

Spring 2013

John J. Brugaletta

John Brugaletta is professor emeritus of English, Cal State Fullerton, and was editor/publisher of *South Coast Poetry Journal* for ten years. He and his wife now live in the redwoods a few miles north of Eureka, where he writes and occasionally turns out a piece of furniture.

Into the Clearing

Just peer ahead. See what a week will bring.
Your visibility's a dozen feet,
the rest a secret of the rain and sleet.
The future can deny us anything.

The next shoe salesman in your life may wring
your neck or make you footwear of concrete.
Just ask the tannic corpses found in peat —
this a rebel, that a worn-out king.

But still, beyond the vengeance and the graft,
at some uncertain date, while we're engrossed
in paying bills or nursing some new slight,

it comes to us how seldom we have laughed,
how rarely we've proposed a lusty toast
to common air and water, or to sight.

Pindaric Ode on Politics

Strophe

What drives them to impetuosity,
to overthrow of custom, history,
tradition's dignity, the charm of use?
Why all this spreading of the term "abuse"?
There is no evolution eons long.
We must have human thoughts the length of song,
or better yet, the size of one quick cry
before the Reaper enters and we die.
We were allotted lordship, so to reign
That some must lead while subjects bear the pain.
The two are separate and always were,
one of them purebred and the other cur.
What though starvation not infect the best?
We bear the burden of the golden crest.

Antistrophe

The question now arises, "Who is best?"

Is it who likes to pose with hand in vest?
What use is liking, though it custom be?
And what of those judged best by history?
A few were lionized for killing foes,
but most esteem the ones who always chose
to share their coat or water with the child
who shivered or was thirsty. They were mild
with harshness, empathized with those in pain
and were not always prepossessed with gain.
They treasured life, down to the ant or fly
and did not ask what benefit or why.
We live not all alone; we are a clan,
a varied family with servant man.

Epode

A nation so immense will soon divide,
unless an iron fist is posed to strike
the recusant or rebel, either side.
But who is harmed if two don't think alike?
A certain reticence will cool both brows
and couch all differences in tender terms.
Let not the bumpkin in us mire in sloughs
the equines or the doughty pachyderms.

Conversation with the Healer

Lord who raised your friend to walk,
and who healed the man born blind,
may we have a little talk
of *agape's* pleading kind?

These afflicted follow You
in quotidian delight.
Each one studied, each one grew
in your concepts of what's right.

They show love to fools, the wise,
imitating You with all.
Help them now, good Lord, to rise.
Let them not, neglected, sprawl.

Granted, wholesale healing's time
is the kingdom's widespread health;
though the kingdom's not yet prime,
it grows vigorous by stealth.

If your time came unawares
when your mother asked for wine,
in its way the kingdom stares
when one rises from decline.

Heal them, loving Lord through whom
every one of us was made.

Put them back upon your loom,
where their bodies will rebraid.

Purity

When Yellowstone erupts and earth goes dark,
its pyroclastic flow eliminates
some faithful, and its virulence deflates
their egos with the cougar and the lark,
this great ablution, purifying all,
will sterilize at once our seven sins
with our delights, our kindnesses and grins,
and leave us shrouded in an ashy pall.

Is this the providence for those who crook
the knee—be it ourselves or progeny?
Is nothing real but what we strike and see?
Is nothing holy, neither flesh nor book?
Have we, naïve as infants, all mistook?

Are we to be but pure fragility?

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. *What the Wind Says*, a collection of dog poems focusing on her canine search partners over the past forty years, is forthcoming.

Sonnet for an Unruly Pup

Your coat, though sable, is no precious fur
of a dead beast. Your amber eyes, no stone
that glitters behind glass. And I aver
your teeth aren't pearl but polished on a bone.
Your voice not tempered as a fluted tune,
your step, though quick, is not a metered dance;
your mind not logic, but a druid rune.
No choice of mine, you came to me by chance.
My trail-companion, in the dark my guide -
but you're already ranging out of sight.
I feel the wildest east-wind in your stride,
the unclipped feathers of a raptor's flight.
If license lies in what I write of you,

I wish to make my visions of you true.

Bones

The new pup has found a bone.
She's been running the April fields
no matter how I call "Come!"
past where old dead dogs lie buried.

She's been running the April fields
as if they were only always hers,
past where old dead dogs lie buried
under rain, sun, and earth.

As if they were only, always hers,
the stones and grasses of the world
under rain, sun, and earth
push up from underground -

the stones and grasses of the world,
and the bones, like daffodils
push up from underground
when we're not looking; too busy.

And the bones, like daffodils -

bone that holds the memory of lives.

When we're not looking, too busy,
she'll chew it to its marrow.

Bone that holds the memory of lives.

No matter how I call "Come!"

she'll chew it to its marrow.

The new pup has found a bone.

Learning Trust

Blackbirds scatter. My puppy pushes through
the gate, off pavement. Is she still on-scent?
or critter? Creekside star-thistle, all new
to her; beckoning. But here, grasses bent

as if someone, this morning, walked this way.

Is my pup too intent - the hunt, pursuit...?

A game she's bred and trained for. Since first-day,
she dances with scent in her shepherd-suit.

A handler always doubt. Old question: *Are
you sure?* She speeds her pace; she's looking good.
But dogs can be distracted, or just lie.

She darts off into trees as dark as char.
And there's our camo'd quarry - in this wood
so well hidden, I would have walked right by.

Aaron Baker

Aaron Evan Baker was born in Chicago, Illinois. He studied Ancient History at the University of Chicago, and has a Ph.D. in Classics from Brown University. He is an attorney and college teacher, and lives in Evanston, Illinois with his wife, Stephanie, and their daughter, Laura.

Sunt Aliquid Manes

The dead are something, I have heard; but I
Could never make them speak. One day, I walked
Out to the park near my apartment. There,
A black path through the stripped and sodden trees
Somehow compelled a thought of her, and I
Almost believed that she and not her absence
Walked with me.

I have returned to say
It was not so—though I walked all that day.

Leticia Austria

Leticia Austria is a native of San Antonio, Texas. She has devoted most of her life to music, working as an operatic coach and pianist, most notably at the Houston Grand Opera. She then entered a Catholic monastery, where her childhood love for writing poetry was rekindled and encouraged. After two and half years in the cloister, she left to care for her parents while continuing to hone her poetic craft. Her work has appeared in both print and online journals in the US, UK, and Canada, and has been translated into Italian. Ms Austria has also won top prizes from Utmost Christian Poets and the Laurel Foundation, and was a finalist in the 2012 Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Contest.

Apologia

My verses are but letters never sent,
The wringing out of years too full to bear,
The winging of a heart consumed and spent,
Laid out for judgment excellent and fair. (*)

My words are only echoes of the words
Unspoken, hostages of heart unvoiced
And broken like a captured, wing-clipped bird
That gave its higher songs to silent joys.

My poems are paradoxes better read

By eyes unschooled, uncritical of skill,
By readers ruled by heart instead of head,
Whose hope has never waned and never will.

* "excellent and fair" from Emily Dickinson, "Ample make this Bed"

Joe R. Christopher

Joe R. Christopher is a retired university teacher and poet who has published two or three books on CS Lewis (depending on how one counts them). Christopher continues to write essays on Lewis, hoping eventually to organize them into three more books.

Adam, Lilith, and Eve

One day, in Eden, on a bench,
Sat three, discussing fact and hunch.
Naked all three and unashamed,
For who back then for such was blamed?
Since they thought nothing of being naked,
They so conversed—in words partakēd.

Adam between his wives was pleased
At having some confusions eased.
"It is a fact," said he, "we're given
This park for our secluded haven;

The cattle chew its grass, and we
Do naught but pick its fruits so free.
The apples, kiwi, pears, and such
Are simply ours upon our touch.”

Said Lilith, “I’ve got a simple hunch
It won’t continue long, this lunch;
Sooner or later, we’ll have to work—
Some flaw in paradise must lurk.
There’s no free lunch—no, none at all;
Our perfect weather will turn to squall.”

Said Eve, “Relax, enjoy our chat—
You’re always saying things like that—
Predicting that misfortune comes.
Who cares? Until that day, all . . . hums.”
(She waved a hand at a swarm of bees,
Who’d soon make honey for their ease.)
“Until that day, let’s just ignore it—
Whatever *it* is; our talk’ll outsoar it!”

Said Adam, brushing off a wasp,
“I hate the subject to unhasp,
But why don’t we a threesome make—
It’s never here a bad mistake.
Another pleasure in our fields—
And I’ll sustain till pleasure yields.
Only one rule binds us in life,
And we will not that fruit e’en sniff.

All pleasure else are all our own,
For pleasures as a good are known.”

“No thanks,” said Lilith, “not today,
Tomorrow, yes, I’ll join the play;
Today I give my share to Eve,
Who greatest pleasures will achieve.
Go seek delight in sun or shade—
I need to think about this glade,
This park, in which we mould our play,
And that great rule which we obey.
Perhaps I’ll ask our God, come a-strolling,
What is the purpose of self-controlling?”

Todd Outcult

Todd Outcult is a United Methodist pastor and author of twenty-five books in six languages. His poetry has appeared in many publications including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Christian Century*, *Rattle*, and *Barefoot Review*, among others. His upcoming titles in 2014 include *Husband’s Guide to Breast Cancer*, *Before You Say “I Do”*, and *The Other Jesus*. He lives in Brownsburg, Indiana with his wife and a menagerie of wild animals.

The Snowman in Summer

He dreams deep dying of leaf to frost,
The windshields covered with hominy dew,
When the sun consumes in its holocaust
The remains of an old year not yet new.

With coal-black eyes, though apropos,
He twists his stick arms avant-garde,
Entombed in sleep until the snow
Shall resurrect him in the yard.

Home from Rugby Practice

My son says he played well
And does not need stitches
In the ear that is dangling
By a thread and beat to hell.

His grit of eighteen years
Has turned him into man
And left him bruised and
Unwilling to shed tears.

But I blanch and recoil
At the sight of his blood
And his open vein.
Impressed by his toil.
Proud in his pain.

Jesus Boy

He was a builder of clay birds
And wooden instruments of trade,
A godhead portioned into thirds
Still learning from the ones he made.

With every loaf he broke and blessed
A word resided in his hands
Which day-by-day his youth expressed
As honoring his own commands.

R. M. Rousseau

A native New Englander transplanted to the coast of Southern California, R. M. Rousseau has worked for many years as a translator,

interpreter, freelance writer, and website developer. Her poetry has been published in *The Lyric*, *Westward Quarterly*, *Haiku Journal*, and *Four and Twenty*. Her Twitter stream – which sometimes includes haiku -- is @ritamarie949.

Fences

No casual row of wooden post and rail
to loosely demarcate a boundary line;
instead at march along the hiking trail
a sturdy chain-link fence with warning sign

establishes the rules of when and who
with padlocked gates to back up its commands.
Protected from mere walkers passing through,
untrammled plant life spreads across the land.

Free passage goes to birds and butterflies,
who soar above or flit straight through the holes,
as well as creatures of an equal size
who slither, hop, and creep between the poles.

But man alone, the great galumphing brute,
is trapped within a narrow, wire-walled chute.

Kathryn Jacobs

I am a poet, a medievalist, and tenured at Texas A & M C. I took a doctorate from Harvard, published a volume of poetry called *Advice*

Column last year, and have roughly 8 dozen poems at a wide variety of excellent journals, yours among them (also etc). I have also written a scholarly book on medieval marriage customs and sixteen articles.

At an Aviary in Pittsburgh

A plethora of fluffy-headed birds
explode around us (squat-necked, scratching). We're
the sloths they peer about and never see

because we're just so boring. Little birds
who look like paint-by-numbers disagree;
they stick their bellies out and pose, and peer

at real-life sloths with hooks like amputees:
they hope the sloths are watching. Who just spear
their giant green beans, munching undeterred

by squawks and flutter. They're the pragmatists;
they know what matters. And the chocolate capes
arranging brand-new stubble in each fist

ignore us too; they're nesting. So we gape

and everybody lets us: clumsy herds
of biped mobile trees who plod amidst
mantilla-headed, thigh-high walking birds.

Grumpy Fish Poem

(at the very same aviary)

The spoonbills look a lot like spatulas
(clutch head, flip firmly); nobody eats soup
with anything that flat. And long-legged stilts
clutch half-a dozen fingers in each claw,
which makes you wonder where they got them; troupes
of children must be stub-palmed (I feel guilt
at even thinking of it). And one gnaws
a slipper-silver fish still wriggling, scoops
up filaments (I think he's dead now), tilts
a beak up (gravity) and swallows (gulp):

quick, think of something else. And yes my dad
said "don't identify," but it must suck
to be a fish when copper-chested ducks
are tail-tipped upward, hungry. So I've had
Enough of predators, and – sorry dad –
those sticks look just like fingers.

Bus Stop

Inhaling thick-wet-gummy with a breath
like cold potato soup, and closed-in smells
that make you think of sweaty animals

(they smell so worried). And you feel compressed
though nothing's supposed to be there, and you dwell
in fog forebodings that would be banal

in sun, if you could see them. Cobwebs cling
to curled-in fingers, cuff-bound (clammy-numb).

They make me scare myself with furry things

I can't claw off my face, and goblin thumbs
in private places. Stuck here, soggy-tired
of cold and trapped and bus stops, until I'm
a piggy bank of feelings; just so mired

in all of them. The bus is here; high time.

Forest F. White

Forest F. White is a technical writer from the Silicon Valley and graduate of UC Santa Cruz's creative writing program. He currently lives in New York with his wife, the artist Ashli Sisk. He is the author of one volume of poetry, *Gospels of Rage*, and a short novel, *A Phantom Agony*, both published in 2012. His work has appeared in the *Cyclamens & Swords* online journal and *Nomad's Choir* magazine. His next volume of poetry, *Humble Vanities*, is due out in 2014.

Regret

Like wrecking balls, my fists recall the love
that lingers, hidden beneath the floorboards
of my heart like a body. I'm thinking of
you, your wrists and your fingers, and the words

I'd have rather said, because I'm angry
still. A fist must be open for this hand
to hold yours, tender. Now, we can both cry
about how I should have been a gentler man.
If you come back to me, there won't be
a lot I can do, except say "Sorry,"
"I didn't mean it," and "Why do you say those
things you do?" The crooked root of rage,
sown in the decrepit soil of my youth, grows
thick, gorged upon the shame I can't assuage.

Peter C. Venable

Besides college publications, Peter Venable has been published in *Chrysalis*, *Crucible*, *Sparrowgrass Poetry Forum*, *The Roll-Schola Contemplationis*, *American Vedantist*, *The Penwood Review*, *Word Riot*, *Ancient Paths*, *e-zine*, *Vineyards*, *Time of Singing*, and *The Christian Communicator* (3 issues). He works as an addiction and mental health counselor, and is graced with a happy marriage, daughter and son-in-law, and Yeshua.

Hildegard

Book One. Vision One: God Enthroned*

I saw a great mountain of iron hue.
One enthroned on it of such glory, blew
Great beams and glitter that blinded my sight.
A soft shadow stretched, to my eyes, a delight,
Like the wing of wondrous length and size.
Before Him, at the mountain's foot, edgewise,
Stood an image of eyes, not human shape,
Whose marvelous gaze, no one could escape.
In front of this, another image stood:
A child in tunic, shoes white as dogwood,
Upon whose head such magnificence poured
From the One enthroned, could not be endured.
I could not even glance upon its face.
From that mountain, the One in fiery space
Showered a storm of many living sparks,
Which sweetly flowed around these forms, in arcs.
Also I saw upon the mountain's side,
From many windows, human heads abide.
But some had faces waning pale as blight.

The others' faces shone, Edelweiss white.

Is this a dream? Delirium's foray?
A migraine vision, her suffering's soothsay?
Is this a place? A galaxy away?
Or a spiritual realm—not a clergy cliché?

*text by Hildegard of Bingen, from her *Scivias*

Book Two. Vision One: The Redeemer*

I saw a calm man, from pink-ruffled dawn,
Pouring radiance in darkness, whereon
With great force it drove him back as a flood,
So he poured out the redness of his blood
And whiteness of pallor into Death's grotto,
And struck the darkness with such a strong blow
The prostrate person was touched by Him.
This soul, luminescent, walked from the dim.
The serene Man, come from the dawn's mint smell,
Shone more brightly than human tongue can tell.
He rose in sublime joy to pristine heights
And glowed in plenitude of fruitful sights,
Surrounded by lush and fragrant delights.

Is this a dream? Delirium's foray?
A migraine vision, her suffering's soothsay?
Is this a place? A galaxy away?
Or a spiritual realm—not a clergy cliché?

*text by Hildegard of Bingen, from her *Scivias*

Stuart Jay Silverman

Stuart Jay Silverman is an east coast expatriate retired from college and university teaching, he divides his golden years between Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Chicago, Illinois. More than 400 of his poems and translations appear in 100+ journals and anthologies here and abroad. His *The Complete Lost Poems: A Selection* is published by Hawk Publishing Group. His poetry leans toward creation, rather than expression. He hopes a poem of his provides the reader with a doorway into a new experience, not merely exploring his feelings.

A Late-Afternoon Shower and After

The rain came steadily for an hour
as though unconscious of its power,
as, indeed, it must have been
to inflict that unremitting din
on hood, and window, and sliding roof
of a car intent on staying aloof,
avoiding nature's impartial threat,
but fated, always, to get wet.

The buildings stared indifferently down,
here, and, likely, the rest of town,
brick and mortar, steel and glass
sure of its solid imposing mass.

The water dripped as water must
if not made ice or securely trussed
in glass or plastic or ceramic--
by nature, otherwise, dynamic.

The sky drooped whitely over the street
(while the rain contrived not to miss a beat)
a roll of batting creased with dirt
one couldn't conceive designed to hurt
till darkness rose with a flash of teeth
and shook some bones in their human sheath,
and, safe inside, one could hear the sound
of a cloud far off striking the ground.

Trees upswept by a sudden fright
gave up their leaves without a fight,
littering streets with green and red.
Then, the reigning moon looked down and
bled,
bathing streets in a sticky glow
headlights fashioned to look like snow
till dawn freshened its tousled hair,
and a half-drowned sun came up for air.

Aden Thomas

Narnia

My son, these stories cut a path
through the thick and tangled forest's wrath
of your restless mind. Your eyes sway deep.
Your breath attunes to rhythmic sleep.
You slip below the sand's caprice
secure in the traveler's layered fleece.
The hazy night god guards the crows
those creeping birds, those shaded flows.
It's then I open your closet bold
and waver through the hanging cold.
I feel the branches under tread
and there emerge in snow. Ahead,
next to a lamp post, in a glowing thaw,
the dark outline of a lion's paw.

Paula Mahon d'Entremont

Paula Mahon is a family physician in Manchester, NH who writes poems and stories on the side. She has been published in the *Storyteller*, *Pink Chameleon*, and the *Poet's Touchstone*. She has also won a 3rd prize in a New Hampshire poetry contest and Bark magazine's "Puppy Love 2012" poetry contest.

March in New Hampshire

There's not much to like about March in New Hampshire.

The snow is all dirty, my yard's filled with mud

which gets on my shoes, then my floors and my carpets.

I spend all my free time by cleaning this crud.

March in New Hampshire, it isn't so pleasant,

unless you like skiing on oatmeal grained snow.

There's ice, rocks and bare spots. Your skis will get beat up,

but tickets are cheaper should you choose to go.

However there's goodness in this cold, wet weather.

The sap of the maple runs best when we're chilled.

The syrup the sugar house yields in March rawness,

sweetens bananas and salmon I've grilled.

There's not much to like about March in New Hampshire,

but I'd rather have March here, which I can abide.

I don't want to deal with tornadoes or earthquakes,

And here if its sleeting, I'll just stay inside.

