

Spring and Summer Issue 2012

Welcome to our new look! Hammering out the glitches on the new website took longer than we'd hoped, but here it is. Since spring has passed us by, we will acknowledge the fact and simply combine the issues. With the new, more problem-free site, we should be able to update more simply from here on out. I think you'll find we have some gifted poets this issue. Enjoy the issue.

Dr Jim Prothero
Co-Editor

I'm going to start the issue by featuring a short poem by my co-editor, Dr Don Williams, which in its own witty way addresses the heart of this online journal.

“LIES’ OF THE POETS”

What is this thing, “poetic inspiration”?
I can write at will a decent line
In any meter you might specify,
But that will guarantee no fermentation
Of wordplay into visionary wine,
No paradoxical, truth-telling “lie.”

Free verse won't do. You have to learn the craft:
That's how you build the altar, after all.
So follow Form though men should call you daft
And then stand back and like Elijah call,
And—maybe—you will see the Fire fall.

E.M. Schorb

E. M. Schorb has appeared in *The Formalist*, *Measure*, *The Dark Horse*, *Trinacria*, *The Lyric*, *Candelabrum*, *The Pennsylvania Review*, *The Innisfree Review*, and others.

AGENT SONNET

“Why don’t you write a novel, for God’s sake,
get down to something good to read, instead
of solipsistic verse? Give us a break!
Write something worth a read at night in bed.

The public likes a song, a song in rhyme,
not free-verse pouting about the poet’s life
in chopped-up prose, a reader’s waste of time!
The reader wants a story full of strife!

The reader likes a good detective story,
or else a horror story, good and gory.
The public likes a bit of gruesome fun.

The public wants some sex; to be a voyeur;
to let a woman be a man-destroyer
while islanded romantically in sun.”

Kirk Westphal

Kirk Westphal is an environmental engineer and have written many journal articles on water management, some of which have won national awards. By night, however, he writes poetry, fiction, and memoirs. Recently, two of his poems were selected as winners of the Plein Air Poetry Contest, sponsored by the Concord Poetry Center and the Fruitlands Museum in Massachusetts. By invitation, he has also read one of his poems (with rhyme and meter!) on National Public Radio.

Shades of Moon

Universe of light collected,
source unknown to human eye,
Luminescence hidden, gathered,
Here within our tent we lie.

Nowhere in the dome of heaven
though the pinpoint lights may vie,
Might you find such soft diffusion
as our canvas arch of sky.

Colors all inside are equals,
blue and green recline in white,
Our aurora borealis,
pale soft and still as night.

'Til without a hint or notice
awning moist with silver dew,
Here within our habitation,
watered colors find their hue.

Yet as dawn rays slowly brighten
chrysalis of moonlit sky,
Behind the flap of painted wonder,
Still within our tent we lie.

Our Room

In wooden room of northern pine,
Whose permeable grain retains
Three hundred years of passers by
And I am but the same.

Of coast and forest, sentry timbers
Overhead now strain
To bend the cold and rain away
From those who rest ... no names.

Beneath, a hearth in ageless stone,
Within, a quiet flame,
That warms the spirits of its guests
After they leave, before they came.

And I, I sit with One I know,
Two chairs here, both the same.
Our words pass silent in this place,
We came to leave our names

In walls that will remember long,
In floor boards that will strain
Beneath the feet of guests to come.
This wood now holds our name.

Afternoon Vespers

If ever words, though formless, could be
heard
as leaves in summer decked with yuletide
bells,
could you incline your ear and hear them
tell
of evanescent liturgy with birds?

In spring it was, midst grove of oak and
birch
where winter's warmth lay stacked in rows
to dry,
A song, a flute as clear as cirrus sky,
a chant within this alcove of the church.

I knew at once the source of this refrain,
his descant having all the others
stayed,
I could not see so high, and so I prayed
this bird his fire, like his voice, make plain

No sooner had my supplication flown
from mind to air to sound if form it knew,
an answer, affirmation of his hues,
on lower branch alighting to be known.

From nearer perch his feather-embers
burned,

a setting sun foreshadowing its night,
imparting to the day his timbred flight ...
I pursed my lips and I his call returned.

More labored than his voice, mine
unrehearsed,
yet note for note I followed, listening,
He offered back his own, a christening
of this, our reverent litany in verse.

Each time he answered closer still he flew
to lower boughs until the closest branch
grew from an elder apple tree, a chance
to take a seat within a nearer pew

and radiate through sunlight cross the
glade,
most igneous of life with crystal call,
in verdant leaflets he arrived as fall,
All glories one. With this, farewell he
bade,

And flutter-dove back toward the sky,
away,
and I, alone with apple, birch, and oak,
a voice within me gathered here and spoke,
and asked of my communion on this day.

Taylor Graham

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada. Her poems have appeared in *American Literary Review*, *International Poetry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Poetry International*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. Her book *The Downstairs Dance Floor* (Texas Review Press) was awarded the Robert Phillips Chapbook Prize. Her latest book -- *Walking with Elihu: poems on Elihu Burritt, the Learned Blacksmith* -- is available from Amazon.

ANOTHER

Don't say a word. Too many words - the news
tonight, a shooting at the high school. Bruise
on daylight. How could words put Wednesday back
together? Here's the teacher with her stack
of words on paper to rouse, to defuse

explosions of the mind - those vivid hues
of meaning and allusion, reds and blues
of language - too many colors make black.

Don't say a word.

The poem-moth of metaphor or ruse
alights on silence. Click-off safety. Choose
which image of the day -in camo flak-
jacket, boy with pistol? Syllables crack.
In this night's dark I ask the healing muse
to say one word.

TO A SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD

Forget horses. You'll go away to school
and sell your sweet black mare. And so it seems
your bright wide-open chances overrule...
She's gone. But no - in after-years of dreams
you'll call her - she'll come trotting from some cool
shade of pasture, from longing's silver streams,
and disappear like dream. What can I tell
you, anyway? These dreams we learn to sell.

A PEACE-SHRINE

Upon the shore a man set stones
one on another in the name
of amity. But hear the moans
of ocean bearing endless blame.

His shrine was trashed - a barren shore
of salvaged stones, a threshing floor.
The breakers batter without cease
this place that held some thoughts of peace.

BALANCE SHEET: THE OLD HOUSE

Carbon-copy invoices
from thirty years ago, faded like your eyes.
But listen to the voices
calling as from distant skies,
this odd moment when our past before us lies.

You planned that house by the sun,
a living-space nooked among towering trees.
We raised the walls, one by one;
reached and lifted; hands and knees;
rooted ourselves; opened doors, threw away keys.

Now government wants this proof:
how many 2x4s, the cost of every screw;
the worth of floor-joists and roof.
Value? How the storm-winds blew!
Now we've sold the house; our holding days so few.

A THOUSAND POEMS

A shopping spree today, let's go uptown.
This crack in pavement, dandelion-down
on sale - in fact, they're giving it away.
And here are pigeons iridescent-gray,
each speckled pick-peck-bowing like a clown;

and cheap remainders, jacaranda's gown
of fallen petals, once a purple crown
above the sidewalk - hurry, it won't stay,
bargain-hunters trampling it to brown.

A shopping spree
among these crowds who jostle so, and frown
and worry credit, how a man can drown
on dry land, free sunlight. A child might say
there are a million nooks to peek and play
if you can look at Main Street upside-down -
a shopping spree!

Janice Canerdy

Janice Canerdy is a retired high-school English teacher from Potts Camp, Mississippi, who keeps her grandchildren. Her poems have been published in various anthologies and magazines, including Quill Books anthologies, Southern Poetry Association anthologies, *The Romantist*, *Bitterroot*, *The Lyric*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Victorian Violet*, *Encore* (the NFSPS anthology), and *The Mississippi Poetry Society Anthology* (pending). She is thrilled and honored to see her poems in *The Road Not Taken*.

Youth's Sonnet

They view the world through filmy
innocence,
the youngsters who now hear the future
call.
Into that forest bountiful and dense,
some travel slowly, careful not to fall.
These planners, with the guidance young
ones need
and patience to sustain and keep them
strong,

may labor long and hard; but most
succeed,
as they had hoped and prayed to all along.
Some rush ahead--though they can't clearly
see--
to find their niche before it is too late.
They take what is in lieu of what could be.
Unwittingly, too soon they seal their fate.
That good things come to those who wait
is true.
The wise ones look ahead and then
pursue.

October

God in all His majesty
gives us now His tenth great gift
of multifarious joys.

Ghostwinds whistle lilting tunes,
motivating dancing leaves
to make their scuttling noise.

Chilly winds and hoarfrost light
do their part to signify
that summer has lost its hold.

Distant hills are masterpieces.
God, the Artist, planned the blend
of reddish brown and gold.

Now we cut and stack the wood.
Soon we'll wear our heavy clothes
and shut the windows tight.

Then His last two wondrous gifts,
siblings of the tenth, will come
with holidays' delight.

Anissa Gage

Anissa Gage is an artist in the Oil City Arts Revitalization * Artist Relocation Program. She's third generation American, of Russian heritage. She was raised in the Midwest, outside Chicago. Her verse is often an accompaniment to her realist paintings and drawings. A portrait in rhyme is written along with a fine art work as a total expression. She's also a third generation fine artist. She was born in 1956. She's been doing poetry readings in the Oil City area, and has her art studio in the Transit Building in Oil City. She has poetry published in the October edition of *Snakeskin Review* and the Autumn 2010, Spring and Summer 2011

Perseus

"Fair lover, gaze aloft at midnight's sky!
You see how beauteous it is! -- the moon
Has drenched herself in ocean waves: the eye
Can view the stars aloft: that spangled boon
Like dazzling diamonds, in a wide swathe strewn --
The Milky Way, that airy path, right there
Reminds me of a tale I learned one June
Of those two constellations. If you care,
An old romance that I've a pressing need to share.

"Tonight's so velvety, mysterious, and rare
That it reminds me of this princess, one
Whose boastful mother prattled her more fair
Than sapphire Nereids who in sea dance run
The breakers, out of foam and daydreams spun.
Alas, she looked but with a mother's eye!
There was no lustre greater than the sun
That made the bosom of each soul to sigh
When they beheld her: no lithe magic Lorelei;

Perhaps it was the eyes defining fair
As ever, for the god Poseidon's maids
Have skin as pearly blue as ocean air
Or the entrancing and immortal shades
On mesmerizing glaciers in the glades
Of mountain glens, perhaps her ebon hair
He deemed less lustrous than those sapphire braids
The sailors so hypnotically ensnare
Along with siren songs ethereally rare.

Perhaps, alas, 'twas jealousy, a spell
That turns the gods to demons and the souls
Of mortal maids and men transforms as well.
Perhaps her songs were wrought of what consoles
The spirit and transforms it, and conjoles
A man to brave the monsters of the deep:
To dive into the waves in treacherous shoals
In valor that would make a mother weep
Where swirling currents churn and jagged cliffs are steep.

Oh all her songs rose skywards like the lark,
At her sweet voice the rosebud came undone,
Then dreams awakened from the hopeless dark,
And dancing waves all leapt to kiss the sun.
Poseidon, in a rage that dimmed the sun,
Commanded she be naked, bound in chains,
To Jaffa's cliffs, for his Leviathon
To feast upon her, relishing her pains.
This monster's chasmous roar raised howling hurricanes.

"'Tis curious: an Ethiopian girl
More beauteous than this great robe of night
All decked with diamonds, and the clouds that whirl
In soft edged gloaming; like the moon's delight
Her eyes and brilliant smile were quite as bright
As Artemis' mirror, or the sea
Whenas she gazes on it. Oh it's quite
Peculiar how, for an eternity,
All art's imagined her as fair as blond can be!

"Alas, mistaken fools! She was more fair
Than fragrant foamed Arabian coffee, sweet
With spangled sugar, tinct with spices rare,
From steaming ibrik; and her beauty beat
Upon kind Perseus' heart: in her defeat
A reigning triumph, made her conquest rise,
When chivalry espied her, in retreat
From slaying Gorgons, with his bloody prize:
In pathos chained, with maddened agonizing cries,

"Persuades this hero of the ancient world,
This son of Zeus, so courteous, kind, and brave,
Then on some wondrous pinions, flight unfurled,
To rescue her, to swoop to earth and save
This piteous virgin from a toothy grave.
The legend differs on his plummy flight,
On how he coursed the heaven's architrave
And whether Pegasus, in skyey flight
Or Hermes wing-ed sandals swept aloft our knight,

"For knight he was, in this first chivalry:
He came, although descending from above,
To slay the dragon and the virgin free:
The first St. George!, for all the legends of
This hero on the pinions of a dove
Are in some curious figures in accord:
He bound her only in the chains of Love,
Her hand in marriage was the knight's reward,
And he, like our King Arthur, bore a magic sword.

Perhaps her voice melted bold Perseus' heart:
He turned and met her eyes, her eyes were stars,
Her voice, melodious, transcended art.
He braved the dragon, like the mad Hussars
He hacked and parried. Rocks all rolled in jars.
Hot blood roiled out in clouds. The monster cried,
Then thrashed the waves, the whilst this avatar's
Attempts to slay him sliced his scaly side,
Until he disappeared in one last downward slide.

Some women weep in terror, some may faint,
And some collapse in screams and lose their breath,
And some sing songs in rapture like a saint:
Each woman faces the onslaught of death
According to her nature, or so saith
The Lord. The maid Andromeda? She sang
She sang to ease her terror. One hairbreadth
The dinosaurian dragon's fiercest fang
Just missed her while her celebration of hope rang.

"And I, your knight, your courteous Langston Hughes,

Have won for you my love this Holy Grail:
This sacred chalice here, whose glittering hues,
Enchased with all the heavens, cannot fail
To rouse your soul and all your foes assail:
I slay the dragon, laying at your feet,
This perfect rose, this poem, for words prevail,
Yes, words, our magic sword, will now defeat
Those chains of slavery making misery complete.

"Now, hearken, even all the gods themselves
Have painted lovers portraits in the stars
For none perhaps to fathom but the elves
Whose passion is as magical as ours.
I've fashioned here a glory like the czar's,
For Alexander Pushkin, Russia's bard,
Their pinnacle, their peak aloft all pars,
Was black: a fact some Russians disregard
Today for some small hearts too strangely dull and hard!

"Although those foolish artists paint her fair,
An Ethiopian princess, ever known,
More fair than any fair beyond compare,
She reigns forever on an ivory throne.
Her African descent was always known.
Here I, your Perseus, with all my art,
Andromeda, in peril and alone,
Extend my laurel wreath before your heart.
Forever in the Muse's firmament apart

"We'll always glide, as beauteous as night,
In sacred sable vesture through all time.
And everyone who reads this will delight
In you as I have done. Beyond all crime
That bigotry and prejudice and grime
Can league against us both for endless years,
In most sublime and glorious earnest Rhyme
My words will slay this serpent and his fears,
We'll walk in starry heaven through this vale of tears."
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The Purest Pair of Shoes

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Through all the world the purest pair of shoes
Are white, pristine as is our Lady Moon
They're soft and secret as a spun cocoon,
And sacred as the sandals of the Muse.
Through all the midnight hours they amuse
Themselves in dance, more graceful than a tune,
Each one as scrumptious as a macaroon,
Through glimm'ring halls and shimm'ring forest dews.

Above them, luminous, twin sapphire jewels
Dart by as swiftly with each blissful pounce,
While fireflies blink by on nimble wings,
And mice, and voles, and shrews, those scamp'ring fools,
All skitter by, a-tremble, to each ounce...
He raises his white whiskers high, and sings.

An Enchanted Dream

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I dreamed I waltzed for hours and hours last night,
Forgotten was my shattered land of dance:
I lived again in its sublime romance,
And gliding, pranced, ecstatic, in delight.
Forgotten were all tears, and every right
Once ripped from me in whisper and in glance
Was mine again, and we were in a trance,
And floated on: the ball was at its height!

Then we were motionless, alone, it seemed:
The room moved round in an enchanted dream,
The elfin magic of the midnight swirled
Around us: those jeweled hues all brightly streamed,
Those starry gems that sparked with glint and gleam,
While we, in blithe eternity, both whirled.

Some Flowering Trees

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I dreamed of blossoms -- apple, cherry, pear,--

And in my homesick memory I moved
Among them in a dreamy kind of care,
Whoever, in my past again, reproved.
I hear the sound of the uneasy lake,
The monster who has swallowed thousands more
Than I've ever imagined, though I take
A peaceful pleasure in its whispering roar.
Alas, then I remember where I am,
And how, so poor, I never can return,
Alone and gray now. Here they call me "mam";
For poetry no single cent can earn.
 Perhaps, so homesick, I should plant some trees
 If I can manage it, to bring me ease.

Author's Note

In line 5 "uneasy lake" is Lake Michigan.

Hera

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So solemn and majestic Hera moves:
Her jeweled peacocks, sparked with azure beams,
Are steeds: her dazzling chariot, golden, gleams;
They cry, and draw her where her heart behooves:
In thunderous rage again she disapproves
Of Zeus's flagrant raptures, and she schemes
To hunt his conquests and destroy the dreams
Of those he's trifled with; as passion proves
That timeless dictum of a woman scorned, --
Our goddess, though divine's, a woman still,
With marriage sacred to her, and all those
Sweet meadow creatures, milky, and their lows:
She strives to rule her husband with a will --
Alas! he's as unfaithful as the horned!

So May it Be
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What was this place, so glorious and grand,
These wide majestic beauteous sweeping stairs,
This carven stone, now far beyond repairs,
In what abandoned tropical lush land?

Alone, all swathed in verdure, here they stand:
These palms and ferns have all become the heirs
Of those who once ascended, with their cares,
And clearly for a longer future planned.

So may it be that if the race of Man
Is doomed and we all vanish into time,
That we move into history with grace:
With echoes of magnificence, a plan
Of greatness and of hopes that dared to climb, --
Not ruins filled with poisons to erase.

Katie Bickham

Katie Bickham is a professor of English and composition in her home state of Louisiana, a location which takes center stage in much of her work. She is also currently working towards her MFA in Creative Writing at Stonecoast through the University of Southern Maine. Her work has previously been published at FrostWriting.com and her poems printed in Deep South Magazine.

Fruition

My husband and I share an apple whole,
his teeth cracking the peel mine leave behind.
The soft flesh gives, but skin is left to grind
until we've carved the core into a pole.

When I was small, I had the skins removed
from apples and other delicacies
which never needed skinning. Grapes, green peas,
a plum tomato, sliced and peeled and grooved.

A woman now, I've learned to eat the peel,
to tolerate the fibrous shells involved
in reaching the sweet centers which, dissolved,
are pleasanter for having been concealed.

He comments on the ripeness with a drawl,
begins to clean the remnants from his lip.
I apprehend his hand in a soft grip
and kiss his sticky mouth, whiskers and all.

Letters to the Underworld: Demeter's Sestina

September smuggles in the autumn rot,
exhausted flowers, trees bent low with fruit.
I pace the rows of apple trees alone –
imagine your new home, wonder what grows
in hell. I found our carving in the wood
today. How simple we were. Seasons flee.

The contract said you had to go – not flee
from me, too frantic to sling shut the wrought
iron gate, to help me chop the rotten wood
for our October fires. This season's fruit
will go unharvested, and all that grows
will do without me, face its fate alone.

This morning I happened upon a lone
line you'd penciled next to Donne's "The Flea."
They're joined by blood. I rub your scrawl. It grows
hazy, the paper brittle, aged by rot.
November drags. Blood's strong, but what of fruit?
How cold it is. Write home soon, if you would.

I found myself half-dreaming in the wood,
the trees you climbed and nested in alone.
I'd hoist your books and lemonade, whole fruit.
December's threatened all the leaves to flee,
to blanket earth, to make it rich with rot,
to say, "Use my body to feed all that grows."

The orchard glistens white in freezing rows.
The January world's asleep, and I would
join it, cloak myself in blankets in the grot
of your old room, endure the cold alone.
But you will be home soon. The seconds flee,
my hope suspended by one ice-proof root.

What we lose in flowers, we more than gain in fruit.
The sting of each year's gains and losses grows
but dims when February blooms. You'll flee
his clutches soon, but do you think you would
if I said, "No. Relax. I'm fine alone."?
I'd say it if you said so. Let earth rot.

Flee him, my daughter, only fruit I've born.
We've wrought this pact, grown hard. If we had not,
then one of us would always be alone.

Kathryn Jacobs

I am a poet and full professor at Texas A & M – C, currently teaching from Flint (online). David Roberts Books published an anthology of my poems, *In Transit*, last September. I also have three chapbooks (from Finishing Line and Pudding House Press), and roughly a hundred and thirty poems published at *The New Formalist*, *Measure*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Trellis*, *Fourteen Magazine*, *14 by 14*, *Light Quarterly*, *Deronda Review*, *Wordgathering*, *Candelabrum* and *Acumen (UK)*, *Slant*, etc. I also have a book from the University Press of Florida (criticism) and fourteen articles.

A Frost-ian Moment

I knew, of course, that I was backtracking,
because I'd seen those lily-pads before.
But last time they were only sun-sloping.
And then some long legged birds came wading by,
which made me think about the fat green pads
all stuck-together, floating in the still:

they might be launching-pads for egret wings.

Now, I'm not saying this is practical,
or that they ever tried. And I don't mean
the sun was missing, either (it had moved,
but not enough to speak of). I just mean
that in between two visits, being lost,
the lily-leaves were languid as before –

no, it was I who differed.

Tender Mercies

You couldn't toughen him, although we tried:
you simply cannot make scar-tissue "take"
on certain souls. But that's not why he died:
you don't need calluses when strangers break
the fall that they see coming. Half the time
he never knew the hoops that they walked through,
or what a web of intricate design
dissolved before him. And they never knew
exactly why they did it; just a boy
who trusted them, and had the sort of face
that people want to help; or, to enjoy
an innocence that tends to go to waste
in worlds like this, where now a bitter clerk
may likewise share in God's mysterious work.

Landmarks

We measure from disasters: landmark loss.
The refuse on the sidewalk when the world
tipped sideways on you (just for instance): odd,
the details you remember. Clean across
two parking places, pink-smear: flotsam, hurled
when Ordinary stopped – what sort of god

would show it to you like that? Blinking where
the sidewalk tipped you, thinking, "That's my shoe.
And there's my leg, still in it." Slow down, stare.
You pick up something what was part of you –

and now it isn't. Later you'll make peace
with status quo (prosthesis). But as yet
You still read "two" as normal. And the piece
you can't help missing? No, you won't forget.

Butterfly Bait

A man-museum. Oh, and butterflies.
You might see arm-sized flowers, and a vine
that drips down purple blossoms. Mostly though
it was a man exhibit; butterflies
were background flutter: extra.

Cro-magnon

is such a well-fed species. Crocodiles
like fat and wiggly (human babies work).
But for a predator as stuffed as us,
you simply stave off boring. Butterflies
of neon blue and ornamental eyes
that close up like a pack of cards: that works.
And rug-backed turtles, with their fuzzy shells
of undulating algae. Anything
to make them notice – and then box them in
with walls of glass, so that the rest of us

admire the man-exhibit, marvelling
at this, our own reflection.

Kit Zak

After retiring from university teaching, I began writing poetry, working with our environmental group to clean up an old coal plant, and visiting far-flung grandchildren. I was selected by the DE Division of the Arts to participate in a poetry retreat in 2008 and I belong to several writing groups in the area. I have had poems published in *Avocet*, *Samsara*, *Drowned in My Own Tears*, and other journals.

In trying to write the villanelle, MR THOMAS RESPONDS TO HIS SON, I have an even greater appreciation for this stunning use of imagery, rhyme, and rhythm in Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle."

MR. THOMAS RESPONDS TO HIS SON

Fret not, my child. Time's a rapacious thief
and death a partner trailing close behind.
We meet each sunrise as an act of faith.

The loss of friends is the keenest grief.
We dare not note the dimming of our mind.
Fret not my child. Time's a rapacious thief.

Each day's hour seems somehow more brief.
My youthful concerns I now deem mostly blind.
We greet each sunrise as an act of faith.

Your blissful youth is a glorious sheath.
We aging will spare you talk of our decline.
Fret not, my child. Time's a rapacious thief.

Our chats dispel my loneliness, a glad relief.
Tell me your hopes and dreams before we dine.
We meet each sunrise as an act of faith.

Acceptance is the path past grief.
Cloud gazing brings a quiet peace, I find.
Fret not, my child. Time's a rapacious thief.
We meet each sunrise as an act of faith.

Unapologetic (An Ekphrastic Poem, after Kandinsky's Red Spot II)

A splash of color made with paint...
it's abstract. Does it show restraint
or is it an enforced aesthetic?
Is it unapologetic?

Was Kandinsky's Moscow era
influenced by some chimera?
Was Kandinsky's muse poetic
or just unapologetic?

Questions might outnumber answers,
growing steady like some cancers.
Was his vision sympathetic?
Was he unapologetic?

That splash of color resonates
no matter how the mind translates.
It draws one in. It's quite magnetic...
Also, unapologetic.

R.J. Clarken

Ships that Pass in the Night

He looks across the crowded room
and wonders, Should I not presume?
but then he thinks, Well, why not try?
What is the worst? She'll pass me by?

She sets her glass upon a shelf.
I'm here all by my lonesome self,
she sighs, But maybe...hmmm...that guy...
What is the worst? He'll pass me by?

He makes a start across the floor.
Don't be a fool. It's not a chore.

It's time to put aside 'the shy.'
What is the worst? She'll pass me by?

As he gets close, she pulls a phone
out of her purse. I should have known.
She texts a message in reply,
then leaves. They pass each other by.

Rob Zselezky

Rob Zselezky is a medical proofreader and sometime editor. His poetry has appeared in *Measure*, *Concho River Review*, *The Lyric*, *Freefall*, *Quotade*, and *Encore*.

Oak

I counted one hundred forty-seven rings
on the fresh-sawn stump, five feet wide at the base,
that served up, on its tabletop, wonderings
at its lost self, high estate for birds of class.
It broke through the earth in an exclamation,
green cry of the blue water planet,
years before Lincoln broke through sedition
and grew into a giant we don't forget.
This is how water climbs up the sky
to wave green hands at eras coming by,
till an insect whine with a chainsaw's bite
severs the behemoth from its height.
It huffed out sawdust (what it had to give)
which flew like sighs for having been alive.

Uprooting Hemlock

After you've cut its height down and clipped it
into a living stump, take a shovel
and spoon away the soil around it
till more roots show than are countable.
(It's the little roots that count.) Take a pick
and dig away more earth, so even more
roots show, stroke by stroke. Don't think it heroic
to swing with all your strength; that'll only make you sore.
You can see how it is that, piece by piece,
you finish the job. Yet, before you'd started,

the thing's resistance seemed almost to increase
as you thought about going in in a mad
frenzy trying to yank it up like a man,
but it's best done step by step, in keeping with a plan.

Robert Lavett Smith

Born in Michigan in 1957, I grew up in northern New Jersey, in a suburb of New York. Since 1987, I have lived in San Francisco, where for the past thirteen years I have worked as a Special Education Paraprofessional for the San Francisco Unified School District. I hold an M.A. in creative writing from the University of New Hampshire, where I studied with Charles Simic and Mekeel McBride. In 1982, I studied with Galway Kinnell, as a member of the Master Class at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. I am the author of four small-press chapbooks, and most recently, of a full-length collection, *Everything Moves With A Disfigured Grace* (Alsop Review Press, 2006). All of these are free verse works. A collection of my sonnets, *Smoke In Cold Weather*, will hopefully be published by the Full Court Press some time this summer.

A HAWK

A hawk kept level with the moving car
For half a mile or more. December light
Sketched each black tail feather distinct and bright,
Honed talons sharp as razors. For as far
As where the highest winter pastures are,
Dense knots of wooly bison marked her flight,
Returned to dully grazing. Taking height,
She rose abruptly—dwindled—a dark star.
Then I felt sure we're utterly alone;
Felt the cold gleam in that reptilian eye,
The vast indifference of the broken sky.
Such chance encounters freeze us to the bone—
A casual cruelty resides on high,
Takes aim from heaven, certain as a stone.

FORCE OF HABIT

i.m.: Patricia Lewis Smith, 1953-2005

Some years ago—at least fifteen, by now—
We met one rainy morning on a bus,
A chance encounter that would shape our lives.
You had a cold; I proffered Kleenex; how
Could such a trivial act have flourished thus?
You're five years dead, but part of us survives
In one unconscious habit I've acquired:
Boarding a coach or streetcar, tedious
Sleep heavy on me, headlights sharp as knives,
I scan the passengers for the desired
Face never found among them. Longing thrives
Where nothing else will grow, being poisonous.
Memory, with trembling fingers, touches one
I've never quite believed is really gone.

Marc Berman

Marc Berman is a native of Paterson, New Jersey. He received a bachelor's degree from Columbia College in New York City, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. After college, Mr. Berman obtained a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, and opted for the tangible rewards of the bar over the impecunious splendor of the pen. Recently, he began to atone for that decision, and started to submit his poetry for publication. His work has since appeared in several journals, including *The Lyric*, *Jewish Currents* and the *Naugatuck River Review*. Mr. Berman makes his living as a small-town attorney in solo practice. He has a side career as a musician, appearing with orchestras and opera companies throughout the Northeast. Besides writing poetry, he is also working on a children's book.

I LEFT ONE LEAF

I left one leaf last fall to lie
beside my scarlet oak and die
and so to live and not to blend
with clumps of bloodstained mulch. This end
alone suffices. Better to try
to vault above the sham blue sky
and only grasp a cloud, than to fly
to your grave first class. To start this trend
I left one leaf.
In March I searched the yard. And by
the haughty tree, where he thought I would spy
the dry cadaver of my rebel friend,
just crabgrass waved, like a note penned,
"I left." One Leaf.

Sandra Bounds

Sandra H. Bounds has a Master of Arts in English and has taught in both high school and community college. An active member of the Mississippi Poetry Society, she was its 2005 Poet of the Year, and MPS published a chapbook of her poetry to honor that selection. She has won many awards in the annual contests sponsored by MPS, and she has been published in such journals as *Art Gulf Coast*, *The Lyric*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Sharing*, *The Well-Tempered Sonnet*, and *Westward Quarterly*.

Words Fitly Spoken

Words are instruments with healing power
to calm and comfort and conciliate
once released from the heart's secret bower.

Lovely as a rainbow or a flower
when offered to soothe or to mitigate,
words are instruments with healing power.

Used singly or in a stream or shower,
words encourage and ameliorate
once released from the heart's secret bower.

As love's sacrament at the apt hour,
words cheer and console and alleviate.

They are instruments with healing power.

Like mantras of sacred grace, words devour
hate, mend and restore, and propitiate
as they speak from the heart's secret bower.

Words can strengthen fearful souls that cower,
inspire sagging spirits, and motivate.
Words are instruments with healing power
once released from the soul's secret bower.

Aria in Pink

As they arise from Winter's tomb,
the peach trees sing their songs of pink
and bashfully blush into bloom.
When the Spring sun warms Winter's tomb,
and jonquils peep from their safe womb,
then all the world is on the brink
of soon escape from Winter's tomb
as peach trees sing their songs of pink.