm smiling, that I feel free and strong
and I send my greetings and love to all the sisters and brothers out
there (on being arrested for bank robbery). —Patty Hearst*

I remember watching you on video:
You robbed the bank, the focus of the scene.
What did you feel? I didn't seem to know.
I was transfixed by your strange glamour, though.

I remember you were grainy, but still you:
As if they made you up, but brought you down.
There was something exciting, in what you'd been through
(The crease of media ambivalence
Would voyeurize me with experience).
I didn't know what you were going to do.

In that one moment, to mythologize,
You became another person for our eyes.
An heiress/outlaw, carrying your gun,
Released from our constraints, you now had none.

She Compares Her Lover to Her Cat

Gail White

While you're away, my love, I stroke instead
of you the dainty panther in my bed,
more exquisite than satin and more sleek
than rain, but sadly unequipped to speak.
You are my information source, my song,
my lover's lexicon—and yet how wrong
about your health, how vexed with what I write,
how testy at an unintended slight!
The panther only purrs—but you, my mate,
how can you be so damned articulate
yet lack the sense to come in when it rains?
If only you had fur and she had brains.

Sonnet: Jean de Gombaul

Jennifer Reeser

The Voice which sounds and sounds from Pole to Pole,
The hope and terror of both dead and living,
Which summons bodies, spirits, out of nothing,
And with one word called forth the cosmos whole.

The voice of God, which renders skeletal
The cedars, while the bramble's fruit is swelling;
Which shelters and protects the poorest dwelling,
And wrecks the glory of the capital.

This thunder echoing, this sacred cry,
To which the mountains and the woods reply,
And which directs all things toward their end.

To which the highest height, the lowest tier,
Those dead, those not yet brought to be, attend,
My soul, it calls you, and you do not hear.

Pantoum

Jennifer Reeser

Unsettled autumn wind and weather, why return?
I hear the sound of sirens at your season's start.
Your dry breaths, premature and subtle, I discern.
This time next year, will they have blown my world apart?

I hear the sound of sirens at your season's start.
Inspire me with your frigidness, that I resist.
This time next year, will they have blown my world apart?
One says I am the lover whom she most has missed.

Inspire me with your frigidness, that I resist.
One flatters me beneath a bright and full blue moon.
One says I am the lover whom she most has missed.
One draws me toward the boulders with her monstrous tune.

One flatters me beneath a bright and full blue moon.
Relate again to me the fall, austere and stern.
One draws me toward the boulders with her monstrous tune.
Unsettled autumn wind and weather, why return?

Flight EZ426

Alison Brackenbury

In Edinburgh Airport's warm afternoon
I watched a dark girl in the terminal
With eyes of shallow waters, blue and green,
Who led her small son round on a loose rein
In a calm quiet, as women walk with men.
They lean behind me now in the last lull

Before the flight; and in the throbbing plane
She speaks to his low crooning, "Look, a man."
With mustard-yellow coat, with a bleached mane,
A boy with crooked smile, a radio,
Sweeps arms with joy to tell the crew to go,
She lilts, to soothe her fright, her son, "Look, man!"

The boy sprints to a truck door, leaps inside.
Will he spring up, so young and free, again,
Shift ended, sun in eyes, his friend beside?
"We'll see Dada," she soothes. Wing tilts. Her tone
Sings to the plane's lift, "I am not alone,"
To son, to the truck cab, and on the flight,
The pilot, squinting forward into light.

Dickens: a daydream

Alison Brackenbury

The scrapman's son bangs at our door, skives school, like father, his before, all crammed in van's hum. 'Anything, sir?' curls wild, your scavenging people.

The doe-eyed girl at the café till is child's height, yet does not spill one bean from heaped trays, hammers bills, your frantic, stunted people.

Bad teeth, bent hips, the pitbull's snarl called you out from the lawyer's yarns. Happiness bored you most of all, white tables, good, quiet people.

One was your wife. You glimpsed ahead the young actress's breasts instead, buds crushed by silk. She never said your name, changed dates, fooled people.

London, in its lost party time, the trees' lit snow, the towers' gold chime, the heat of bars, the twist of lime, you shun as in a fever.

We meet beneath the dripping bridge, soot, fear and sorrow on each ledge. Hurt child, you scour each rag-strewn beach, walk all night, stride and shiver

until the dawn strikes London's walls and clangs Good morning from St Paul's. Waitresses, Poles, striped bankers pour, your million words. Sleep, river.

I'm Really Not Crazy, but She Is

Karen Paul Holmes

This is going to sound strange
but I think the jewelry my friend made me was cursed.
Necklaces of sodalite, lapis, rose quartz beads
Swarovski crystal earrings, blood red for Valentine's
and a little note, *with loving kindness from C—*.
All, she claimed, vibrated energies to benefit me.
Never quite my style, but it's the thought that counts:
She wanted my husband.
Within two years of the "gifts":
One of our dogs almost died
his body attacking its own red cells.
The other dislocated her hip—
surgery involving rods
and reshaping bone.
My husband had his thyroid removed
and started sleeping with his natural healer (C—).
His niece's husband committed suicide.
His sister died of lymphoma, but before that,
her dear friend had a stroke
in the middle of the night while visiting us.
My mother's lymphoma returned
and killed her.
My brother had bladder cancer surgery
then a staph infection.
But silly me, I still have the jewelry.
Shoved it in a plastic bag when my husband sprung
the news. Didn't have the heart to give it away
and cause someone else such trouble.
Today (!) I'm taking the baubles to a thrift shop
having first blessed them any way I could.
May someone wear them in peace.
May my family's peace begin again.
May the curse not travel through this poem to you.

Still Life with Poppies

Leslie Schultz

Lanesboro, Minnesota

Mist in the valley at dawn
sifts over thin clusters of poppies
rising—yellowy-orange, stems of thin green—

from between that mythical rock
and a hard place: garden wall and side walk.
Life seeks that fine line we must all walk,

finds a fertile edge between
twin implacable mysteries—
striving to bloom, scattering seed.

Here is where I plant hesitant filaments—
seedlings of vision and ritual—
one candle, one brief dance of flame.

Clerking at the Ideal Laundry

Patricia Callan

A lousy job—I'm broke and strapped
I work this place where there's a baseball bat
upon a shelf in case I must deter
some amorous jerk, maybe the customer
who thinks his pockets leave no hints:
boxes of rubbers, cash and mints.

Shirts are piled high on the racks,
lingerie, underwear, T-shirts, stacks
of sheets, neatly folded, and heavy bags
of wash left by the tipsy wife who brags
she'd never touch such things and—wink—
speeds off to meet her lover for a drink.

The artist's paint on spattered overalls
give me a view of how her day is spent.
Slapping paint on client's walls,
she's hired, a helper with a tired lament,
whining the way a weary toddler bawls.
Sorry, I can't remove her discontent.

Delusional for years, he'll pray for you
Robed like a priest from head to hem with starched
collars left here every week, the few
nostalgic threads before the day they marched
him out the seminary door. Still daft,
he always waves his beads at me. Witchcraft?

I fondle the Armani blazer twice
monthly, notice it's tailored flawlessly.
On monogrammed, white handkerchiefs, precise
lipstick stains flame scandal up at me.
He straightens his tie, manner elegant,
"Toss them." His vows? Irrelevant.

A pretty, flowered robe (size large), pale pink,
shrouds this sickly girl who'll no doubt shrink
inside her clothes grown massive as in a cape,
from week to week. She has no fat or shape.
How long before this hanger looks obscene?
How long before there's nothing left to clean?

The reasons for attire, always the same.
to hide, to flee or try to costume shame.
At this place no soul can be redeemed
a mangled life cannot be bleached and cleaned.
I'll take—why not—whatever cash I find
and leave your clothes, your stains, your dirt, behind

Peter Recalls The Fire

Annabelle Moseley

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (Acts 2: 1-4)

He had called me his rock and sought to build
upon my back, which felt more chalk than stone.
And then the bellowing came—house was filled
with wind. I felt him calling in the bone
and marrow of me. Blood-deep, filled with storm,
a zeal-strong wind would be what it would take
to strengthen my denial, change my form
to rugged. Everything was now at stake.
Then fire brought language, words forged in flame.
I tasted singed vowels, yet felt no pain,
only the burn of wanting speech to claim
as many souls as I could tell, explain
the parable of one man made of chalk—
God's wind and fire transformed into rock.

The Delphic Sibyl of Siena

Annabelle Moseley

Pavement mosaic, Siena Cattedrale

The guided tour was over for the day.
The church, banded in marble, black and white,
was bolder than the pamphlets showed. The light
was loud as newsprint; having more to say—
guiding my eyes to settle on the floor

upon a prophetess of pavement, pale,
a stony muteness hollowing her wail.
The dust of tourist's shoes was what she wore
atop her smooth-hewn robes and classic face.
This Delphic Sibyl rendered in concrete
held those who never looked down at her grace,
offered a prophecy beneath their feet.
Covertly joining each one to that place—
she rooted them to wisdom sly, discrete.

To Serve and Obey

Jeff Holt

She cries reluctant tears a nun might shed
then wipes them, hard, and snuffles one last time.
She tells me that she loathes her empty bed.
Her husband left when she was past her prime.

And oh, the children.... they're her greatest love,
but taking care of them is all she does.
She prays she'll meet someone. The Lord above
must want her to be happy, soon, because

her pastor said so and the time would come—
she was no fool—when men would call her old.
For men were shallow. Each one was a bum,
just shaved, wearing a suit. If he seemed cold,

he'd simply stopped pretending that he cared...
Why did she want one, then? She tipped her head
and gazed past me, her eyes grown slightly scared,
and said "To help me know that I'm not dead."

Tercets from the Train

Marilyn L. Taylor

Human dramas implode without trace.—Marge Piercy

Gorgeous, they are gorgeous, these two women getting
on the train, one in lime green silk, black hair
a mile wide, the other slim as a whip, coiled

in red linen. Their two small boys, grinning,
have squirmed into facing seats, bubbling with spare
energy, the cuffs of their designer jeanlets rolled

at the ankles, their studded shirts glinting.
I overhear the women talking over what to wear
to some convention (should it be the gold

Armani or the St. Laurent?) while the boys are gazing
through the rain-spattered window, practicing their
locomotive lingo in shrill, five-year-old

voices, demanding information: are we going
faster than a plane, where is the engineer,
does this train have electricity or coal?

But the women's eyes are fierce, they are grumbling
over Lord & Taylor, which was once a store
to be reckoned with, although the one with wild

hair points out that even Bloomingdale's is growing
more K-Martish than it ever was before.

Don't you interrupt me, child,

she hisses to the boy who wonders why the train is grinding
so slowly through the towns, and where
the bathroom is and what the ticket-man is called

until she bends over him, glaring
from beneath her shadowed eyes, a crimson flare
on either cheek. *You're interrupting me*, she growls.

Now you'll be sorry. His mouth is gaping
as the flat of her hand splits the air,
annihilating two long rows of smiles.

I warned you, didn't I, darling?
Now don't you dare cry. Don't you dare.
Up and down the aisle, the silence howls.

Aylestone Meadows, Croft Hill Ponds

Charlotte Innes

They are the guts and fiber of the earth,
their muck as yielding as daemonic love,
yet still releasing mallards, dragonflies,
and (look!) a swift, all dip and glitter, steeped
as *I* am in this razor-joyful heat,
as if the bog beneath these yellow reeds
might suck up every tattered disbelief.

“Today it’s sunny, cold & beautiful”

Charlotte Innes

Your note from Philadelphia,
as crisp and clean as today’s rain,
the surprise of it, the way it shines
the street to stainless steel or reddens
fences liberating secrets
they’ve been dying to tell. My dear.
Your *sunny-cold* is stirring up
a hidden rot, the long-gone loves
we kissed to life, as if to say,
our love colludes with all we’ve borne,
like silt, enriched enough for growing
more, and sodden, growing less.

Reflections Of An Aging Moon

Sally Cook

Great brassy stalks of varicolored horns
Blow notes to keep the bees awake at noon.
Immersed in gaudy zinnia's stippled forms,
They dance and flit, in homage to the moon.

Among the varied shapes and hues, a muse
Cavorts in blue-strewn, stiff-crimped marigolds
More crimson than a girl would ever use
To rouge her lips. The snowy, waving folds
Of Spiraea, and the lily's pleat,
So pristine, and on her bronzed skin so cold,
Combine to make her robes rich and complete.

The ancient orb thinks he may be too old,
So goes on moving tides, and makes it rain,
While wishing he were young and lithe again.

The Interview

Sally Cook

Once in a blue moon you get interviewed.
You're ready, for you wrote the answers down,
But back off when you see the slightest frown,
Before more damning comments can intrude.

You get control, firm up your attitude.
Replies keep popping up -- you push them down,
Think fast and say you wore a fancy gown,
Brocaded, beaded, when your dress was brown

And second-hand and every turn you viewed
Seemed drab, not brilliant. Once the shaky crown
Of knowing slips, you know you're not a clown
Yet hands are damp, eyes blurred. You feel unglued,
And dull as your stained teeth, next to the wreath
Of dead white choppers questioning. You seethe.

Contributors

William Baer, a recent Guggenheim fellow, is the author of twenty books, including *Love Sonnets*, *The Unfortunates* (recipient of the T.S. Eliot Award), *Bocage and Other Sonnets* (recipient of the X.J. Kennedy Poetry Prize), and four other collections of poetry. His other books include *Times Square and Other Stories*, *Classic American Films: Conversations with the Screenwriters*; *Luís de Camões: Selected Sonnets*; and *The Ballad Rode into Town*. A former Fulbright (Portugal) and the recipient of a N.E.A. Creative Writing Fellowship, he was the founding editor of *The Formalist*, and he currently serves as consulting editor at *Measure*.

Mark Belair's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry East* and *The South Carolina Review*. His most recent collection is *Breathing Room* (Aldrich Press, 2015). Previous collections include *Night Watch* (Finishing Line Press, 2013); *While We're Waiting* (Aldrich Press, 2013); and *Walk With Me* (Parallel Press of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2012). He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize three times. For more information, please visit www.markbelair.com

Alison Brackenbury was born in the English East Midlands, in 1953. She grew up in the countryside and comes from a long line of skilled farm workers. She has been, at various times, Oxford student, librarian, horse owner and metal finisher. She is now retired, except from cats and poetry. Her work has appeared frequently on national BBC Radio, and has won a Cholmondeley and an Eric Gregory Award. Her ninth collection is *Skies* (Carcenet, 2016). *Skies* was featured in *The Guardian* and on Radio 4's *Front Row*, and was *The Observer's* Poetry Book of the Month.

Kim Bridgford is the director of Poetry by the Sea: A Global Conference. As the editor of *Mezzo Cammin*, she founded *The Mezzo Cammin Women Poets Timeline Project*, which was launched at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in March 2010, and has since held celebrations at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and at Fordham-Lincoln Center. Her collaborative work with the visual artist Jo Yarrington has been honored with a Ucross fellowship. Bridgford is the author of nine books of poetry, including the recent *Human Interest*. She has been called "America's First Lady of Form."

Elijah Burrell: Aldrich Press published *The Skin of the River*; Elijah Burrell's first book of poems, in 2014. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in publications such as *Agni*, *Sugar House Review*, *Measure*, *Cider Press Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and many others. Audio versions of his poetry have recently been featured on both *The Missouri Review's* and *Sugar House Review's* podcasts. In 2012 he joined the faculty at Lincoln University. An assistant professor in Lincoln's English department, he teaches creative writing, literature, and composition. He resides near Jefferson City, Missouri, with his wife and two little girls.

Patricia Callan, playwright and poet won the Loren Taylor Contest for *Papa's House*, a play about one day in the life of the Samuel Clemens family. In collaboration with composer Yoko Nakatani, she wrote the book for *The Adventures of John Manjiro*, a suite of piano pieces, performed frequently throughout the United States. Her chapbooks, *Out of the Case: Instruments on the Analyst's Couch*, and *Field Songs* were published in 2008 and 2013, respectively. Her poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *The Poet's Touchstone*, *The Powow River Anthology* and other journals. She has contributed several essays to the online data base *The Mezzo Cammin Women Poets Time Line Project* and is a member of Pinellas Writers and The Powow River Poets in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

Catherine Chandler, an American poet and translator, is the author of *The Frangible Hour*, winner of the 2016 Richard Wilbur Award (forthcoming, University of Evansville Press); *Lines of Flight* (Able Muse Press), shortlisted for the Poets' Prize, *Glad and Sorry Seasons* (Biblioasis), and *This Sweet Order* (White Violet Press). Winner of the 2010 Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, the Leslie Mellichamp Prize and a recent finalist in the X.J. Kennedy Parody Award and the *Able Muse* Write Prize, Catherine's complete bio, audio podcasts, reviews and other information are available on her poetry blog, The Wonderful Boat at www.cathychandler.blogspot.ca.

Sally Cook: A former Wilbur Fellow and six-time Pushcart nominee, Sally Cook received book publication in the 2013 Aldrich Press Poetry Book Award Competition. The resulting book, *The View From Here*, is her third. She has appeared in venues as varied as *Chronicles*, *Lighten Up On Line*, *National Review* and *Trinacria*.

Also a painter, her dual career began in Manhattan's historic Tenth Street Co-operative movement. Her visual works are represented in national collections such as the N.S.D.A.R. Museum in Washington, D.C and The Burchfield-Penney, Buffalo, NY, where an oral and visual section on her work in both venues is presently being assembled.

Dana Gioia is the Poet Laureate of California. His volume *99 Poems : New & Selected* appeared in April.

Justin Hamm is the author of a full-length collection of poems, *Lessons in Ruin*, and two poetry chapbooks. His work has been awarded the Stanley Hanks Prize from the St. Louis Poetry Center and has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Sugar House Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, and *New Poetry from the Midwest*.

Karen Paul Holmes is the author of the poetry collection, *Untying the Knot* (Aldrich Press, 2014). She was chosen for *Best Emerging Poets* (Stay Thirsty Media, 2016), and other credits include *Poetry East*, *Atlanta Review*, *Slipstream*, *Cortland Review*, *Lascaux Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology Vol 5: Georgia* (Texas Review Press), and many more. Formerly VP-Communications at a global financial services company, she is now a freelance writer and writing workshop teacher. To encourage fellow poets and their audiences, she hosts a monthly open mic in the Blue Ridge Mountains and a poetry critique group in Atlanta.

Jeff Holt is a Licensed Professional Counselor from Dallas, Texas. He has poetry forthcoming in *Measure* and has recently published poems in *Angle* and *The Sonnet Scroll of Poetry Porch*. He has previously published poetry in *Antiphon Poetry Magazine*, *String Poet*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and other journals. In 2012, White Violet Press published Jeff's first book, *The Harvest*.

Jay Hopler is a poet, essayist, and translator. His books include *The Abridged History of Rainfall* (McSweeney's, 2016), *Before the Door of God: An Anthology of Devotional Poetry* (Yale UP, 2013, co-edited with Kimberly Johnson), and *Green Squall* (Yale UP, 2006). The recipient of numerous awards and honors including the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, the Whiting Award, and the Rome Prize for Literature, he teaches in the writing program at the University of South Florida.

Charlotte Innes is the author of *Descanso Drive*, a first book of poems, to be published by Kelsay Books in 2017. She has also published two chapbooks, *Licking the Serpent* (2011) and *Reading Ruskin in Los Angeles* (2009), both with Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared in many publications, including *The Hudson Review*, *Rattle* and *The Sewanee Review*. She has also been anthologized in *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond* (Beyond Baroque Books, 2015), *The Best of the Raintown Review* (Barefoot Muse Press, 2015) and *The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), amongst others.

Kimberly Johnson's most recent collection of poetry is *Uncommon Prayer* (Persea, 2014). She has also published a number of critical works on Renaissance literature and translations from Latin and Greek poetry. Recipient of awards and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the NEA, among others, she lives in Utah.

Janet Kenny was born and educated in New Zealand, worked as classical singer in the United Kingdom, then settled in Australia where she became involved in nuclear disarmament. Poetry publications include *The Chimaera*, *Folly*, *14 by 14*, *Iambs & Trochees*, *The Literary Review*, *The Guardian*, *The Spectator*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *The Raintown Review*, *Snakeskin*, *Lavender Review*, *Soundzine*, *Victorian Violet Press*, *The HyperTexts*, *Kin*, *Umbrella*. Her work is in the collections *The Book of Hope*; *Filled With Breath: 30 sonnets by 30 poets*; Mary Meriam's sonnet anthology *Irresistible Sonnets by 71 living poets* and *The Best of the Raintown Review* 2009-2015. Her last book was *This Way to the Exit* published by White Violet Press. Her forthcoming collection *Whistling in the Dark* will be published by Kelsay Books.

Jean L. Kreiling's first collection of poems, *The Truth in Dissonance* (Kelsay Books), was published in 2014. Her work has appeared widely in print and online journals, including *American Arts Quarterly*, *Angle*, *The Evansville Review*, *Measure*, and *Mezzo Cammin*, and in several anthologies. Kreiling is a past winner of the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters Sonnet Contest, the *String Poet* Prize and the *Able Muse* Write Prize, and she has been a finalist for the Frost Farm Prize, the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, and the Richard Wilbur Poetry Award.

David W. Landrum lives and writes in Western Michigan. His poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Evansville Review*, *First Things*, *Measure*, *Christianity & Literature*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Angle*, and *Antiphon*.

Mary Makofske's latest book, *Traction* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2011), won the Richard Snyder Prize. Her other books are *The Disappearance of Gargoyles* and *Eating Nasturtiums*, winner of a Flume Press chapbook competition. A new book is forthcoming from Aldrich Press. Mary lives in Warwick, NY.

Annabelle Moseley is an award-winning poet, author, professor and speaker. Author of nine books, her most recent is a double volume of poetry entitled: *A Ship to Hold the World and The Marionette's Ascent* (Wiseblood Books, 2014). Moseley was the 2014 Long Island Poet of the Year and 2009-2010 Walt Whitman Birthplace Writer-in-Residence. She is a Lecturer at St. Joseph's College and Founding Editor of *String Poet*, the online journal of poetry and music.

Sally Nacker After receiving recognition as finalist (Fairfield Book Prize), semifinalist (Crab Orchard Series in Poetry), and honorable mention (Homebound Publications), Sally Nacker's first book, *Vireo*, was published by Kelsay Books in February, 2015. Shortly afterwards, Sally was invited to be a featured poet with her book at *Poetry by the Sea: A Global Conference* in Madison, CT. *Vireo* has been taught at the college level. Sally earned her MFA in Poetry from Fairfield University in 2013. She resides in New England with her husband and their two cats. Please visit her website at www.sallynacker.com.

Jennifer Reeser has published five books. She has received critical praise from Nobel Prize nominee, Sir Naseer Ahmed Nasir, and from X.J. Kennedy, who wrote that her debut collection, "ought to have been a candidate for a Pulitzer." Her novel-in-verse, "The Lalaurie Horror," debuted as an Amazon bestseller in epic poetry. Her work has been included in the anthologies, "Measure for Measure," from Random House/Penguin's "Everyman's Library" series, in Longman's "Introduction to Poetry," and in *The Hudson Review's*, "Poets Translate Poets." Her work has been translated into Urdu, Hindi, Persian, and the Czech language. Her website is www.jenniferreeser.com

Leslie Schultz (Northfield, Minnesota) is the author of a collection of poetry, *Still Life with Poppies: Elegies* (Kelsay Books, 2016). Her poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies, including *Able Muse*, *Light*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Swamp Lily Review*, *Poetic Strokes Anthology*, *Third Wednesday*, *The Madison Review*, *The Midwestern Quarterly*, and *The Wayfarer*; and in a chapbook, *Living Room* (Midwestern Writers' Publishing House). She has twice won the Maria W. Faust sonnet contest (2013, 2016). Schultz posts poems, photographs, and essays on her website: www.winonamedia.net.

Myrna Stone is the author of four full-length books of poems, including *In the Present Tense: Portraits of My Father*, released by White Violet Press in 2013 and a finalist for the 2014 Ohioana Book Award. Her fifth volume, *Luz Bones*, is forthcoming from Etruscan Press in the summer of 2017. Stone is

the recipient of two Ohio Arts Council Fellowships, a full Fellowship to Vermont Studio Center, and the 2001 Ohio Poet of the Year Award. Her work has appeared in such journals as *Poetry*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Southwest Review*, *Boulevard*, and *Nimrod*, and in nine anthologies

Marilyn L. Taylor, former Poet Laureate of the state of Wisconsin and the city of Milwaukee, is the author of six previous poetry collections. Her award-winning poems and essays have appeared in many anthologies and journals, including *Poetry*, *American Scholar*, *Measure*, *Able Muse*, *Poemeleon*, *Light*, and the Random House anthology titled *Villanelles*. Taylor taught for fifteen years at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and served for five years as a Contributing Editor for *The Writer* magazine, where her widely-read "Poet to Poet" column appeared bimonthly. She frequently offers independent workshops, classes and presentations throughout Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Don Thackrey spent his young years on farms and ranches in the Nebraska Sandhills and continues today to write formal verse about his rural life before modern conveniences. He has degrees from the Universities of Nebraska and Michigan and spent many years at the latter teaching and administering. Now in retirement, he lives with his wife in Dexter, Michigan, where he works on becoming the curmudgeonly old man he always dreamed of being. He is the author of a book on Emily Dickinson and of a book of poems entitled *Making a Prairie: A Verse Journal from the Nebraska Sandhills*.

Gail White is a Formalist poet whose work appears regularly in such journals as *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, and *First Things*. She is a contributing editor of *Light* (www.lightpoetrymagazine.com) and a two-time winner of the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award. Her poetry collection *Asperity Street*, was published in 2015 by Able Muse Press. (And Kelsay Books has just published *Catechism: Poems with cats*.) Gail loves travel and just saw the Bosch exhibit in the Prado. The poet loves the 19th century novel and reads nothing written after 1940. She lives in Breau Bridge, Louisiana, with her husband and cats.

John Whitworth is one of those fattish, baldish, backward-looking, provincial poets in which England is so rich (perhaps too rich). His tenth collection, *Girlie Gangs*, was published by Enitharmon in 2012 to international acclaim. Well, Les Murray liked it. He once won £5,000 for a single poem. His next book, *Joy in the Morning*, will be published shortly by Kelsay Books.



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