



## **Forward!: best young poets University of Wisconsin--Madison 2005. 2005**

Madison, Wisconsin: Parallel Press, 2005

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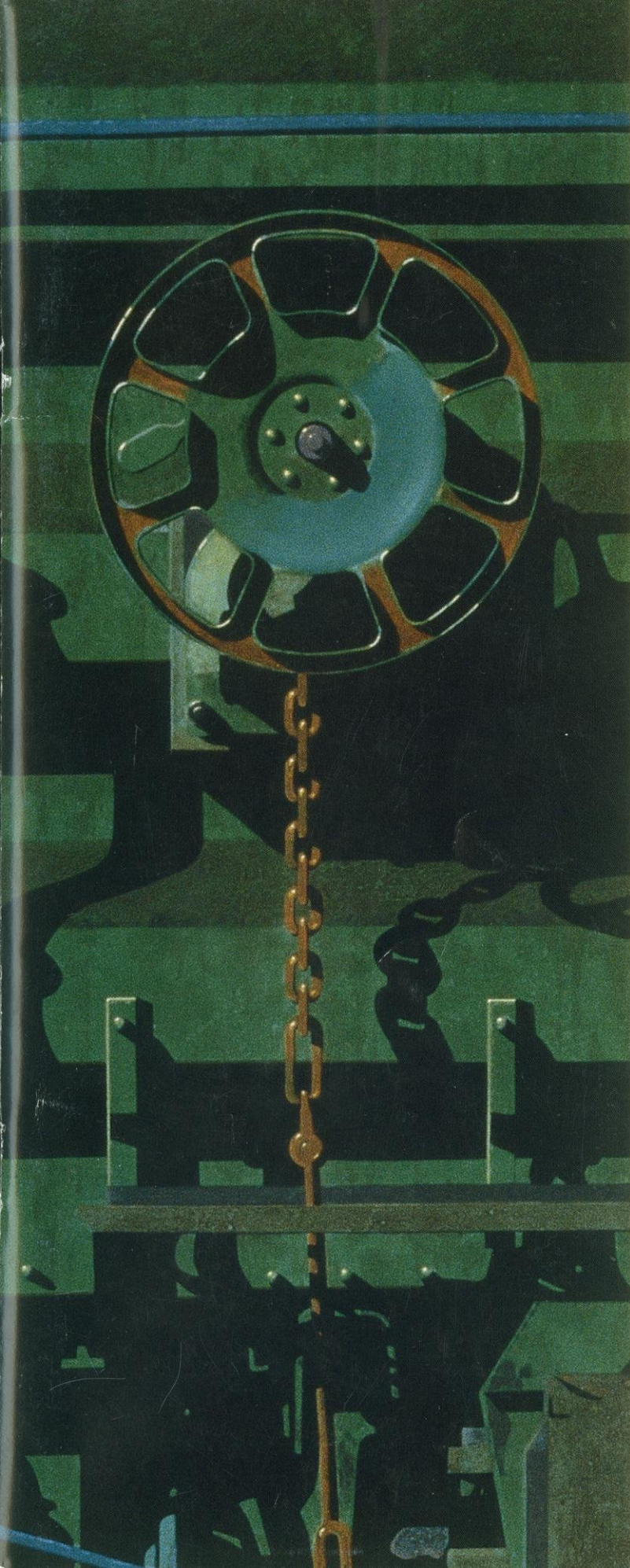
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# FORWARD

**Best  
Young  
Poets**

**University  
of Wisconsin  
Madison  
2005**



# **FORWARD!**

Best Young Poets  
University of Wisconsin–Madison  
2005

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ISBN:1-893311-60-0

Published by Parallel Press  
University of Wisconsin– Madison Libraries

<http://parallelpress.library.wisc.edu>

First Edition

*FORWARD! Best Young Poets, University of Wisconsin–Madison 2005* 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: *Rolling Stock Series No. 7 for Jim* by Robert Cottingham, 1991; collograph, etching and monoprint on Arches Cover white paper; edition of 40, 83 x 37.75 inches.  
Courtesy of Tandem Press.

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## PREFACE

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*It is difficult/ to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably  
every day / for lack / of what is found there.*

“Asphodel, That Greeny Flower”

—William Carlos Williams

**T**erribly these words are just as true today as they were in 1955 when Williams first penned them. Having said that, as the modern world spins dizzyingly into a global matrix of consumerism and corporate news, the small cultural space afforded to poetry becomes paramount in the individual's struggle to celebrate her/his own uniqueness. Indeed, in a society whose citizenry is urged to consume in the most persuasive imagistic language money can buy, poetry is an antidote, a transfiguring personal moment in which the poet and the reader together “carpenter a space for the thing [that is] given” (Sylvia Plath, “Thalidomide”), the thing being the small record of our existence and the larger ramifications of such. In *Forward!*, what I am repeatedly struck by is the insistence of these poets, both undergraduate and graduate, to cull the numinous from the everyday, to be the tongue that hopefully and gracefully speaks against the mind's extinction.

*Forward!* is a collection of poetry showcasing the work of UW-Madison's second-year MFA graduate writing students and the undergraduate winners, honorable mentions, and finalists of the 2005 George B. Hill Poetry Prize. This annual contest is sponsored by the Creative Writing Program and is named for George B. Hill, who was a member of the class of 1908 at the University of Wisconsin, and who was a writer and editor-in-chief of *The Daily Cardinal*. This year's George B. Hill Poetry Prize winners were selected from more than one hundred contest submissions. The 2005 contest judge was Kirk Davis, the Jay C. and Ruth Halls 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.

Forward!

**Amy Quan Barry**

Associate Professor

The Program in Creative Writing, Department of English

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Madison, April 2005



## Romantic Circus Songs

### 1. *Femme de Vol*

If I tell you anything  
I will tell you of  
the crushed peanut shells, popcorn,  
the gummy pull of taffy.  
How the elephants mourn for one another  
with each turn around the ring.  
How peacocks flounce,  
draping fluorescent eyes of God along the muddy floor.

I tell you this because I am  
*Femme de Vol*, Woman of Flight,  
soaring from one metal rod to another.  
All your heads turn up at me,  
eyes watery from floating dust.

There is trouble,  
*désordre*, my darlings.  
With so many sticky-fingered children  
staring with their eyes wide as Christmas morning,  
we begin to feel invincible, almost *magique*.

But I've seen the magician at the end of the day.  
I know his tricks and trades. If at night when he enters my trailer  
and pulls scarves out of my corset,  
*cyon, bleu, vermillion*,  
I close my eyes and pretend we are enchanted,  
listening to the songs of crickets.

But I am not his audience. He is no man I have not had before.  
Cape-less, his shoulders sag like any man's.

There is a cloud over the big top, *mon petite*.  
The children don't see it; their eyes wander  
through the glitter and smoke, relying  
on mirrors to tell them who they are.

I've looked into such mirrors; they have  
spoken to me in backward English:  
Get out...*l'évasion*

Tonight, I hear the lions pace,  
the chickens stir in their pens.  
Women who have bent into the number 3 for a pence  
find night the easiest time to release themselves  
and so they lie,  
lax, in their trailers like spilt milk.

## 2. *Equilibre*

Come, *mon cher*, you cannot afford  
the five francs for the big tent.  
Roam the Midway—sideshow and menagerie  
acts that whistle at you from the main road.

Now look: to your left is *Le Géant Laid*, the Ugly Giant,  
who lifts Albertine and Carlotta onto his two  
brawny biceps as they show off their legs,  
one long cigarette stick at a time.

Watch the patrons, these stuffy women,  
how they ignore his face,  
longing after the giant's robust arms  
and his muscular legs.

How they shrink their husbands—limp  
gangly men with overcoats and tweed hats—  
out of their minds,  
how the men look  
away, ashamed. I love such shame.

How *détestable* he is, the men say,  
lusting after the tall and gallant ladies.  
Carlota and Albertine's brown teeth peer out  
of their lipstick-drenched lips.  
The Ugly Giant, once he finds his bearings,  
does not move.  
And there they stand,  
in wind and rain,  
their legs barely shaking  
in the spotlight of the moon.

### 3. *Constant Crying Man*

And now you are my listener,  
my *auditeur*, aren't you?  
You are *my* captive audience.  
You like what you see, eh? These  
blue eyes of mine, the light  
that can balance teacups?  
Now I've got you.

There is another kind of character, my darlings.  
It is a man who paces, who walks the Midway  
and even after the show is over  
still paces. We watch as the man walks  
in the rain and cries.

I tell you the tears he sheds have been felt by us all  
but we are so used to them now.  
We have a show to do.

But this man, usually wrapped in a heavy  
cloak, cries as he sees a home for himself.  
Perhaps his wife no longer loves him.  
Perhaps he has a hump and the world does not  
accept him. Here he comes, each night, longing  
to be one of us. Talking to the elephants,  
chatting with Greta the Mermaid sprawled in her tank.  
She tilts her head and smiles,  
not understanding the French he speaks.

But, *mon enfant*, you do not want to be here.  
You do not want to be one of us, to be  
alive only when wearing the make-up, thick as  
pancake batter, alive only when the spotlight  
shines on your head. These are temporary halos.

And this is why I warn you, this is what I would say  
if I could climb in children's windows like Peter Pan,  
if you would listen to the woman in red, fake diamonds,  
I would say

go back. We don't want you crying here. There are  
enough tears falling from the big top  
as it is.

**Lisa Marie Brodsky**

## Ars Poetica

As far as your classmate is concerned, the piece peaks  
at *vanity and loneliness*, as if anything else inhabits

the room, each page. On your drive home, the ditch  
is so close—the ditch and then a field, the cornstalks

breaking and the first snow sinking in the harvester's  
headlights. Blood-black deer, whose bodies failed

before bumpers of pick-ups, shine up from the pavement.  
You chase a cigarette butt—its comet-tail of sparks

tugged east, like you, in a trailer's draft—until it too  
is tumbled black. Back home, you shut off the engine

and say *I love you* and mean *Today I touched no one*.

David Camphouse

## Cultural Stud

Who are you  
tangled in the rap of Frenchies: Le Club,  
plunking cigarettes backwards into your mouth,  
your tongue a magic carpet  
with one end tethered to the ground?  
There is a pool table behind you  
& two girls—topless—on their break,  
cue shafts sashaying in & out  
the smug gaps of their palms.  
On stage, Extasis has more curves  
than an ampersand, coiled  
around the smooth metal pole,  
barely an isthmus between floor & ceiling.  
You know her waist is like the yellow line  
on a bus, her nipples the knobs  
for the tint of your dreams,  
your mouth watering so much  
the flood of want reroutes to your eyes.  
You know you were born here.  
This is Hato Rey, Puerto Rico,  
& a Dominican waiter in a leather beret  
insists you order another Scotch  
because your ice has already melted.  
There are traces of Breton  
simmering inside the plush cushions  
when Extasis abandons the stage  
& you grab her arm & tell her  
your heart is red velcro  
& she just happened to be walking by.  
You tell her the past, baby,  
is a sour grape we learn not to bite.  
This is Frenchies: Le Club

in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico,  
& you were born here.  
She is Colombian & drinks  
White Russians. She wants to be  
an American citizen, & you  
are tired of being a graffittied wall  
forgiving the humid caresses  
of your vandals. You tell her  
it's true: you have a token to feed  
to the rusted turnstile of heaven,  
but you have no lube to make it turn.  
She is Colombian & her lips  
stamp your cheek like a passport,  
the aftertaste of Finlandia  
napping under her tongue.  
This is Hato Rey, Puerto Rico,  
& you have to order another Scotch  
because consumption  
is the first policy of solitude.  
The Dominican in the leather beret  
tries to drown you in his shadow.  
You know your busted wallet is empty.  
You look to the girl for help  
& she reminds you your ice has melted.  
*How could it not?* you say  
but she can't hear you. The bass  
throbs. Strobes bulldoze the darkness.  
Behind you, the 8-ball  
drawn into the black hole of a pocket  
trails little bullets of light.

**Kevin Gonzalez**

## **At the Canadian Medical Center in Prague**

no one cries. A girl with fox-fur-red pigtails  
lifts her dress to reveal bears on her panties.  
Her brother crashes Hot Wheels into the wall,  
makes wet explosions. Saliva spots his gray T-shirt.  
No sign of emergency  
as the receptionist offers the mother  
forms. The women's voices peak  
and ebb in French.

The doctor's skin is the color  
of pumped breast milk—  
ghost-white with a lick of blue.  
He leads me down a dirt path  
to the grey body  
of the examination room  
and onto the bed, palled  
in sterile paper.

My breasts tuck  
around the stethoscope  
as the doctor listens for the crush  
and uncrush of my heart muscle.  
Last night, I found this clinic  
in my student handbook:  
inexpensive, staff fluent  
in English. This morning, from the dorm,  
two trams and a metro ushered me here.

The doctor holds out the prescription,  
explains the risks, tells me to expect  
bleeding. He leaves without  
holding the door.

The receptionist waits  
for my credit card  
to go through. She plumps her lips,  
thickening the painful fuchsia.  
The waiting area fills  
with dense quiet. The mother  
and her small, breakable children  
are gone.

**Emily M. Green**

## MOAB

*Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, everyone shall howl.*  
—Isaiah 16:7

Perhaps Lot's son knew his mother was his sister,  
his father  
his grandfather. Perhaps he lay awake listening  
to the stories his parents told about Gomorrah: fire  
withering stone,  
the air hard with noise, and everywhere Yahweh—  
the God's anger a smudge of sulfur on the cornea,  
a biting  
ember on the skin. We forgot poor Moab  
when we christened our largest conventional  
weapon  
*Massive Ordinance Air Blast* or, more playfully,  
the *Mother Of All Bombs*. We hope the enemy  
will mistake  
the blast for nuclear detonation. The enemy will run  
from his bunkers. The enemy will not look  
back, afraid  
he will turn to ash, to salt. When we test the bomb  
off the Florida coast, the deck chair retirees  
barely notice.  
The noise does not disturb them as they putt  
on the humming green of the twelfth hole. A jet,  
says one.  
A poacher, says another. Murder has always been  
man's revenge on God; the distance between  
killer  
and victim, human and deity, does not matter.



But what of Moab, whose whole tribe Isaiah cursed  
for overweening  
pride? Did Moab believe the story Lot told,  
how his daughters, who he had offered to the mob,  
seduced  
him? Could Moab see the crooked line  
of his descent? Could he see his name,  
years later,  
stenciled on the skin of a ten ton bomb?  
Could he see sky and earth cracked open,  
the people  
running, the empty space left behind?

**Nick Lantz**

## Lot's Firstborn Speaks

The god of my father collected foreskins and made housecalls. That day, my father had invited two strangers into our home; my sister and I prepared a feast and then prepared their beds while listening to the crowd of men gathering outside, clamoring for the strangers. And my father went out to them and said: *Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing;* and my sister and I and our husbands listened to my father's words on our last night in Sodom.

In your book,  
my sister and I are still nameless: and I keep our names  
to myself even now, and you will not find them in your mouth.

My father  
had no thought of preserving his own seed. He looked neither forward nor back. I looked to the generations. The next morning I told my sister, *he knew not when I lay down nor when I arose.* Who can say what he knew and when? He didn't speak. After the births of Moab and Benammi, still he said nothing. They say the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Our father had enough fear to make him a wise wise man.

When I had  
made him hard and he was inside, pretending not to know, I can't say if it was his tears or mine that I tasted. It might have been our mother, reduced to salt dissolving on her daughter's tongue. And Lot, our father, awoke as salty as a shipwrecked man, pale and naked, his hair still dripping. And so we all awake, each morning since.

Rita Mae Reese

### **firefly: the time we got baptized**

As always, we were children, only newly thinking  
in complete sentences, only newly compared in our childish qualities:

the pace of our laughs, the quality of our teeth, our slap-shod vocabularies,  
the loops and stutters of our arms and legs... Not to make claims,

not to call a lake a river (for both have natural graces,  
most graceful without the sun), but it was obvious to us then

that our particular glow was a tower of light, of glass, or tracer-bullets  
shot up a chimney. Sad times, this greatness, and like a white elephant

in a Hindu's story, we were hard to feed. And firefly, our dads  
held us by the ear, our moms draped us in white.

Our uncles hit the bottle on the lonely kitchen table  
like all good uncles do, and knew, they said, that we'd run good to

God's high halls. Baptism, dearest, is done in the spillways  
before the waters recede, before the fish are dried and picked,

before the ants trod their ways. Baptism, firefly, is a one-time,  
some strobe that deposits a constant light behind our faces. I've never since

been a spiritual man; I've avoided those murky depths, the tired waves.  
I've prayed, yes, I've fired indiscriminately.

My prayers have been longer ones: for crimes to call mine own,  
for personal addictions, plagues, locusts; yes,

I've prayed like breathing, I've huffed what's put before me.  
I've stopped my heart for days on end. Girl: I tap that bottle three times

before bed, I murder night-tremors, dreams.  
When you touch me I feel the break and spray

of heated glass; I know the quiet inside waves. You know,  
firefly, that I will joke, sometimes, but sometimes I am serious.

**Donald Dunbar**

## **firefly: a blow-up doll**

I'm a lousy sort of blow-up doll, firefly, all lips & eyelashes  
on Valentine's day. What I am is unbearable;  
& last month, falling back into bed, I was mistaken  
for your new French boyfriend. But let's try & keep happy:

I've got an assortment of blue jackets  
to keep me warm. In them, my ribs  
spoon my lungs.

I've bought a tape  
of the eleven best dance numbers.

I brush my cavernous mouth  
after every meal & comb my hair  
when it grows too long.

This last Saturday  
I lost my mind & Jonathan lost his: "I am so  
*here*," he said as the room contorted to his head's pulse.

& I'm a February icicle: I try to be here too, I hold to what I can.

& yeah, like an icicle, I am impossible to distinguish.

Maybe with these plastic parts, I'd have a shot with dress-up: I'll play Amelia's ex  
& write your name four hundred times in the margins of my notebook.  
I'll sign with a wide inkblot, stuff it all into a misaddressed envelope.

I'll use incorrect postage (too much, too soon) & act surprised & tearful,  
grateful when it comes back to me. Or I'll pretend I'm in a hideout:

not meant to be thought of, lest they see me in your eyes. I'll push  
my ear to the wall & like a young radical, try my best not to pray.

No, I'll just give up on impressing myself  
with this melodrama: sighing  
like some oil painting & calling myself  
plastic; because really, though the universe  
is dying I am a man & thus dying  
at some unheard-of rate—I am  
winning, you see.

No, I'll buy some tap shoes, a sporty necktie;  
I might get drunk & watch porn all night, dapper  
in a snappy suit. I might make a few hundred  
sandwiches for practical reasons—

& really, this is all practical, like skin grafts,  
or caffeine & ephedra when you've been driving too long.  
It's some terrible affirmation in the last scene: *I am melting// am—*;  
it's the end of the date & the clouds part:  
a hail of flashlights tumble from above,  
(a pitter-patter on an empty bed).

**Donald Dunbar**

## Poem About Playing Footsie

In the poem about playing footsie under the tablecloth,  
my leg is a long metal arm drifting above the city.

“Crane,” you correct, & the word is a torrent of wind  
slashing through the open double-doors of your mouth.

The businessmen with curling eyes & smart suits  
that press through the wind are punctuation marks.

They know, you see, that they are there for emphasis.  
In this poem, amongst these huffing businessmen,

my leg saunters under the sky that is the tablecloth,  
& is assigned to be a red-painted crane stroking the top

of a building. The building is your leg, for there is room  
for only one crane in this poem. There is a budding

building & a calm crane nuzzling in this city  
& this city is under a table. The table is a cloud-ridden

sky, & our arms are the strings that are somehow  
attached to our legs. Your strings pull your building

towards the viewing deck of your skirt. My strings  
spin my crane around & around. In the poem

about a puppet city, the businessmen that are there  
for emphasis run out the glass doors of our mouths

& slip down your blouse like embezzlers. They are greedy,  
but in the dark space under your breasts

they sob frankly, they twist their faces into bent metal.  
These businessmen, these casualties, are the truth

of this poem, & are puppets. These puppets observe  
with jealousy, from the observation deck of your skirt,

my leg that is a crane in this poem, & is not the poem itself.

**Donald Dunbar**

## **Eve's Sonnet**

Carried high in my mother's breasts, Mary  
spilled out her body, a vestal daughter,  
halo-veiled, and David, slung low in her  
Achilles, gored out, crown for horns, hero,

but I sprouted in her knees, tumorous,  
squished out hermaphroditic, with testes  
in my ribs, ovary for uvula.  
One rib, sown, grew Adam and apple tree.

Hence, apple, eaten, sickled uvula,  
into gut; dried puddles inside my flesh  
tarred my crossing; my femoral weeping,

my fate to bear a people. My pains, scars—  
sickle-like. Fleeting globs of my flesh shed.  
They sculpt the world, compass it, like footprints.

**Adebanke Lesi**

## Envy flushed into our house the day

my suicidal brother capsized himself  
in the river edge of our farm, floated  
downstream like frog on water. He melted

into soil like warm butter, a homemade  
meal for soy and corn. My father has four  
wives: one old, Head Wife, mother of Head Son;

young old, Witch Wife, who can slay with her tongue;  
old young, Matron of tradition, the house;  
and young one, Mid-wife, Assani, who bore

asthmatic baby brother, Second Son.  
the scandal broke like rain from bloated clouds,  
drenched Head Wife in hatred. She screamed and cursed

Witch Wife, accused her of whispering *things*  
in Head Son's ear, things that made him forget  
to swim, to tread, to breathe, *things* that deafened

him—we yelled, but he only sank, leaden,  
bubbling current like a submerged bottle;  
in the end, we glimpsed dark hair on water

soaked orange by the golden, gleaming sun.  
Head Wife scratched Witch Wife's face. *Witch!* she spat. Slapped  
Witch Wife like tide on rock. In the morning,

while I bathe in the mourning silence—no  
cock's doodle, no wheezing Baby Brother,  
vision seeps into me—Assani snuffs

breath out of my sleeping elder brother,  
feeds brother's breath to her son, binds his legs  
with orange ribbons, death's color, weighs his palms

with smooth pebbles, pricks his ears, whispers *things*,  
beyond my sight, Assani stirs supper,  
newly throned Head Son wriggling on her hip.

Adebanke Lesi



## **Fire, Woman**

I know the beginning of your death,  
Doctor says, probing your body  
in the river of light.  
You stroke your reflection,

Dab the flames on your chest.  
Malignant lumps. Four months. Or  
surgery. Risky. Cut  
it away, you choose.

You amble beside Doctor, leaning  
on your I.V. cane. Family? he asks.  
Nope. Adrift, in sea alone, in life.  
Now you lean unto him, a connection.

Anesthesia snapshot: you hug welcoming  
ancestors, dance around the sun,  
bathe alit. But you hear still whispers  
between fingers. Turn around.

**Adebanke Lesi**

## **thawed pond on canvas**

declining, taking the sky  
by its pastel wings  
taking those soluble things  
and raining them full  
like swollen cheeks,  
full cheeks of  
chewy, chewy, chewy, earth.

waning, the showers parted  
in a long moss belly  
carving a warm womb for fresh water,  
sweet like buttermilk  
(past the rocks).

beaming, where blue children  
ache for the fish  
that fly from them under the ripples,  
and the sky's cotton reflection climbs into  
the lake's sour mouth,  
into its sandy bottom grave  
of cool, wet affection.

and you wonder  
why, I stare at your picture  
(God's detour through the anti-city)  
on my shriveled planet.

**Carlin Catra Cwik**

## The Sunday

when the decoy sun drew to its home  
in a hazed yellow thread (like edgewater noon).

soup begins, a cloud of it boils  
dead chicken in your nostril awakened,  
and hard, cream table burdens your knuckles  
tap tap tapping in half circles across a nice wooden spine.

Then she drives in, her rubber soles  
knocking her arrival (on C sharp),  
and ma makes a warm little bed for the casserole  
into the oven.

our bare faces pattle to your room,  
out the swinging screen window,  
I will follow you through the mud we make with our steps  
trampling waxy blades of green, (together).

I will follow you to the dreary silo, (dry as leaves),  
into the cold hole, I will bend my knees,  
my arms will look wrong,  
with the windless smell in knotted hair,  
you will enter in, in that place with me.

and when we should leave?  
the haunted roof keeps us,  
hides us from that smoky sky,  
(the charred sausage air in fall).

Like a wintry, foreign film baking in the back room,  
ma's alone in her boxy supper space,  
setting the forks  
all lined up and nice,  
like toy gentlemen waiting for their brides.

and we of the sheet metal silo, so quiet,  
my glass words tumble like ice  
(in a coke with vodka),  
hitting the powder floor with a smack of wet,  
(hanging on a pin somewhere in Georgia).

The time your shadow hushes me, I know  
those pressed lips are made to kiss me  
when I am sad.

At this time, soft red pies before dinner.

**Carlin Catra Cwik**

## **the fantastic outside**

her palm contains  
    nakedness.  
undressed at the sight of the  
cold, rushing, gray wind.  
red thin things cover lean knuckles.  
(made in heaven)  
but this middle earth  
shows no pity (for a frail work of art)  
in the fantastic outside.  
dark night time feather falls from a  
crow, in the fir tree (to your right).  
see it pull itself apart? Its broken heart,  
misses Florida, a tendril nest,  
    and maybe wool.  
do you hear it cry for nothing?  
over corn stalks ready to be husked,  
    "the Nile! the Nile!"  
tears for a warm river,  
    and maybe you.  
  
    and maybe you.

**Carlin Catra Cwik**

### Naming Things

I guess this is how things happen—

you get your heart broken in Boston,  
pack a small suitcase and move  
to Wisconsin because you heard  
the Midwest is real. There are tiny  
apricots that grow around the bay

outside your window. You get a job  
as a cocktail waitress at Nadia's  
and sleep around. Each morning,  
you become more certain there is  
something here that you can love.

In the evenings, you watch the news  
reports of the forest fires blazing  
through the West. Your cousin Gwen  
calls to say she dropped out of pilot  
school to fight the fires. There are more

important things than flying, she says.  
The live footage is beautiful and sudden,  
the flames rush across the land like  
nothing will ever be enough, like there  
is no other way for this to happen.

You miss the pigeons in Cambridge  
and your old piano. By the time  
August comes, it has been raining  
for days. The orange and pink  
apricot flesh has become flabby

and careless, unable to survive  
in so much wetness. You walk along  
the drenched shore, naming things,  
slipping on the rocks that mark the way.

**Jennifer Garfield**

## Punctuation

After all, won't I become the question  
that rows towards you, my swan-neck  
curved and reaching? Don't you see

this arched back, the parasol a tall man  
holds over a woman's head as they walk  
through some ever dimming city—

Paris, or Berlin, pouring and they never  
look back. That woman's cold stare,  
that man's big hands, what loneliness

can we afford. On the boulevard,  
that man is calling me now, his voice  
carried through the window and afraid

to come back in. Secretly, my arms press  
like a triangle as if to dive into his arms,  
as a questions mark's hook swoons into a line,

as if to say *I love the moment*. Quickly then,  
the rain coming harder, the man shrinks  
and the woman fits him in her pocket.

Watching, I become the jaws of the nightmare,  
Paris looming in the distance where I love you.  
Or maybe that's the wrong dream, and this one

is the cliff where we aren't who we will be,  
where the man jumps because there's nothing  
to go back to, and I'm screaming *what cliff*,

*what inevitable cliff?* leaning over the edge  
like a mother, caution hovering above  
the sentence. This is the regal punctuation

of the end. Language is often desperate.  
Its jaws clamp shut on what it hopes to love.  
And after all, won't I eat through the story

backwards, the words of what could happen  
tender on my tongue? Slowly the picture  
dissolves. The man plummets or is erased.

Jennifer Garfield

## **Waiting for the Macaws**

We wake early to the fog lifting like a flock of egrets off the riverbank. Binoculars, telescope, thermos of coffee we make our way through the tall, wet grasses to the sapota tree. Here, we are told, the hummingbirds can be found. But we are not looking for hummingbirds today. Across the canal, young Josefinos sip fruit juice through colored straws under tin roofs, or play soccer barefoot in the moments without rain. We sit forever, waiting for the macaws, until they become phantoms and I cannot tell if what we've seen is real. They say macaws are monogamous for life. Never alone. We squint for a pair tied with invisible thread, who follows who, knowing where to go before it happens.

They say when one mate dies, the other follows. One summer when we were kids, our father brought home two African dwarf frogs a patient left behind. Soon after, we found their tiny, translucent bodies at the bottom of the green aquarium, dead in each other's arms.

Across the canal, the school bus lurches through muddy streets. Soon the rain will come and there will be no more birds. The sky is no longer the sky. My brother and I have come to this country to forget for a while. Cut the thread. Maybe in a few years he will talk about how happy our parents were, how in love. But this morning we do not have the words for each other. We sit still, sip coffee, waiting for what may or may not come.

**Jennifer Garfield**

## **Pantom: The Lamp Beside The Golden Door**

They built this country  
with the raw of their hands and the sweat of their backs—  
homes built on nothing but faith  
in a place with few mercies and no golden streets.

With the raw of their hands and the sweat of their backs,  
they opened their stores in the pale blue of dawn.  
In a place with few mercies and no golden streets,  
they waved at their children, sent off to school.

They opened their stores in the pale blue of dawn  
for the minimum wage, and, so proud,  
they waved at their children: sent off to school,  
missing teeth, learning the new language—not their parents’.

For the minimum wage, and so proud,  
they take the citizenship test. Coming home, they find their children  
missing teeth, learning the new language (not their parents’)  
from the neighbors, the PD that spits at their doors.

They take the citizenship test. Coming home, they find their children  
Americans. “We’re all Americans now,” they say.  
From the neighbors, the PD that spits at their doors,  
there is silent acceptance—at least for now.

“Americans—we’re all Americans now,” they say,  
the children who lived out their parents’ dream.  
There is silent acceptance at last, for now  
the children have no stores, but proper houses and cars.

The children who lived out their parents’ dream  
find their parents’ place taken by newcomers.  
The children have no stores, but proper houses and cars:  
Moving up and moving out.

They find their parents’ place taken by newcomers  
opening storefronts, wiping hands on stained aprons—  
moving up and moving out  
by sheer force of will and the strength of their bootstraps.

Opening storefronts, wiping hands on stained aprons,  
homes built on nothing but faith,  
by the sheer force of will and the strength of their bootstraps,  
They build this country.

**Sarah A. Mucek**



## **Sestina: “The Man Who Married Two Twins!”**

She'd said that she was one of two girls, twins  
who both retained a bit of baby fat.  
I liked it and would try to cop a feel  
on Fridays in the backseat of her car  
where we learned how to screw and moan and shout  
above the FM DJ's nightly news.

She couldn't wait to tell her folks the news—  
So proud, the first to wed of both the twins.  
She saw the garish ring and gave a shout,  
entranced by diamond's sparkle, white and fat.  
I couldn't say it cost more than my car—  
She squeezed my arm until I couldn't feel.

When we were at the altar, I could feel  
like Brad Pitt must when featured on the news,  
So many running after our small car  
and blurring 'til each person looked like twins,  
While deep inside regret grew swelling fat  
and I repressed the urge to flee and shout.

But after five months all we did was shout—  
We both forgot the love we used to feel.  
While she went out I read the daily news  
and slowly I went grey, then bald and fat.  
She joked she hadn't known she'd married twins  
when I could fill both seats in our old car.

I kept the dog—she got the house and car.  
I think by then I was too tired to shout.  
She told me then that she was dating twins.  
I didn't know how that should make me feel—  
Should I have been so startled by the news?  
I told her that her skirt made her look fat.

I joined a gym and lost my ring of fat  
and then one day I saw her in her car.  
But what to say? I hadn't any news.  
Too late—she saw me and I heard her shout.  
She said, “I love you—tell me how you feel,”  
and when I looked confused, explained, “We're twins!”

Today I'm featured on the local news,  
I have no car and feel I'm getting fat,  
but still I'd shout the joy of loving twins!

**Sarah A. Mucek**

## **Jackson, 1933**

Like Adam, made of earth:  
dry, enduring under the sun.  
Baked shoulders sweat over

irrigation pumps and  
livestock with spotted hips,  
tails arcing like scythes

through the tinder-grass,  
woven on evening porches  
into husk-dolls

squeezed by infants riding  
their mothers' hips.  
In the kitchens, stick-braided

girls in boxes of sun  
cross their ankles and t's,  
floating blocks of carrot

simmer in thin soup beside  
stacks of chipped bowls.  
With their crumpled pansies, windows

overgrow the shed behind the church:  
oily hymnals and pools  
of holy water fill the chapel.

Come Sunday, the collection plate  
clinks: loose change and gravel  
from boys with lost teeth and firecrackers,

ladies fan themselves with curled  
parish bulletins—anything to move the air—  
for potlucks no one can afford.

At the general store—  
—planked up—sunburnt old men  
pull down their cap brims,

drag chairs out front.  
Cards stick to their calloused thumbs—  
peeling back the hours

with Texas Hold 'Em and Stud,  
breathing the dust and listening,  
waiting for the rumble out east:

the collapse of rock, the start of the final deal.

**Sarah A. Mucek**

## **The Day the Pleasure Factory Broke Down**

B.B King howls *When Love Came To Town*  
from the radio that I am not allowed to touch.  
My father drives with one hand on the clutch  
and the other at noon. He taps to the bass sounds  
with his heel on the baseboard. The parked cars surround  
us and stretch out into a path to the greyhound  
track down another three miles. The head of his Punch  
cigar rolls in his mouth, he's saving it for after lunch,  
when the Connecticut broadleaf wrapper will slide down

and he will sit in a box close to the gate,  
his lunch of fries and cheeseburger before him  
as he watches his pick to win, number eight,  
a good rail dog with the typical trim  
frame of a greyhound lose. This is what awaits me:  
the Honduras smoke rising off his lips like a Hymn.

**Christopher Pruitt**

## January 28, 1986 72 Seconds after Launch

*it is hard to remain human on a day when birds perch weeping*  
—Lucille Clifton, "the times," *Blessing the Boats*

I.  
Commit the vapor movements and how like a hinge  
turned door into door, the violence of smoke.  
I held no part of me guarded and it aged  
and now slams further off in my eyes so

ready to be forgotten. I know  
the bonds of the sky were white like uncut wool;  
I would still shear my eyes. I name  
the embers two wings broad and supple.

Each wing spread out and pulled  
the feathers wider and taller  
than my eyes could take in. They were full  
of all the feathers each smaller and smaller.

But then, but then  
I wept and again opened and again my eyes mended.

II.  
I opened and again my eyes mended  
but what about all the others piecing this together?  
In the gymnasium all the students attended  
the launch gathering

on the smoke birds and the hand  
extended across the sky. Did their eyes  
convert to their smallness? No, they opened  
their mouths as a hand thrust by

the birds with a swell of fingers. The hand pushed  
the ocean forward and filled their frames,  
covering the sound of unfinished scratching.  
Their skin became raw in the heavy water that came.

They knew not to drown, to just drop their skin;  
they knew to make themselves a hand and long.

III.

I make myself a hand and long. The wind  
bent towards me but did not offer a hand.  
Nor did I want one. The sky gave me a kind  
branch just long enough for me to rest and

sit. My flesh wanted its own way, that secret held in  
creases, that secret of how to lose our  
form—the architecture grave and stiff. That tough  
yellow is some sadness and what is meant  
to be carved and rubbed away. But I would not begin

to make my fingers blush and swell  
just so that I may pluck all the leaves  
from this branch. I let the tears well  
until every part of me grieved.

Then the tears spread out over my fingers  
until I couldn't see the blue sky of Florida.

**Christopher Pruitt**

## Colonel Mustard's Confession

Miss White is dead. She lies on the kitchen  
floor looking like a Greek goddess. She lacks

color except for the dash of blood on her  
braid and down the small of her back. So now,

the cards roll across the table like static  
and we move the pieces around with

the board becoming a fragmented mosaic.  
These are the rules of our simple game. I

hide in rooms and peer over a slumped man  
at a desk. I can't make sense of it.

What is he writing stringing the lines out  
like rope? His hands are callused from holding

the pen so tightly. The hard silver fits  
each crack. Perhaps we should all gather in one

room. You can sit on the couch holding the rope,  
I'll stand across from you with the knife.

I won't cut us apart. You and I  
will follow the path and fill out the forms.

Yes, I did it.

Christopher Pruitt

## autumn poem

at school we pledged allegiance  
to the buck head again, but again

because our town was bled  
for love on knuckles. at home  
we made stone soup, kept  
our worms, kept some orphaned trees,

a page for broken oars. our yard  
of monument, a junk box  
with word of boys, some words

of girl they named balloon.  
yet how pieces of the former years

were always gone. we once caught  
river shrimps. the doorman  
played accordion. the jangle of our county  
as it beat its rusted knees.

we had true barbeques. Bri got rashes  
from the swamp. Bri got rashes too,

from Johnny. and we all ate jelly-tubes,  
children of chicory and other untold  
weeds. our water-can mother

in lip sheer, our father of coma,  
our father. but when the cops  
brang polish music how the old man'd  
juggle whisky. the way his veins

grew dark come evening. we would  
have to pull our hoods off, even took

apart our collars. it was easier  
to feel the night without them.

**Amelia Rose Salisbury**

## north country love poem

on front steps in springtime we let go, walk  
the public and *Johnny Cash* is written down  
infinite architecture,

our initials have all been carved

a backdoor, as everyone pushes  
the alley through. some won't, the Aussies  
blatantly strip in dank stone stairs,

it's all-spectral here.  
inside we're sitting, what's left  
beneath the lounge lamp—a shrimp plate

only sauce and tails, we touch feet  
the gum stuck below the booth. i've come  
a billion years for this: a white palace of light, we drink  
tall-boys and i remember me in a basket

a giant winged bicycle, my mother pedaled  
pointing down the beach. we'll grow functionless

degenerate in the course of time. we each die  
our own speed, a separate pile  
of hollowed machinery. this conceptual moving along

the ends fold where it began, as all we have  
are topographic maps of youth, the old scent of  
that other city stacked in crates  
along the coops.

its all-tranquil here, the world hung and  
crooked off the door hinge

the maintenance shed afloat amidst what doesn't happen.



dry wall makes the men grow old,  
our lives will pass and reconstructions  
of language, but you are my lean-to made from mud  
and bark, a place when i am lost beyond all woods.

how our north country, the tractor boys  
you in your worn out shirts. why?

because there is so much i want to share with you

among wreckage, an enamored argument  
of light as it sways between pink and several moments  
before a storm. were there words i would string them:

tin wind chimes, they could clang overtly  
how we love is all, a mattress  
in the cabin loft, a grinder box on the porch

the world has gotten by on less.

please be and keep being my early morning,  
a feed boy as films reel down a back wall  
of the barn. we grew up, Minnesota

our Mississippi a white horse, only haloed insects  
as scattered leaves our clothes across  
the floor. the lists are overwhelming, indefinite—

but this is the last day of being so young and  
ever after we rewind again and again the weeping willow.

**Amelia Rose Salisbury**

## with tiny hands

with tiny hands and everything in utterance of yester  
the yarrow 'neath our pillows dreamt of trumpets and tea.  
our hill country, they hymn of blackgrass and whether

we would wear the sad straw wigs. *look here* said mother  
when the gum stuck and we slept ear to lip and face alee.  
our little hands and everything in utterance of yester;

the unison and breath of wooden dolls beside their smaller  
back to back and back to chest like tree to tree,  
our hill country. the hymn of black water and whether

we could hold another with mud in hair and flower brother.  
names of Josh and Jeremiah and Josh, summers like salt, sardine,  
and tiny hands with everything in its utterance of yester

hour and how eyes of silo children know to water  
or love like girl. Jeremiah left his eyes to Anna Lee,  
our hill country, they hymn of blackgrass and whether

it was against his better judgment, said our father  
who smoked a—two corncob pipes, one between his teeth  
and one inside little hands as everything in utterance of yester;  
the hill country in hymns of blackwater and grass.

Amelia Rose Salisbury

## Miss India

*for Gurwattan*

It cannot be helped that in America dignity is a product  
for consumption. We crown this year's queen  
in sweaty high-school auditoriums some Friday every fall—  
she is pleasantly surprised but knows to return the borrowed crystal crown  
Monday morning after the ball. Nobility instantly incarnate  
in a fresh, warm body, so easy, a regular deity:  
we eat her up in the halls.

It was inevitable: together we learned to decide  
that dignity is hurriedly whittled, freshly forged  
each time—and again, again—out of the sweetly rapid breath  
of a lover behind closed doors. Yes, all this and more;  
meanwhile, the tiara dulls in storage.

Yet—

There is something here with flair:  
have you seen the leaves fly off their handles,  
make spectacle of good clean air? They're orange,  
yellow, sure, but far too many show up wearing that ghastly  
grey-brown. Their decay softly chokes  
the clean nibbles of grass. The squeaky strands beg  
to be raked by forgiving hands, leaves pushed  
to the side of the street, broken down, bagged...

Yes. The *grass* needs you, has always  
needed you; *remember?* Each blade deep in the search  
of a different shade—no, of a whole new way to be green.

*The newest fashion is not to give up,*  
says Miss India USA, *don't give up*  
*on pink.* Her sari screams on-stage of  
crushed berries, brilliant vermillion;  
*pink is India's equivalent of grey,* she  
chuckles, showing off her dimple,  
flashing her moon-white teeth,  
*and while you're at it,* she winks  
at the camera, *layer some azure underneath.*

Jessica Wright

## October 11, 2004: Bad Things, Threes

Superman died yesterday—  
I feel responsible. somehow, or simply  
connected. . . the truth is  
he was a topic of inspiration the night before his heart failed.  
We marveled at his determination to walk again, and  
I was *proud* of him, felt *unworthy* while sipping  
Transylvanian wine from a low glass  
and discussing the presidential debates.

That was just hours before  
a young man drowned in the lake—  
Kelly saw the searchboats from her porch,  
skimming bottom, close to shore. Two days later  
and they still haven't found him. I read in the paper  
this morning that his friends heard him say  
Help. Quietly (he said help) and  
I think of his body, grey as it must be now, swollen  
with Mendota's green-streaked water, almost  
still but not, quite; bouncing lightly on porous, swirling  
muck in the un-weightedness of the thick lake—weighted  
*enough*. I'm sure, to pressure the slimy reeds, bend them down...  
His body is incomprehensible to me;  
though. I'm sure as time passes, less and less foreign  
to the crawlingscuttlingswimming lake life that mourns not death  
because death is food.  
We forget the danger of a swim after midnight.

Death is food to a vampire, as bloody wine is  
food to a thinking mind.  
They say that if you kill a man,  
you must assume all that he knew and hated and  
loved; you must *become* all that he was; you must  
represent. *I will show you fear in a handful of dust:*

The man who lived in the basement of Kelly's building  
died—suicide—a week ago.

After we had gathered our stained glasses into the sink,  
stuffed arms into coatsleeves and locked the door, we saw the night was still.  
*Don't say that, he died of natural causes. He was old—yes, he was—he was old*

*Have you ever dreamed you died?  
I've drowned and I have fallen off a cliff. They say  
it doesn't mean anything. At least,  
not that you' ll die—well... I mean...  
a dream like that just signifies a change in life.  
Something you can't control...  
It just means  
a change is coming.*

**Jessica Wright**

**“The knowledge of Observation, doth not introduce an understanding into the essential thingliness of a Thing, but erecteth only a thinkative Knowledge.”**

*A thoughtful email regarding the expansion and contraction of Time*

I’m still thinking breath. Here, now,  
breathing, thinking on Time, trying on images for size. I count  
pennies—limp ‘clip’ into a jar—copper coats my tongue  
as I let each one drop.  
Down. I’m saving up. Breathe out; exhale. (Quick—be where you’re  
not if I could just take my...)  
Breathing in, yes, trying to measure (emphatic: my life depends  
on—) the distance between rightnow and righthere.  
Length contracts into breath and opens up into a deep space relatively  
near, where Envy sidles up onto Hate, who has puckered up to  
Love for a long, hard, juicy stare.  
I listen for the sound between then and there.

Oh, how very far. Last night I dream  
I sit across from you at some shitty bar; everyone drones.  
I sit; I whisper hello.

Undeniably misadvised, we drive—you drive. Suddenly indignant,  
you pull to the side, foot into the snow, say, ‘Complete  
your memories of me. Make them whole. Now.’ I cry  
out, I hear little time prepare to self-destruct (Big Time  
begins the Big Erase)  
I wake in a cringeworthy sweat:  
I cannot quite remember your face.

Maybe today I'll give you a call, ask to borrow a battery—

I need something small. AA. AAA,

AAAA—yeah, whatever'll do. Really.

Sure.

Okay.

Great, well—

Thanks.

Things have come to this: today I took a penny from the bathroom floor.

It was tails-up; I couldn't afford to resist.

—It strikes me that borrowing a battery is like borrowing a Kleenex—

(But I'll bring it back, someday...)

Anyway. tell me, while I'm here in your head—

have you ever mistaken the means and the ends?

Can you inhale the haze that divides here from now,

step into that place that where black holes meld with light'?

Because I've tried and I've tried but can't figure out how:

not tonight; no. not quite.

**Jessica Wright**

### Departure

He left home that day,  
that day the rain came

and it turned so cold breath clouds formed.  
I saw a flock of geese overhead

as I peeked through the eyelet curtains.  
It was late, or rather early, the opal moon was

flirting with dawn, the sound of glass  
shattering inside the family room.

She was screaming for him  
to get out. He was drunk again.

I was seven and wondered when  
the moon was going to disappear.

I watched as he stumbled down the gravel drive  
kicking the air and cursing the wind

wearing blue jeans and his leather jacket.  
It was cold and rainy. He forgot his hat and gloves.

I thought he would come home again.  
So I waited. I waited until

the moon finally sank into the gray sky  
and the formation of geese shifted out of sight.

**Valerie Barnes**



## Searching

Sometimes I walk along the coast  
and just watch the ocean breathe.  
It pulls the water deep within its chest  
and then releases waves of energy  
over the shore.  
Then I look up and listen  
to the lonely voices of the gulls  
whose shrieks and cries  
are quickly drowned out by the acoustic waves.  
Somewhere between sand dunes painted in gold  
and the rock beds of smooth sea-tossed stones  
I meet my grandfather in memory  
as he wanders up and down the coastline,  
both of us still looking for the treasure  
we believe is buried there.

Valerie Barnes

## **Evening Lullaby**

A tangerine moon swallows the horizon.  
The lake below is almost frozen over.

A lone swan sits motionless in a pocket of water  
basking in the citrus glow.

Slowly, it tilts its head back and begins to croon.  
We walk along the frozen shoreline in silence,

the cold tingling our faces. I reach over  
and slip both of our hands into my coat pocket.

**Valerie Barnes**

## Guests

Each Saturday night, they get drunk, silly,  
and they melt slowly into plaid carpet,  
staining the dull pattern. There are movies  
that they don't see, parties they miss, firing

guns and shrieks of pure impotent regret  
into cars and streetlamps. Big strong sonnets  
begin on their stinking lips and end up  
swept under rugs and snowdrifts. They start locked

together in "we" at nine, and end up  
a murder of "I"'s at twelve, black feathers  
tangled, jostling for escape. Shoes and brooms  
lobbed at them, they laugh, or snarl, turn away,

and objects cease fire. Turning the music  
up so no one sleeps soundly, the bass makes  
our windows rattle. Every single night  
I have such important work, must be done

now or I'll lose my way. Never silence  
to inhale. But each time they throw me off,  
retreating fast, black ocean swaggering  
foolish night, I hear their laughing echoes.

## Travis Bird

## Strength

The theater's dark.  
The movie's over.  
You sit and stare.

Your eyes glaze with moisture,  
your throat throbs as you swallow hard,  
but your chiseled face shows no emotion.

The sixteen-foot barbed wire fence  
has kept you safe all these years,  
safe from the disappointment of everyone.

You've been guarded by your own doberman,  
barking at anyone who gets too close,  
chasing them away.

I've been waiting outside this fence for years,  
waiting for you to open the gate,  
but I can't stand here forever.

We've been friends since we were five, but  
I know no more about you than I did when  
I first said hi.

You tell me you're afraid of being weak,  
that's your greatest fear,  
so you've taken measures...

You've learned self-defense, that's obvious,  
your eyes can topple me in just one second.  
When did you find time for the lessons?

It must have been years ago. How young were you?  
What made you start? Even you don't know.  
But since it happened, you've only ever wanted to be strong.

You watched the movies and the television,  
and wanted nothing more than to be the hero,  
the one who never cried.

When you finally stand to leave the theater  
you try to smile, but I can tell you don't feel it.  
I haven't been as unobservant as you think.

Though I can't remember the last time you cried,  
the last time you released your strangle-hold on yourself,  
or when you needed a friend above all,

But it's been so long that even you don't know  
what it is for you to cry.  
In time I'll cut through this wire and force you to cry.

**Alissa Breach**

## **The City of Poetry is Somewhere in Russia**

The city of Poetry has only one main street,  
which forever changes its place in the city,  
and has never been traveled by human feet.

The rhythm of the city is your heart beat,  
as you walk down the pavement: all gritty,  
since the city of Poetry only has one main street.

And you try to make the city smell sweet,  
or lay the concrete to a new street in this city,  
a street that's never been traveled by human feet.

But construction is delayed due to snow and sleet,  
or a decision by the committee  
that the city of Poetry can have only one main street.

This is a city in winter without indoor heat;  
and yet lacks the world's pity,  
because it has never been traveled by human feet.

In the city's mansions are people you'd die to meet,  
but you're not allowed in—you're too gritty,  
because the city of poetry has only one main street,  
though it has never been traveled by human feet.

**Alissa Breach**

## **Sleep**

When'd sleep become the great inconvenience  
in your life? A problem that interfered  
with daily plans, and was the influence  
that you wish had forever disappeared.

Sleep's the CD, when the bill's overdue,  
the plastic bottles, when water's costless,  
the open window, when the heater's new.  
Sleep is everything wasteful; it's useless.

Sleep causes the radiating throbbing,  
which makes your eyes slowly close, your mind roll;  
pressure mounts; you barely keep from sobbing.  
You fight not to collapse and lose control.

You wish, through your dismay, for the soft bed,  
despite work to do; you want sleep instead.

**Alissa Breach**

## **How Red**

It took me by surprise when he never asked  
me to dance, but instead made  
me dance in front of all those people  
who were not dancing.

He just placed on the smallest part  
of my back the smallest part of his hand  
and we danced in circles and twirls, one dip  
and curtsy to wrap it up. He was finished  
with me and this dance that he meant  
to be something

poetic, with the Celtic music, pints  
of ale, entire family clusters gathered near  
a tea and scone saloon, overwhelming  
this space.

I considered how truly red  
his hair was, greasy with the night  
in a pony tail that's too long  
for an Irishman and how the music  
never stopped even though I pleaded  
with it in my head, over and over,  
wanting to just sit and be a little  
girl again.

I considered that  
poetry.

**Catherine Creighton**



## The Average Man's Dream

The cable man said, "I need a vacation"  
and he named *The Bahamas* as his choice.  
Ready, he smelled of smoke and greasy wire, had rainbow  
sunglasses resting on his matte black hair  
and lounged on my recliner, ready.

If I went on vacation, it would be to a place  
I could spot on a map. Pay for things  
in English. There would be no  
women in bikinis with cellulite  
exposed. No bulging men  
running to fetch umbrella drinks.

In the tropics, the danger of dying  
under a coconut tree is too great  
and the places aren't real  
like their pictures.

"The Bahamas, hey?" I said to him, to chit-chat while I hooked  
up the extended cable service.

I stared at his moustache then and couldn't stop thinking:  
He might rape me. On my couch or the floor.

Catherine Creighton

## **impression**

look in the space:  
your self is revealed, she is tangled.

and I am here with you two, on the stairs,  
watching you move.

you can put your shirt back on now.  
I can't name your parts, nor remember  
the story of why we are all here,

you have shown me something I want. now, hush  
and smell the fresh wood.

**Catherine Creighton**

## Sinkhole Opens in Orlando Backyard

*Orlando Sentinel*, October 15, 2004

It is possible that you will stretch out one night  
under the cool Floridian moon,  
yellow as a bruised lemon and just as sour,

with a mojito, a machete and the shreds  
of your final pay stub scattered around you,  
and in an instant, a gulp, a corrective shift,

find the earth opening her mouth before you,  
ripping through the perfect green lawn  
and sending the pink yard flamingos flying.

Her mouth will be as dark as the back of your closet  
and lodged in her soil throat you will see  
your missing keys and lost credit card statements,

*You can leave this hemisphere*, she says,  
her voice not as loud as you thought it would be,  
and breath smelling like rain,

*Your mother was wrong.*  
*You can dig a hole to China, crawl through*  
*on your hands and knees, and live to tell about it.*

You will believe her because the dirt under your nails  
and behind your ears tells you she's right,  
and you will cross your arms across your chest and roll

slowly towards the hole, eyes closed like you're falling asleep  
and fall until you find yourself floating  
on a pink inner tube in the Indian Ocean,

where it is almost night again,  
and the stars' tiny mouths open and close,  
singing the songs they wrote for you.

**Elizabeth Goltz**

## **To Romulus Augustus, the Last Emperor of Rome**

*According to legend, after killing his brother Remus, Romulus founded the city of Rome in 753 BC. In 476 AD, a boy named Romulus Augustus ruled Rome at the age of 14 for nine months. He was the last Roman Emperor in history.*

Some choices: wheat or rye,  
fly or drive, are so simple  
you can make them without asking  
your mother. Others are made in-utero,

promises breathed into a belly—  
the last place you were invisible  
and felt only your mother's heart  
beating like the feet of marching barbarians.

Tell me, Romulus Augustus, do you like your name?  
Do you feel the heat of it shining  
though your skull like a crown?  
Or does it hang heavy at your flesh

like secret leeches that fester  
behind your ears at night, whispering  
the eulogy of your namesake who floated  
down the River Tigris with nothing

but a brother and a bassinette,  
learned survival from a wolf  
and created the city that towers  
around you like rumbling clouds.

Romulus Augustus, you are not  
the only one with a name that haunts.  
At night my dead aunt horns her way  
under my door while I'm sleeping,

straightens my slouched back  
with her hands and hisses the 'Z' and soft 'B'  
of my name, then the recipes for the perfect  
lemon meringue and chocolate silk.

I always wake stiff with visions  
of whipped white peaks.  
So do not be afraid when you wake  
with the taste of sour dog milk  
on your lips and the blood of a brother

you don't have on your palms—  
names have their way of reminding you  
what you were born to do.

**Elizabeth Goltz**

## Getaway

Maybe it's the black  
strand of hair twisted  
around the toothpaste tube  
like a starved serpent,  
or his overalls and underwear  
burying the bedroom  
in heavy heaps,  
or the pink birthday cake  
dumped in the sink  
a fly buzzing,  
but she's leaving  
without clearing her half  
of the closet, sticking  
a Post-It saying *There's no place  
like home* to the fridge,  
and stepping into the rain  
with a duffel bag  
and bus fare, the ripped  
fringe of her jeans  
drinking puddles  
as she runs  
and worms,  
sensing water, rise  
from their holes  
and spread out  
on the sidewalk—  
tiny sacrifices  
just waiting  
to be cut in two.

Elizabeth Goltz

## Small

*This was our ambition: to be small and clear and free.*

—John Ashbery

We sat in the shade, the cool and darkened willow and remembered things pushed from our memories. We designed what was: a splinter in the silk-spiked sheets; because you always told me we could find, what would be, in our dreams. Well,

mine left me crying, screaming, awake. We turned to face another side; the zipper, broken and stained. The sun blocked your visions, you faced to turn me like you could change me like you had before. I stood well rooted as a willow. You spat at my leaves and walked off. We, the

willow and I, blinked at you in discontentment. You seemed to think that I would be your safety lens, forever. I always thought you could count more cards than that. Still, a dream speaks to me as if I were asleep, as if I were awake and with you still. You liked to bleed,

you said. You bled for me, you said; spilled emotions, puddled confessions. I liked to laugh, I said; I wanted the last word. Sailing with the clouds and the doves, they never believed me; who could tell the difference between black and red when all the world sat down

and shared a round of shots. We keep saying things will be different when we move. And suddenly, love is not small and clear. Did you mean it when you said you would forgive my virtues and forget my faults? I don't see how things will be when we are older and getting

together for coffee is hard, we have both sworn off caffeine and hate to go the extra mile. Picture something pretty, get your mind away, from this. Don't leave with nothing. I knew you when you were small, lost, when you cried to stray kittens and they shared their milk with

you. Don't tell me you will change, you spun too far for that. You realize, we are merely characters in a greater setting; we are little, cheap, fallen. Regardless, we bury our passions in the sun beneath the willow and walk off. Nothing can stop us, our memories believe.

**Jodi Green**

## Falling into Honey

Represented by sheer  
stillness,  
the white-willow  
dying grace, she  
sidled up to his bare  
condensation,  
design. Content with the shattered  
solitude of dew  
textured, fire  
soaked  
symphony of touch.  
Anticipated fear spiraled an ivy maze of  
geometric intuitions, piercing into  
misplaced emotions with a tear.

She burned danger through  
rough shallow bark, incensing  
a constitutional  
train of resistance.

Her mother's shameless  
crystal punchbowl trembled under her  
Jell-O intoxicated  
fingertips, roaring the  
dimension of fractured  
light to the snowy marble tile.  
Dripping  
slowly in a  
waterfall of  
crumpled glass:

silent riot, release.

He tasted like wintergreen  
tea,  
smoothed of  
honey.

Relinquished appetite  
floated  
in cloudy vanilla  
spiced streams  
above their silk-stained heads like metallic  
candy wrappers. His hand reached out and  
shuttled a  
tear from her amaretto  
cheek.  
She loved it when

his eyes illuminated the sky.

Jodi Green



## Under the covers

We, for once, may have lain in hiding against the sting of spatial orientations. And yet, instead, the light went on upstairs and

silence. Lit against the sun, despite the sun and knowing not the sun, our clothes glowed against the floor. Patterns

spoke praises of themselves. We spoke of problems in patterned existences. Exhausted by the end, we lay on our backs and watched

as the sky shut its eyes on us. Conversation streamed into our thoughts like oil and we said too much to say anything.

Childhood swept the nation, breaking windows and perspectives louder and louder as it was thickened with time.

When we were kids, we searched for monsters under our beds. When we grew up, monsters found us, under the covers.

Above, under and through grew to tell lesser lies. Questions erupted in exhaustion and fell to the floor, panting for continuation.

We received mental breakdowns in turn, dished out with our breakfast cereal and coffee. Smiling, we popped them down and turned to leave.

We all grew up knowing change would create stains, spills, heartbreak across our silk webs. Today at least, blankets shield the stares.

Respect was the glint of a tiger. Respect was powder in a box. Respect was the thudding of the headboard. Respect fell through skylights at

night and busted through mouse holes by day. It curdled mold and disrespected leaks. Respect lingered in the folds of clean laundry,

whistled through gray hair and set off fireworks at obscene moments. Respect was and what is now?

- I remember the height of a shooting star.  
- I will remember, always, how you looked at me  
and talked up daisies

they fumbled their revelations; we lay shivering under the covers, waiting for rain. Begin, end, put us to sleep.

Jodi Green

## Metamorphosis of the Daughter

Harried-looking with the flustered, frightened  
air of a hunted fox, she pushes you  
onto that bus in your stroller, padded  
and cushioned in pink pastel with its thin  
plastic sheet over the front, hiding you  
from January's razorblade embrace.  
Around you pictures of dragonflies and  
bees whirr across the fabric, gauzy wings  
and glittering million-faceted eyes  
watching over your slumbering larval  
softness. Hidden under pink blankets, coat,  
hood, lavender mittens, and the puffy  
boots with cartoon princesses foretelling  
eternal immobility, you are  
a mere wisp of black hair and two darkly  
glittering eyes.

But gradually you unfold. She pulls  
the purple mittens off and you have ten  
fingers, delicate as feathers, you stare  
in awe at them. She pulls your hood back and  
you have a face, she pushes the blanket,  
pink as a cat's rough nurturing tongue, to  
the side and there you are, a child, clicking  
your soft mandibles together in joy,  
laughing at your mother, feeling her face  
with your feathery hands, climbing across  
her lap trying to touch the world outside  
the bus window, the colorful world you  
have been hidden from since the day you were  
born.

A girl sits nearby, knitting and clutching  
A coffee mug. "Di di di!" you cry out,  
covetous, reaching for the silvery  
yarn and the cup with its hot green glitter,  
"di di di di!" *In Hindi it means "big  
sister,"* your mother explains to the girl,  
*she thinks you look like her sister, and she  
wants your things,* understating your dizzying  
need to have these things, to circle around  
them until you fall into that gorgeous  
light. She puts a bottle in your outstretched  
hands.

And then the bus begins to approach your  
stop and the transformation reverses:  
the hood, the blanket, the mittens. You  
shriek at first, wounded, betrayed, but the pink  
blanket settles over you like a chill.  
Sinking back into your dragonfly and  
bee cocoon you willingly submit your  
fingers for cancellation, until you  
are again faceless and immobile. The  
knitting girl stares, the needles in her hands  
rattling like fortune bones, the silvery  
yarn whispering against itself like cricket  
legs, promising and promising: *Little  
sister, this is your seventeen-year slumber.  
One summer you will finally emerge,  
unfold like a paper crane into your  
true body, one with bright, gauzy wings and  
one thousand winking eyes.*

**Christie Taylor**

## The Paradox

*Based on "Theseus Combatting the Minotaur"*

—Antoine-Louis Barye

Your bodies beaten bronze by sun  
metallic shining sweaty licked by gods  
you fight together, man of bull and prince  
of Athens, the maze around you falling

and the bride of violence must be love  
the way the monster curls his leg around  
your thigh, Theseus, how your hand holds  
the soft fold of one ear in a gesture almost tender

and you will not be parted  
though you hold your sword between his eyes  
so coldly like a surgeon cutting off a limb  
he is still of you, Theseus, fastened as firmly  
as a mountain to the earth,

his right hand plowing furrows in your back  
and as he falls back bleeding red  
across the sand his left falls on your shoulder  
like the partner in a dance and you see?

It is a tango.

Christie Taylor

## **“Mother Who Drowned 5 Children In Tub Avoids a Death Sentence”**

*The New York Times*, March 16, 2002

But maybe you had already died,  
your eyes crude black Xs  
in sketches of the trial, naked in their  
emptiness, unclosed, uncovered,  
maybe it was your corpse on trial, cold and white  
wheeled in on a gurney and wedged  
upright at the defense desk by pillows  
and the polite hands of your attorney,

and being dead, you didn't give testimony  
let the lawyers tell your story,  
both sides now,  
the black ooze of your depression  
described like Hamlet's blameless  
pathos, while the translucent waters  
of murder fell from the prosecution  
with almost loving detail.

Maybe you didn't hear a single  
word of this, each sound tripping  
at the edge of your mind and never quite  
making it through the door  
and, just maybe, your own words did  
the same thing, clenched between the blue  
lips and white teeth of rigor mortis,  
maybe you were trying to explain

that the end it all comes down to suicide,  
no single gunshot but rather the one decision  
repeated infinitely as your one most precious  
thing struggles endless minutes under your hands,  
desperately thrashing, his small eyes wide  
in terror, death flooding his lungs,  
his veins, his every cell, until blue  
with water he gives one last, tiny shudder

splashing his life and yours  
across the cold, white bathroom floor.

**Christie Taylor**

## MFA BIOS

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**Lisa Marie Brodsky** moved from Chicago to Madison in 2001. During her MFA stint at UW–Madison, she met a variety of talented poets whose influence she will never forget. Lisa Marie's poetry has been in a variety of journals, among them the *North American Review* and *Born Magazine*. Her thesis manuscript is entitled "Romantic Circus Songs." She would like to thank everyone in the creative writing department for an incredible experience.

**David Camphouse** was born in Centralia, Illinois, and graduated from Southern Illinois University with a bachelor's degree in horticulture. He presently lives on the south side of Milwaukee and will complete his MFA in creative writing at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in May.

**Kevin Gonzalez** was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. His poems have appeared in *Callaloo*, *Poetry*, *Indiana Review*, *North American Review*, and *Hotel Amerika*, among other journals.

**Emily M. Green** will be moving to Oxford, Mississippi, in the fall. She enjoyed her time in Madison immensely, and is grateful to the creative writing faculty for all of their generous help.

**Nick Lantz** received a B.A. in Religious Studies from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He currently resides in Madison and is completing his MFA.

**Rita Mae Reese** was recently named a Wallace Stegner Fellow in fiction. She is completing her MFA in poetry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she was a Martha Meier Renk fellow. Her poetry has won a "Discovery"/*The Nation* award and two AWP Intro Journals Project awards. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, and *Mid-American Review*.









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