

Autumn 2012

We have been working through far too many technical difficulties, but here it is at last. We have some excellent poets this issue. Enjoy.

Jim Prothero

Sandra Bounds

When Autumn Comes

When Autumn comes, we offer grateful praise
for trees arrayed in colors, rich and bold,
for festive warmth of its majestic days.

Breezes stir. Goldenrod gracefully sways.
Plump pumpkins rest in heaps of burnished gold.
When Autumn comes, we offer grateful praise.

White cotton fields present harvest displays
as scenes of geese in rhythmic flight unfold
in festive warmth of Autumn's joyous days.

The beauty of Nature, our fear allays,
the fear and dread of Winter's icy cold.
When Autumn comes, we offer grateful praise.

Woodland creatures scavenge in wild forays.
Busy squirrels scamper and loudly scold
in festive warmth of Autumn's cheerful days.

Nature's beauty and wonders all amaze
with Infinite grace to refresh the soul.
When Autumn comes, we offer grateful praise
in cheerful warmth of its delightful days.

Michael J. Vaughn

Michael J. Vaughn's poetry has appeared in *Confrontation*, *Iodine* and *Caveat Lector*. He is also the author of 13 novels, including *The Popcorn Girl* (available on Amazon Kindle). Vaughn lives in San Jose, where he works as an opera critic and plays drums for the San Francisco rock band *Exit Wonderland*. He is a regular contributor to *Writer's Digest*, where his most insane assignment was to explain meter in 1,000 words.

On Receiving Tickets to *As You Like It*

Airily, a waking dance
to rhyme and rope, to grift and chance.
to all the stars that tread the night and
seize upon the eyes.

Garishly, a speaker dips to
gather breath and tongue and lips,
to stalk upon the stage and whisper
iambes to the flies.

Cautiously we wander in
to swim in love and feast on sin,
to bear the pangs of yestermen and
brave the ribs of fear.

Patiently we climb the rungs of
fossil words and speech half-sung,
waiting for the moment when the
fractured chords ring clear.

Tragically, the sense will hide
unless the actor steps aside and
shakes the author's meanings from the

servitude of ink.

Finally the only route to
stir the play from tile and grout is
easing back within your seat,
a passive sun, enlivened meat,
cauldron for the spice and heat,
and choosing not to think.

Range

To study on the highest brows and drink among the low.
To plant your feet in roasting sand and contemplate the snow.

To hear Puccini all night long and wake up to The Who.
To watch a slate of foreign films but also Scooby-Doo.

To talk of football with the girls and fashion with the boys.
To fill your nooks with tools and books but leave yourself some toys.

To pace the alleys of Manhattan, stalk the Teton peaks.
To chase the wind at lightning speed then rest for weeks and weeks.

To dine on brie and caviar then order out for fries.
To work in foulest britches and proceed to suits and ties.

To leave your mental gates ajar, to shake the hand of chance.
To sing the open-throated life, and run, and fight, and dance.

Tween

Horses and harry, clamber and carry
Swindle and pause and reason and cause
Driving the years to a morbid strut

Keyboard and mouse, neighbor and house

Watching and fretting and ever subletting
See how the mowers continue to cut

Pamela Sue, Ronnie and Boo
Skipping and crying and endlessly lying
Charging the towers of adolescence

Gossip and noise, textual boys
Makeup and combs and angstian poems
Random sparks of efflorescence

Fillies and mares, unicorn stares
Lined up like soldiers, pebbles to boulders
Wanting the touch of equestrian hands

Letters and calls, residence halls
Lectures and class and E equals mass
Time takes you down like a statue of sand

Todd Outcalt

Todd Outcalt is the author of twenty-five books including *Candles in the Dark* (John Wiley & Sons), *Before You Say "I Do"* (Perigee) and *The Best Things in Life Are Free* (Health Communications, Inc). His work has appeared in such publications as *American Fitness* and *Brides*, and his poetry most recently in *Rattle*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Rosebud*. He lives in Brownsburg, Indiana with his wife and enjoys kayaking, hiking, and reading.

On My Daughter's Wedding Day

How lovely your years have collided on this day
Of laughter, love, and indelible light,
Your face a flower, your dress a bouquet
Of memories in white.

Your smile and beauty makes your father blessed,

Though as I grieve your years exhaled
I wish I could through love's excess
Redeem where I have failed.

I see you slip away, coiled in his arms,
My child, my fair phenomenon,
Desiring to save you both from this world's harms
And kiss you with a song.

Emily Strauss

Emily Strauss is a retired teacher, self-taught in poetry, with around 70 poems in public both online and in print. Her villanelle elegy was for a friend who died in a drowning accident. While she often focuses on the natural world in her writing, in these cases she had more personal stories to tell.

II.

On the Death of a Friend

Dusk held the light o'er the ocean long
before you came home to rest that night.
You were always the one who was strong.

The chill sea canyons you swam among
flowing kelp arms enfolded you tight.
Dusk held the light o'er the ocean long

turning the sea from turquoise to brown.
Women waited on shore for a sight—
you were always the one who was strong.

The placid surface was surely wrong,
gentle swells smoothed the last circling fight.
Dusk held the light o'er the ocean long.

Later the sand found dark gulls in throng,

the empty boat reflected no light.
You were always the one who was strong.

We stare out to sea, empty but drawn.
We hear the wind's cry and find it trite.
Dusk held the light o'er the ocean long—
you were always the one who was strong.

III.

Spring 2003: On the Commencing of War

As war commences one seldom sees
Flags unfurling or buglers anymore,
Instead we watch the channels pour
Us full of scenes of steel batteries.
Battalions massed without fineries
Charging a dusty plain, at the fore
A command jeep and captain roar
Into view, camera catching tragedies

Still to come. Here trees bud while I
Sit numbly in my private winter's
Despair, not for war, a different loss.
The tanks prepare, innocent girls toss
Flowers, he turns the corner, from high
Up my last view and my soul splinters.

Joshua Gray

A Native of Washington DC, Joshua Gray was the DC Poetry Examiner for Examiner.com for two years before moving to India, where he has exchanged a 9-5 job with being a househusband and continue raising his two boys. He has been published in many journals and his book *Beowulf: A Verse Adaptation With Young Readers In Mind* was published by Zouch Six Shilling Press in 2012. His Web site is www.joshuagray.co.

Eliot's Three Voices

In the dreadful silence I can still hear the restless sound
of a mindful muse, wistfully wandering left to right
and back again, cleansing, making amends, lost, then found
precariously placed around words of audible sight.

Your collective comprehension speaks
With the vibrations of one throat. It employs
a persona that sweats and reeks
of a feverish art, crafting a subtle noise.

We are hungry for the good and bad;
the strong and weak, the common, sublime.
Do not draw near to see who's been had:
the actions of others create the motives of time.

These harmonious voices are made to coexist --
the restless and laboring winds that blow away the mist.

Shoppers' Inferno

"Abandon Hope, All Ye --" but it's too late.
And stripped of lucre, what's the point? Yet we
Still seek the commerce shopping malls create,
The ambience of grand iniquity.

Our aimless milling brings the guards to watch
And follow us. Our footsteps seem a crime --
Their disembodied circles, out of touch,
Bode ill for those with money, space, and time.

To hide our state, we toy with merchandise
We cannot buy. Communicants no more,

We feign rapt interest, mulling over price.
A whim, not want, should move us out the door.

It feels like a strange pantomime of faith,
A practice run in case our luck should change,
And yet devoid of ecstasy or wrath
Like bleeding without blood. It makes me cringe

To sit exposed for all to scrutinize
Our net worth, peering through us as they pass
And clutch their branded bags to exorcise
The dearth of things, the emptiness, the loss

Of something far more valuable than this
Poor world of strangers where, if eye meets eye
Across the slim, invisible abyss,
We see but nothing, nothing there to buy.

The Assault

I watch clouds moving overhead
in almost regimented lines,
like an inverted sea of lead
loading into magazines.

Too high for rain, I think, too light
to keep up this relentless pace.
Their ranks obliterate the sight;
they are the full horizon's face.

The convoy darkens as its load
descends, collecting moisture, dust,
its troops unlimited, its road
forever forward south-southwest.

Imperfectly, the rows converge.
Their size and speed have me in thrall,
when one great mass explodes its charge
and with the sky, I'm swallowed whole.

Siham Karami

Siham Karami lives in Northwest Florida where she owns a technology recycling company. Her poetry has been or will be published in *String Poet*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Innisfree Journal*, *14by14*, *The Lavender Review*, *The Whirlwind Review*, *New Verse News*, and other venues.

The Magic of Old Saws

Your fury, softened by an old refrain,
a line we shared so many times before,
disperses into clouds that hide the pain.

And when that stare bodes thunder in the brain,
a dumb, familiar joke lets you ignore
your fury. Softened by the old refrain,

as if somehow a speeding bullet-train
were stopped by words -- the crash I'm waiting for
disperses. But what clouds could hide the pain

accumulated from such pelting rain
and lightning stabs? I wonder how I bore
your fury -- softened by an old refrain

or some absurd cliché? It seems insane:
I wave a song -- the bull, about to gore,
disperses in a cloud that hides the pain.

Yet what else holds on alien terrain
but landmarks from a world we have no more
where fury, softened by an old refrain,
disperses under clouds of hidden pain?

Lark Burns de Beltran

Lark Beltran, from northern California, has lived in Lima, Peru for many years as an ESL teacher. She and her husband also have a place in the jungle. Quite a few of her poems have appeared in online and offline journals.

Caught

Alien woods, prehistories ago ...
sun-gilt through dense branches glimmering,
the human race light years from embryo.

A swarm of gnats cavorted in the glow,
on conifer's tall trunks were clustering
in alien woods, prehistories ago.

The course of day's prolonged adagio
some fragments for out time were destining,
the human race light-years from embryo.

The pines exuded pitch; to this we owe
the insects captured - such a tiny thing -
in alien woods prehistories ago.

One dreams, imagines, but can never know
lost landscapes of Earth's primal, tender spring,
the human race light-years from embryo.

I claim a speck of this scenario:
two gnats inside the amber of my ring,
from alien woods prehistories ago,
the human race light-years from embryo.

John MacLean

John MacLean has been a high school English teacher for thirty years. He has also been an assistant district attorney, merchant seaman, mill hand and church sacristan. During the past year, his poetry has appeared in *The Road Not Taken*, *The Lyric*, *Spitball*, *14 by 14*, and *Kota Press*. His book, *If You Teach It They Will Read: Literature's Life Lessons for Today's Students* is published by Rowman and Littlefield. He and his wife of thirty three years have four children and live in Westchester, New York.

Last Lesson

I can not see the river for the dark,
But watch the lights beyond the western shore,
And then your playing echoes up the hall,
And fills the empty rooms your sisters left.

For years you've practiced every Wednesday night,
So tiny once you hardly fit the bench,
The notes a language I could never share,
Although their beauty moved me even then.

The calendar that shows when you will leave,
Now says this is the week the Wednesdays end,
And the old teacher, once a child like you,
Will bring her bag of music one last time.

I will sit silent in the nearest room,
And listen as that last half hour flies,
Pass you a vase of flowers, close the door,
And leave the two of you to say goodbye.

Sunset

From my back porch I tend to notice more:
Like flocks of birds receding with the light

And heading south along the Hudson's shore
As fading day wings with them into night.
And if I'd let myself, I'd see them take
A wing's worth of that possibility
For bold migrations younger men might make
And speed now toward a setting sun with me.
But then the sunlight feathers through the cloud
And that grey river kindles into flame
And warms the wings of birds that cry aloud
As if convinced that time was theirs to tame,
Convincing me I need not watch and wait
While winds grow cold and hours grow too late.

Just Passing

The players all seemed simpler in that time,
Though heroes. My dad told me Yankees came
To hang out at Rizzuto's bowling lane,
Near where he sold his gypsum board and lime.
One day, McDougald's son ran toward the street.
My father heard the yell and made the stop,
Just shy of traffic, picked him on the hop.
The all-star shortstop marveled at his feat.
Gill's dead now, and remembered sadly for
A single drive that struck young Herb Score's eye.
Gill thought to quit the game, a decent one,
His hero status he so lightly wore.
Soft with their memories Gill and my dad lie,
With none to note their glories, but a son.

The Seekers of Jade

By what name does he know Voltri Massif
When clad in skins he climbs its frosty slope?
In air as cold as glass, what does he seek?
He finds a block left by a granite hand,
He banks a fire, breaks off a piece of jade.

Three hundred miles north, a knowing eye
Seeks just that piece. With water, sand and art
His leathered hands polish that stone for weeks.
And when he passes to an unmarked grave,
His sons take up the secrets of the axe.

From Brittany, a merchant seeks the coast
Where strong men prize the magic of green rock.
He holds those polished axe heads, never meant
To work at wood or earth, but wealth to build:
His children will not hunt or polish stone.

For centuries, a useless, priceless axe
Is placed upon a rich man in his grave
In hopes his name will outlast flesh and bone.
Years pass, even the handle becomes mould,
The axe head is the only thing time leaves.

As men seek meaning in such ancient things
The curious diggers scratch at lonely fields
From Canterbury to the Dorset downs.
Polished again, safe beneath museum glass,
The mute axe heads demand to be admired.

In cold rooms, scientists can make rock speak:
Deciphering its magnetic signature,
The axe heads pulled from those forgotten graves,
Wide scattered echoes of some ancient power,
Came from that same block on that distant alp.

What is it that men found in finding this?
To solve a geographic mystery?
What are we all but shapers, worshippers?
The busy hands of men still beckon us
To climb through icy sunlight, seeking jade.

Taylor Graham

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada. She's included in the anthologies *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library, 2012) and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University, 2004). Her book *The Downstairs Dance Floor* was awarded the Robert Philips Poetry Chapbook Prize. "No Lake But Golden" is from her current project, a collection of dog poems, about living with her canine search partners over the past 40 years.

No Lake but Golden

Spirit set on the hike,
I drove upcountry with my dog.
Blue sky impending thunder,
paintbrush blooming under granite.

I drove upcountry with my dog.
No parking at the trailhead.
Paintbrush blooming under granite -
it beckoned another way.

No parking at the trailhead
so I chose a little dead-end track.
It beckoned another way,
crossed a stream; under lodgepole.

So, I chose a little dead-end. Track
promised no lake, no view;
crossed a stream under lodgepole,
then climbed hot, bare rock.

Promised no lake, no view,
we stopped to look and consider,
then climbed hot, bare rock -
wait! - was that an eagle, Golden?

We stopped to look and consider

blue sky, impending thunder.
Wait. Was that an Eagle? golden
spirit on the hike.

Fog

Where could an old man be going, this late?
November. Bundled close against the cold,
he walks the dark steps down and shuts the gate.

A small town. Just three streetlights punctuate
the closed-up shops where all's been bought and sold.
Where could an old man be going this late

with fog and woodsmoke smudging the charred grate
of home? The human life has been foretold.
He walks the dark steps down and shuts the gate.

I've walked in daylight, six streets down, or eight,
when sunset torched the cottonwoods to gold.
Where could an old man be going this late

to leave the goldenwood behind? The sate
of age, of knowing rust, corrosion, mold?
He walks the dark steps down and shuts the gate,

imagining a place where old friends wait,
perhaps. A fire, a cup to pass or hold.
Where could an old man be going, this late?
He walks the dark steps down, and shuts the gate.

Too Much With Us

Everything falls apart. We've got to think
about some fix-up. This house past its prime -
what about this rat in the kitchen sink?

Dust and doghair. I only have to blink

to see the windowsill is thick with grime,
everything falls apart. We've got to think.

The roof. My aching back. We're on the brink,
we're never getting younger. Now's the time -
there can't be a rat in the kitchen sink!

But I hear termites gnawing. There's a stink
like rotten meatloaf. Isn't it a crime,
every - what's that beep? Let's sit down and think:

the future, deck and taxes, more red ink.
My hair is graying, doorknob feels like slime.
Did you say a rat in the kitchen sink?

Beneath each coat of paint, a crack, a chink.
You'll never solve it with a poet's rhyme.
Everything falls the way we've come to think.
Surely there's no rat in the kitchen sink?

James B. Nicola

James B. Nicola has had almost 300 poems appear in publications including *Road Not Taken*, *Atlanta Review*, *Tar River*, *Texas Review*, *Lyric*, and *Nimrod*. A Yale grad and stage director by profession, his book *Playing the Audience* won a CHOICE Award. He also won the Dana Literary Award for poetry, was nominated for a Rhysling Award, and was featured poet at *New Formalist*. His children's musical *Chimes: A Christmas Vaudeville* premiered in Fairbanks, Alaska—with Santa Claus in attendance opening night.

A Brilliant Ice

A brilliant ice has bent these birches over.
In warmer weather, back when you were young,
You'd swing them. Winter woods bring back that age.

You shiver for a moment, then recover,
Imagining the birches being swung
By a passing poet, mad man, boy, or lover
Freed suddenly from thoughts of violence
That only swinging birches can assuage.

As a boy, most of your songs were still unsung;
As a lover, you had hope; as poet, cause;
As a man, white with experience, a rage
Has been congealing lately, but it thaws
As you hold hands with birches you once flung.
They're teaching you of bending, in a silence.

Carol Frith

With her husband, Laverne, Carol Frith co-edits the journal *Ekphrasis*. She has a "Special Mention" listing in the 2003 Pushcart Prize Anthology and two sonnets in *150 Contemporary Sonnets* (University of Evansville Press). She is a seven-times finalist in the Nemerov Sonnet competition.

Her chapbooks are from Medicinal Purposes, Bacchae Press, Palanquin Press, Rattlesnake Press & Finishing Line, and a full-length collection was released from David Robert Books in 2010. She has a new chapbook from Gribble Press.

Her poetry has appeared in *Seattle Review*, *Road Not Taken*, *Measure*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *POEM*, *Atlanta Review*, *Pedestal*, *Rattle*, *Poetry Kanto*, *The MacGuffin*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Measure*, *The Literary Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Clackamas*, *Smartish Pace*, *Cutbank*, *Chariton Review*, *Rhino*, etc.

Sarah

A garden of the sad, she used to say:
wisteria and lavender for grief,
two trees, a weeping willow and a bay,
a tear-drop pool that held a single leaf
which stained the amber water tannin-dark.
Sarah had the *vision*, after all.

Her voice was gentle, her demeanor stark.
She broke from chores to watch the evening fall
in shades of violet. Sometimes she
would talk about a random visitor—
a tall man of uncertain age. When he
appeared, silhouetted in the door-
way of the night, she never drew a breath,
her cautious vision working through a death .

Janice Canerdy

Janice Canerdy is a retired high-school English teacher from Potts Camp, Mississippi, who keeps her grandchildren and tutors children ages 12-17. Her poems have appeared in various anthologies, including those published by the Southern Poetry Association, the American Poetry Association, Quill, the Mississippi Poetry Society, the National Federation of State Poetry Societies; and in magazines/journals, including *The Lyric*, *Bitterroot*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Victorian Violet*, *The Romantist*, *True Romance*, and *The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry* .

God's Lock and Key

The ones we know the best in life
we hardly know at all.
Between the souls of any two
exists a secret wall.

The ones who share the most in life
keep so much locked inside.
For every shred of self we give,
three shreds we don't confide.

Those friends held by the strongest bonds
keep portions of their best,
and lovers with the deepest love

share much but hoard the rest.

If human minds were open things,
would we drain them bare?
Could ruining life's best mysteries
in any eyes be fair?

If we could delve inside the thoughts
of those whose love we share,
if we could take what isn't ours,
should we? Would we dare?