



# LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## **Forward!: best young poets University of Wisconsin--Madison 2007. 2007**

Madison, Wisconsin: Parallel Press, 2007

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/P66JDRCBYYJVS8M>

Copyright 2007 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. All rights reserved.

For information on re-use see:

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

# FORWARD



## BEST YOUNG POETS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON 2007



# **FORWARD!**

Best Young Poets

University of Wisconsin–Madison

2007

Published by Parallel Press  
University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries  
Madison, Wisconsin  
<http://parallepress.library.wisc.edu>

Copyright © 2007 by the Board of Regents  
of the University of Wisconsin System

All rights reserved

ISBN: 978–1–893311–91–6

First Edition

*FORWARD! Best Young Poets, University of Wisconsin–Madison 2007* is a collaboration of the Creative Writing Program in the Department of English, UW–Madison; the University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries; and University Communications Creative Services, UW–Madison.

Front cover image: *Soft and Fluffy Gears Series: West in the Breast* by Alan Shields, 1987; handmade paper construction, edition of 15, 18 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 18 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches.  
Courtesy of Tandem Press.

# CONTENTS

---

<b>Preface</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>MFA Poets</b>	
Erinn Batykefer	6
James Crews	7
Marianne Jay Erhardt	8
Jacob Gamage	9
Sarah Nelson	10
Heather Swan Rosenthal	12
<b>George B. Hill Awards</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup> Place—Kia Vang	14
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place—Katie Malchow	17
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place—Jennifer Proctor	20
<b>Honorable Mentions</b>	
Tala Oszkay Febres Cordero	24
Sirianna Helleloid	28
Lindsay McGaan	32
Julie Olah	35
Eve Penzer	38
<b>Finalists</b>	
Molly Crickman	41
Andrew M. Gallas	44
Jason Lester	47
Leif Martinson	50
Sam Sahakian	53
Zoe Schwab	56
Matthew van Oosten	59
<b>MFA Biographies</b>	<b>62</b>



## PREFACE

---

*"There is fatigue, something stagnant about the poetry being written today. . . For all its schools and experiments, contemporary poetry is still written in the rain shadow thrown by Modernism. It is the engine that drives what is written today. And it is a tired engine." —John Barr, President of the Poetry Foundation*

Every few years some critic raises the question: "is this the end of poetry?" The very nature of the question extends from an apathy regarding contemporary art, and a yearning for days past: when all lines were iambic, when poetry was more political or less political, when it was more formal or more experimental, when it was easier to read and had an audience, when poetry was taken seriously or served as pure entertainment, when it was emotionally complicated or more engaging intellectually, when poetry was new or steeped in tradition. Such apocalyptic visions are primarily exercises in nostalgia. On a recent radio program concerning the decline of American family values I heard Senator Trent Lott discuss how perfect his childhood was in Mississippi in the 1940s. This was stated without any mention of the conditions that led to the Civil Rights Movement. Isn't it convenient when the critic uncritically includes himself as one of the last surviving members of the greatest generation? Beauty, empathy, anxiety, craftsmanship, and recklessness thrive in the work of young writers today. The voices of our best young poets cast a spectrum of interests, and take many shapes and forms. When I think of Barr's pronouncement of the decline in American poetry, and read the poems collected in this anthology, it seems clear that regardless of talent or potential, young poets and writers must continue to believe in their craft, but shield their spirits to be successful. Sometimes the shadow of history is nothing more than the ego of the historian looming.

*Forward!* is a collection of poetry showcasing the work of UW–Madison's first-year MFA graduate writing students, and the undergraduate winners, honorable mentions, and finalists of the 2007 George B. Hill Program. The program is named for George B. Hill, a member of the UW–Madison class of 1908. Hill was a writer and editor-in-chief of the *Daily Cardinal*. The 2007 George B. Hill Poetry Prize winners were selected from more than one hundred contest submissions. The contest judge was Jennifer Key, the Diane Middlebrook Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.

On behalf of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, it has been our distinct honor to teach all of our writing students and to aid them in the formulation of their individual and stirring voices, which they will carry out into the dizzying world.

### **Amaud Jamaul Johnson**

Assistant Professor of English  
Creative Writing Program  
University of Wisconsin–Madison



## Archetypes, Icons and Options: A Guide for Girls

You could be Lorelei Lee, breathy and covetous—  
funny, even. See how she gets what she wants in the end?  
You could be happy, provided you have a nice ass  
and the voice to belt out *diamonds are a girl's best friend*  
like you mean it. Or, a variation on the theme:  
Cinderella didn't break any laws to get millions and a man—  
just lived a few nights in crystal shoes beyond her means  
and clinched a classic happily-ever-after to get out of a jam.  
What, you don't love a rich man? Well, then. Forget  
the beauty parlor; no use maintaining that bleach-and-wax sheen.  
Just take off your shoes and open your legs; get  
used to this Old Woman in a Shoe business—smelling of feet,  
never unpregnant, beating the brats nightly. Too mundane  
a tragedy? Pack a bag with incendiaries, an opal-handled knife,  
a faulty parachute. Who you love will determine your name—  
Dido, Juliet, or Isolde—and how you'll take your own life,  
for being tragic is the same as taking orders. But if you'd rather not,  
you could be Laura and do whatever you want under a veil  
of possibilities. There's always some lonely Petrarch  
ready to jizz his sheets over who you might be, to jail  
himself in the burning man conceit, making you his ice queen.  
Who you are won't matter, and that's the beauty of the whole scheme.

Erinn Batykefer

## How to Write a Love Poem

You must step outside the night, look in  
and become the harmless, lonesome voyeur  
standing in your own backyard. Watch

the two figures move inside and listen  
to their familiar voices straining with music  
through the screens. Always live between

the moment the lover places the needle  
on Billie Holiday's "Fine and Mellow," then  
takes your hand, and the moment his sleep

spreads its dark throughout the apartment,  
everywhere but the quiet corner in which  
you write by flashlight. And because of this

betweenness, windows will open themselves  
constantly in your poems. Men will look out  
and look in like the man now standing

in the damp grass below this window.  
Do not notice him as he fills his notepad  
describing how these two figures silhouette

themselves against orange lamplight, moving  
in time to "Love will make you and take you."  
He records laughter and the precise arc as one

body dips another; he writes down cricket-drone,  
streetlight and the scurrying of cockroaches  
back into cracks in the pavement as he steps

closer, and the lover pulls the shade, then  
takes both of you, at once, into his arms.

**James Crews**

## **sentence**

they are allowed twenty-five / books each / magazines count

on a hot night the guard makes them / pull down their sleeves / put away / the guns

in the mess / the men collect what a recipe calls for / forty-two sugar cubes

five pads of butter / three envelopes of hot cocoa mix / then down for count

his letters have been read before / and sonny knows/ in time they will break

at the folds and the ink / a thick cursive of questions / will fade with touch

open gym tonight for units two six and nine / ceramics in the learning center

to be admitted / you must sign yourself in / sergeant / all clear

**Marianne Jay Erhardt**

## **The Astronomer's Room**

The clusters above me  
are not constellations,  
not even stars, but green  
glow-in-the-dark stickers  
glued on the ceiling to scale,  
Betelguese & Rigel  
in flawless placement.

She must've been  
a perfectionist, designing  
galaxies from a step ladder,  
compass in hand,  
a pencil between her teeth,  
calculating the relative distance  
of Orion & Perseus,  
Ursa Major & Minor.

When I'm in bed,  
I place one foot on the floor  
to keep the room from spinning,  
this earth from its rotation,  
this motion  
that keeps me still.

**Jacob Gamage**

## Not Carrying a Lantern

not having to,  
you can be  
swept into

the deep-  
pocketed night  
and retrieved

by streetlight  
your image  
stamped along

the quai d'orsay  
like the fine,  
tight overstitch

of the mending  
maid; stockings  
flashing along

the river, your ears  
cherry blossoms  
under a wig—

housing a wren  
on a twig, a key  
on a velveteen

ribbon, and  
a smudge  
of kohl

from wiping  
your eyes—  
sweet and bare.

Not Marie  
Antoinette  
but queen

of the latin quarter,  
my lover, from  
my window

leaving, in the style  
of one recently  
made into bed

or in the likeness  
of our lady of  
the flight to Varennes.

**Sarah Nelson**

## Disintegration

1.

A voice on the radio said  
to imagine Florida was a thumb  
    shrinking slowly to the size  
of a little finger.    The edges  
    will change, the voice said.    The edges  
will no longer be edges.    They will be submerged  
    and pulled in by the tide.  
The voice suggested moving inward  
meaning further away    from what we knew as the edge.

I imagine sitting at a cafe table    near the shore  
my hands warm around a cup of tea  
    as I watch the ocean pawing its way up beach.  
How the intricate underpinnings of the fig tree  
    its lattice of dark veins  
    will be washed clean of soil  
and how tables will rise and float away    white tablecloths  
    undraping themselves  
until they undulate through the salt water    opaque jellyfish.

II.

Disintegration is fundamental. For example,  
    the half life of carbon-14 is 5730 years.  
The isotope decays, and what remains    is a new element.

III.

Over time, the inaudible brush    of enough shoes  
and the burgundy threads of the rug  
    begin unbraiding themselves from the jute    fraying  
so that bits of red fiber    are swept into the air  
    by the light wind of the broom.  
Some rugs are for sitting on, some rugs tell stories,  
    others are only for prayer.

IV.

The therapist suggests moving inward  
with a kind of attention    one gives the horizon  
    when waiting for rain.  
Then redrawing your map.

V.

The voice on the radio said it will affect tourism.      It will affect ports.  
And I imagine us      in small glass-bottom boats on windless days  
                         going out to look down through the water      at the walls of stone,  
the useless doors with ridiculous locks.      All that we could not hold.

And I imagine our hands      weathered by then      pressing together,  
                         the heat      erasing      the seam.

**Heather Swan Rosenthal**



## **Sugarlove**

Girl, I feed you sugar  
love in lumps juiced from the stalk  
of my cane, beat the blues

out of your ivory keys, lips swollen  
with sweetness like the sting of a honeybee.  
I can taste you on my tongue,

black licorice whip thin  
flogging the upsurge of each bud. In turn,  
you thicken like a slaughter-house cow,

teats spilling milk—no use crying  
over a dead child. I want to crawl inside the vinegar-  
soaked soft eggshell of your womb

and rest my head against the jelly paste  
of your son. I scrape him off like burnt toast;  
there is only room for one man.

Woman, I want to drink  
from the saccharine lips of a girl, the red  
meat of a fresh fruit. I thumb

each shadowed curve and find soft  
flesh, the taut breasts of youth  
now heavy with soured milk.

**Kia Vang**

## **Opium Baby**

Baby sleeps to the music box  
jungle, nestled against the rugged body  
of Father's AK-47. He sings  
of his People of the Mountains, weeps

for the first time—tears that machete  
the limbs off trees. He sings to the music  
of slaughter, Sister and Mother harmonizing  
in their screams of rape and murder.

Safety is the darkness sitting on the crisp  
skin like wet burlap, the Mekong  
kissing the flesh with lips  
of the dead. Father maps out the footprints

sunk into the mud, leg split open  
like the overripe watermelons Mother used to grow.  
Hungry for flowers, Baby howls;  
Soldiers reply with a syncopation

of bullets, and Father weeps for the last time,  
feeding Baby a quiet dream of poppies,  
and swims that river which never ends,  
hope and guilt like lead in Father's heart.

## **Kia Vang**

## The Troubadour

If love is blind then so are mice who dance  
the minuet in three-four time. Their eyes  
mistake for what they hear, and so they leap  
in turn of steps too slow to bear. So young  
are girls who stitch their blood on sheets of white  
sateen, thumbs pricked by spindling trickery.

Though some believe the spell is fabled trickery,  
she walks as if asleep, a fine-tuned dance  
rehearsed with time, the lead a pawn in white.  
He clears the space for what's to come, his eyes  
are trained, his pike's *en garde*. He waits the young  
girl's gift of trust to place its hand and leap

into the black forest of kings, then leap  
again for pleasures stained red with trickery,  
a bed of needles laid with hay. A young  
wolf cries into the night, and joins the dance  
beneath the mouth of full moonlight. Blue eyes  
invite the swell of hips, the sign of white

in winter comes, the spill of milk from white  
and tender breasts. And so she takes a leap  
into the dark, her face a book in eyes  
of men who write the words of trickery  
onto the lips until they sing the dance  
that sons of kings will steal. Without the young

coquettish charm, she finds herself a young  
and lonely girl. And waits beneath the white  
moonlight to see and hear the sounds of dance  
as night falls fast. Instead she hears, with leap  
of faith, the trot and whinny of horse and trickery.  
With racing heart, and stars in girlish eyes,

her knight arrives in horse and carriage, and eyes  
the girl with knowing looks. She bears her young  
and aching body with unintended trickery,  
and born the son of kings before, her white  
and chivalrous knight can do no wrong, but leap  
in bounds and break the beat of her blind dance.

And so the dance is done and dead, her leap  
at last is grave, her eyes wide shut and young  
she falls for love and misery, white knights and trickery.

Kia Vang

## **I shaved my legs tonight**

because I thought maybe you would see them.

I wanted to be as smooth as a new piece of chalk,  
so your fingers would glide

over my skin like an eraser on a blackboard.

Because hair is no longer the barrier

between you and me, or

me and me. Because I want your fingers' journey

to discover something beneath

the skin I have tamed. Because velvet's more valued

when touched, and I want your prints tracing

cursive kisses down my spine.

I want the whorls of your fingertips

to polish me like sandpaper

and remove my roughness underneath.

**Katie Malchow**

## **Eve's Thanks**

Thanks for the tree we leaned against while summer leaned into us, heavy and hot like a baby's tears. Thanks for the blue sky winking as palm met palm like the graze of the snake's forked tongue. Thanks for our sweat, skin dewy, shoulders kissing as our backs relaxed against the bark, apples seducing on the branches above, breeze blowing red with sin. Thanks for the animal instinct carrying us through every first motion: my lips melting into his melting into the apple's sweetness coursing through our blood displacing the virgin breeze and kissing sweat, leaving us alone, shivering redness.

**Katie Malchow**

## **Blank**

Age eighteen skin aching for the taste  
of ink. Her first needs to fill the boyfriend's  
lungs with iron, twist mom's intestines  
around the tines of a fork. The artist's skin drips  
like melted plastic, he imprints her wish  
small and scarlet on her pelvic bone. One tug  
of the zipper spills the tangible heart.

**Katie Malchow**

## Seduction of the Guillotine

*Paris, 1794*

On your back like this, there is a surrender.

I told him my struggles were unzipped  
hundreds of men ago, before night hung  
its watch around my neck, tightened the rope  
below my ears and hummed arias,  
the numb wait.

He just curved power through his smile  
and sentenced my back to the board  
(*“for the whore”*)—  
throat long and exposed  
for one last blush of blood, fingering his jaw  
as he mused my eyelids wilting with the sting  
of black-red ecstasy.

Tongue jutting between teeth, he stands there now,  
as the final blade in mute anticipation.  
Strangers murmur into a courtyard breeze,  
bathing me as his eyes bathe  
my grounded body, thighs splayed,  
hair billowing to the dirt, a curtain  
at midnight.

Bedtime mice hurry past and my fingers  
stretch for their tiny shuffling bodies,  
for the warmth of life beneath  
fur and sound.  
I catch only the air  
of movement, meaningless words,  
he asks me a question or two and the crowd  
stands and stares,

the submission building  
at my spine like a bird curving skyward  
in flight. Midair, there is a wall  
invisible to most, the higher  
you climb—

A crack of sound.  
The flash of pure round light  
blinding metal, his tongue  
slipping past and plunging through  
the slit, wet skin  
of my neck—

my life bone.

**Jennifer Proctor**



## **Submission by Watercolor**

Painter boy, paint her flat  
and heavy, curve her blue  
in crooked stoned heat, stone  
as the smooth table runs  
from shoulder to hipbone—

she closes her eyes not to watch.

Brush-stroke lover, release  
her thighs as heated glass,  
mold your own, ink the hips  
of a woman not ready to give  
to you, gutted boy.

Just press her whole  
into cold, redirect every  
hair, every oval of her  
mouth so she swears  
she's your blue in every  
lie of your art.

**Jennifer Proctor**

## Chloe

There was my girl, sweet, small  
for a Labrador, lying medicated  
beneath the domed, white blanket as heat  
masked her shaken body.  
My heart and my family hovered near,  
heavy as stones in the pockets  
of the living drowned,  
as little ribcages do not traditionally  
interrupt SUVs, unhinge license plates,  
and remain within the taut bowstring  
of the living.

I wandered the clinic, heart chasing  
the back of my neck, in heels and sweatpants  
and swollen skin.  
Refrains of wind would rush with the doctor  
as he passed, appearing from anywhere,  
straight to her side.

The air caught me in pauses, suddenly still.  
The raw color of honey, her body aching still.

Shading the terror of doctors was the curious in her  
dark eyes, warm nightfall of idleness, internal unwind.  
It was there, she showed, somewhere between  
the wounds and light ripped through us both,  
that she was still there, my girl,  
panting slow, life sighs.

*Come again, to this wildflower we used to call home.*

Leaves had long abandoned the trees that day.  
Matchsticks held wiry and dull above their roots,  
ground deep in the snow. The sun creaked past  
the corner of a cloud, daring any life  
to bloom and be seen in this old blanket,  
silent movie screen.

And there she was,  
in a little room on the corner  
of nowhere forgotten, in life's other  
opened palm, there lived my little dog,  
Chloe.

**Jennifer Proctor**

### Poet meets Señor Picasso, Los Caracoles restaurant, Barcelona, August 18, 1957

Abuela is screaming a hundred miles away  
while you sit next to a bald sailor  
your eyes—

    eyes they say are mine—  
linger over the *puta*<sup>1</sup>  
fanning herself at the corner table.

She reminds of you  
of the sailor's weeping woman—  
pathetically painted face  
of desperation.

She sells herself  
but so will you—  
three poems  
for three bottles so you can  
soak your organs in spirited turmoil,  
turn your teeth gray like dusted porcelain,  
wipe the image  
of your wife's misery—

She lays in a hospital bed  
sweating like the chickens  
that roast in the restaurant window display,  
pushing out  
your baby,  
*Mujer llorando*<sup>2</sup>

but you don't know that

you don't know that your drenching binges will  
drown her until she leaves you,  
weaken your body until you fall to your death,  
keep you  
from ever knowing if  
    our eyes  
are really the same.

All you know is in a few weeks you will return.  
You will kiss my seven year old mother  
and newly born uncle  
with whore stained lips  
and tell my abuela that  
the bald sailor says  
*el arte no es casto.*<sup>3</sup>

**Tala Oszkay Febres Cordero**

1. slang for prostitute, whore
2. "Weeping woman" by Pablo Picasso, 1937
3. Pablo Picasso's famous words, "Art is never chaste."

## **Terracotta Warrior Souvenir from Xi'an, China**

The moment we meet,  
my urge  
is to break you—

I want to hold you  
in my fist—  
gather my fingers  
around your molded body  
and squeeze you—  
squeeze you  
the way Superman  
squeezed a piece of coal  
to get the diamond out of it—

I want to feel  
the little pieces  
of your commercial miniaturism,  
your imitated heroism,  
cut into my palm  
and I want to bleed—  
I want my hand to cry  
for your lack of mysticism.

I don't doubt  
you were made in China,  
probably in a ceramic factory,  
a million times over,  
to be sold at the excavation site  
where they claim you are an exact replica,

but I still want to break you—  
8,000 times over,  
and I want you to survive—

I'll piece you back together  
like a little archeologist,  
and then maybe  
you will feel  
handcrafted,  
and then maybe  
I will feel  
what a real warrior is.

**Tala Oszkay Febres Cordero**

## **No Cigar**

the lover tells me  
the absence  
is felt in the hand—

44 years  
with only five fingers,  
the hand constantly gropes  
for the sixth  
like a lost comrade,  
searching  
for that slender bodied  
mulatto—

that perfect blend  
of the elements  
whose fog  
breathed a humid air  
into his lungs,  
enriched his colorless words  
into a smoky rhetoric,  
gave purpose  
to his mouth—

now  
he sits lost  
with crippled hand,  
breathless,  
with ashen mouth,  
wanting  
for that Cuban beauty.

**Tala Oszkay Febres Cordero**

## **better homes and gardens**

We listen as *1 tbsp olive oil*  
*sizzling* rain thump runs on the roof  
when we curl, together, *1 onion*

*sliced* hidden under old quilts  
as the lightning cracks *8 cloves*  
*garlic crushed* and I think, apropos

of nothing: citric, battery, hydrochloric  
acid. You lick ice cream from my nose,  
fill my pores with *3 tbsp fresh rosemary*

paint after laying aside the walls  
to learn to dip *2 carrots*  
*peeled* hands in a bucket to play;

you give me *2 stalks celery*  
*chopped* fluttering lye-dust  
lashes and shattered *1 c diced*

*tomatoes* glass windows—and, you smile,  
as if my homegrown soup could fix  
thirty horizontal cuts *1/3 c parsley*

*ripped* across your iodine  
thighs. You boil *6 c white*  
*beans* toxic waste; I substitute

*a pinch salt* protein for phosphorous,  
hide the cold medicine *dash of pepper*  
under the garbage, count the knives

littering my *parmesan grated* counter-  
top. If this wasn't a recipe—if this was rock  
stars—if this was—millionaire foreign—

I could wrestle you. Body against  
body. Resist. But you are home-  
made crystal: when you say,

"No doctors," I put down the phone.  
There are no heroines here, only pans,  
unwashed, lining the sink like syringes.

**Sirianna Helleloid**

## **snapshot of a world, tinted**

I think of frogs, whose throats—membrane  
thin—vibrate and push

sound waves  
across crisp air, distance

muting the rumble, eerie  
and echoing, old

as our argument  
still playing across your mint

wet lips. I press  
arched backed spoons

into avocados, their silver  
glinting soft

and sharp,  
like the lime juice

down your tongue.  
Later, when we throw back salt

and worms,  
I seek weak points only a friend would notice:

we banter,  
and I lose,

between slices  
of pear, or your abrupt non

sequiturs about her eyes, or the apple  
you bite and lick—mark—

with precise  
teeth.

My voice thins,  
thrown over miles.

**Sirianna Helleloid**



## the built golem

Barefoot on the margarita floor  
I used to dance:

dance with the meat knife  
and the potato peeler  
and the sugar ants, sucking  
them up with straws.

But then my feet got stuck—  
and you were thumping  
in the bedroom, stoned.

If you give me your sins, I will  
hang them  
with the dirty wash. You are like  
the roadkill finches,  
the afternoon when it pours,  
my split ends.

I bang a saucepan against the gas burners  
where you lit your cigarettes. The ants  
scatter. I cook  
you beans & rice, shove the spoon  
past your lips. And I think:

Let me smear your body in mud, let me chip at the frozen ground, and  
let it cut my fingers, my blood smearing my winter scarf, the taste of it like the  
taste of road salt or dust: heavy. Let me fill a plastic bucket with mud, let me take it  
to the kitchen, and let the mud thaw from sleep.

(I was embryonic when my mother pulled me aside  
and said: "Listen: the best way of knowing is doing."  
She knew alot. Men, algebra, rugby, faith, fixing  
cars. I didn't know a thing but sandboxes and rain.)

And I think:  
Let me prop your eyelids open.  
Let me spray paint your sight.  
Let me—

I snap: you watch  
the ants move,  
over the way my voice carries in your ears,

so I palm you, push my fingers  
into your clay belly, chew  
on you like onion skins,  
like cud in my mouth,  
working you between my sour teeth.

Your fingerprints, the photographs  
in your wallet, every piece  
of oxygen in your lungs:  
I mold your dust.

Each atom, an Adam

Faith, an action

Prayer, a command

So, I do this.

There are no ants:  
I move you in my image,  
my hands marionette your corpse.

**Sirianna Helleloid**



## **Prairie Fire**

your wheatgrain fingers  
feather my dusty spirals  
of hair: wispy and passive

as the prairie smoke. carbonized  
petals sigh from cackling milkweed  
and dandelions, all burning

to grow. tracing their remains  
to the sky, I, too, burn through  
tomorrow, kindling the flames

with pine and precision, until  
your abating rains fall  
with a breathy *hush*.

**Lindsay McGaan**

## **Cooking Lessons**

At five I learned to stretch her long linguine, cranking the handle as flour and dough cleaved between silver teeth. Mia nonna floured my hands, palms to the ceiling, and strung my fingers with capelli d'angelo. Spaghetti grew like vines around my arms as she wove and braided our strands together, her own threadlike hair pinned back in patches.

Mia nonna laughed when asked for her recipe as I spiced the pot with crayon shavings. They sprinkled out of my eight year old hair, folding into her sauce so thick I ate it as afternoon soup. In spoonfuls it slid, warm and tangy off my lip, staining the white counter.

Some afternoons I stir my tea with her ladle, hot water spilling onto my bare legs.

**Lindsay McGaan**

## **Persuasion**

His large, black hand bleach white palm  
closed over the seat of my cherry bike  
the bike I want with its fenders scooped  
by thin worn wheels, spoked and dusty black bracelet,  
turned by his other hand the size of my face  
big enough to tuck his thumb under my chin  
and push his fingers neatly into and under  
my knotted hair, damp and callused skin  
smells like mint. I want the bike.  
He says with sweet green breath  
the seat alone, the seat small from his dark  
marble knuckles wrapped around, is worth \$100  
alone because of the cocked brand embroidered  
in clean white stitching across bold bands of red tatty leather.  
I want the bike. He says he'll take \$180  
for the whole bike, worth \$700 he says,  
with the seat. I take it, the bike that's held  
up in his running, curling, spice-oiled arms fast black  
on the cherry metal, brushed against my finger pads  
as it's handed, his warmth against the bike  
against my arms, against my face, palms  
touching, holding, selling just trying to sell  
with his hands a bike. I want the bike.

**Julie Olah**

## **Arbored**

She rests in the chair in the white dress and shadow  
of waxy leaf trees dark leaf trees  
brushing her calf-ear cheeks like pages of a book  
veined in letters describing the sea glass light  
roughed up dirt smelling like leathery roots white  
like her dress from being buried in the shade  
of dust. And here she'll sit  
under a roof homed in leaves where their wax drips  
to the table and tans on the lace of her glove  
in the light of silhouetted words etched on leaves  
telling her smooth as suede whisperings  
scrolling stories in her eyes.

**Julie Olah**

## The Other of Old

*I grow old. . . I grow old. . .*

*I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. —T.S. Eliot*

"I grow old" say the lakes  
filled with the whites of night's eyes,  
the moon crying bits of salt  
forever missing her love  
the sun

"She is old" says dirt faced boy  
waiting on the stoop, pointing at  
his mother, but she is dangerous  
like darkness, young love drawer locked  
a picture

I am old, I am old  
my legs around your driver's side  
ass against the wheel as you press  
the car to rev, my love  
the engine

Old man old  
sitting in a booth with old friend  
George, shoeless darning argyle footsy  
while above, the sweater vests and bowed ties  
shake formal hands with love  
of men

I grow, growing old  
and in the bottoms of my trousers  
rolled are your faces lighted  
in the movie house, yellow gold  
on your faces changing with the loving hum  
of light

**Julie Olah**



## **Memory Palace**

We had not spent more than a day  
Within the ancient city walls  
When history showed its burning face  
To us in dreams throughout the night.  
Where marbled floors had yet to break  
And pheasants served on glazy plates  
Secured the blessings of the king  
Whose subjects begged his sacred touch.

A gilded sign says, Do Not Touch.  
Antiquity alive this day  
Within the palace of the king  
That stands in ruins of tumbled walls.  
Here, where the servants stacked the plates  
And where the queen applied her face  
Before invaders came to rend  
The stillness of this Roman night.

**Eve Penzer**

## **Nantucket, 1927**

On table-tops we stood  
and Sarah,  
bob whipping her rosy skin,  
would announce that she'd spotted England

that perhaps each crest  
was the height of a sigh  
and each wash  
the release of breath

from the merfolk,  
holding court in shallow depths,  
adorned in pearls  
and fishy gills

with no sense of up or down,  
she would say,  
if they'd carefully float beneath passing ships  
so that no sun could point them  
to the heavens

**Eve Penzer**

## **Your 19<sup>th</sup> Century Telephone**

I wish that I could be  
your 19<sup>th</sup> century telephone  
so that you would cradle me in one hand  
against your soft hair  
and warm ear,  
while your voice hums near my mouthpiece.

You would drape your body  
over my wooden shoulders  
as you recall your day.  
And I would listen,  
intent on catching your breath.

**Eve Penzer**

### **clean dog**

what a relief to see a clean dog  
standing still, as if perhaps  
it was a statue  
of the same dog  
a monument to cleanliness  
next to godliness  
those suds  
streaming down  
the sidewalk naked in  
little rivers revealing  
what lies beneath all the shit and stains  
like pigeon shit covering our only tributes  
but the dog  
will eventually wag its tail  
and what then  
when statues no longer exist? when  
monuments crumble, leaving only  
a pile of dung

**Molly Crickman**

## **in the case of my friend**

a particular sadness belongs to the end of a book  
like you're  
losing a friend  
you just made  
you can't just start another one  
you need an evening  
to digest  
the leaves of  
what you've eaten  
it is the same with lovers  
and losing friends  
who are lovers  
you can't just start another one  
you need an evening, and  
in the case of my friend  
I needed several.

**Molly Crickman**

## **Night Owl, Navel Gazer**

When you're up  
all night  
with your mask of feathers  
hiding,  
how you really feel  
I can still follow  
your eyes, searching  
the length of your thighs  
You know I want my body  
to bend like that,  
following the curve  
of the moon.  
You're a crumpled wad of paper, stuck  
in this photograph  
of a photograph  
cracked  
with age, not aging while  
I'm here, so  
how can I look at you,  
as you look  
at yourself, naked  
not even blushing while  
you stare forever  
at your nipples,  
trying to fool me into thinking  
that you're only just  
navel gazing  
on a background  
full of stars.

**Molly Crickman**

## **Dichotomy**

1

Ocean, deep,  
Wind through rain. Trees full  
Of feeling, hours of silence.  
Reassurances on a face.  
Sounds ring like truth.  
I move through foggy expanses in my  
Head and call them my soul.

2

Chrome, sleek,  
Fluorescent light on bright white. Trees cut  
Down for this sight, the ticking of a clock.  
Disappointments on a mirror.  
Pills color the harm.  
I buy and wish and worship in my  
Head and hate and call it a body.

**Andrew M. Gallas**

## **The Twins**

Like cats, they may have nine times to die,  
Though they've got  
Ten vital claws  
Going for them.

But you, you, you've got a hand  
Up on them,  
So to speak:  
An orange stick.

Futures and lies surface in a palm. Deeply  
Carved lines arrowing to-  
Ward accusatory fingers.  
No ring decorating  
Any more than  
Bone and tendon.

Lazily, lazily, one truth slides and falls down like  
The blood of  
A hunting from  
Skillfully sharpened talons.

Half-moon calls to the tide. I  
Feel your ebb.

Oh, how it makes me feel  
Even  
If I feel like drowning.

I don't know when a manicure became a religious rite, but I know  
It sure hit  
Like a nail  
In my cross.

**Andrew M. Gallas**



## **A Choir Concert Solo**

The butterflies come, as they always  
Do, disregarding season. I flick  
Them away, forget their heaviness on  
My shoulders and in my chest.

I walk away and onto the stage:  
My platform.  
I carry my ribcage like a prize  
On my belly. I will show them.

The other man on stage looks at me,  
Half-smiles, winks. He begins to wave his  
Fluid arms and wordless sounds  
Spill from somewhere behind them. I am ready.

I am counting in my head, counting to four  
And starting over, endlessly, counting down.  
The moment comes.  
I dissolve.

Suddenly, I dissolve; my head hollows out,  
My spine disappears, my legs firmly rooted  
Into the stage, even below the stage and the  
Ground into the earth, they are gone too.

I cannot see. I cannot see the spotlights  
Bright like four aligned suns, I cannot see the  
Outlines of the tops of heads sitting below  
Me. I cannot see my mother. I am a voice now.

My voice, my self, swells and rises and  
Falls in time. I open and display shimmering, audible gold.  
I ride on the wind of noises behind me,  
And my throat drowns them out.

I have entirely dissolved and become this  
Music, this elastic vibrating sound, this song.  
The other man on stage is waving his fluid arms,  
Flying, and I am soaring above him.

I am without conception of time, am beyond time. Uncomfortably, I am  
Descending and I realize that I have somehow gone silent, that my body has  
reformed,  
That the audience is applauding. I have shown them.  
Courteously, I bow.

**Andrew M. Gallas**

## **The Giant Slugs of I-90**

littered the shoulder  
of the highway  
like discarded bumpers,  
and when the cars collided  
into them they burst  
with the unnerving pierce  
of a tire blowout.

Pivoting antennae,  
they tested the torpid air,  
sliding on their mucus trail  
to pass the locus of massacre.

No one honked,  
or slammed on the brakes,  
or heard the ephemeral trill  
of the skunked, dying road kill,  
shriveled and stuck  
to the asphalt.

Deliberate and steady,  
they slugged along like unswerving soldiers  
towards the eventual place  
they all hoped was coming.

**Jason Lester**

## **The Third Night**

*after Natsume Soseki*

What the cactuses had to say was hard  
to swallow. Their advice stuck in my throat  
like teeth chattering what I already knew.  
I followed every pudgy arm and thorn  
of it as my steps dragged through the desert waste,  
and she grew heavier and heavier  
on my back, not letting me forget.  
*It was the blind green men pointing the way.*

My mind was full of scorpions that day.  
The sun was just beginning to go down,  
and the sand shone like fool's gold, and centuries  
of old mistakes we can't rid ourselves of,

when I entered the grove of wilting shrubs  
and knelt, and dug a grave, and buried her.

**Jason Lester**

## **These Things I Know**

On the frozen lake, there are streaks of snow on the ice. Sometimes, when the lake is white it ice melts into the sky.

There are holes where fishermen sit and wait, and there are curious fish below who wonder why these little holes are all that's left of the sky.

Three squirrels gather around an oak tree, hind legs in the snow and acorns in their hands. The many stories these squirrels will tell only rarely concern themselves with the sky.

Soaked in snow and breathing fire, three children crouch on a slanted roof, watching fire trucks float towards them in the sky.

When the world ends many truths will die, or cry themselves to sleep.  
At bedtime, mothers will tell their children stories about how they once knew snow,  
and how they had once seen sky.

There are fast rivers of melted snow, and the steps are light in the thaw.  
Breath exhaled mixes in the air and floats its way up to the sky.

**Jason Lester**

## **diving**

The empress of calligraphy bound,  
and bound to me. And all the

gris and bristle, the bees like tacks,  
writing is rooting through the trash.

Sputtering concatenations, formative  
utterings in unpolished birch bark.

Scuttling two euro coins to buy  
another sack of coffee, and a pack of pall malls.

Writing is day old bread, the spotted grapefruit  
dug out of someone else's rubbish.

**Leif Martinson**

## **apeiron**

Oracular dreams,  
and colonnades.  
Strange voices with  
grim dirty hands.

Underwhelmed  
at Epidaurus by  
fleshy curving stones,  
hills and serpents.

Passing sultry  
fish-eyed death and  
bone-wood; salt stubborn  
under nail, unrinsed.

Step-star from vista  
and sally towards  
unwanted view, and  
shadowy grove, unearned.

Under the lintel  
trimming off oily  
tangles, sleeping  
with legs, unwashed

stolen wine seeping  
through wending limbs  
the saffron bowl spilling  
over the hillocks,

oregano crushed  
under starry step, and  
scenting again,  
earth-anchored feet

In Dodona, no doves  
in the white oak, only  
Jackdaws make-nesting  
on the lintel stone.

Likewise, we wash each other  
slowly in the fountain,  
and sleep between  
the knotted roots.

**Leif Martinson**

## **in carne**

We make our thoughts meat.  
And hang them up to cure  
in the shed where the men  
with cigars play sheepshead

and watch while we tie arms  
against ash branches to stink  
quietly in the winter sun.  
The crows can pick at our brains.

When the leaves grow purple,  
the women throw clay plates  
knock out our coughs, and  
give us something to chew on.

Between a glass eye and Horus  
we rub our rope burns and dig  
out something to smoke while  
we watch the morning come.

**Leif Martinson**

## **Doing Nothing**

*after Nick Flynn's "Inside Nothing"*

A rage-fueled engine, the inside

stalling, a flower kept  
closed. In soda-storms our brains

freeze, to keep the anger  
inside, doing nothing

& we do the nothing violently

fists clenched,  
swallow pride, swallow

action, bit by bit, every second  
a challenge. Drip by drip by drip by  
drip by drip by drip by drip, lid

& straw, all night

ruined. We freeze  
still harder, jaws drop

low, level to  
the puddle of ridicule. Thawing, we  
totter home

across the black-cat's path, become

defeat, done nothing,  
always  
silent, polite victims, line us up

for them, like bowling pins,

a shooting range around us. It freezes  
our tongues, our frowns.

**Sam Sahakian**



## **You're Dancing with a Bear**

What an elegant couple  
the two of you make  
though your partner is pant-less,  
I guess it's appropriate.  
I only wonder why he's wearing that Hawaiian shirt,  
as the pattern seems to be of little evolutionary advantage:  
it certainly wouldn't stop a bee-sting.

Regardless of dress,  
I was instructed to avoid those guys,  
that they're only after one thing,  
can effortlessly tear you limb from limb,  
eat you alive.  
It's their nature.

But I guess you're already past that—  
in the ecstasy of that dip,  
your hand on his shoulder,  
right paw in your hand,  
left one suspiciously hid from my line of sight.

So, I see that you're very good friends.  
Good for you.  
Dance it up.  
Enjoy while you can.

Because you will never get in  
to that furry brown head  
and you'll never know  
what goes on behind those blank shining eyes  
as he flails you around  
like a rag doll made out of deli ham.

And when he moves for your bacon, your honey,  
whatever—  
or does tear you limb from limb,  
like they all inevitably do—  
I'll pick up the pieces,  
and say I told them so.

**Sam Sahakian**

## **In the Morning**

The alarm blares 7:45.  
Mash the snooze button—  
Kill the messenger.  
Bask in eight minutes of bliss.

Mash that snooze button  
The alarm clock has it coming.  
Eight minutes pure bliss  
Showers are overrated.

The alarm clock had it coming.  
Check that it's 8:88  
Showers are overrated.  
Besides, you're already 33 minutes late.

Check that it's still 8:88.  
Sit up now, need to yawn and stretch.  
You're already 33 minutes late?  
Your watch suggests 8:27.

Sit up now, need to yawn and stretch.  
Set the wheels in motion.  
Your watch insists 8:37,  
Toaster pastry will provide all necessary carbohydrates.

Set the wheels in motion.  
Roll downstairs and through the door,  
Toaster pastry will provide all necessary carbohydrates  
To fuel the most unremarkable day in history.

**Sam Sahakian**

## **Proposition**

Guys, men, boys,  
whatever you call them  
(when you're in your mid-twenties,  
always told her,  
"Lucien,

I'm  
gonna marry you

one day."

(?)

**Zoe Schwab**

## July Fourth

You and I toe  
through the field  
of an early July evening,  
sticky with an independence we all use  
as an excuse for some flashy fire in the sky  
and public drinking.  
Careful not to disturb  
the marsh of blanket corners,

propping hands, bare feet,

wine glasses, beach chairs,  
homemade sandwiches  
that exist together tonight as a new ecosystem  
suddenly planted on the middle school field  
right between the  
basketball court and the  
jungle gym whose spindly figure marks  
the limit. I imagine that we might be

like two dragonflies chasing each other  
above the muck,

but we are too much  
on a mission for that.  
We dodge the children who  
whiz around like banshees,  
waving glow sticks in the air,  
giving the lightening bugs a run for their money.  
We try to be as natural

as the fried dough grease and popcorn butter  
smudged in the air.  
But we are not so stealthy,  
apparently,  
as a nasaed "Ouch!"  
springs up at us from below.

You have stepped on a soccer mom's hand.

**Zoe Schwab**

## **Marty, What Are You Looking At?**

His daughter so shamelessly sits on the window seat with *Trent*, still.

The sun comes in and their silhouettes are like holes in a sheet of paper that had been folded over and cut at the crease to achieve symmetry.

He watches through the crack between the kitchen door and the doorway.

Slowly, the slit of light that had divided them is getting smaller and soon their bodies become one shape together. They stay like this for some time, not even kissing, barely touching, but just sitting there close and involved.

It's happened, he thinks.

They float upstairs to her room across from theirs

and then his wife asks if he wants some lunch, she's making herself a rollup.

**Zoe Schwab**

## Lethbridge

We asked him how he had lived to be 107 years old. We demanded secrets. The room smelled of walnuts and Tullamore Dew. He said that Lethbridge was a strange town. We stared up at his walls and saw pictures of when he was young. There were shouts in his eyes then, we realized, but now, long sentences.

He broke our inspection by asking us if we could make him some toast. We opened the cupboards. Piles and piles of Wonder Bread. Then the click of the toaster brought smiles to our faces. We gazed at the coils as they flared into deep oranges and we imagined our faces glowing had the kitchen been a dark forest, in some sort of fiery séance; slight ghosts of smoke slipping from the aurora.

We set the toast next to him. He sat in his chair looking out the bright window at those damn pear trees. The pear trees were flowering this time of year; snowy whites. They were Callery Pear trees, *Pyrus Calleryana* we remembered, and they lined the strange roads of Lethbridge to infinity. Outside, a cloud momentarily passed over the sun. He closed his eyes and patiently ate his toast. Then a lone bicycle moved away from us down the dirt road. We imagined the sound of bike tires on gravel and the gossip of wind beneath the white flowers. We watched the bicycle until it disappeared into the trees. Then a bird disappeared into the trees. Then another. A few hours later we quietly left.

## Matthew van Oosten

## **My Moon**

My moon break today  
cracked and fall  
My pieces

Out of the sky  
crash into black oceans  
somewhere turbulent  
boundless

everyone has jumped from  
skyscraper heights  
but few bother to land and  
shatter, could be a sign

But we know these seas,  
We space know

And my moon glow us

**Matthew van Oosten**

## **Night of Study**

A dead bird,  
the sun is taken care of.  
In the fluid distant, prairies  
palpated by lightening

Farms too: the scarecrow  
swallowing fire, poised  
patiently waiting  
the crows the crows

Above the frosted, cold  
atmospheres, there is  
probably one star  
I sit directly beneath.

There won't be anything  
in the markets next week. Ever.  
Cancel all plans, the crows said,  
as they laughed hard into my window.

**Matthew van Oosten**



## MFA BIOS

---

**Erinn Batykefer** is the Martha Meier Renk Distinguished Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison where she is an MFA candidate. In the fall of 2007, she will be the Stadler Poetry Fellow at Bucknell University. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Maisonneuve Magazine*, among others.

**James Crews** is originally from St. Louis, Missouri. His poems appear or are forthcoming in Best New Poets 2006 and *Prairie Schooner*. His chapbook *Small Yellow Envelopes: Poems* will be published by Parallel Press (UW–Madison Libraries).

**Marianne Jay Erhardt** will receive her MFA this spring, unless her thesis is really, really bad. She is originally from New York (not the cool part) but has taken a shine to the Midwest, and plans to stick around for a while.

**Jacob Gamage** was born in Park Ridge, Illinois, raised in south Florida, and now lives in Madison, Wisconsin. He is currently working toward his MFA in poetry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**Sarah Nelson** moved to Madison from Los Angeles to get her MFA in poetry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

**Heather Swan Rosenthal** is currently a Martha Meier Renk Fellow at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. In 2001, she received an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship Finalist Award. Her poems have appeared in *The Cream City Review*, *Iris*, *Mothering Magazine*, *Forward*, and *The Comstock Review*. Her chapbook *The Edge of Damage* (Parallel Press) is forthcoming.









THE UNIVERSITY  
*of*  
**WISCONSIN**  
MADISON