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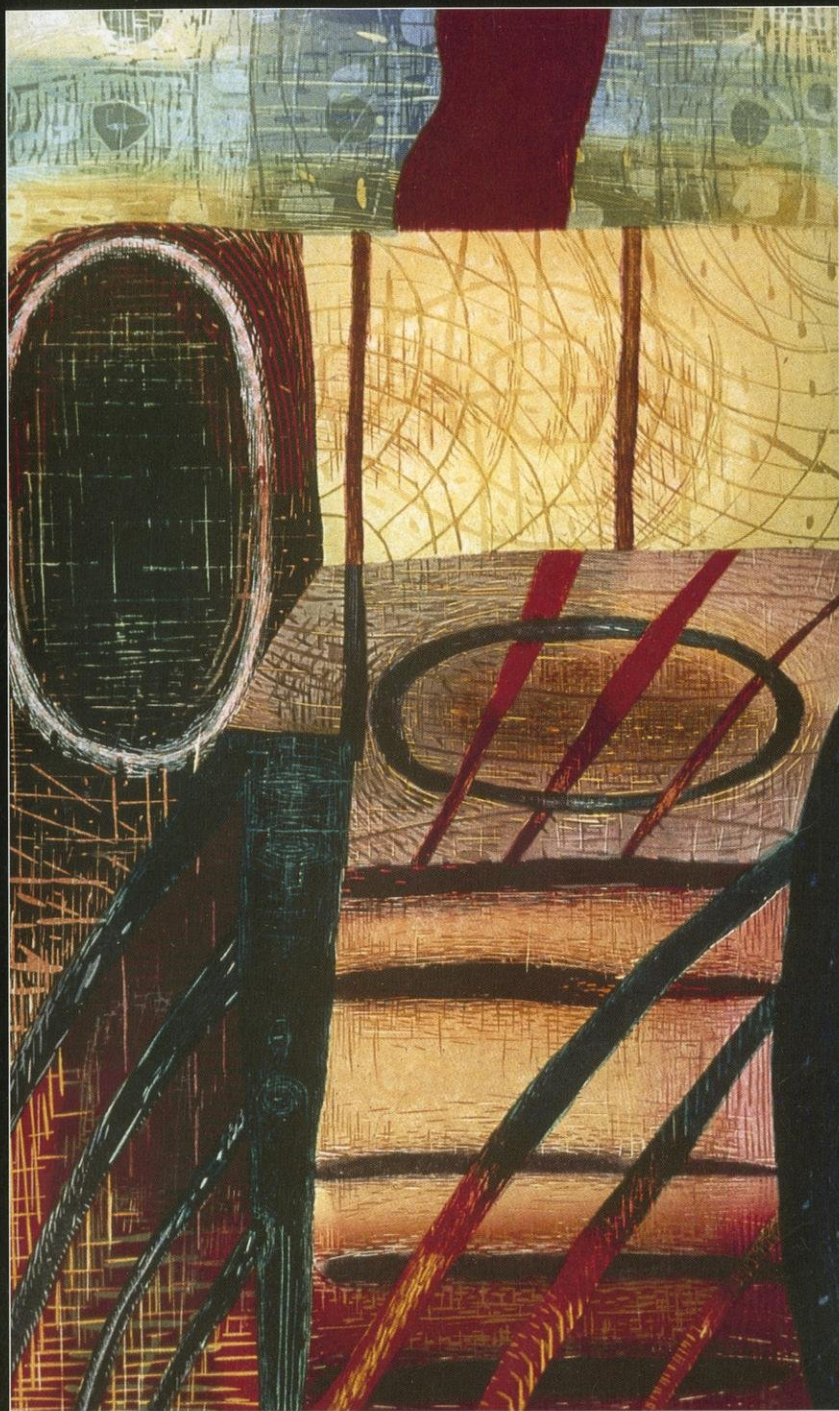
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forward



Best Young Poets

University of Wisconsin-Madison
2006

FORWARD!

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University of Wisconsin–Madison
2006

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PREFACE

“the jury which sits in judgment upon the poet, belongs as he does to all time...”

Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” 1820

With each poem, we take a stand; directly or indirectly, we both name our genius and expose our limitations. Our struggles, what we find beautiful, what makes us laugh, the degree of our outrage—how we choose to respond to the world we’ve been given and the world we’ve made—defines us. With each poem, we sign our names twice—once in air, another in dust. We witness and have witnessed the joyous and painful episodes that reflect our time. What judgment comes, what praise, what criticism, this moment cannot be stolen, we are here, our voices ring into an eternity.

Forward! is a collection of poetry showcasing the work of University of Wisconsin–Madison’s first-year MFA graduate writing students and the undergraduate winners, honorable mentions, and finalists of the 2006 George B. Hill Program. George B. Hill was a member of the class of 1908 at the University of Wisconsin, and 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 2006 contest judge was Collen Abel, 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

Ceremony

For Irma

Loss is not a distance, though at times it seems so.
A window comes between us. Our light,
focused there, and reflected
so one does not know if she is any longer
in the world. Sees only self and sky
hovering behind.

One calls and kisses. Lip marks
look like language, blueprints for paisley,
notes on a score, moon phase-shaped islands
in water. One begins to sing.
Suddenly, there is sea on the other side
of the surface and one is in it
as other is hovering in the sky. The song
comes back in the mouths of fishes.
This is ceremony. There is no surface.

Sarah Nelson

Yellow Cling Peaches in Heavy Syrup

*We died in your hills
And we died on your deserts
We died in your valleys
We died on your plains
We died 'neath your trees
And we died in your bushes
Both sides of that river
We died just the same*

Woody Guthrie, from "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)"

I thought of you this morning,
Woody, as I ate my breakfast
from an aluminum can.
You said, "The crops are all in
and the peaches are rotting,
the oranges are stacked
in their creosote dumps."

The first time I heard this,
I was driving on a road
that mimicked the Mississippi,
upstream. Mid-January,
& I was thinking of summer,
the white fog lifted,
icicles on branches
replaced by leaves.

I was alone on that road,
no cars for miles, when
I imagined my own death,
how long it took them
to find me. That look
on my mother's face,
as she sorted my belongings,
looking for something
to cling to.

Jacob Gamage

Relational V: Leonardo's Folio 53 Recto

And if the eye that looks at the star

or you

turns swiftly in an opposite direction

away

it will appear to it that

from here

this star forms in its stead

still making

a curving line of fire

in the absence

and this occurs because the eye

what kindles

preserves for a time

what is held

the image of the things

it sees

this thing that shines

your eyes

and the impression

your eyes

the radiance

your eyes

is what endures.

Heather Swan Rosenthal

First Blood

I found the sleek blush
of blood on my thighs
in the duty free bathroom
like a torn seam, a red doorway
leading from the darkened
house of my body:

it felt like exodus
as we fled the murky well
of Pittsburgh after the funeral—
the frantic pull of blood looking for light
as we crossed over
Canada's drawbridge border.

At the cabin, I eased myself
into the lake, pressing my body
into another dark body,
the waves gleaming black
like loam, like the vein-blue darkness
under my ribs.

I laid still, bleeding into Lake Wawashkesh
wasted, unkissed, untouched,
and I could feel death's relentless frisson—
a knot of genes washing away:

great grandchild, invisible egg.
Immeasurable fraction of my grandmother
whispering out of me on skeins of blood,
spilling backwards to the ancient lakebed,
into a vast room of unbroken,
other darkness.

Erinn Batykefer

I thought you didn't play the piano

the last time i was wrong
the sky fell a little
in buffalo

fortunately for buffalo
deacons were on hand
gathering deacons and
hardly anybody
died more than once

when we landed the first thing
we forgot was
lake effect
it quiets the distance
between mouth and throat

warnings
of intense blooming
at village limits
failed to stop the crowds
from stopping
and listening

Marianne Jay Erhardt

Wawanaisa Lake: Ross

Before he was awake, I walked out to the deck. The sun spilled its watercolor onto the lake. Trout, bass and pike (heavily-stocked, they said) nipped at the clear air above them as if to get a taste of what we keep breathing in so deeply each morning. In the dim of five a.m., their tiny risings to the surface looked like hundreds of invisible men skipping stones, making wishes.

But no one was stirring that early, the world sleeping its happy sleep. I went down to the beach, took off everything. I eased into the icy water, which drank the length of my body like liquid mercury, thick and silver. I swam toward one of dams, which stretched at least a hundred feet across the lake. Two beavers glided through the water toward what I thought must be their lodge. Small, cone-shaped, it leaned against the bank—sticks, mud and rocks packed together precisely. I almost went back, dragged Felix out of bed to see it. But stayed, floating there. Wondering how many seasons it would last.

When I slipped back into the cabin, I slid between the cool sheets, fell asleep against his chest. His rising, falling breath. All the scents of this place—evergreen, cedar and rich loam—filling us, leaving us.

James Crews

La Carolina

Everyone was talking about it.
Gerardo killed some *chilango*
on Luis Urbina this morning.
Stabbed him the gut while his kids'
singing voices broadcast from the
cement school down the street.

But the *chilango* deserved it.

Doña Quili sells candles on the side of the road.
Outfits for the Baby Jesus on the Candelaria,
Marigolds on the Day of the Dead.
Keeps a flask of tequila and a bottle of Fanta
under her table for guests.

Old ladies set down their buckets of corn dough,
stroked their grey braids with grandma grace,
Asked, *did he have a mother?*
How long will he be in jail?

Quili saw Gerardo get taken away,
Blood smeared all over his angry face.
Poor Gera,
She said.
He'll be in jail for life.
But somebody had to take care of that chilango
Always shakin his fist at kids and stealing money from
The tortilleria and the corner store.

Children rose from his chalk outline;
drew their own;
screamed *go back to where you*
came from! to no one in particular,
tackled each other to the ground.

The butcher hacked through a ribcage,
slung the carcass over his shoulders,
and ran it up the market stairs,
his green nylon apron covered in blood.
Old ladies on the stairs tightened their noses,
put money in their aprons,
sold their plastic bags of dough for 15 pesos a piece.

Caitlin Yunis

Mushrooms

Romono's dreams are prophetic,
which is why he had already started roasting the coffee beans over the kitchen fire
when you arrived.

Of course you can stay, in the room near the towering white irises.
In the bathroom, there are old phonebooks, use them for toilet paper.

While you help to grind the coffee beans in the mill, listen.
Romono will tell you that he also saw his son Roel die in his dreams,
before it actually happened that July night on the cobblestone street outside his house.
Roel ran away from his mother and Romono is still waiting for her to appear in his dreams
so he knows who should receive the death certificate
and the suitcase with old t-shirts and a moth collection stored in jalapeño jars.

Roel died years ago, and the five different apparitions of the Virgin,
though well-depicted in the guest room, lead to nowhere.

And lately Romono's dreams are only predicting trivial things, like your visit —
when he saw you get off of the pick-up truck he started crushing the peppers —
and the whereabouts of his neighbor's runaway cow.

So, over sweetened coffee and eggs with *chile*, he mentions the mountains.
That it is mushroom season, and that soon he will go to collect them.
He loves to go on Sundays when everyone else is at church.
He climbs up the path along the river where the rocks shift under blankets of moss.

While at the top he becomes the arms that hold the sky in place, and when he is tired, he lets go.

And he returns with wet socks and plastic bags full of mushrooms.
Some of the mushrooms will be sautéed and others traded for candles and honey,
while the socks will hang to dry above the vegetable garden and the chickens
will nip at the toes until they fall.

And somehow the smell of the mushrooms and olive oil will make up for the dreams, and he is reassured that someday he will arrive to her, although they may be old and she may have forgotten that she ever had a son she couldn't care for. And he will hand her a death certificate and a suitcase full of old t-shirts and a moth collection stored in jalapeño jars.

And you will wonder why you came first in a dream, and now today, to the place where Quetzalcoatl was born and young men die from sniffing glue and fighting.

But stay a while, Listen to Romono as he presses the corner of his eye because in his dreams you were listening, better than the Virgin in all her forms.

Caitlin Yunis

Marigold

My umbilical cord hangs in a plastic bag
from the ceiling. It has been there
for eleven and a half years pushing
origin towards purpose, collecting flies.

If you want to grow like a marigold,
pluck its petals and dry them in the sun,
put them in a jar, add 100 proof vodka
and bury the jar underground for one month.
Then, dig it up and lay several drops
under your tongue.

Delfina says,
You grow towards where you come from,
and I have run away so many times
I hardly bother to unpack my market bags.
I have begun to love the leaving,
the tip-toeing past Delfina's closed
bedroom door, past the chickens and the
lemon trees and empty soda bottles lined up
in a neat row along the driveway.

I ride in the back of a pick-up truck
to the end of the gravel road thirty miles
from Delfina's house.
I sit by the side of the road,
learn what it is to be a man by watching;
it is not much different than being a woman.

I don't choose to come home
but I end up there late at night.
I arrive with less than I left with—
I am learning to join
the moon with the moonlight.

Caitlin Yunis

A Delta of Bone

May my grave
be the birthplace
of many deer.

Walking a cat's cradle of trails,
my mind was like the mud nest of wasps:
loud with a thousand stinging thoughts.
I was counting crows,
an act of divination and desperation,
trying to winnow a meaning
from the absolute empire of winter.

And then, as if a manifestation
of the earth's urge to sing of herself,
a porcelain-white chorus
pierced the cacophony of my mind:
a bloom of bone had grown
up out of the mineral snow,
a seedling sown by the blossoming moon:
one deer antler, rooted
in the ground, vegetative,
branched like a sapling seeking sunlight.
I bent low to pick the strangest flower.

There is no thing of this world
as cold as bone when it has had a night
to swallow the cold of snow
down its throat of marrow,
and there is no thing of this world
as smooth as bone when it has been whittled
and polished by the sandwind of time.
I held the delta of bone in my own.

It was pronged but was one stem at its base,
which was crowned by a corona of calcium.
The place where it had once been rooted
to the sphere of the deer's mind
smelled like the migrant blood
we harbor in the hostels of our skin.
From this disk grew weathered veins
(an antler, a weathervane)
which ran in mineral deposits
to the four terminal points
(the cardinal directions)
which were dulled at the tips
by the bark of buck-rubbed trees,

at the feet of which the deer must have left
little votive cairns of velvet.
The stalk of bone split into two
and became deltaic
like the Ganges at the sea.

What does it mean
when you find yourself
(and you must find yourself,
having wandered, shamanic,
outside yourself)
holding a length of bone?
it means that flesh,
which is the least of what we are,
has melted like thawed snow
and only that skeletal scaffolding
upon which we hang
the drapery of our living
like a threadbare coat
on a hanger, remains.
When all the antlers have settled
singular through the soft earth,
we will lay upon a great hammock
of woven bone and deer
will bear the weight
of what we have done.

But today the antler I found
that day near an effigy mound
beyond Madison weighs down
my feather-light poems
and decorates my desk
between two ears of Indian corn.
They cannot hear my prayers.
They are deaf when I say
I owe all I am
to the deaths of deer.

Austin Smith

Earth Moon Renga

Across a claustrophobia
of blood-fisted sumacs
I study the ornithology
of winter cardinals,
catholic and regal in red,
the way they flare
like violent thoughts
against the remissive earth.

The diurnal moon
which we thought we knew
we didn't.
I stare at its pocked face
through concavities
of melted sand and see
a phrenology of craters
at the interface
of lunar night and day.
Vast seas like sockets.
The full moon
a raccoon skull.

It would take you lives
to cross the Sea of Tranquility,
a ragged prophet
of a mortal religion,
preaching to no one,
staggering your crucifix
of bones toward earthrise.

Think of cardinals
flying against the milled marrow
of that moonscape.
Think of sumacs
rising like a thousand-fisted revolution
against that bone powder background.
This is the starkness
with which your life
must flare, incendiary
in love, above the ashen city
of your birth,
or else nuclear winter
will turn our earth lunar
and an atom
cleaved like dough
(no bread or communion wafer

moon to transmute us)
will settle an amnesia
of uranium dust upon us,
and in the open mouths
of dead cardinals,
and on the scalded fists
of the last protesting sumacs.

Austin Smith

Poem for Les, Homeless

You were somehow yourself
and the autumn, in your coat
smelling like the ashes of pets
and the bins in Salvation Army stores,
standing broken in our door,
begging my father to let you
park your car in our barnyard.
Les, you were so senescent,
standing there like an exhausted season,
singed by several fires,
your voice a procession of smoke.
How could we say no?
All your possessions
boxed in the backseat
of your old station wagon,
which fell so deeply asleep
in the bed of our land
you could not wake it
with the harsh whisper of the ignition.
You went to see your dying mother.
Car towed, boxes in the barn,
waiting for you to return
with your lantern of remembrance.
I found your Bible
one day of farm boy boredom,
its tragic lists
of births and deaths
(your mother's name
awaiting a date).
It was occult.
I carried it the way
a boy carries a turtle he has found
and hid it beneath mundane books.
The passages that moved you
you had marked with faint graphite.
The red words of Christ
I thought to be disturbingly
suggestive of blood.
I quit reading it in exasperation
in the midst of a tedious list of names.
I have lost it.

How have you,
the book, and I
grown so far apart
on the birth date of this poem,
like triplicate points of a triangle
that traces the base
of a pyramid of ash?

Austin Smith

"Scientists to Hunt 'Bigfoot' in Rainforest"

–ABC News, January 27, 2006

They call him *Gigantopithecus blacki*,
and you have heard him called the "snaggle-toothed ghost,"
but when you saw him, his mouth was closed
and he was kneeling on the shore of the Pahang river,
hunched over in a way that made him look
like a dark mountain peak.

While you hid behind a mahogany tree,
you waited for him to stand,
jump in the river, arch his back
and cry out, but he only crouched there,
looking into the river and tracing his fingers
through the water as if he were
writing his name.

You wish you had not told the girl at the market,
who told her scientist friend.
They will track him with beeping radar
and stake cameras along the teak forest paths.
They will watch him at all hours from a van,
and pass the time, until they can catch him,
by eating greasy dumplings
and telling jokes that always end
by pounding fists over their chests.

If they would come find you,
the anonymous witness to this mystery,
you would not tell them your true reason
for staying up nights, miles from your home:
You waited to hear the deep whoosh of his hands
grasping and releasing branches,
to place the soles of your feet into a footprint
and know that you are not the only one
to roam these woods at night,
unseen and alone.

Elizabeth Goltz

“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 will say,
her voice not as loud as you thought it would be,
her 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 over 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 B.C. In 476 A.D., 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 wiith 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

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Sorry is dead

when they can't talk they cry.
eyes become little newspaper clippings
of tragedies.

only there was no train crash today
in that tear that just smeared
but the wetness is everything said in the world.

a car door slams another caption
out of my eye,
where my brain tinkers with some verse

that said take the long way
in life, *you will benefit.*
but will your legs?

that scatter over a fence.
April has no pity for love
sucking color down the cheeks

I peel myself
and shed it all running for you
for that screen door banging

the wind from the east on its merry way
with no intention of calming down
or taking a jog through the pines

instead of the front porch.
I'm out of oxygen, I'm out of forgiveness
with the Bible in my head

the biggest, fattest apology
is most easily given by
taking a seat in a dark chair

from the kitchen,
with a moth flying around the ceiling
and letting someone else cry instead.

Carlin Catra Cwik

flour

white footsteps disappear
into the soup.

it cooks with the wooden spoon
holding its hand.

poor little dear.

strips of chicken meat
gather at the metal rim,
like little fingers that spent

too much time in the bath,
with oil puddles and milk

and strange salty water.
sad for the rice, lonely
at the belly of the pot.

they are soggy soft livers
that jump like electrical hairs
and aren't alive.

watching rice bleed its grain
into the soup,

when the hotplates
drain your eyes
like red strings

of drowsy bus stops.
don't you feel sorry
for rice maggots

when you sleep?
they burst membranes

without a friend
and your fork,
like a petite metal dancer

is in their backs.

Carlin Catra Cwik

Clouds

Lips taut
the skin of cranberries
to peel, to unpeel
in the narrow moats of saliva.

That empty tongues
might know the taste of hers.

And little O's
soaked in her company.
Her sleep,
drawn in folds of flattened grapes,

knocking to the lush of her clavicle,
her knees.

To the numb globes plucked from the throat
in barbed trance.
Long strokes of doubt
shed away when she awoke.

Carlin Catra Cwik

moonbathing

The whir-hush Atlantic
smoothes your choking face, its antic
tides the low tock high tick

of clocks marking longitude in phosphorescent
waters. Jellyfish, diatoms, sea rays pause their ascent
as the ship passes and leaves the rippled scent

of petrol. Lay low, your body: substance
splayed. Fingers clench, relax—a nighttime stance.
Small crabs and crayfish crawl, as ants

crawl, over your bare breasts. Air pauses to trace
hair, pores, goose bumps, the slowing race
of your heart as the sibilant sss

of waves creeps under your tongue, like melancholy
or decomposition. An earth smell: pine, holly,
your body, washing up against a boat's lee.

Siri Helleloid

radius of poetry

To find the radius of a nucleus
search out my fingertips
as they write poems on skin

while your hands, uncertain,
map the path of electrons
to find the radius of a nucleus

in my pores, as if your equations
form parenthesis over my body
as they write poems on skin

as if, under you, my metaphors
calculate probabilities, or are used
to find the radius of a nucleus.

Together we breath numeric
literature that our atoms translate
as they write poems on skin,

as they make symbolic conversions,
as they hypothesize how
to find the radius of a nucleus
as they write poems on skin.

Siri Helleloid

I never seem to sleep

i.

His raised veins are midnight
under papyrus skin.

Eyes marbled
with age.

Bones hair-brittle
with age.

We walk on gravel streets.
Hunched over, his hand

tight on my arm;
I am dark

and worn.
We take child steps,

the crowd drifting, blind
to us.

ii.

I steady his hand,
bowl rattling

against his fingers.
Toothless he drinks,

spilling soup
down his chin.

He says: *Be glad,*
sing. His marbled

lids closing;
his hands, cold

and fragile
under mine.

iii.

His breath: an exhale.
I kiss his eyes,

marble hard and closed.
His body: pallid flesh.

At night, alone, nude
with no covers, I lie,

the heat and the dust
in my throat, the moan

and rustle
of ghosts in the white walls.

Siri Helleloid

Reduction

A pomegranate
broken between us,
rubies burst in our mouths,

their essence stains our fingers
one young summer.
I remember this.

I am beyond language now.
I have no ears and my mouth
is full of chalk.

In the quiet house
lights yawning but not turning out.
Sudden on the air

oranges and pears
the scent of bleeding
one young summer.

This is how I come back to you.

Mandy Peters

The First Wife

Raise your glass to Vegas, boys,
your first wife has been sent
down the sticky river.
Take the sheets off the mirrors,
pack your suitcases,
grab your dollars.

The first husband gets on the plane,
crosses himself with Jack Daniels,
dreams of roulette
landing on Red 32.
Her color. Her age.

Raise your glasses to Vegas boys
Count your chips.
Tip the dealer.
Let's dance on the grave.

The first husband grieves
table to table a hundred
bucks up three shots down.
When they married,
she smelled like lilacs.

The first wife can't remember
the words do not exist.
Her fingers fade in your mind.
She is a Polaroid working backwards
disappearing into white,
then a flash.

Mandy Peters

Ritual

In ancient China, the body was washed,
raw rice placed in the mouth.

Buried alongside a hat with no strings,
empty jars, a lute left out of tune.

The mourner lived alone in an unadorned hut
ate tasteless gray gruel,

slept on twigs, musty earth for a pillow,
walked leaning on a cane.

Once a year there is a sacrifice.
I place a shot of Dr. McGillicuddy's

Mentholmint Schnapps on the table.
Silent, I wait.

I lift the glass to my lips,
its bite wearing down my throat,

a gift to her as I get older
but she does not.

Mandy Peters

The moon is not yet lit

Please tell how a river-corpse conceives?
Internal decay, Oggie, is what scholars
crave, and I wish of sorts, to be a scholar.
The frankincense and tea water of
your piss says tadpoles are erupting from
the eggs inside your skull, but I will gather
them and make us escargot, tomorrow

Oggie. These sand cakes you have
baked me with slabs of mud mean
you have already loved me, like nobody
ever, and roots poke through to bank
in you where they unravel their feathers. You,
like the pregnant virgin of men, Oggie,
drain up in my riverbed, but you think
my eyes are only water. Please. Let me

stay with you at the pace of a book,
let me sleep with you here, like two gothic
boys from Tennessee, (only I am a girl)
if sleep is what you need? We'll use
these crushed up beer cans for our pillow.
Need I find my elusive red fishnets? You stare
through me like an owl statuette, stuffed

with crumbs of clove and bread. If you
blink, which you won't, an hour
of flattened birds hatch. You lay quiet
as a manuscript and I think I know
how you feel when you watch the reeds
less sweetly lip each other's neck. Your face
grows scruffy with shadows, and I believe
your gallant veins are rusty as a saw. But

when the lord lays us down to nap,
he often puts his mouth around the moon's
filter, drags, and blushes because you know
what he doesn't. Like a rock tumbled frog,
each breath you never draw, limps away.
And Oggie, gleaming with frost,
your head makes a cheap chandelier.

Amelia Salisbury

Boulder Dam

Pieces of the dam was brought
by mystical horse, but we worked with

cinematic limbs, we trotted hard
into closets of the canyon and thus
became the work we did. To holler

for a cook's parade we'd crawl
through the adit with a lit toilet

paper torch and atop the chords which were
our spines low flame splayed and dull
pain in the lower calf of conscious

began to hose itself off. There was
nothing which could promise

wages but the stark courting of fevered
trees. A bedspring we'd turn
on side like a table. We put butter on

our bannock. Dipped our brimmed
caps in coal and like some half dead

bees who'd swum misled inside
a pipe, we dinked around in rust
and goggles. We fastened up

the river's garment and scratched
our beard. The lord we knew would

compensate unto our nerve ends
new cartilage. We chewed rough
grass and gargled long the onion

water. We became an unsought flower,
who drooped of shovel and stamen,

who slunk through trestle and gantry
spitting quiet prayers. We'd spread
the river's legs and escort each into

her stockings. Like crooked stairways
we stood and the Colorado stubbed

her slippered toe, wedged it into
our palm, but there was nothing which
could raise the ante. Her ankle

like an apple core, we had to bring in brooms
to clear the stone before she stepped.

Amelia Salisbury

“Petite musique pour Edith”

influenced by the painting by Jean Dubuffet

A ghost bit the handle bar girl who wore
my red scarf. A ghost or a dog. A dog
whose snout was like an elongated
fish. Some things you can't forget—they are
so true. The girl wears my red scarf.

Through rips in our morning gowns
the wind blows and when the gravel grips
our tires, frozen gems drop and hide
inside the crawl space of logs. The boy
rides my brother's bicycle. Have you

ever spoke in tongues? Opened your mouth
and let loose a moth made of cut-out
dolls? Globes of breath like an abandoned
sorcerer's ball. This is a photograph
in catch weed and nettles. Later, we sit

in broken lawn seats, poking with a twig.
In the photograph the boy builds a fire
as my brother would. And let me point
out something—the devil strumming
his mandolin. One fabled apparition of the sea,

with the tail of a seal, has the singing
human head. Here at the epicenter, the girl
wears a bonnet. A turned over bowl
because the boy had worn a ten gallon hat.
Nothing scares me anymore. Not the bells

strung in telephone wire. Not, the tepid
coats which hang like costumes on
the gaffs of a tree. We were holding
charred sticks. Black cocoons bursting off.
Hot ashes lifting up the dandelion people.

Amelia Salisbury

Growing Season

This spring wears a melancholy green,
and crumples up more letters than she writes.
Cigarette smoke hangs between her eyes and the sky
and she coughs harder.

These days, she is moving slow and green,
hanging heavy like wet branches
under the weight of sudden leaves.
Some days only crows will sing in the garden,
and she fears her flowers will unbloom.

Some births are easier than others.
When the sun is slow,
there are other lamps to light.
She understands this, sits,
lifts the pen, tries harder.

Melissa Sandvick

Flight

I don't know about you, but I
don't have a lot of time

for folding paper cranes against the fall
of seconds down the wall,

and if everything could be done
when everything should be done—
that is, to say, on time—

then I would have a place to put them all,
the cranes, near the window
so they could navigate the night.

Melissa Sandvick

Quatrain

February 23rd

Listened to the shutters rattle
throughout the night. Read old
diary entries

Today I bought alcohol and poetry

Until time to turn out the light.

May 14th

Everything tumbled out
of the suitcase, slid over
the edge of the bed in clear light
from the window.
Sun's gaze: pitiless,
odd comfort in cataloguing
things packed, unpacked alone.

August 15th

When the flowers faded, the vase
returned to its owner. Counted
seventeen pairs of shoes left to seed
in the hallway. Already shade trees
growing out of envelopes on the desk.

November 4th

Desolation of grasses. Neighbor dog
scratching up the fence. Rumor of a man
who paid six dollars for his coffee.
Snow on Monday. Someone somewhere
must be selling firewood.

Melissa Sandvick

dissipate

in the morning you adore me with a letter. I use it as a donut
in a coffee cup of remembered phone calls.

during the afternoon you waver. I munch on wilted
green leaves of the way you stopped
looking at me starry eyed. I dip my fork in hang ups
and the first three digits of your number.

by evening you laugh at me. I cut the stale
bread of your image with the sharp end
of words still ringing in my ears, smearing
on a sour absence left hanging
in the air.

at midnight I'm scavenging empty
cupboards, forcing
tap water down my throat.

Karen Hess

alone

gasping, we breathe hair gel and cologne
hugging bass, digging acrylic nails
into martini glasses filled with tonight

we hand anyone the blue of our eyes
meet the flint in my eyes
collide with mine, with mine

we laugh and then listen, searching for an echo
we fix our hair and run our fingers through the silence
drowning out the DJ

the hours condense into beads of sweat rolling
down our faces, we dance harder
hoping harder

an exhale rises, then smolders
from the grooves of an empty city street
the night sizzles and then sighs
the white rain carries morning

Karen Hess

orange

I was on the ground pretending
I was essential like brown earth,
blowing at the clouds,
watching them float like feathers,
and I was useful.
Then suddenly I felt him tap me,
young seed, orange tulip, pushing
through the soil, against my back,
I felt him claw my skin
and pierce my flesh.
He scooped out spine.
I saw him rip through my stomach,
I saw torn skin and milky blood.
My t-shirt drank red.
He extended petals like fingers
reaching out for me.
He was grinning at me, gloating
He was proud.
He wanted me to say something.
But I couldn't move; I couldn't leave.
He was grounding me;
an orange anchor in my back, staring,
licking his lips.
He started growing taller,
inching toward my face,
he had teeth,
I couldn't leave.

Karen Hess

Slipstitch

Sacrificing our curls for the flat
of the rain we ran
in the barnyard, naked
in pink water socks. Arms bobbing,
weaving like airplanes
around your car and the summer kitchen;
the stove was burning
our popcorn while, breathless,
we ate the clover growing
under half-dead apple trees.

Across the highway, the neighbors
on their combines saw us
through the tree line: thoughtless
and storming, reckless
near the coop; they told
their children to walk
straight bean rows.
In the deluge, our ankles,
spattered with mud and hay.

I hugged you close that night
as the last stick popped
in the fire box; fed and warm
you squirmed and bit your knuckles—
saving that afternoon,
you placed it neatly in your bag.

Then on a pancake clouded morning you drove,
hammocks for eyes and restless
against the steady grey line.
Still, I am not above
spinning with my arms out.

Allison Lake

Madeline

Ten years ago we knew
she would end like this:
a greasy kitchen
in a hot house, dusty tables
and yellow paint drawn out,
full ashtrays abandoned
like forest fires.

My grandmother looks at me across
the rim of her coffee cup,
pulling my name from her lips
as if she knew me—once;
blue eyes gone to grey,
her hair left uncurled. She searches
along the wallpaper, the nicotine, with a plate
of cookies in her hand, lined
up like gravestones, pale and hard.

Haunted in make-believe,
she plays herself backwards:
her limbs move like the arm
of a record player; she is automated
and yet, she plays the blues,
dancing, tired in her own hypnosis.

Allison Lake

Rock Pile

Like a running stitch,
we drove, measured and curved behind
the windshield of that old blue Ford,
six seatbelts taken and one
left for use; our grandmother steady
in the front seat with the needle
she pulled.

The hay sharp and burning our noses,
my cousin pressed himself
against the window, watching
the driveway spill down
its hill, dripping
into the yard.

We made Coke bottles line
the windows like cats
in that house; green and sage-like,
stuffing them with flowers and childish
things, milkweed silks and pollen
dusting the sill.

With too much sugar
and a shrill June sun we ran
into the creek with our shoes
still on, holding fish hooks
in our bare hands, fighting
for the calluses we'd wear.

And in the fall we will build fires,
as if the trees aren't orange enough,
watching in silence
as the old barn boards writhe
in the flames, waiting to gather
nails in the dust.

Allison Lake

Locksmithing

She called a locksmith today;
he told her it would cost
fifty dollars to open that door
again. Inside, the collection
of twenty years: a quilt
made of tee-shirts, so many
many coats; skins of
different lives—the same
body inside. Maybe she
thought nakedness absolution.
She stared at that cheap gold
door handle; a fading varnish
on top of splitting wood.
He said it would take a while
to get to her house. She
stood naked staring
knowing she couldn't live
outside of herself, or leave
behind the day her
husband looked her in the
face and uttered, "I don't."
Her awkward feet found a pair
of boots—left in the hall
closet, too large and
dirty—perfect for kicking
in doors. Her body shook
at the impact of the first kick,
then grew determined with
every thud, although panicked
that it wouldn't open—that
she could never get it all
back, especially the hurt—
or, that it would. Then
the door gave up, the past
re-opening all its wounds.
She reached behind the door
with an older hand,
and covered herself in a wool
coat from ankles to chin.

Nadia Olker

Taxidermy

As I lie here,
my stomach breathing your scent,
my elbow on your pillow,
I glance out the window
wondering why I'm not out there;
in the turning of the leaves,
in the smell of campfires
miles, maybe even cities away.
I see the frightened mallard on
your wall—its wings spread.
You must have gotten that one
right in the chest.
The dog barks next door,
you turn away from me, dreaming.
The mallard and I stare blankly
at opposite corners of the room,
and I spread my arms open
ready to be mounted.

Nadia Olker

Droplets

Drop of water on the windshield;
initially dragged along its way
by wind, gravity
at the heart of its diagonal trail,
but now plowing
across a field of dirty glass,
in the midst of its
downward path, attaching to
the particle build-up
that takes a man's lifetime
to collect,
carries it in its belly
along the way, finally
breaking into a million
molecules at the edge
of glass, behind it
a perfectly cleared trail
through which to see
a somehow purer landscape
moving gradually to
a father's forgiveness.

Nadia Olker

How to cut Up a Chicken in Italy

The chef, with this beautiful
thinness about her—fine arms, hair, waist—
commands me to *break it*.

A large knife lies next
to the freshly washed chicken. Feathers
still needing to be plucked.

First, a simple cut to divide.
Then the cracking of its back, a hard
severing with my hands.
Now, hemispheres. Each identical,
owning parts of what was whole.

Knife gliding between
ligaments, tissue, meat,
knows where to cut, and I
apply force.

It feels wrong—
the noise, little bones
breaking, separating.

Tell me to grind the pesto, or flatten the dough, cut
peppers or just drink the free wine—
not break her apart.

Catherine Creighton

Ruckus

She often ate oranges late at night.
Threw peel upon peel in a heap
on the floor. Drank milk at two,
and never brushed her teeth.

It is impractical to fall
asleep around here.
The noise always distracted her mind.

“Ruckus,” she would say, shrugging,
attempting to recover
dreams that die fast and float.

Were they thoughts of picking dandelions in grandpa's field?
The stumbling milkweeds,
forts in shreds, the creek just grass
and crickets' whistles only listened to by the sky. . .

Was her mind dancing in the dark?
With two suede shoes and never-ending stars,
party poopers vertical on a bubblegum floor,
crimped streamers and high-flying balloons. . .

Here, in her best lavender suit,
she twirled like all the girls,
till she got sick
and wanted to go home to her bed
where she could lie down. Never
clean up or put anything away.

She found it hard to find the exact place
where she was. So, she gave up, opened her eyes
and listened to the ruckus.

Catherine Creighton

Deadbeat

There are many people
like my dad, who think
that smoke from dryer vents
might mean the house is on fire
or that actions can be predicted,
like some fancy earthquake
scale telling how soon
the land will move. But I colored
on the kitchen wall
and he was gone for days.

He left us
with nothing
but a tattered couch, stale jelly beans
and four sutures in her left arm.
No matter how hard my dad tried
to make soup or watch horror movies
with me on that couch, he failed—
even to notice how beautiful she is
with her deep cheekbone shadows
and hair that felt so thin and light.

We put up a sign to keep
him off our grass
knowing that sometime
he'd be back for his things—
take back the dog tags
from St. Andrews, his razor
blade that wasn't for his face—
and tell us *I can't stay here
anymore, living off cereal and milk,*
as if he could know any better.

Catherine Creighton

Palo Alto, 2003

Stanford's hats have "Cardinal" written in script on the back
As if they were stuck in the Fifties.
We try our best to stay unaware of the fact
That our lives could not be less risky.

It's as if we still live in the Fifties.
Abandoned tech parks dot the arid landscape.
We realize our lives could not be less risky
While we sit under a palm tree, getting shit-faced.

Abandoned tech parks dot the arid landscape.
The streets are totally silent by night.
We sit under a palm tree, getting shit-faced
Next to a flashing yellow traffic light.

The streets are totally silent by night.
One man walks out of an art-house movie.
Next to a flashing yellow traffic light,
He looks like he has several doctoral degrees.

One man walks out of an art-house movie
And we turn and head for somebody's home.
He looks lilke he has several doctoral degrees.
He isn't ashamed to be going alone.

We turn and head for somebody's home.
We try our best to stay unaware of the fact
That he isn't ashamed to be going alone.
Stanford's hats have "Cardinal" written in script on the back.

Dan Wohl

Báte, Báte, El Chocoláte

The minute hand is a jumpy thermometer
Made of magic, not mercury.
I see the tear-smear'd back of my chair at the circus
After those damn clowns just *had* to come on.
I hear the muffled lines coming through the intercom
While I read about the Marx Brothers and wait for my cue.
I smell the turpentine that sits in your garage
For years and years until you finally need it.
I taste the blue raspberry Iced on my batting gloves,
After we drove to the minigolf course (they have a batting cage).
I feel the weight of a thousand years upon my shoulders
Do I want to accept it this minute, now? I'm intoxicated
By how fleeting it makes me feel in my bones—
A cursory blip on the sonar of Earth.
Palo Alto, California, 1997. Lara Buelow and I
Couldn't have known how we wanted to live in each other.
I walked into her dim mini-room under her loft bed
And I would have wished I could stay there forever.
Occasionally I'd get the cherry Iced, not blue raspberry.
The multiplex actually had ones that tasted like Coke.
I was fine with paying for *that*, just not the six movies
I might see in a day. (Wednesdays we got out early).

Armenante's graduation party promised "hella nice food."
It *was* hella nice, because we all got hella trashed.
Dude, are you allowed to do that in here?
I took the cigarette out of my mouth and simply smirked
At Rajeev Sharma, informing him, "I am above you in life, sir."
There's a slow creeping dread when you begin to feel
That you don't know how you relate to all those around you.
I want to feel as peaceful as being at battle with one evil enemy
And you know exactly what you have to do at all times.
There would be no choice but to all band together
And we'd feel zero remorse for destroying the wicked foe.
We'd have unquestioning friendships forged by fire
And feel special enough to just be part of the group.
I wouldn't pull the sword from the stone, but I'd try
Like everyone else, and laugh about it at the pub later.

Behold the King of Rock 'n' Wohl: The man who's a mystery
Most to himself. Hopefully you'll know the truth as soon as I do.
The raucous graveyard spits and spews like it can't hold any more
But there's no reason the graves of thought can't be stacked on each other.
There's empty plots reaching up to the stars, down to Hell and back again.
I will not close the gate for anything, going in or out;
As a matter of fact, here comes something now:

Bâte, Bâte, El Chocolâte. Sorry about that, there's nothing I can do.
But perhaps you will think: when the chocolate gets stirred,
Does it scream out in protest or accept its fate?
I'm not sure. And anyway, I have a feeling
That damn minute hand's about to jump again.

Dan Wohl

Between Sheets

The yolk of the December sun
splashes on eggshell walls,
escaping the glassy cold as

soft songs voyage
from the radio
to the island of my bed.

They glide, slide,
slip between sheets,
wrap warm arms around my waist and
stir me into milky blankets.

I stretch and
hair pours over pillows, in it
melodies tangling and twinkling.

The folding and unfolding

sheets,
a butterfly net,
catch whirring words which

float and flutter
between
skin and cotton,
between
field and sky,
between
breathy breezes

they perch on the eager hands of
flowers, moss.

Zoe Schwab

Man Sitting Outside of Espresso Royale at 10:30 on a Thursday Night

It's cold out here, but you can't smoke in the cafe,
though the inside glows like the
butt of my cigarette.

I can see them desperately congregated
in that light bulb of a room.

They suck on the bones of words
in their textbooks,
licking the pages clean
while savoring the last droplets of their
\$4.00 lattes.

It's all addictions.

My addiction keeps me out
here in the blue cold
on the wiry metal chairs,
but I love my cigarette, coffee, and reading
time more than anything else.
Smacking my chapped mouth between sips
then taking a drag and
exhaling
as my finger bows to turn the page
and my feet rest on the table before me,
that's comfort.

Zoe Schwab

Hair Loss

When you disappoint me
I recede
like an old man's hairline.
It has been slow,
one by one,
until the scalp is
suddenly raw
noticeably bare.

Zoe Schwab

Wurlitzer

Cocktail napkins got a tough job.
So too, this line of ants—
Flicked one by one
From bourbon puddles.

Our plans laid out: Ecstasy! Hermitage!
To revolt as bellybuttons?
Linty and loving it
In subterranean belly dens.

Harumph. Conclusions too jagged
To draw. Snuff it. Plug the juke. And unravel another
trouser tail from the gap
in Black-Eyed Susan's smile.

Jordan Soyka

**“Anon it became suddenly”: Haikus for
Frank O’ Hara**

1.

A flirty sprinkler
sprays Jane’s blouse; the city bus
slows its stride.

2.

Clouds clatter in rush hour:
a picnic of clumsy collisions—
you kiss my stubbly cheek.

3.

I jump out of the subway, black like the night.
Sky! You are so small!
A sparrow shattered your presence.

4.

Waking up to sun,
cars, Tchaikovsky—I left the radio
on all night!

Jordan Soyka

Heavy Psalms

Next, about the
tornadoes. I was depressed
and I'm not sure
what changed. I cringed
and then, suddenly—

Alaska: it seems a bit
random and fleeting to me; I was
bewildered, and I'm not sure
what spoke. Abstractions
eaten, like in a dream.

Sleeping, blurry fire:
depressed and fleeting
Next—a proclamation
cringing and bewildered. There's still
the loneliness that speaks.

I didn't question it. The loneliness
had changed. Random and fleeting, stranded
in Alaska, sleeping. The tornadoes
began to speak—chaotic. And then, suddenly,
it went away.

Jordan Soyka

Study Break

our vehicle stops dead
in its tracks like
animals do when seeking
temporary places
to claim as their own.
but instead of dripping oil, or
other liquid deposits,
we sit, hushed into
a snow bank, with tires
committed to stay and chat
awhile with the
bushes. while driver and
passengers announce questions and
[secretly dwell on
the evidence of
being on a hill and with
potential of
rolling down backwards and]
perhaps stifled cries that grow loud
with a short lilt in
the throat, someone near blows
into their kerchief a mere
trajectory
missile of a sneeze. house
lights flicker on—intermission
of the ride, folks—the
subdued audience files out.
up the trodden
road are three boys running
in shorts kicking a soccer ball,
yelling in chinese.
cars angle away from our
depleting mob.
in the daytime, no one
will remember their sharers of
small talk and curious expressions thrown over shoulders

Allison Welch

Once I Cashiered

here are women with
their guilty pleasures.
they try to hoard the
suspicion under
darting eyelids for
quick recoveries
of embarrassed reads.
of course they refuse
the receipt: the thief
cannot leave finger
prints on obvious
places. and sir, did
you plan the perfect
joke? the knowledge of
sharing your clever
turns of phrase could no
better avoid the
temptation of a
weak jaw than a child
fasts from beloved
sweets. it was too late
to hide beneath the
register. they had
passed the bargain buys
and affixed sign which
read 'please wait here.' the
toothless ladies and
their cheap husbands in
paperback copies
don't care for advice.

Allison Welch

A Walk on State St.

among nature's territory, on the
outside, kisses of rain seep into the
pores of futile passengers. mad runs are
to sludge through muck from point a
to b [an equation corrupted
on dampened paper]. a fervent glance towards
frosted windows sees inside to occupants
who escape the real fog of compiled
desolation. and the buildings next are
sporting wigged statues wearing the finest
blush in vogue. who, then, is more alone? could
this man separated from his last drops
of drink by glass [as are we from him] find
peace from searching musty crevices? his
mustache curls white above hand under chin.
or these falsified renditions of humans?
neither cannot be lonely together.

Allison Welch

MFA BIOGRAPHIES

Erinn Batykefer is an MFA candidate in poetry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her poems appear in the spring 2006 issue of *Connecticut Review*. She is from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

James Crews grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, where he attended Webster University. He is now pursuing his MFA at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and wonders if he will ever live outside the Midwest.

Marianne Jay Erhardt was first “published” on her brother’s typewriter when she was seven years old. Now she’s in *Forward*, and an MFA candidate at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

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 degree 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 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*, and *The Comstock Review*, among others. She is also an artist.



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