APRIL GIFTS

2014

Created by: Susan F. Glassmeyer
Cincinnati, Ohio, 2014

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Welcome to APRIL GIFTS 2014
presented by LITTLE POCKET POETRY
in celebration of National Poetry Month

Introduction

Folks have asked over the years how I select the poems I post every April. Let me start by saying I may skip breakfast, but I never skip poetry. I read thousands of poems throughout the year. They nourish my life and fuel my work every day. I print copies of the best poems I read and place them in an old brass cauldron in my bookroom where they simmer for months. Come January, I take up "the contenders"—boiled down to a couple hundred poems by this point, and read through them again, culling the best of the best in what is largely an inspired process to find 30 "stars" for April. Although craft is a compelling influence when it comes to choosing the poems, craft alone never trumps what I call "the body and soul of the poem"—it's ability to move me, wake me up, shake me up, or otherwise cause me to pay close attention. February and March bring more reading, researching and studying the poets who wrote the chosen poems. Then it's down to the business of condensing and organizing the material that will accompany each poem. By mid-March I'm looking at how the poem order wants to line up, similar to organizing a chapbook of poems, fraught with its own fun challenges and puzzles to solve. Because I'm still reading new poems every day, sometimes one will be so spectacular it will bump a contender out of its spot in the line-up and takes its place. (That just happened a few days ago!) Finally, there's the task of editing, proofreading, and creating the final drafts that get emailed to over 400 of you who love poetry. Fingers crossed every year that my mail server will not "bench me" for flooding cyberspace with poetry!

As ever, I'm grateful for your continued interest and always welcome your feedback on April Gifts. Hearing from you is part of the pleasure of this annual work. Write to me if you like, if only to post a readback line from a poem you enjoyed. Tell me what moves you, opens your heart, or inspires you to do some of your own writing. Feel free to share any of the poems with your family, friends, students, co-workers . . . the butcher, the baker, your pizza pie maker.

So let's begin with our first poem . . .

A Cold Rain the Day Before Spring

From heaven it falls on the gray pitted ice
that has been here since December.
In the gutter rivulets erode piles
of dirt and road salt into small countries
and the morning is so dark, in school
teachers turn on fluorescent lights
and everyone comes in smelling of damp wool.
From heaven it falls, just the opposite
of prayer, which I send up
at the traffic light: please
let me begin over again, one
more time over again, wipe the slate
clean, the same way after school
janitors, keys jangling from
belt loops, will use a wet rag and wipe
the school day off, so there is only
the residue, faint white on the smooth
surface. It's the same way
the infield looks before the game
begins, or the ice on a rink
between periods. All new again
for the moment and glistening.
Imagine each day you get to start
again and again. Again. How many
days does the janitor enter the room
of your soul, wipe it clean
go out into the hallway
and push his broom
down the long corridor, full
of doors to so many rooms.

—by Stuart Kestenbaum

POET NOTES

Stuart Kestenbaum was born and raised in New Jersey. He has been writing poetry since grade school, but started to take it more seriously while getting a B.A. (in comparative religion) at Hamilton College, in Clifton, N.Y. After graduation, he began submitting his work to small periodicals, and his poems have since appeared in The Sun, Beloit Poetry Journal, Black Fly Review, and Northeast Corridor. In the early 1980s, Kestenbaum quieted his "inner editor" and moved to Maine where he began to cultivate his own voice. In 1988, he became director of the prestigious Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle. In this place where nature is prevalent, in a community where creativity and craft are paramount, his life and work seem to have found a perfect home. http://www.haystack-mtn.org/index.php

Former Poet Laureate Ted Kooser wrote of Kestenbaum's poems: "No hidden agendas here, no theories to espouse, nothing but life, pure life, set down with craft and love." Publications include three poetry collections: *Pilgrimage,* (Coyote Love Press), *House of Thanksgiving* (Deerbrook Editions 2003) and *Prayers and Run-on Sentences* (Deerbrook Editions 2007) which was written after his brother died on 9/11 in the World Trade Center. Kestenbaum has also published a collection of essays: *The View from Here* (2012). An exquisite Book Arts limited edition collection Kestenbaum's poems, *A Deep Blue Amen,* was released in 2013. These 50 books are individually handmade and bound by artist Amanda Degener.
www. http://cavepaper.com/amanda/books.html

Kestenbaum's newest book, *Only Now*, is forthcoming from Deerbrook Editions. Poet Stephen Dunn says: "*Only Now" is a rare accomplishment: a collection of poems that takes on the fragility of the world and our own mortality, and does so with unflinching directness and, most impressively, with wit and a sincere prayerfulness. Many of these poems are what I would call strangely hopeful warnings, elegies-in-advance. They worry about the world in ways that register the beauty of what is in danger of being diminished.*

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Stuart Kestenbaum
In seeking Stuart Kestenbaum's permission to use his poem for April Gifts, I asked him what role, if any, solitude played in his writing process? He replied: *Yes, solitude plays an essential role in my writing.* ***While ideas for a poem can come at any time and in any place, I need to be in a contemplative space to write it.*** *In the quiet I can go beneath my original impulse into something that I hope will be deeper and then deeper still.*

I try not to repeat poets in this **April Gifts** project, but sometimes I find certain poet's work irresistible. **Maxine Kumin** has appeared twice before, in 2008 with her poem *Looking Back in My Eighty-First Year*, and again in 2009 with *A Calling*. Maxine Kumin died on February 6th of this year at age 88.

Women and Horses

After Auschwitz, *to write a poem is barbaric.* —Theodor Adorno

After Auschwitz: after ten of my father's kin—
the ones who stayed—starved, then were gassed in the camps.
After Vietnam, after Korea, Kuwait, Somalia, Haiti, Afghanistan.
After the Towers. This late in the life of our haplessly orbiting world
let us celebrate whatever scraps the muse, that naked child,
can pluck from the still-smoldering dumps.

If there's a lyre around, strike it! A body, stand back, give it air!
Let us have sparrows laying their eggs in bluebird boxes.
Let us have bluebirds insouciantly nesting elsewhere.
Lend us navel-bared teens, eyebrow- and nose-ringed prodigies
crumbling breakfast bagels over dog-eared and jelly-smeared texts.
Allow the able-bodied among us to have steamy sex.

Let there be fat old ladies in flowery tent dresses at bridge tables.
Howling babies in dirty diapers and babies serenely at rest.
War and détente will go on, détente and renewed tearings asunder,
we can never break free from the dark and degrading past.
Let us see life again, nevertheless, in the words of Isaac Babel
as a meadow over which women and horses wander.

—by Maxine Kumin

POEM NOTES

Theodor W. Adorno was a German sociologist, philosopher and musicologist known for his critical theory of society.

Isaak Emmanuilovich Babel was a Russian language journalist, playwright, literary translator, and short story writer.

P**OET NOTES**

Maxine Kumin was born Maxine Winokur in Germantown, Philadephia, in 1925, into a nominally observant Reform Jewish family that lived next door to the Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a teaching order. Here she attended the first few years of primary school, which, she says, accounts for the juxtaposition of Jesus and Jewish rituals in many of her poems. She attained a BA and MA from Radcliffe.

Maxine, the mother of three children, lived on a farm in Warner, New Hampshire with her husband where they raised ten foals, a succession of dogs and cats, some sheep, organic vegetables, and for several springs, tended a hundred sugar-maple taps. Both Kumins were avid horseback riders and competed in distance rides and carriage drives. In 1998 at age 72, Maxine survived a nearly fatal carriage accident. She wrote about her heroic healing journey in *Inside the Halo and Beyond: Anatomy of a Recovery.*

Her numerous awards include the Pulitzer and Ruth Lilly Poetry Prizes. In 1981-1982 Kumin served as Poet Laureate of the United States. She was poet laureate of New Hampshire from 1989 to 1994. She is the author of 18 books of poetry, several novels, essay and short story collections, and many children's books.

POET BACKSTORY

Maxine's mother was a conservatory-trained pianist (a Bach specialist) but the poet says her mother's hopes for a career as a professional musician were crushed by her authoritarian father, just as young Maxine, an outstanding swimmer, found her own aspirations (to join the Aquacade) blocked by *her* father, who told her she *"would come to nothing."* Maxine turned to writing verse, but when she entered Radcliffe at age seventeen, she discovered an atmosphere hostile to creative writing. After one professor told her she had no talent and *"would be better advised to say it with flowers",* Maxine did not write again for nearly a decade. She married, had three children, and entered a life typical of many women in that era after WWII. In an interview in 1980 she said: *It was just after the war, and this is what everyone was desperately doing: the tribe was seen as the saving centrality in a world that had gone totally awry. And I came to poetry as a way of saving myself because I was so wretchedly discontented. It just wasn't enough to be a housewife and a mother. It didn't gratify great chunks of me.*

Kumin began writing again, "in the closet", and by the late fifties met Anne Sexton at a poetry workshop at the Boston Center for Adult Education. Maxine and Anne began an 18 year friendship which included almost daily phone calls to critique one another's poetry. They kept a private phone line between their houses open during the day, whistling into the receiver to summon each other when they had lines to share.

April Gifts—created by Susan F. Glassmeyer of Little Pocket Poetry—2014

April Gift #3—2014 It had been long dark, though still an hour before supper-time

Charles Reznikoff (1894–1976), the son of Russian immigrants who fled the Russian Empire, was born in what he called "the Jewish ghetto of Brownsville" in Brooklyn, New York. When he was twelve, Reznikoff's family moved to a section of Brooklyn that was isolated from the Jewish community, a neighborhood that was mainly laborers and clerks who lived in mostly cold-water flats without heat. Reznikoff described it as a place where "the hatred for Israel smoldered." He wrote that he would have to rush home from high school in order to avoid the taunts of children leaving their grade school.

It had been long dark, though still an hour before supper-time

It had been long dark, though still an hour before supper-time.
The boy stood at the window behind the curtain.
The street under the black sky was bluish white with snow.
Across the street, where the lot sloped to the pavement,
boys and girls were going down on sleds.
The boys were after him because he was a Jew.

At last his father and mother slept. He got up and dressed.
In the hall he took out his sled and went out on tiptoe.
No one was in the street. The slide was worn smooth and slippery--just right.
He laid himself down on his sled and shot away. He went down only twice.
He stood knee-deep in snow:
no one was in the street, the windows were darkened;
those near the street-lamps were ashine, but the rooms inside were dark;
on the street were long shadows of clods of snow.
He took his sled and went back into the house.

—by Charles Reznikoff

POET NOTES

From his teens, **Charles Reznikoff** had been writing poetry, much of it influenced by the "Imagists", an early 20th century group centered in London. In a 1913 *Poetry* essay titled 'Imagiste', Ezra Pound laid out three standards by which he felt all poetry "should be" judged—

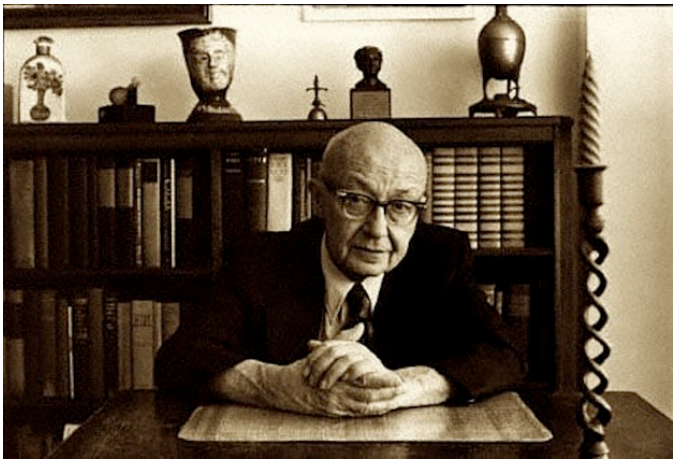
1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective.
2. Use of absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.

Charles Reznikoff is best known today as one of the founders of the "Objectivist" movement. They were mainly American poets, influenced largely by Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. The basic tenets of Objectivist poetics were to treat the poem as an object and to emphasize sincerity, intelligence, and the poet's ability to look clearly at the world.

Reznikoff's poetry was largely unnoticed in his lifetime. However, influenced by a family story of his grandfather, an unpublished Hebrew poet whose manuscripts were destroyed after his death, Reznikoff was determined to be published, and acquired a second-hand press and learned how to typeset. This enabled him to partner with other poets to establish To Publishers, and later, Objectivist Press, largely to publish their own work.

Much of the last 40 years of Reznikoff's life was consumed with a long work, an extended poem, *Testimony*, that ran to 500 pages over two volumes. The work is the retelling of stories gleaned from civil trial records he cataloged while working in a law office in his youth. Limiting himself to the words of the participants themselves, the result is a powerful anecdotal history, told in a poetry virtually without metaphor, and stripped of any authorial presence or emotion. It is, in one sense, a monument to Objectivism (not to be confused with Ayn Rand's philosophical Objectivism).

Near the end of Reznikoff's life, some recognition, along with a revival of interest in his work, began to stir. A new publisher, Black Sparrow Press, took note of him, and published his last book, *By the Well of Living and Seeing: New and Selected Poems, 1918-1973* in 1974. In short order after his death, Black Sparrow brought all of his major work back to print.



I'm probably in the minority, but I enjoyed our unrelenting winter here in the Ohio River Valley. Frequent snowfalls allowed for more reflected light than what we usually experience November through February. Abundant snow also meant more lovely wildlife coming out of the woods into our yard looking for food. I even welcomed the extreme sub-zero temperatures that only seemed to strengthen my resolve against any sense of 'the winter blues'. It's easy to wax poetic about the elements when you have a heated house to come home to, and all the comforts that go along with it. Not so, for those unfortunate people who live homeless through all seasons. Today's poem by **Eavan Boland** is an achingly beautiful tale about a young couple during the bitter winter of Ireland's Great Famine, 1847.

Not to be missed, listen to this tender if not pragmatic reading of today's poem by Ms. Boland: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VagsCgLgVc

Quarantine

In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people
a man set out from the workhouse with his wife.
He was walking-they were both walking-north.

She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up.
He lifted her and put her on his back.
He walked like that west and west and north.
Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.

In the morning they were both found dead.
Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history.
But her feet were held against his breastbone.
The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.
   There is no place here for the inexact
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.
There is only time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.
   Also what they suffered. How they lived.
And what there is between a man and a woman.
And in which darkness it can best be proved.

—by Eavan Boland
from *Against Love Poetry*

POEM NOTES

From Dodge Festival Poets Blog: "*Quarantine* is from Boland's collection *Against Love Poetry*. It seems incongruous at first that the author of this poem would define herself as against love poetry. But in the title poem from that collection she writes, "It is to mark the contradictions of a daily love that I have written this." Boland isn't against love poetry so much as against sentimentalizing relationships. She is willing to witness the contradictions of a daily love, of daily life, not in spite of but because of how difficult this sometimes is. To do less is to trivialize human experience. Boland is also deeply aware that everything has a history. For her, attention to the things of this world includes attention to the history they carry. This includes the history carried in the body. It can be public or private, national or familial, but in Boland it is always personal, and she makes it personal for her readers."

POET NOTES

Eavan (pronounced eeVAN) **Boland** was born (1944) in Dublin into privilege and oppression simultaneously. Her father (Frederick Boland) was a career diplomat; her mother (Frances Kelley), a noted post-expressionist painter. When Boland was six, her father was appointed Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and she was rudely introduced to anti-Irish hostility upon her family's move to London, and certainly aware of, and influenced by the patriarchal stronghold on poetry in the academy. Her prolific output of work that began with a chapbook (*23 Poems* Dublin 1962) has championed both justice and thoughtful understanding. She has blended both the personal and the historical into her work with the seamless craft of a master. Boland is the recipient of numerous literary awards and is the author of two dozen books of poetry, and several books of prose as well.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Eavan Boland

Answering questions from callers on a PBS program, Boland made this observation: *I'm a feminist. I'm not a feminist poet. I've said somewhere else that I think feminism has real power and authority as an ethic, but none at all as an aesthetic. My poetry begins for me where certainty ends. I think the imagination is an ambiguous and untidy place, and its frontiers are not accessible to the logic of feminism for that reason. So I don't really think it's created that poetics you speak of, in exactly that way.* An anecdote illustrates: *I once gave a workshop and I asked*

the women poets there, if you went back to that little town you've come from—these were small towns—would you say I'm a poet? And one of them said, if I said I was a poet they'd think I didn't wash my windows. And that stayed with me so long, the sense of the collective responsibility of someone as against the individual thing it takes to be a poet.

When asked about the impact of the internet age on the Bardic, oral parts of poetry so essential to the Irish tradition, she observes: *There's no doubt that the verbal and oral parts of Irish literature have been at the heart of the strengths of the tradition. But poetry is …one of the most fugitive arts: it can be assigned to memory, taken and hidden in the mind, smuggled into smoky cabin back rooms, recited there and then conveyed only by speech to another person…so it's one of the most likely arts to survive colonization. There's no denying that change has come rapidly to Ireland in the last twenty years--and technological change especially. I doubt that it will have much effect on a poet like myself--my poetry methods were shaped in the age of the pen and the typewriter. But the web will inevitably become a second-nature feature of the environments of poets who are still being formed. I'm fatalistic about that. The struggle of the poet--to be exact, to be truthful, to convey experience in language--won't change because the broadcast medium changes.*

Poet and playwright **Arlitia Jones** lives in Alaska where the winters are 9 months long. She grew up in a family meatpacking plant in Anchorage and according to one little note I dug up, sometimes still works there when she's not on the road with her successful theatre productions. It was in the sub-zero record-breaking month of January (Ohio + how many other states?) that I accidentally discovered Arlitia Jones and today's stellar poem. Check out her simple but oh so smart website with great writing and amusing visuals:
http://arlitia.com/

No more cold poems after today, I promise.

January

Morning is a black wing flaring
at a window feathered in ice
through which there's nothing
to be seen but Anchorage
hunkered under halogen lamps.
Industry stops. Too cold
even to work inside
at Wholesale Tendermeats where
the butchers move like slow bears
dazed in the chill of the cutting room,
white luggers stretched over
bulk of winter coats and longjohns.
At break the coffee in their cups
turns cold before they drink it.
They pass sections of newspaper—
a well-worn currency between them.
I see they're selling health insurance
for pets now, says the bookkeeper
behind the counter, who, at age forty-eight
and uninsured, could finally pay
cash for her first mammogram.
And the butcher scrabbling
his fingers in the candy dish
set out for paying customers swears
These fucking people drive me nuts,
and tells about the border collie
he had when he was a kid. Smacked
by a car, not bad enough to kill it.
I had to hide him under our porch
or my dad would've shot him.
We never heard of a veterinarian.
Says his father worked swing
at the railroad, coupling, un-
coupling the cars. In his house
nothing went to the animals.
Hardly anything to the kids.

In the office black and white
floor tiles tell the lie: wrong and right
remain distinct, one from the other.
It's the cold platform they stand on
every day. Their break
stretches to a half hour and still
they're reluctant to hit it.
With four hours and twenty-six
minutes of light, dark rules
the beginning to every year
and appetite sets the price
for red meat. Out of Nebraska
beef tenders run twelve bucks a pound
when you can get them. For months
Americans have been stockpiling
New Yorks and Tenderloins
to prepare for the barrenness
of a new century. They pay dearly
to avoid hunger, to avoid chicken.
One of the butchers worries
about pipes on the outside wall
of his house. In weather like this
something always busts. Every-
thing shuts down. In her reflection
in the window glass the meat-
wrapper watches herself trying
to breathe warmth into her hands.
The kid who once believed
she would fly, vowed
to throw herself to the wind,
is hunched in a chair, conserving
body heat, cold and grouchy
at the thought of getting up.

—*by Arlitia Jones* (from *The Bandsaw Riots*, Bear Star Press, 2001)

POET NOTES

The Bandsaw Riots by poet **Arlitia Jones** won the Dorothy Brunsman Prize in 2001 and drew many readers and much praise to her work. About the book, poet Linda McCarriston says:*"Mother Jones, Adrienne Rich, Louise Bogan, Hayden Carruth echo in these poems that sing expletive as gorgeously as they do epiphany. Talk about transgression! The Bandsaw Riots blasts past the formalism of content, posture of address, and the entire miniscule, effete world that has long defined American poetry as bourgeois. Bless this voice that has NOT been "normalized" by the academy to fit its basic black of poetic intellectual conformity."*

Arlitia Jones has an MFA from the University of Alaska and is a former adjunct professor in creative writing. She initially shied away from writing for theater "because it was too hard." But Alaska thespian Dawson Moore talked her into participating in the "Alaska Overnighters," a writerly equivalent of a runner's marathon in which authors are given a topic and must create a script from scratch in 12 hours. In the course of just one year, Jones has three stage premieres for "Tornado", "Come to Me, Leopards", and "Rush at Everlasting".

Jones can recite exactly what her college education cost—
"One caribou = two collections of poems" and "Moose, by far the bigger animals, were windfall: / two hardbound anthologies and all of Rich's prose."

Valid Photo Identification Required

I don't understand myself, nor do I know myself, nor
can I explain or prove who I am to anyone else.
All I know is that I'm a man who let his out-
of-state Driver's License expire and who
does not have his original Social Security Card,
(issued at birth?) or a copy of said document,
to obtain which one must have an unexpired
Driver's License, which requires, of course, a valid
Social Security Card. I needed something to get me
on a plane at LaGuardia. I did have a Birth Certificate,
and when I slid it tentatively under the bullet-proof
Plexiglas window at the Brooklyn Social Security Office
and said "What about this?" to the unexpectedly
sympathetic and ontologically sophisticated young
Asian-American man scanning my application
for a replacement card, he looked at me and said:
"This doesn't help. This just proves you were born.
We need proof of your continued existence."
I threw up my hands and looked down at my body,
as if to say, Well, I'm standing here, aren't I?
I admit I have not done much with this life.
I have failed at love, let down my friends,
ignored my best instincts and given my worst ones
free play, but for better or worse I have continued
to exist. Because if I hadn't continued to exist
I wouldn't be contemplating all the joys and deep
satisfactions of non-existence, as I am right now.
I don't imagine the dead are required to show papers
at every river crossing, or that only those with valid
photo ID are allowed into the caldron, or the
harpsichord concert, as the case may be. Often I wake
at 3 a.m., I wanted to tell him, with the night terrors,
scrambled fears of death, which would be one
of the privileges conferred exclusively upon the living,
and often I wish I could forget myself completely,
forget the fragile, worried, rabbit-hearted self
that seems to run my life, forget the whole
nightmarish mess—I wouldn't have that
feeling if I hadn't continued to exist, would I?
It's true, I wanted to confess, I have no children
to mirror me into the future, and mostly I only
half-inhabit the poems I've written, a ghostly
uneasy absence floating just below the lines.
In fact, from the Buddhist perspective
I don't exist, but neither do you, nor any of this.
A luminous emptiness is all there is.

Instead I tell him I just want to visit my parents,
for Christmas, in Nebraska, for christsakes.
Which was no help.

—by John Brehm
(from *Help is On the Way*, first published in *The Gettysberg Review*)

POET NOTES

John Brehm was born in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1942, and has spent most of his post-academic life moving back and forth between Portland, Oregon and New York City.

In 2009, while receiving rejection letters on what would become his second full-length book, *Help Is on the Way,* Brehm got word that his very close nephew George, who was teaching in Japan, had become suddenly and critically ill with a rare liver disease. A transplant was needed and it turned out that Brehm was the only compatible donor. He was off to Kyoto for an experience that would change his life. The arduous operation was successful, but two days later his nephew suffered a brain hemorrhage and died. The doctors and nurses stood vigil in silence with the family in the last hour of George's life. They all rode the hospital elevator together where the body was placed inside a hearse waiting on the busy street. The doctors and nurses bowed a long bow, and held it until the car was gone.

Brehm returned to the states, and found himself unable to sleep through the night, waking up about 3 AM, unable to get back to sleep. This went on for about 9 months, and he began filling these hours capturing pieces of what grew into the 17-page poem "Side By Side." It became the third section of *Help is on the Way*, a title chosen before his nephew's illness.

For a poet whose work is filled with rich humor, this was a very different task. When asked if it was difficult to move from work that was laugh-out-loud humorous to more serious topics: *"No, not really. It's a thin boundary between the comic and the tragic, or about finding something funny in a situation that's also painful. Those things seem intertwined, almost inseparable for me. I don't think they're separate realms."*

Brehm's other work includes *Sea of Faith* (2004) and a chapbook, *The Way Water Moves* (2002). His public readings in and around Portland have a large following, and he regularly teaches workshops at the Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver.

Ten Thousand Baby Mollusks Named Karen Diane

Not to overstate, but this mollusk owes
its life to me. California beach,
softball-size turban shells, a bunch
of young guys showing off for some girls.
Low tide and they found the coiled shell
I'd just picked up and set down.
What is it, what is it, they cried,
turned it over and saw the mollusk's great foot,
one giant white muscle strong enough
to resist the tides, oh gross, one said, a girl,
because it's a snail, really, an unlovely
gelatinous body, it eats with its foot,
moves in ripples of flesh, does not speak,
does not sing or fly or hunt in packs,
the things we humans admire, does not have
a courtship dance, does not groom its mate,
does not look eerily like us or nurse its young.
I'm going to crack it open, one yelled.
And the California-brown boy raised it
over his head.

Later I looked up the shell. *Tegula regina*,
the queen's turban, hard shelled
but on the inside soft, defenseless,
almost let go but not quite, the long arm
of this boy nearly a man, ashamed long enough
to put it back when I screamed no,
carefully even in the water where, in an hour,
the waves would reach. I thought at first
I was the voice of the mollusk, yelling
what it might yell but I was my own voice
shouting over the onshore winds, the surf,
shouting at the long brown arm,
at the queen drawn back
in its stranded shell, splendid,
higher than it had ever been.

—by Karen Skofield

POET'S FORMAL BIO:

Karen Skolfield's book Frost in the Low Areas (2013) won the 2014 PEN New England Award in poetry and the First Book Award from Zone 3 Press. She is a Massachusetts Cultural Council fellow and winner of the Split This Rock poetry prize and the Oboh Prize from Boxcar Poetry Review. Skolfield is the poetry editor for Amherst Live, a twice-yearly production of poetry,

politics, and more, and she's a contributing editor at the literary magazines Tupelo Quarterly and Stirring. She teaches writing to engineers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she earned her Master of Fine Arts.

POET'S IRREVERENT BIO:

This far juicier version was written by a good friend of Karen Skofield. "Karen is married to an electrical engineering professor, which is a field of engineering that is opaque and difficult even to other engineers. She has the same job as I do and is much better at it. She's traveled everywhere. She was in the Army. She's even-headed and sincere and enthusiastic, so much so, that I wonder why she ever associates with me. She almost never listens to music. She doesn't know what's on TV. Her kids are cool and curious and patient. For every cigarette I've ever smoked, she's run a mile. She's a great XC skier. Her only weakness I know of is she's afraid of pond ice. But she skates all the time.

"Whenever I think 'What would Karen do?' I realize that whatever it is, she would have got up earlier and got it done already. She goes to a writing retreat twice a year. She will outlive me by decades.

"She has listened to me complain about almost everything possible and is still willing to speak to me.

"I bet she's really bad at wasting time."

IN HER OWN WORDS—Karen Skofield
How do you define success, as an artist?

My last six months have been a true embarrassment of riches: a book published, the MCC grant, the Split This Rock poetry prize, and most recently, the 2014 PEN New England Award in poetry. I'm over the moon. I find myself giggling at inappropriate moments. But yesterday, an astute journalist asked me, "So what's the opposite of that? What does a lack of success look like?" I realized it's not a lack of publishing or awards – I truly believe that so much of this is due to having my manuscript or application or book in the hands of the right readers. Slippery luck. There's so much great writing out there, and I expect that I will only occasionally get to ring the bell.

When he asked, I understood that the opposite of success for me is not the lack of awards but the absence of writing. I went through nearly 10 years of writing very little, of forgetting the rush of a successful line. I'm so grateful to be back, writing. The awards and publications nudge me toward more writing, more success with writing's joys.

You teach technical writing, presumably to engineers. Does your creative aesthetic enter your teaching? In what way?

Yes, I teach writing to engineers. The engineering students are fabulous folks, smart and sweet and very earnest. And very insecure about writing. Writing terrifies them. Rather than back off from that terror, I instill in them how much writing they'll have in their careers.

Oddly, this seems to relax them – writing becomes just one more thing they have to do, rather than the one thing they fear and avoid. I try to keep class lighthearted : we play with Legos, we reverse engineer paper airplanes, we dissect instructions for tying a tie, we pick apart Fox News graphs and charts, we read hilarious McSweeney's articles and summarize them. So my class planning strives to be creative, even if the writing assignments are more basic with instructions, process descriptions, ethical issues in engineering, and the like.

And it's funny – you'd think that reviewing the basics of grammar and punctuation would be dull, that it would hollow out any love I had for writing, but it does the opposite. My students tease me about how much I love the semicolon, and they're right. Teaching has helped me fall in love with that sexy little piece of punctuation all over again.

Among past poets, who would you like to meet for coffee?

Deceased, for coffee: Anne Sexton. Sappho. Sylvia Plath. Hart Crane. Shakespeare. Wallace Stevens. Agha Shahid Ali. Walt Whitman. Emily Dickinson. Another list that must remain incomplete and barely brushed. But then I think, who could I tell? I mean, let's say I did just have coffee with William Shakespeare. Oh, and he told me EVERYTHING. You wouldn't believe me. My husband wouldn't believe me. I would check myself in somewhere, but still, I would know I had this conversation, and all these answers to giant literary mysteries, and those answers would still die with me. Walt Whitman, I wouldn't be able to help myself, I'd lean across the table and give him one big, sloppy kiss. Probably Sappho, too. Guess I'm not above the need for bragging rights. But again, who could I tell?

April Gift #8—2014 **Invisible Mending**

Poet **C.K. Williams** is the current Elliston Poet-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati. The Elliston Poetry Room, housed within the Langsam Library, has one of the best collections of modern poetry in the country with over 10,000 books, magazines, records and tapes relating to 20th century poetry. Past Elliston Poets-in-Residence have included many of the poets featured in April Gifts: Robert Frost, Randell Jarrell, Donald Hall, David Wagoner, William Stafford, Carolyn Kizer, Louise Gluck, Jean Valentine, Marge Piercy, Mary Oliver, Heather McHugh, Jane Hirshfield, Molly Peacock, and Claudia Emerson who will be featured in April Gifts later in the month. Several members of the Greater Cincinnati Writers League http://cincinnatiwritersleague.org/ (founded in 1930), Cincinnati Writer's Project http://www.cincinnatiwriters.com/ (founded in 1987), along with other poets and writers in the Cincinnati area have had occasional access to teaching clinics and poetry readings by Mr. Williams since his arrival at the University of Cincinnati.

C.K. Williams is particularly well-known for his long-lined almost prose-like poems. Today's poem is an exception—a different kind of music, says Williams. *Invisible Mending* is from *Repair* which won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 2000. Poems in *Repair* have more to do with reconciliation and acceptance than in most of Williams' books, and I was strongly drawn to this one.

Invisible Mending

Three women old as angels,
bent as ancient apple trees,
who, in a storefront window,
with magnifying glasses,
needles fine as hair, and shining
scissors, parted woof from warp
and pruned what would in
human tissue have been sick.

Abrasions, rents and frays,
slits and chars and acid
splashes, filaments that gave
way of their own accord
from the stress of spanning
tiny, trifling gaps, but which
in a wounded psyche
make a murderous maze.

Their hands as hard as horn,
their eyes as keen as steel,
the threads they worked with
must have seemed as thick
as ropes on ships, as cables
on a crane, but still their heads
would lower, their teeth bare
to nip away the raveled ends.

Only sometimes would they
lift their eyes to yours to show

how much lovelier than these twists
of silk and serge the garments
of the mind are, yet how much
more benign their implements
than mind's procedures
of forgiveness and repair.

And in your loneliness you'd notice
how really very gently they'd take
the fabric to its last, with what
solicitude gather up worn edges
to be bound, with what severe
but kind detachment wield
their amputating shears:
forgiveness, and repair.

—by C.K. Williams


POEM NOTE

. . . when I lived in Philadelphia, there was a storefront in which there were three women, and there was a sign that said "Invisible Mending." And I used to stop and watch them because I was fascinated by their concentration and their focus. And then much, much later the poem started growing– I don't really quite know why– and then I began to think about the fates, and the great fates who spin out people's… our lives, our destiny, the length of our lives. And then the poem grew out of an interplay between those two things. —CKW

POET NOTES

C. K. Williams was born in Newark, New Jersey on November 4, 1936. His first book of poetry, *Lies* (Houghton Mifflin) was published in 1969, and since then a prolific stream has followed: his own poetry (more than 20 collections), prose, translations (from Greek, Polish and French), children's books, essays and criticism, anthologies edited, plays and even a song cycle. Williams has won virtually every major poetry award there is to win.

He is famous for his use of long lines, derived from Whitman, and fashioned into a powerful and versatile poetic tool. The length of line reflects thoughts worked out over a long period of time. It also reflects persistence, and the benefits of long-term literary and philosophical engagement.

He splits his year between Princeton, New Jersey, where he has taught since 1995, and Normandy in France, the native country of his wife, French jeweler Catherine Mauger, who he met in 1973. He maintains an active reading and teaching schedule, including his current position as Poet-in-Residence at University of Cincinnati.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—C. K. Williams

When I was about 19, I wrote what I thought was a love poem for a girlfriend, and the feeling of writing it was something I'd never experienced before, although I had read a lot of poems when I was young. My father read poetry to me, encouraged me to memorize poems. But the writing of it was quite a different thing. And somehow right away, after that first poem, although I knew I wasn't trained for it, I had no real background for it, I knew that that was what I was going to do.

Writing poems is incredibly pleasurable and addictive. Something happens when you write–especially poetry, of course, and prose, too. There's a kind of a feeling of something happening to you that's a kind of fusion of will and submission and inspiration that's quite marvelous, where something sometimes will—at its very best—seems to be happening through you and to you, rather than you making it happen. And there's very little in the world that's like that, and very little that's so close that's coming out of your own consciousness into something else.

Poems have a different music from ordinary language, and every poem has a different kind of music of necessity, and that's in a way, the hardest thing about writing poetry is waiting for that music, and sometimes you never know if it's going to come. . . . Sometimes you have a poem that you really want to write and it never happens.

A dark poem is meant to redeem the dark part.
I don't think of reflection on dark things as necessarily dark.

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It was once suggested to me that I avoid posing questions in my poems. One question was pushing it. Two was asking for trouble. Really? You think so? How can you be so sure? Poet **Paisley Rekdal** may border on being impudent, but I feel her questions engage the reader, in part, because she doesn't shrink away from bold declarations either. I won't mention how many questions are in this poem, but I would like to have the three lines that follow the poem's final question engraved on a rock in my garden.

Happiness

I have been taught never to brag but now
I cannot help it: I keep
a beautiful garden, all abundance,
indiscriminate, pulling itself
from the stubborn earth: does it offend you
to watch me working in it,
touching my hands to the greening tips or
tearing the yellow stalks back, so wild
the living and the dead both
snap off in my hands?
The neighbor with his stuttering
fingers, the neighbor with his broken
love: each comes up my drive
to receive his pitying,
accustomed consolations, watches me
work in silence awhile, rises in anger,
walks back. Does it offend them to watch me
not mourning with them but working
fitfully, fruitlessly, working
the way the bees work, which is to say
by instinct alone, which looks like pleasure?
I can stand for hours among the sweet
narcissus, silent as a point of bone.
I can wait longer than sadness. I can wait longer
than your grief. It is such a small thing
to be proud of, a garden. Today
there were scrub jays, quail,
a woodpecker knocking at the white-
and-black shapes of trees, and someone's lost rabbit
scratching under the barberry: is it
indiscriminate? Should it shrink back, wither,
and expurgate? Should I, too, not be loved?
It is only a little time, a little space.
Why not watch the grasses take up their colors in a rush
like a stream of kerosene being lit?
If I could not have made this garden beautiful
I wouldn't understand your suffering,
nor care for each the same, inflamed way.
I would have to stay only like the bees,

beyond consciousness, beyond
self-reproach, fingers dug down hard
into stone, and growing nothing.
There is no end to ego,
with its museum of disappointments.
I want to take my neighbors into the garden
and show them: Here is consolation.
Here is your pity. Look how much seed it drops
around the sparrows as they fight.
It lives alongside their misery.
It glows each evening with a violent light.

—by Paisley Rekdal
from *Animal Eye* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012)

POET NOTES
Paisley Rekdal grew up in Seattle, Washington, the daughter of a Chinese American mother and a Norwegian father. She earned a BA from the University of Washington, an MA from the University of Toronto Centre for Medieval Studies, and an MFA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is the author of the poetry collections *A Crash of Rhinos* (2000), *Six Girls Without Pants* (2002), and *The Invention of the Kaleidoscope* (2007) as well as the book of essays *The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee: Observations on Not Fitting In* (2000). Rekdal currently teaches at the University of Utah, where she is also the creator and editor of the community web history archive project Mapping Salt Lake City.

Voted one of the five best poetry collections for 2012 by *Publishers Weekly, Animal Eye, (*Rekdal's latest book) employs pastoral motifs to engage a discourse on life and love. As *Coal Hill Review* states: *"It is as if a scientist is at work in the basement of the museum of natural history, building a diorama of an entire ecosystem via words. She seems not only interested in using the natural world as a metaphoric lens in her poems but is set on building them item by item into natural worlds themselves."*

Paisley Rekdal's work grapples with issues of race, sexuality, myth, and identity while often referencing contemporary culture. She has been honored with a National Endowment of the Arts Fellowship, a Pushcart Prize, a Village Voice Writers on the Verge Award, and a Fulbright Fellowship to South Korea. Her work has been included in numerous anthologies, including *Legitimate Dangers: American Poets of the New Century* (2006) and the 2010 Pushcart Prize Anthology.

POET'S FUNNYBONE—Paisley Rekdal

The kids I grew up with thought it was hilarious to call me "Parsley". When they got older, they came up with the slightly more brilliant appellation, "Plaid". That said, being a child of the 70's and 80's in pre-Yuppie, Stoner Seattle, I was hardly the sole victim of Bad Parental Decision-Making. Some of my classmates were (and I'm not kidding) "Blueberry" and "Rainbow". In some ways, I think I got off lightly.

My father likes to remind me that, had I been a boy, I would have been named Rufus. RUFUS REKDAL. Let's take a moment to consider the ramifications of that, shall we? Perhaps the universe took pity and intervened on our behalf. I am, after all, an only child. When my mother got really mad, she would yell my name in reverse order, "REKDAL PAISLEY!" weirdly, in a Southern accent like some bad extra playing one of the drill sergeants in Full Metal Jacket.

I sometimes wonder if my name has actually held me BACK a little in my writing career, not just in my own unwillingness to take my work seriously, but in others' reception of my work. I suspect my first poems took a bit longer to publish because who in his right mind would a) want to read the work of someone who must surely be writing the next great anapestic epic about unicorns or b) feel comfortable advocating for anyone whose name evoked Hendrix-inspired air guitar sessions while stoned on cough syrup? While I greatly admire the writing of poets like John Ashbery or Cole Swenson or my friend Alicia (a.k.a. A.E.) Stallings, in all honesty I most envy the sonorous commanding tones–the dour nobility—of their names. I mean "A.E. Stallings." That SOUNDS like a real poet, doesn't it?

I would also like to add that my name has likely also made me instantly sympathetic to the work of other oddly named poets. I feel a rush of tender feeling, for instance, when faced with poems by Cleopatra Mathis, Oni Buchanan or Vona Groarke.

***Would I have ever worn, actually, paisley?** Ha! This is actually a problem for me. There are many, many dresses and scarves I would have bought but for the Paisley Problem. I did, however, break down for one skirt and, recently in Vietnam after all my other clothes literally dissolved from mold, a lovely cotton shift. It's easier to wear paisley in Asia, however. No one there knows that my name is odd, or what the fabric is called.*

NOTE: These quotes were taken from an online interview in June 2012 by Matthew Batt, professor of English and creative writing at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul Minnesota. And yes, that's his real name.

I believe in body poems, poems that rise from the body. A poem is a creature of sound. A poem comes to us, all poems come to us, through the oral tradition. Yes, a poem has a certain life as mere text on a page. But that life as text is only a fraction of the poem's complete life. A poem can't assume its complete life until it's been given voice. . . . A poem has a sound form, it's comprised of a sequence and combination of sounds. A poem has musical devices. A poem has kinetic energy. A poem has risen from the physicality of its maker, and it speaks to the physicality of a listener. . . . For me, writing a good poem means writing an embodied poem.
—Paulann Petersen

Today's poem is a delicious one to say out loud. If you read it . . . *slowly* . . . and . . . *feel* . . . what is asked of you physically, you may get a sense for what Ms. Petersen is suggesting. Can you feel the similar but subtle differences the *p's* and *m's* and *b's* make when your lips come together to pronounce those letters? And the more complex movement of the mouth when combining the *m* and *b* to sound out *'crumbling'* and *'chamber"*? Can you feel the distinct variation that comes when you gently bite your lower lip to form the *f* and the *v* in order to say *'flecked'* and *'viscous"*? What bearing does your breath have on embodying this poem when you speak it out loud?

Appetite

Pale gold and crumbling with crust
mottled dark, almost bronze,
pieces of honeycomb lie on a plate.
Flecked with the pale paper
of hive, their hexagonal cells
leak into the deepening pool
of amber. On your lips,
against palate, tooth and tongue,
the viscous sugar squeezes
from its chambers, sears sweetness
into your throat until you chew
pulp and wax from a blue city
of bees. Between your teeth
is the blown flower and the flower's
seed. Passport pages stamped
and turning. Death's officious hum.
Both the candle and its anther
of flame. Your own yellow hunger.
Never say you can't take
this world into your mouth.

—by Paulann Petersen


POET NOTES

Paulann Petersen was born in Portland in 1942, and has lived her entire life in Oregon. In 2012, she began her second term as Oregon Poet Laureate. So what, exactly, does a poet laureate do? What Paulann does is what she's been doing for a long time: promoting poetry tirelessly and brilliantly. Her schedule of events in service to poetry in Oregon in March and April includes nine events in seven cities, working with teachers, seniors, younger adults, high school and middle school students, putting her 20 years as a high-school teacher to great use.

Erin Fitzpatrick-Bjorn, a Library Services Coordinator describes one such event, a workshop with middle school students in Gresham: "She's so gracious and positive with everyone she meets, every student was engaged with her activity, and took time to talk individually to students after each workshop session. One of the girls who came up to share had written about her favorite food that was a special dish her father prepares for the family. As soon as she heard the poem, Paulann said to the young woman, 'You know what I would like you to do, I would like you to go home and write that poem down and give it to your dad. It would mean so much to him'. "I think that may have been the most powerful moment of the day for me to see. It was a message to that child that her work matters and that her writing is strong and that poetry can affect people -- and getting that message from someone who's a real poet…so much better than just getting it from a teacher."

Petersen has published six full-length books and five chapbooks, and is a very active member of the board of Friends of William Stafford, organizing the annual January William Stafford Birthday Celebrations. Of the over 60 events she coordinated last year, more than 40 took place in Oregon. Other celebrations took place in New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Kansas, Washington, Vermont, Texas, Nevada, and California. Internationally, January William Stafford events have been held in Japan, Sweden, Malaysia, Morocco, Mexico, and Scotland.

QUIRKY POET HOUSE

Petersen lives in a Victorian cottage near the Sellwood Bridge, at Portland's southern edge. Her house is tastefully quirky, not crammed with books but unmistakably the home of a writer. A large photo of Janis Joplin sits on the floor near a whimsical ceramic frog. A row of mannequin hands fills a front window, and a dress model wears a cape from the Alaska Fur Shop, the store her grandfather owned in the Hollywood District. "This is the girlfriend," Petersen says, gesturing at the model. "She gets to wear what she wants. You can tell she's formidable. You don't mess with her."

A few years back, I attended a creative and socially enjoyable workshop facilitated by poet **Jack Ridl** in Holland, Michigan. Three years after that experience I am still benefiting from what I learned under Jack's spell: Take chances. Quiet the inner critic. Pay attention to your passions. Trust your deeper sense of self. Have fun. He is a one of those beloved teachers who makes teaching a subversive act. His casual manner belies his depth of knowledge; you don't know what hit you (in a good way) until after the fact—zen-like. His new collection of poems, *Practicing to Walk Like a Heron,* was published in February, 2013 by Wayne State University Press. Jack's more personal poems in this collection are set apart by a section of circus-themes poems adding visions of elephants, trumpets, tents, sequins, and sideshows, and the uniquely travel-weary perspectives of jugglers, trapeze artists, clowns, and roustabouts. The economy of words in today's poem is a little master class for poets. The line breaks are high strikers. This poem hits the bell with the hammer.

To get a good sense of Jack Ridl's understanding of poetry, check out the following:
http://throughthe3rdeye.com/node/1146
His TED talk is worth more than one sitting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXA_qbItcmc
Jack's website: http://ridl.wordpress.com/

Roustabout

It's a bed. Can't gripe.
Plenty of coffee. Have
my mug. Been here
with the show ten years.
Once took off to try
some factory work.
Hated it. Every day
was Monday. Always
the same place. Here it's
a new town, something
new to talk about, deal
with—mud, wind, broken
rigging, ripped canvas.

During matinees we bet
on Alfredo, if he'll try
a triple, and every night
after tear down, we see
if the town's got any action.
But you turn on a townie,
you're gone. One guy lost it
in Nebraska somewhere. "No
one pulls a knife on me," he
growled walking off the lot.

Most guys last two, three years.
A few jump mid-July. I can't
settle. Rather be nowhere, be
nobody. Put up the tent,
play some cards, during the show
take a nap, eat, tear down, roll up
the canvas, pull up the stakes.

—by Jack Ridl

JACK RIDL FEATURED AT HOCKING HILLS POETRY FESTIVAL APRIL 25/26 Jack is delighted to be featured at the annual Hocking Hills Poetry Festival in a gorgeous part of Ohio. Alan Cohen of Logan, Ohio is the master of ceremonies for this year's program titled *The Deliberate Path of Kindness.* For details go to: http://powerofpoetry.org/home.htm

POET NOTES

Jack Ridl grew up in both the world of basketball where his father was a well-known head coach at Westminster College and the University of Pittsburgh, and the world of the circus, inherited from his mother's family. In Jack's words: *My mother was raised with a cousin so they were like brother and sister. Cousin Albert, when I came on the scene, took me in. My father was overseas in WWII and Cousin Albert was a circus man. Circuses were in his blood since he was little. He ended up owning a circus—they had to be tent shows, not shows inside buildings. It's a whole world. So when I was a kid during the circus season, primarily during the summer, he and I would travel around and do circuses. He knew everybody. So I was always behind the scenes. In the sports world I was behind the scenes with my father and in the circus world, I wasn't watching the show, I was always in the back lot or hanging out with the elephant trainer after the act.*

JACK'S WORKSHOPS, ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS Retired from college teaching at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, Jack Ridl now conducts workshops and one-on-one sessions. More than 90 of his former students are now published authors. Jack's web site is www.ridl.com He lives in Holland with his wife, Julie, along a creek that winds into Lake Michigan. Their daughter is the artist, Meridith Ridl.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Jack Ridl

What do you see as your job as a teacher? What do you try to do in the classroom? *The thing about me is I'm not too big on education so I've always felt like, 'well I'm working with students on poetry here. I could also be working with students on poetry in my garage, in the church basement, or out in the field.' The education part is irrelevant. I'm not here to educate anyone. I'm here to give people poems, that's what I want them to have for the rest of their lives. I'm not about educating anybody. I didn't even like school. So, maybe that's ultra subversive, to be in an educational institution and not be terribly affirming of education.*

I always thought if you [students] got into something, your own inner selves would master it. The mastery comes from within. I can't make you, well I could, but then you'd just be an ox pulling a cart and I'd be there cracking the whip. I want the ox to want to pull the cart. And if not, then just munch some grass. It doesn't bother me any! ***I really don't want to be the person who makes you 'master' something. I like students to discover what they want to master and that they can. If they discover it, then I can help them do that. Then I can say, here's how to use a line break. But to make you, I'm not interested. You have your spirit and I don't want to violate it, but I'm here to help you be with it, find it, go with it, develop it - that's my job.***

I know why you tap the bat four times before stepping into the batter's box. Most call this a superstition. I don't think it is. I think it's something that shifts the psyche into the place it's meant to be. So yeah, a certain pen, blank book, comfortable chair, ragged shirt and comfortable socks, all that stuff creates something like integration. Whew, heavy. And I've a chair that looks out a window down the creek behind our house. At the same time, I developed a way to write that enables me to start writing anytime. Kind of like Frank O'Hara saying something like he better know he can write on a Manhattan bus at rush hour.

. . . I don't want poetry to be just another thing to "Deal with, cope with." Nope. The "work" is a joy. It always rewards, brings realizations and surprises. I'm a basketball coach's son. You learn early that work is not tedium. It's a profound form of play, joy. You learn to play the game. I loved to practice. I'd practice all day. Same with poems. And it's not to be misunderstood as taking things lightly or just messing around or settling for. I love the revision part. It's practice. "Let's see if I can crossover dribble and hit a fadeaway."

I met poet and psychotherapist **Gail Martin** last October on my way home from one of my trips to northern Michigan. I made an extra stop for a poetry reading in Kalamazoo to hear two of my favorite Michigan poets—Jack Ridl (featured yesterday) and Susan Blackwell Ramsey (featured in April Gifts in 2013) read at a fabulous independent bookstore called The Bookbug http://www.bookbugkalamazoo.com/. I was amazed that nearly a hundred people came out on a cold and rainy weekday night to listen to poetry. Gail read today's poem from her new book *Begin Empty-Handed* and I had a lovely conversation with her afterward when she signed a copy for me.

I'm especially smitten by today's poem because I know its geography so well. When I'm up in the Leelanau Peninsula, I hike the trails at Port Oneida, ride my bike on Voice Road, go dipping at North Bar Lake, and have eaten more than a few meals at Good Harbor Grill in Glen Arbor. Aside from those personal joys, this poem strikes a haunting note you may resonate with.

I Don't Want To Say How Lost I've Been

Missed my road by Cathead Point, took the wrong loop on the trail at Port Oneida.
Got so turned around on Voice Road by North Bar Lake I couldn't speak for three
days. I went to the IGA after it closed. Good Harbor Grill doesn't serve dinner.
I never know which side of the road the river will be on. It takes me a while to
realize I'm lost. You could call that confidence or part of the problem. Lake = north,
lake – north, I say to myself, but lake = west and northwest a bit down the road,
and there's a lake to the east here too. A friend's husband draws a map by hand
each time she leaves, CANADA at the top; MEXICO at the bottom. The oceans
are implied. This is to help her know if she overshoots a turn. I understand. I love
maps, the names, the blue shapes of lakes and rivers. I can find my way anywhere
theoretically. What's hard is the YOU ARE HERE part. And it isn't exactly
loneliness, although I'm calling it that.

—by Gail Martin

POET NOTES

Gail Martin is the author of *Begin Empty-Handed*, newly released from Perugia Press, an independent press in Massachusetts. Her manuscript won the 2013 Perugia Press Poetry Prize, selected from over 500 manuscripts. This is fast becoming one of my favorite new reads! Her work is also featured in the anthology *Poetry in Michigan*, *Michigan in Poetry* by New Issues Press.

Ms. Martin is widely published. Recent work appears in *Alaska Quarterly Review, Prairie Schooner,* and *The Southern Review* and in the anthology *Sweeping Beauty* (University of Iowa). Her first book *The Hourglass Heart* (New Issues Press) was published in 2003. She is a Michigan native with roots in both southern and northern Michigan. Gail works as a psychotherapist in private practice in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

More information on Gail Martin can be found on her website:
http://www.gailmartinpoetry.com/

IN HER OWN WORDS—Gail Martin

About her new book *Begin Empty-Handed*, Gail says this: *It speaks, I think, to our need to make space for both the wonder and miracle of everyday living, but also the harsh pain of knowing that all that we are attached to and all that we love will ultimately be taken away. . . I have a strong identification with the ideal so I tend to be disappointed a lot when life doesn't live up to that. So I need to work to stay open to the possibility that life being different than what I thought it was going to be means that it's different, not necessarily that it's less.*

Galway Kinnell Reads James Wright, Martins Ferry, Ohio, April 13, 1991

1: *He Reads, And Is Interrupted*

Rich and plain
as his linen shirt after he sheds his jacket
(we wait for the workman next
to roll his sleeves, forearms
over the lectern
as over the fenders
of a car, wrenches and hammers
rattling in the pocket of his tweed),
Galway's voice moves out among us, slow, tentative,
tough supple garfish probing the banks.
Bly presides to his right, *ex cathedra*,
the wild scud of his hair
a squall, his eyes closed
so that the words may enter his skin
as wrens might hallow red air.

Then three quick blasts
from the emergency airhorn three
more *hahn hahn hahn* three
more:
sound stunning as falling I-beams,
torpedoed propane tanks,
colliding reefers or coalcars.

Galway smiles, blinks, gapes about, unsettled.
The audience, outlanders mostly, scholars,
poets, a few working stiffs from somewhere else
in the world, all shift and mumble
till the silence focuses again.
Gurgle of a coffeemaker somewhere,
library murmur: Galway reads on.

Meanwhile, slipping outside,
I see the life squads, four or five
ambulances, pulling into the millgate by the river.
Outside Dutch Henry's bar, three men
stand smoking on the curb:
of course they have lived the lives of tough angels,
Wright would have had it no other way,
would have had them step out of a joint
as out of the river's darkest channel,
wiping their hands on their pants and cursing,
as they do right here.
Nor would they have faces other than these:

Coleridge, Goethe, the old Leonardo,
that dusty-browed mechanic.
Nor is there around them any nimbus
but graylight and the stink of slag.
There's blood, maybe, in the mill down there,
freshly broken bone, flesh snagged, flayed, scorched—
the thousand wounds this place inflicts—
and where the railroad bends along the river,
old snow like drifts of broken fathers
slumps ashore.

2: *Life Here*

No fault of Robert's or Galway's
that they do not understand
the three blasts on the horn.
There are birds that live here
whose names remain, even to the natives,
completely unknown,
birds that walk the depths of river
among chains and broken towboats,
nesting in the silted skulls of virgins.

There are animals in these parts
that eat fire, chlorine, slag,
and that have eighteen stomachs to
digest them into willow leaves and flies.
Poetry means nothing.

There are teachers walking the streets here
wearing brass knuckles, married to
iron bridges and drowned Buicks.

There are restaurants just upriver,
along the railroad tracks,
where a thousand last meals
have been eaten, and bars where
no one drinks.

Churches that scream.

Hillsides bleeding children.

Catfish that will not be opened,
even by fishermen's knives.

3: *Wright, Speaking From Heaven*

I ran away from this place
forty years ago, and was smart to do it:
why do you come back, friends of mine,

strangers with pens in your pockets,
talking a load of pious crap among those I avoided
and those who often hated me?
Listen: places hardly ever want their poets.

Ah, Christ, you know I love you.
Come clean. Nothing has changed.
The rich still devour the poor.

Tell them what America has done,
what America has failed to do—
tell them why you keep coming back,
putting my words in your mouths.

—by Richard Hague
from *During The Recent Extinctions: New & Selected Poems 1984-2012*

POET NOTES

Richard Hague is author of fourteen collections of poetry and prose, most recently *Learning How: Stories Yarns & Tales* (Bottom Dog Press, 2011) and *During The Recent Extinctions: New & Selected Poems 1984-2012* (Dos Madres Press, 2012) for which he received the 2012 Weatherford Award in Poetry. Semi-retired, he teaches at Purcell Marian High School in Cincinnati, Ohio and occasionally at Thomas More College, Crestview Hills, Kentucky. He was recently the featured writer at the Emory & Henry Literary Festival, and will be Visiting Writer at Appalachian State University in April 2014. He owns and operates Erie Gardens, an urban mini-farm in Madisonville, a neighborhood of Cincinnati.

Originally from Steubenville, Ohio, Mr. Hague is a graduate of Xavier University, Cincinnati. He occasionally serves as critic for the Greater Cincinnati Writers League http://cincinnatiwritersleague.org/ an organization of aspiring poets founded in 1930. Known for his passion for poetry and generosity as a critic and teacher, Richard Hague is respected and admired by writers and students throughout the Cincinnati area.

The Poet's Hierarchy
for Galway Kinnell and
for the Poet Populist Movement

It's as if, here too, there's a hierarchy:
a Poet's Heaven, where the favored few
live, feeding on fame, Pulitzers and paychecks
on parties, applause and book signings
in the midst of endless wine and crackers and cheese.
O the celebrity! O the throngs!
And then there are the rest of us
also in love with the word, the mystery:
we dance, unnoticed, in the alleys of the world
we dance, barefoot, on the pavement, in mud --
we are the peasants, the gypsies, the beggars
dancing outside the Poet's Heaven,
dancing, nonetheless, under stars.

—by Pesha Joyce Gertler
Published in *Chrysanthemum*

POET NOTES
Pesha Joyce Gertner was born in Portland, Oregon, and went to Brooklyn with her father after her mother's death when she was 17 months old.

Gertner returned to the northwest, first to Portland for undergraduate work, and eventually settling in Seattle, where she earned an M.A. in Creative Writing, with a focus on women poets. She had found her calling, and in 1981, founded "Self-Discovery for Women through Creative Writing", which in turn spawned a community or women writers in Seattle that has thrives today. Her Mission Statement: *The silence of women's voices through the centuries led me to create a stimulating yet safe space where women's voices can be respected and nurtured. My commitment is to maintain this space so that women writers always have a circle, a home, a temple to which they can return. It is my belief that through hearing the voices of all of humanity, instead of only half, the balance that is gained will heal the entire human family.*

Gertner joined the faculty of North Seattle Community College in 1984, and in 1987 she co-founded and coordinated "After Long Silence," a monthly reading series for women poets, still taking place at the school, now expanded to include male voices. Gertner has published one chapbook, *The Healing Time: Finally on My Way to Yes* (Pudding House 2008) and has had many poems published in a variety of journals.

In 2005, she was elected to Seattle's position of Poet Populist, established in 1999 and unique to the city, in which local poets are nominated by various literary organizations, then selected in a city-wide popular vote.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Peshna Joyce Gertler

I grew up in an extended tri-generational, bi-lingual family of story tellers, poets, dreamers, who lured me into the magical world of language. As an imaginative only child, poets and writers became my closest friends. My Jewish immigrant grandmother's need to work in the sweatshops (for family survival), precluded an education. Hence, she could neither read nor write in English, and through her, I learned how language can shut one out as well as draw one in. Out of this heritage, my love and respect for language grew, my appreciation of the magic and power of words.

April Gift #15—2014 **To Judge Faolain, Dead Long Enough: A Summons**

Linda McCarriston *accomplishes a near miracle, transforming memories of trauma into poems that are luminous and often sacramental, arriving at a hard-won peace.* — poet Lisel Mueller

I read McCarriston's book *Eva-Mary* twenty years ago and was stunned by her fearless record of the domestic abuse that marred her childhood in working-class Lynn, Massachusetts. Her unflinching poems even encompass compassion for the pain-inflictors while still holding them accountable. Today's poem left a lasting impression and infused me with courage to write my own narratives.

To Judge Faolain, Dead Long Enough: A Summons

Your Honor, when my mother stood
before you, with her routine
domestic plea, after weeks
of waiting for speech
to return to her body, with her
homemade forties hairdo, her face purple still
under pancake, her jaw off just a little,
her *holy of holies* healing,
her breasts wrung, her heart
the bursting heart of someone
snagged among rocks deep
in a sharkpool – no, not "someone,"

but a woman there, snagged
with her babies, *by* them,
in one of hope's pedestrian
brutal turns – when, in the tones
of parlors overlooking the harbor,
you admonished that, for the sake
of the family, the wife
must take the husband back to her bed,
what you willed not to see before you
was a woman risen clean to the surface,
a woman who, with one arm flailing,
held up with the other her actual

burdens of flesh. When you clamped
to her leg the chain of *justice,*
you ferried us back down to *the law,*
the black ice eye, the maw, the mako
that circles the kitchen table nightly.
What did you make of the words
she told you, not to have heard her,
not to have seen her there? Almost-
forgivable ignorance, you were not
the fist, the boot, or the blade,
but the jaded, corrective ear and eye
at the limits of her world. Now

I will you to see her as she was, to ride
your own words back into light: I call
your spirit home again, divesting you
of robe and bench, the fine white hand
and half-lit Irish eye. Tonight, put on
a body in the trailer down the road
where your father, when he can't
get it up, makes love to your mother
with a rifle. Let your name be
Eva-Mary. Let your hour of birth
be dawn. Let your life be long
and common, and your flesh endure.

—by Linda McCarriston
from *Eva-Mary* (Texas Tech Press)

POET NOTES
Linda McCarriston is on the faculty of the low-residency MFA program at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. She lives in Rockport, Massachusetts, and also shares citizenship with Ireland. McCarriston completed her MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College in Vermont, and a BFA at Emmanuel College in Boston.

Five of McCarriston's poems first appeared in 1979 in *Ploughshare*. Her poems have since appeared in many other journals and in a broad range of anthologies. She has received numerous prizes and awards for her work including two literature fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. Of her three collections, *Talking Soft Dutch, Eva-Mary* and *Little River,* the award-winning *Eva-Mary* (Tri-Quarterly Books/ Northwestern University Press) has received the most attention.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Linda McCarriston

Bill Moyers asked McCarriston: *How do you decide to write about such painful experiences?*

MCCARRISTON*: Those who argue that poetry says the unsayable generally mean the unsayably beautiful or the unsayably profound, but the unsayable can also mean what people simply don't want said, ever. That's why poetry is extremely radical—poetry allows the individual experience to strike like lightning through the collective institutional consciousness and to plumb the depths of actual communal experience so that what people don't want said in fact gets said, and in a way that is unignorable.*

The simplest definition of poetry that I have is heightened speech. I think that poetry is truly inspired, truly vatic or bardic. It is extraordinary speech that at times comes through a poet with extraordinary power. It allows one to speak with a voice of power that is not, in fact, granted to one by the culture. In other words, as a woman in this culture I did not have the stature from which to speak those poems. I was simply a common woman — I was not authorized to speak in my institutional way, I was not a judge, I was not a priest; I was not a psychiatrist, I was simply a housewife — and yet the stature and authority of poetry itself visited me, permitted me, enlivened me, enlarged me, and those poems were written by me. If I had been a novelist, I think I might have been able to do something similar, but the fact that poetry does not respect institutional power and that it comes to all sorts of people means that I was permitted to assume a voice of stature to utter these poems.

Here is an insightful interview with Linda McCarriston by TriQuarterly Online in which Linda talks poems of bardic speech—public vs poems of lyric speech—private.
http://www.triquarterly.org/interviews/linda-

April Gift #16—2014 **Mother**

I write for other people with the hope that I can help them to see the wonderful things within their everyday experiences. In short, I want to show people how interesting the ordinary world can be if you pay attention.... Poetry's purpose is to reach other people and to touch their hearts. If a poem doesn't make sense to anybody but its author, nobody but its author will care a whit about it.—Ted Kooser

Mother

Mid April already, and the wild plums
bloom at the roadside, a lacy white
against the exuberant, jubilant green
of new grass and the dusty, fading black
of burned-out ditches. No leaves, not yet,
only the delicate, star-petaled
blossoms, sweet with their timeless perfume.

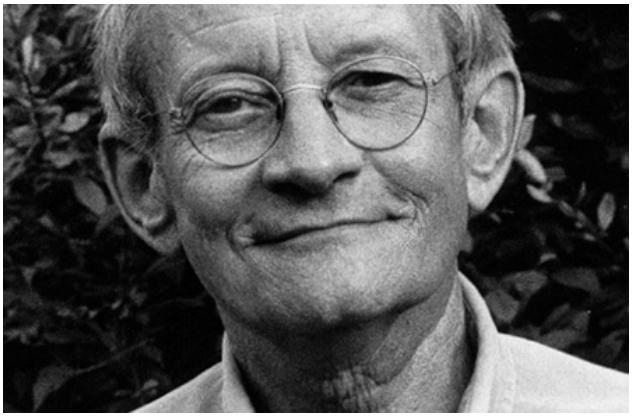
You have been gone a month today
and have missed three rains and one nightlong
watch for tornadoes. I sat in the cellar
from six to eight while fat spring clouds
went somersaulting, rumbling east. Then it poured,
a storm that walked on legs of lightning,
dragging its shaggy belly over the fields.

The meadowlarks are back, and the finches
are turning from green to gold. Those same
two geese have come to the pond again this year,
honking in over the trees and splashing down.
They never nest, but stay a week or two
then leave. The peonies are up, the red sprouts
burning in circles like birthday candles,

for this is the month of my birth, as you know,
the best month to be born in, thanks to you,
everything ready to burst with living.
There will be no more new flannel nightshirts
sewn on your old black Singer, no birthday card
addressed in a shaky but businesslike hand.
You asked me if I would be sad when it happened

and I am sad. But the iris I moved from your house
now hold in the dusty dry fists of their roots
green knives and forks as if waiting for dinner,
as if spring were a feast. I thank you for that.
Were it not for the way you taught me to look
at the world, to see the life at play in everything,
I would have to be lonely forever.

—by Ted Kooser



POET BIO

Ted Kooser was born on April 25, 1939 in Ames, Iowa. He began writing poetry from the time he was quite young and got serious about it as a teenager. He took a position teaching high school after graduating from Iowa State University in 1962. He later received an M.A. from the University of Nebraska in 1968. Realizing that he had to make a living, Kooser took an entry-level job with an insurance company in Nebraska. Throughout his insurance career, Kooser kept on writing, usually from about five-thirty to seven o'clock each morning before he went to the office. He says: *"I never saw myself as an insurance executive, but rather as a writer in need of a paying job."* He would remain in the industry until 1999, retiring (as a vice-president) due to a serious encounter with cancer. He is now retired and teaching half time at The University of Nebraska. Kooser is married to Kathleen Rutledge, retired editor of The Lincoln Journal Star. They have one son and two grandchildren.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Ted Kooser
In order to write a good poem, the poet must read as much poetry as he or she can. Read fifty or a hundred poems by others for every one you try to write of your own.

Considering the ways in which so many of us waste our time, what would be wrong with a world in which everybody were writing poems? After all, there's a significant service to humanity in spending time doing no harm. While you're writing your poem, there's one less scoundrel in the world. And I'd like a world, wouldn't you, in which people actually took time to think about what they were saying? It would be, I'm certain, a more peaceful, more reasonable place. I don't think there could ever be too many poets. By writing poetry, even those poems that fail and fail miserably, we honor and affirm life. We say 'We loved the earth but could not stay'. —TK

DANA GIOIA ON TED KOOSER

Ted Kooser is a "popular poet"—not one who sells millions of books, but popular in that unlike most of his peers he writes naturally for a nonliterary public. His style is accomplished but extremely simple—his diction drawn from common speech, his syntax conversational. His subjects are chosen from the everyday world of the Great Plains, and his sensibility, though more subtle and articulate, is that of the average Midwesterner. Kooser never makes an allusion that an intelligent but unbookish reader will not immediately grasp. There is to my knowledge no poet of equal stature who writes so convincingly in a manner the average American can understand and appreciate. —DG

WRITING THROUGH ILLNESS

In the late 1990s, Kooser developed cancer and gave up both his insurance job and writing. When he began to write again, it was to paste daily poems on postcards he sent in correspondence with his friend and fellow writer Jim Harrison. The result was the collection of poems called *Winter Morning Walks: 100 Postcards to Jim Harrison* (2001). In poems both playful and serious, Kooser avoids talking directly about his illness. Rather, he refers to disease and the possibility of dying in metaphors focusing on the countryside around his Nebraska home, where he took long walks for inspiration. Kooser again teamed up with Harrison to publish *Braided Creek: A Conversation in Poetry* (2003)—their correspondence consisting of entirely short poems written to each other while Kooser was recovering from cancer.

Information about Ted Kooser's life, his numerous books and awards, can be found at http://www.tedkooser.com.

April Gift #17—2014 **Accident**

I am drawn to poems that show evidence of empathy and compassion. Today's poem was written when the poet's oldest son Noah was in the sixth grade. **Todd Davis** says: *This poem was born out of sorrow and out of the conundrum of how to help my son enter such a world where fathers die by their own hands. I only hoped my poem could help Noah see some way to stand by his classmate, to show some kind of mercy.*

Accident

They tell the son, who tells his friends
at school, that the father's death was
an accident, that the rifle went off
while he was cleaning it. I'm not sure
why he couldn't wait. We understand
the ones who decide to leave us in February,
even as late as March. Snows swell.
Sun disappears. Hunting season ends.
With two deer in the freezer any family
can survive. I know sometimes
it feels like you've come to the end
of something. Sometimes you just want
to sit down beneath a hemlock and never go
back. But this late in the year, when plum
trees have opened their blossoms?
Yesterday it was so warm we slept
with the windows open. Smell of forsythia
right there in the room. I swear
you could hear the last few open,
silk petals come undone, a soft sound
like a pad sliding through a gun's barrel,
white cloth soaked in bore cleaner,
removing the lead, the copper, the carbon
that fouls everything. My son knows
you don't die cleaning your rifle:
the chamber's always open.
I told him to nod his head anyway
when his friend tells the story,
to say yes as many times as it takes,
to never forget the smell of smoke
and concrete, the little bit of light
one bulb gives off in a basement
with no windows.

—by Todd Davis
"Accident" first appeared in *The Least of These* (Michigan State University Press, 2010)

POET NOTES

Todd Davis, was born and raised in Elkhart, Indiana, the son of a veterinarian father and a Methodist minister mother. He teaches creative writing, American literature, and environmental studies at Penn State University's Altoona College.

Todd Davis is the author of four full-length collections of poetry--*In the Kingdom of the Ditch*, *The Least of These*, *Some Heaven*, and *Ripe*—as well as of a limited edition chapbook, *Household of Water, Moon, and Snow: The Thoreau Poems*. His poetry has been featured on the radio by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac* and by Ted Kooser in his syndicated newspaper column *American Life in Poetry*. His poems have won the Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Prize and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Todd Davis
(from 'How a Poem Happens'—an online blog by Brian Brodeur)
Usually when I draft a poem I stay at it for at least a few hours. Then for the next three or four days I keep checking up on the temperature of the poem. What this means is that the poem undergoes some form of revision—often minor adjustments, like line breaks or single word replacements, but occasionally major rearrangements occur, too. I don't remember exactly with this poem ("Accident"), but I'd hazard a guess that it went through at least twelve to fifteen "revisions." (I put "revisions" in quotation marks because with this poem it was minor tinkering.)

I'd imagine I'm not alone in making the mistake of getting a poem in the mail too soon, however. But when poems come back to me I try to have a forty-eight hour rule. I read them carefully a few times. If they still seem to be working, they must be back in the mail within forty-eight hours. After all, part of the trick of getting a poem into the broader world through publishing is to make sure it's in circulation with editors. When you think of the astronomical odds of getting a poem published in some journals, then you realize, like a major league batter, you have to see a lot of pitches before you get your bat on a ball.

I don't believe in the perfect poem. That's not to say that I don't try to polish and polish my work. . . . Even after a poem of mine is published in a journal it often goes through another revision or two before entering a book manuscript and being published in that context. So: all poems are finally abandoned. *But just like the creators of poems—all of us imperfect, all of us fallible—the poems themselves are all the more beautiful and valuable to me for their imperfections.* —TD
For more information about poet Todd Davis: http://www.todddavispoet.com/

April Gift #18—2014 **Adelaide Crapsey**

Today's poem is somewhat of an oddity. It's actually been critiqued as "a disappointing lyric tribute". So why does it merit a spot in this year's offerings? Well, I wanted to share with you my discovery of poet Adelaide Crapsey because I feel she deserves to be better known and I thought this poem was a good introduction. I was also moved by the heart if this poem. The poet's words, "your mouth of blue pansy", brought tears to my eyes.

Adelaide Crapsey

Among the bumble-bees in red-top hay, a freckled field of
brown-eyed Susans dripping yellow leaves in July,
I read your heart in a book.

And your mouth of blue pansy—I know somewhere I have
seen it rain-shattered.

And I have seen a woman with her head flung between her
naked knees, and her head held there listening to the
sea, the great naked sea shouldering a load of salt.

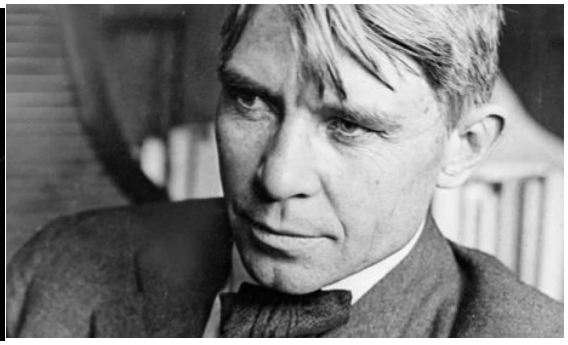
And the blue pansy mouth sang to the sea:
Mother of God, I'm so little a thing,
Let me sing longer,
Only a little longer.

And the sea shouldered its salt in long gray combers hauling
new shapes on the beach sand.

—by Carl Sandburg

There are two poets at work in today's offering: **Adelaide Crapsey** and **Carl Sandburg**—both born in 1878. Never heard of **Adelaide Crapsey**? Neither had I, until a year ago when I discovered the cinquain, a poetic form she adopted, developed and Americanized.

Adelaide Crapsey



Carl Sandburg

POET NOTES

Adelaide Crapsey was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1878, and raised in Rochester. At Vassar College she was class poet for three years. After a brief teaching career, Adelaide developed consumption, an archaic name for pulmonary tuberculosis, and died at thirty-five in 1914. She was said to be bereft and sometimes bitter about her impending death, yet she remained impassioned about her writing to the end. Her interest in rhythm and meter inspired her to create a unique variation on the cinquain. The year following her death, a posthumous selection of her cinquains and other poems was published. Carl Sandburg's poem, "Adelaide Crapsey", brought her work to wider attention.

THE CINQUAIN

The cinquain is a short poem consisting of five lines. **Adelaide Crapsey** did not invent the five-line poem. The Sicilian quintain, the English quintain, the Spanish quintella, the Japanese tanka, and the French cinquain all predate hers. What she did invent, however, is a distinct American version of the five-line poem. Inspired by Japanese haiku and tanka and based on her advanced knowledge of metrics, she believed her form "to be the shortest and simplest possible in English verse" containing, respectively, two, four, six, eight, and two syllables with accentual stress patterns of 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 1. Adelaide also broke with tradition by titling her cinquains and used initial capitalization exclusively for each of the cinquain's five lines. Here are two samples of Adelaide's cinquain.

Niagara

Seen on a Night in November
How frail
Above the bulk
Of crashing water hangs,
Autumnal, evanescent, wan,
The moon

Triad

These be
Three silent things:
The falling snow...the hour
Before the dawn... the mouth of one
Just dead.

POET NOTES

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) was born in a three-room cottage in Galesburg, Illinois in 1878. Behind that modest house in a small wooded park, the ashes of Carl Sandburg are buried beneath Remembrance Rock. Sandburg worked from the time he was a young boy. He quit school following his graduation from eighth grade in 1891 and spent a decade working a variety of jobs. He delivered milk, harvested ice, laid bricks, threshed wheat in Kansas, and shined shoes in a hotel before traveling as a hobo in 1897. As a hobo he saw first-hand the sharp contrast between rich and poor, which instilled in him a distrust of capitalism. His experiences working and traveling greatly influenced his writing and political views, as did his college years.

He was virtually unknown to the literary world when, in 1914, a group of his poems appeared in the nationally circulated *Poetry* magazine. Two years later his book *Chicago Poems* was published, and the thirty-eight-year-old author found himself on the brink of a career that would ultimately bring him international acclaim.

April Gift #19— 2014 **Sweetness**

Stephen Dunn's poems often demonstrate that 'to tell' is just as good as 'to show' if you have something worth telling.

Sweetness

Just when it has seemed I couldn't bear
one more friend
waking with a tumor, one more maniac

with a perfect reason, often a sweetness
has come
and changed nothing in the world

except the way I stumbled through it,
for a while lost
in the ignorance of loving

someone or something, the world shrunk
to mouth-size,
hand-size, and never seeming small.

I acknowledge there is no sweetness
that doesn't leave a stain,
no sweetness that's ever sufficiently sweet ….

Tonight a friend called to say his lover
was killed in a car
he was driving. His voice was low

and guttural, he repeated what he needed
to repeat, and I repeated
the one or two words we have for such grief

until we were speaking only in tones.
Often a sweetness comes
as if on loan, stays just long enough

to make sense of what it means to be alive,
then returns to its dark
source. As for me, I don't care

where it's been, or what bitter road
it's traveled
to come so far, to taste so good.

—by Stephen Dunn
from *New and Selected Poems 1974-1994*

POET NOTES

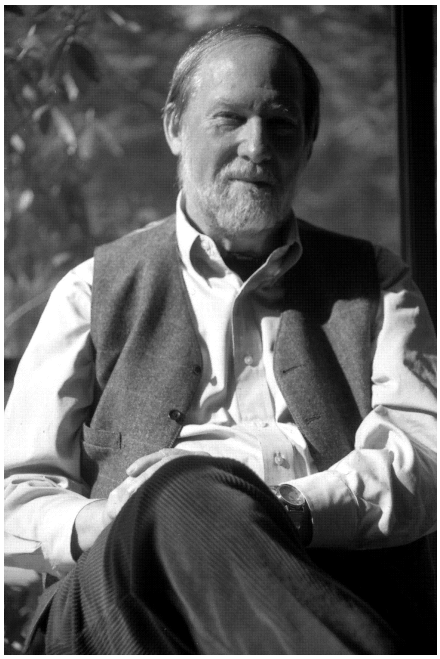
Stephen Dunn, born in 1939 in New York City, has written seventeen collections of poetry, and has won numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his 2001 collection, *Different Hours*. Since 1974 Dunn has taught at Richard Stockton College of NJ, where he is Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Stephen Dunn

My barometer for myself when I'm writing is that I'm not truly in my poem until I've actually startled myself, and if that doesn't occur, I'm probably working with my conventional work-a-day mind too much and for too long. For me, poems come alive when I start to say something that I didn't quite know I was capable of saying.

. . . one of the things that I certainly don't want to do in poems is treat somber subjects somberly. I'm fond of Frost's notion that "if it is with outer seriousness, it must be with inner humor. If it is with outer humor, it must be with inner seriousness".

I'm an inveterate reviser. I'm just always doing that. In my lifetime, there have been a handful of poems that have been finished without much revision, but only a handful. I often go to Yaddo or McDowell in the summers and tend to generate a lot of work without worrying about completing it. Then I spend the next year refining those poems and getting them in shape. A fairly new experience that I've been having is revision as expansion. Most of us know about revision as an act of paring down. Several years ago, in looking at my work, I saw that I was kind of a page or page and a half kind of poet, which meant that I was thinking of closure around the same time in every poem. I started to confound that habit. By mid-poem, I might add a detail that the poem couldn't yet accommodate. That's especially proven to be an interesting and useful way of revising poems that seem too slight or thin; to add something, put an obstacle in. The artificial as another way to arrive at the genuine—an old story, really.



Natalie Diaz's book, *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2012) stems from experiences rooted in Native American life, with an important focus on her brother's crystal meth addiction after returning from deployment in the Iraq War. Take note: There is a second poem embedded at the end of today's entry.

Why I Don't Mention Flowers When Conversations with My Brother Reach Uncomfortable Silences

Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.
—Wislawa Szymborska

In the Kashmir mountains,
my brother shot many men,
blew skulls from brown skins,
dyed white desert sand crimson.

What is there to say to a man
who has traversed such a world,
whose hands and eyes have
betrayed him?

Were there flowers there? I asked.

This is what he told me:

In a village, many men
wrapped a woman in a sheet.
She didn't struggle.
Her bare feet dragged in the dirt.

They laid her in the road
and stoned her.

The first man was her father.
He threw two stones in a row.
Her brother had filled his pockets
with stones on the way there.

The crowd was a hive
of disturbed bees. The volley
of stones against her body
drowned out her moans.

Blood burst through the sheet
like a patch of violets,
a hundred roses in bloom.

—by Natalie Diaz
(from *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, Copper Canyon Press, 2012)

POET NOTES

Natalie Diaz grew up in the Fort Mojave Indian Village in Needles, California, on the banks of the Colorado River. She now lives in Mohave Valley, Arizona, where she continues to writes poetry while spearheading an effort to preserve the Mojave language from extinction, work featured on a PBS News Hour segment (http://video.pbs.org/video/2248385686/).

In 1997, the NCAA Women's Basketball Final Four was held in Cincinnati, and Old Dominion University was one of the participants, led by seventeen year-old freshman point guard **Natalie Diaz**. Her skill on the court had earned her a full scholarship, and early in her undergraduate career she began writing poetry as a way to embrace who she was and where she had come from. She went on to lead her college team to the national quarter-finals each of the next three years, then played professionally in Europe and Asia for several years, until returning to Old Dominion to complete a MFA in writing. Poetry was in her blood.

Diaz was awarded the Bread Loaf 2012 Louis Untermeyer Scholarship in Poetry, the 2012 Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Literature Fellowship, a 2012 Lannan Residency, as well as being awarded a 2012 Lannan Literary Fellowship. She won a Pushcart Prize in 2013.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Natalie Diaz

Natalie, who are you to go into this bright day and love and smile when people are dying and suffering all over the world. One of the poems in "When My Brother Was an Aztec" is about making love after watching the news about the war. I write because I don't know how else to make sense of the things that wake me at 2:30 a.m. gasping for air or the thing that makes me have to push and pull myself through mere minutes of certain afternoons. I think my poems are my attempts to understand the animal that I am. To understand how to, and this hearkens back to an almost conversation you and I had, how to live with the monster that I am. That we all are.

What turns you on, creatively, spiritually or emotionally?

Possibilities. When there is not just one way to do something. Lots of options. I can get excited about projects where there can be lots of possibilities. If something doesn't work you can go back and try something else, but you never have to start from the beginning, you can always just try new routes, new ways.

What turns you off? *People who want to change things, make a difference, but can only see one way of doing it and can't open up to see another way of seeing. Like people categorize you as a Catholic or as an Indian or whatever and assume ways of being. I hate it when people have convinced themselves that they are open-minded and yet only see one right way of being. They tell you to fling open all the windows and doors, to open your mind, and then when you do, they tell you that you aren't looking out the right windows. I pray before eating and some people get visibly upset when I do that, but it's not something that I'm doing to them – praying is part of who I am. Along with that, people also need to stand up for what you believe in instead of being*

anti-everything and putting things into categories and instead of standing up for what you don't believe in. People have all these different opinions on what they believe, or don't believe, about Christianity, Gay Marriage, etc., and they need to stand up and be heard. Instead people worry about imposing themselves, about believing the wrong thing, they worry about offending people. We are all allowed to offend people–that is one of our greatest rights! We need to open our minds to things we don't understand, and people that are close-minded can't do that. Rilke reminds me of that – each of his poems is like a prayer, offered up to comprehend the incomprehensible. Writing is that way for me. ***I write about what I don't understand. Things that make me not able to breathe when I wake up in the morning, things that wake me up at 3 a.m., that keep me pacing from room to room. I write to try to understand why we do the things we do.*** *That's why I like poetry, it stays so close to the questioning. In fiction you can get lost in the character, but in poetry, even narrative poetry, you still see the brickwork, you see the line breaks and stanzas and so it is more bare. In poetry I have a clearer understanding of what I don't know – it's a clearer representation of that.*

POEM EPIGRAPH

The epigraph for today's poem is a line taken from the following poem by esteemed poet *Wislawa Szymborska* (pronounced (vees-WAH-vah shim-BOR-ska)

Under One Small Star

My apologies to chance for calling it necessity.
My apologies to necessity if I'm mistaken, after all.
Please, don't be angry, happiness, that I take you as my due.
May my dead be patient with the way my memories fade.
My apologies to time for all the world I overlook each second.
My apologies to past loves for thinking that the latest is the first.
Forgive me, distant wars, for bringing flowers home.
Forgive me, open wounds, for pricking my finger.
I apologize for my record of minuets to those who cry from the depths.
I apologize to those who wait in railway stations for being asleep today at five a.m.
Pardon me, hounded hope, for laughing from time to time.
Pardon me, deserts, that I don't rush to you bearing a spoonful of water.
And you, falcon, unchanging year after year, always in the same cage,
your gaze always fixed on the same point in space,
forgive me, even if it turns out you were stuffed.
My apologies to the felled tree for the table's four legs.
My apologies to great questions for small answers.
Truth, please don't pay me much attention.
Dignity, please be magnanimous.
Bear with me, O mystery of existence, as I pluck the occasional thread from your train.
Soul, don't take offense that I've only got you now and then.
My apologies to everything that I can't be everywhere at once.
My apologies to everyone that I can't be each woman and each man.
I know I won't be justified as long as I live,
since I myself stand in my own way.
Don't bear me ill will, speech, that I borrow weighty words,
then labor heavily so that they may seem light. *—by Wislawa Szymborska*

Several Things

Several things could happen in this poem.
Plums could appear, on a pewter plate.
A dead red hare, hung by one foot.
A vase of flowers. Three shallots.

A man could sing, in a burgundy robe
with a gold belt tied in a square knot.
Someone could untie the knot.
A woman could toss a gold coin.

A stranger could say the next line,
I have been waiting for this,"
and offer a basket piled with apples
picked this morning, before the rain.

It could rain in this poem,
but if it rained, the man would continue
to sing as the burgundy silk fell
to the polished parquet floor.

It could snow in this poem:
remember how the hunter stamped his feet
before he leaned his gun in the corner
and hung his cap on the brass hook?

Perhaps the woman should open the ebony bench
and find the song her mother used to sing.
Listen: the woman is playing the song.
The man is singing the words.

Meanwhile the hunter is taking a warm bath
in the clean white tub with clawed legs.
Or has the hunter left? Are his boots
making tracks in the fallen snow?

When does the woman straighten the flowers?
Is that before the hunter observes
the tiny pattern on the vase?
Before the man begins to peel the shallots?

Now is the time for the woman
to slice the apples into a blue bowl.
A child could be watching the unbroken peel
spiral below the knife.

Last but not least, you could appear.
You could be the red-cheeked child,

the hunter, or the stranger.
You could stay for a late meal.

A Provencal recipe.
A bright red hare, shot at dawn.
Shallots. Brandy. Pepper, salt.
An apple in the pan.

—by Martha Collins

POET NOTES

Martha Collins was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1940. She is the author of *Day Unto Day* (Milkweed, 2014), *White Papers* (Pitt Poetry Series, 2012), and *Blue Front* (Graywolf, 2006), a book-length poem based on a lynching her father witnessed when he was five years old. Collins has also published four earlier collections of poems, three books of co-translations from the Vietnamese, and two chapbooks.

Collins founded the Creative Writing Program at UMass-Boston, and for ten years was Professor of Creative Writing at Oberlin College. She is currently editor-at-large for FIELD Magazine and one of the editors of the Oberlin College Press. In spring of 2010, she served as Distinguished Visiting Writer at Cornell University.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Martha Collins
Do you find a relationship between words and writing and the human body? Or between your writing and your body?

Is there anything you dislike about being a poet?

Well, there's not a whole lot of money in it! Which in some ways is good: unlike fiction writers, for instance, or painters, poets can't even dream about compromising for the sake of money. Which of course doesn't prevent the oxymoronic Poetry Business, aka Po Biz, from being a factor in most of our lives. That's certainly what I dislike most about being a poet—but again,

there's the good part, which is being in contact and dialogue with other poets. Sometimes I envy Emily Dickinson her solitude; most days, I don't.

What advice would you give a young poet?

Read, read, read. Read broadly, not limiting yourself to poets who seem immediately appealing to you; read deeply, when a poet does attract your attention. Read especially carefully when you're drawn to a poet or poem but don't know why.

When you turn to writing, don't settle easily: push the poem as hard as you can. I don't know whether young poets today have the problem I did (and still do), but I've learned that I have to push past the a whole army of mental censors (based on parents, teachers, critics, the culture at large) that tell me I cannot / should not / must not write what I'm writing, whether for aesthetic or moral or some other reasons. It took me awhile, but I finally learned that I'm usually onto something when I hear the censor's voice.

I'm currently reading **Joel F. Johnson's** book, *Where Inches Seem Miles* (2013 Antrim House) out loud to my husband. These deeply human poems have distinctive personalities that cause me to pause between readings, allowing space to savor each one. Joel's work supports my belief that good poems are the best short stories ever written.

Oakbrook Estates

When the mayor, who is black (our second),
reviewed the subdivision plans, he asked
about lighting, curbing and lot size, about square footage
and average price before he asked, as if in passing,
what about the old oak, will it have to go; and I,
older than the mayor, old enough to remember its name,
knew which oak, and said possibly not, we could keep it
for green space, and the mayor, walking me to his door,
said it would be good to have green space, this pleasant
chocolate-skinned man never acknowledging
the oak's name, though from his question,
from the carefully casual way he asked, I think he knew it,
that he had been told the name by a father or grandfather
though neither could have seen it, as I did, or been there,
as I was, when last it was put to that purpose,
and I, the lesson's last witness, then a boy of seven or eight
watched how the feet turned, twisting first left then right
then left again in car light, the head obscured, dark
above the beam, though I strained to see it, wanting
to see how the neck looked, how the rope looked,
the dead face, trusting as a boy of seven or eight will trust,
that it was just, that my elders had taught a necessary lesson,
but wondering if it might have been more
just to have selected someone older, since this one
seemed in my eyes, in a boy's eyes, watching
the body twist in The Lesson Tree,
in the stark light of Buford Neil's station wagon,
too small, too young, almost still a child.

—by Joel F. Johnson

POET NOTES
From his website http://www.joelfjohnson.com/ . . .

Joel F. Johnson grew up in Georgia and lives in Concord, Massachusetts. He participates in workshops at the Concord Poetry Center, where a raucous gang of friends and poets has read, critiqued and improved nearly every poem in this book. Joel is a self-employed businessman with a wife and three children. These four intelligent, funny, loving individuals are the center of his life. Part of Johnson's plan may be to do his work without calling attention to himself. His bio mentions specifically that he lives and works in obscurity in Concord, Massachusettes. The contact page of his website features a single head shot, a ramrod-stern man in 19th century attire

with a caption clearly written by a man who likes not to be bothered: "This is Joel **H.** Johnson, author of "High on the Mountain Top," hymn number 5 in the LDS Hymnbook. If you're looking for Joel **H**. Johnson, you're in the wrong place.

Joel F. Johnson is an accomplished poetic ventriloquist—adept with voices old and young, male and female, rich and poor, contemporary and medieval. He even does a convincing rattlesnake. But his voice is most at home in the American South. Raised in Georgia, Johnson can do deep south, and does just that, reading in unaffected dialect poems from the segregated south.

LISTEN to Joel read several poems from his new collection, including today's "Oakbrook Estates": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtOXTFK2tQI

READ a starred review by Kirkus of *Where Inches Seem Miles*:
https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/joel-f-johnson/where-inches-seem-miles/

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Joel Johnson
I wrote and asked Joel Johnson:
Do you find any value in keeping the revision drafts of poems you have written? If so, why?
JJ: *I have in my office a tool no poet should live without: a shredder. I don't just delete drafts, I shred the paper versions. It is incredibly satisfying to find that extra word or clunky phrase and chop it into tiny pieces. I've never regretted destroying a draft. Of course, I can't be sure that the last draft of every poem is always the best, but it is the only one I keep.*

Today's poet, Claudia Emerson says: *In graduate school, I was reprimanded for attributing nobility to animals—and I suppose I still do perceive animals as having valuable purpose and rights to this earth in ways that we don't respect and increasingly violate.*

Buying the Painted Turtle

Two boys, not quite men, pretended to let it go
only to catch it again and again. And the turtle,
equally determined, each time gave
its heart to escape them. We were near
the base of the old dam where the river
became a translucent, hissing wall, fixed
in falling, where, by the size of it, the turtle
had long trusted its defense, the streaming

algae, green, black, red—the garden of its spine—
not to fail it. They held it upside down,
the yellow plastron exposed; they hoisted it
over their heads like a trophy. I left it
to you to do the bargaining, exchange
the money for us to save it, let it go;

fast, it disappeared into deeper
water, returning to another present,
where the boulders cut the current to cast
safer shadows of motionlessness. We were
already forgotten, then, like most gods
after floods recede, after fevers break.

We did not talk about what we had bought—
an hour, an afternoon, a later death,
worth whatever we had to give for it.

—by Claudia Emerson
(from *The Late Wife*, LSU Press, 2005)

POET NOTES
Claudia Emerson was born in Chatham, Virginia in 1957. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from the University of Virginia in 1979, and her M.F.A. in poetry from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1991. Emerson is currently a professor of English and Arrington Distinguished Chair in Poetry at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She is a contributing editor of the literary magazine *Shenandoah*.

Claudia Emerson is the author of several collections of poetry: *Late Wife; Pharoah, Pharoah; Pinion, An Elegy; Figure Studies; and Secure the Shadows*. She won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for her collection *Late Wife*. Her verse has also appeared in numerous literary journals and publications, including *Shenandoah, Poetry, Blackbird, Southern Review, Five Points, Visions International, Ploughshares, Chattahoochee Review*, and *Crazyhorse*, among others.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Claudia Emerson

I did college at the normal age. I graduated in 1979, got married almost immediately, went back home to Pittsylvania County, and then I had a decade where I did a lot of different things. I was a branch manager for a little library for a while in Gretna, Virginia—only a two-room house. I was a substitute teacher. I was a meter reader. I was a part-time rural letter carrier—that was probably the best job that I had. But at the same time, I had a used bookshop in Danville, Virginia. I did a lot of really crazy things, and then I realized I wanted to be serious about writing, and I applied to UNC at Greensboro and was lucky enough to get in, and it changed my life.

I suppose you can tell that Robert Frost was an early influence and continues to be a lasting one on my view of the natural world and the ways I present it in my poetry. I also lived for many years in a rural landscape, in very old farmhouses that had their own relationship with the critters that wanted in, and then once in, wanted out. And I have all my life been fascinated by animal consciousness and drawn at least to making the effort to understand that consciousness. We share this planet with all sorts of creatures whom we as human beings tend to see as not just other but lesser, and I have long been concerned with what I saw even as a child as a disharmony with the greater "natural" world of which we are part, and from which we are apart.

ETC.

You can learn more about Claudia Emerson at http://www.claudiaemerson.org/

Claudia lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia with her husband, Kent Ippolito, a musician who plays with various types of bands. The couple were married in 2000 and together write songs and perform. Got 6 minutes? Here's a charming Youtube film I stumbled upon. Claudia and her husband give us a little tour of their home and garden, her writing rooms, plus a little bit of their own music and singing. Enjoy! http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6npoFzbF94

Seventh-Grade Science Project

I ran in a field of wildflowers,
waving a butterfly net, three
yards of gauzy fabric stitched

to the looped rim of a hanger
stapled to a broom handle.
By summertime my father

had already left with his
beautiful mistress. Mother
stayed inside and loafed, said

she could not watch my tiny
murders. The field held lemon
lilies, daylilies aflame in orange

and red, buttercups, purple
clover, and wild roses with
thorns that cut my arms.

I caught a black swallowtail,
monarch, fritillary and mourning
cloak, a painted lady. I learned

how to sneak up on a butterfly,
its long tubular tongue uncoiled
inside a flower, and pinch the

folded wings between my thumb
and index finger. I dropped each
hostage onto a wad of Clorox-

soaked cotton inside the kill jar.
I observed the flutter of wings,
the wiggling thorax, and when

the wiggling stopped, I placed
the butterfly on a felt mounting
board. I stuck a straight pin

precisely into the center
of the thorax and eased
the wings apart. Broken

wings or missing antennae
would lose points. I prepared a
data label for each butterfly—name,

date of capture, location—then slid
the bodies inside a shadow box.
The pin-pricked fingers, wasp

stings, and blood on my arms
were what I paid for my first
A in science. All that summer

I ran like something wild and left
my multi-colored fingerprints
on everything I touched.

—by Diane Lockward

POET NOTES

Diane Lockward is the author of three poetry books, most recently *Temptation by Water*. Her previous books are *What Feeds Us*, which received the 2006 Quentin R. Howard Poetry Prize, and *Eve's Red Dress*. Diane is also the author of two chapbooks, *Against Perfection* and Greatest Hits: 1997-2010. She is the recipient of a Poetry Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the first place winner of the 2012 Naugatuck River Review's poetry contest.

I recommend Diane Lockward's Poetry Newsletter as well as her blog "Blogalicious". Last year I discovered Diane's wonderful craft book, *The Crafty Poet: A Portable Workshop* (Wind Publications) which is filled with material from both her blog and newsletter. Find out more at: www.dianelockward.com

IN HER OWN WORDS—Diane Lockward

Poetry has given me a second life. I found poetry—or it found me—when I was a real grownup. By the time I started writing, I had three teenagers and a career as a full-time high school English teacher. Poetry opened up a whole new world for me—outside and inside. Five years ago I left my teaching job in order to more actively pursue what had become my passion. The timing of my departure could not have been more fortuitous as that first summer I hooked up with my most excellent publisher and signed a contract for my first full-length collection. I then had the time to help promote the book, do readings, and revel in the thrill of it all. I now have more time for writing, reading, and going to poetry events. I no longer have to cram everything into July and August. Poetry is no longer at the fringes of my life, but at the very center.

Diane's advice to emerging writers: ***Learn the craft. It's essential to have a heart and a brain, but you must also learn the craft and know what you're doing and why. Be patient and persistent; it won't happen overnight. Learning the craft takes years. Writing the poems takes weeks, months, even years. Sending them out is time-consuming and the responses are slow in coming back. Here's my daily mantra: Go forth boldly.***

This poem began one day when I overheard the phrase 'coming forth into view.' This phrase gave me a feeling a little like hope, a little like nostalgia, and it seemed totally associated with the existence of life. The resulting poem is my attempt to evoke that feeling by focus and place and by acknowledging a specific few members of the massive volume of life forms constantly coming forth, each and every one warriors against oblivion. — **Pattiann Rogers**

Forth Into View

The slender checkered beetle, pale
earth brown, sallies forth from among
the bark canals of the oak, the eaten mar
of the woody gall left dying. Her spiny
yellow hairs sparkle in the summer sun.

Lacewings, locust, and laurel loosen
cocoon, carapace, and bud, shimmy out
and pause, airing wings expanding like rumpled
petals, spreading petals opening like slatted
wings, as they pass into the new world.

Toe by toe the children of the sun depart
from the east out of living fire to become
spikes, glumes, anthers, sheaves, broad
montane grassland, flowing steppe,
savannah, veld, wild horse pampas.

The fiddler crab with his royal blue
spot emerges beside the great charging
dawn of the morning sea, scuttles sideways
out of the drenched sands and savory
mud bank of the tidal marsh.

Now echoes in cougar lairs, snake crannies,
coon burrows, the hillside den of gray fox.
Moonrat's nose appears from the crevice
in the bluff, sniffing fish and wormy mud.
Turtle's beak shows at shell's edge first.
Claws and feet extend directly.

The smooth, golden-green swale
of the trout swivels upward, breaks
through the boundaries of sky
with its mouth wide open gulping day.

After parting the flap, after gripping
the knob, after lifting the latch, after kicking
the door until the hinges crack and fail
and the hindrance falls, then the jaunt,
the saunter, the sprint, the lope, the totter,
ramble and meander, the traipse and slink,

the shamble, shuffle, gallop and glide,
the push against the beyond begins.

—by Pattiann Rogers

POET NOTES

Pattiann Rogers was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1940. She graduated from the University of Missouri in 1961 and received her M.A. from the University of Houston in 1981. She has published numerous books of award winning poetry and has been the recipient of several grants and fellowships. The mother of two grown sons, Rogers lives with her husband, a retired geophysicist, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in Castle Rock, Colorado.

"The poetry of Pattiann Rogers often celebrates the natural world, displaying an intimate knowledge of astronomy and biology as well as an investigative curiosity when it comes to questions of consciousness and the spirit. In all of her books there is a quest for holiness and wholeness, an exploration of our connection to the world—to the lives of animals and plants—and, on a grander scale, to the universe. Rogers is known for her intelligent, highly detailed, exuberant poems that examine the phenomena of science and faith." — poet Jeannine Hall Gailey

IN HER OWN WORDS—Pattiann Rogers

I write about what interests me, those things about which I wonder and which arouse my curiosity, ***and I write about whatever I want to celebrate or honor. Some poems are prayers. I want to create writing that pleases me, from which I learn something, and in which my imagination is at play to a high degree.***

Music was a large part of my childhood. My older brother played the piano, the clarinet, the violin, and the baritone horn. My mother paid him a nickel to get up and practice the piano before school. He had a big jar full of nickels. And I woke up many mornings to the sound of a Chopin Polonaise or "Rhapsody in Blue" or "Claire de Lune." I played the piano and the flute, but not so well. I took tap dancing and ballet, but was not so great. But I was a good, strong singer. I could sing harmony, the alto parts. I was one of three children chosen from my elementary school to be in the All City Chorus. I attended that chorus practice and our church choir practice every week. I sang and sang and followed the instructions of music teachers. I learned about counting sounds and accented and unaccented notes and the effects of various rhythms and tones, and numbered beats to a measure, major keys and minor, verses and choruses, repetitions, rests and silences, crescendos and diminuendos. Just like poetry. All the elements of poetry. Music always convinces me that human beings, all of us, are redeemable, capable of love and righteousness.

Today's poem by **Carol Ann Duffy** is dedicated to Judith Radstone, who died at age 75 in 2001. Radstone was a radical bibliophile, bookseller and political activist, and a well-known figure in the poetry world. Duffy's poem, *Warming Her Pearls*, was inspired by a conversation with Judith about the practice of ladies' maids increasing the luster of their mistresses' pearls by secreting them beneath their clothes to be warmed by their skin.

Warming Her Pearls *for Judith Radstone*

Next to my own skin, her pearls. My mistress
bids me wear them, warm them, until evening
when I'll brush her hair. At six, I place them
round her cool, white throat. All day I think of her,

resting in the Yellow Room, contemplating silk
or taffeta, which gown tonight? She fans herself
whilst I work willingly, my slow heat entering
each pearl. Slack on my neck, her rope.

She's beautiful. I dream about her
in my attic bed; picture her dancing
with tall men, puzzled by my faint, persistent scent
beneath her French perfume, her milky stones.

I dust her shoulders with a rabbit's foot,
watch the soft blush seep through her skin
like an indolent sigh. In her looking-glass
my red lips part as though I want to speak.

Full moon. Her carriage brings her home. I see
her every movement in my head.... Undressing,
taking off her jewels, her slim hand reaching
for the case, slipping naked into bed, the way

she always does.... And I lie here awake,
knowing the pearls are cooling even now
in the room where my mistress sleeps. All night
I feel their absence and I burn.

—by Carol Ann Duffy
from *Selling Manhattan*.

POET NOTES

Carol Ann Duffy was considered a strong candidate to United Kingdom's poet laureate in 1999, and Tony Blair's administration had wanted someone who exemplified the new "Cool Britannia," not an establishment figure. Duffy certainly fit that bill. First-born child (1955) to an active trade-unionist family in the poor section of Glasgow, this lesbian Scot had gone off to Liverpool with poet Adrian Henri, at age 16, and lived with him more than 10 years. She later said "He was great, he gave me confidence. It was all poetry, very heady, and he was never faithful. He thought poets had a duty to be unfaithful." In the end, though, the Blair administration decided

not to risk a tabloid-fueled fuss about her sexuality, which neither Duffy nor her partner at the time, Scottish poet Jackie Kay, wanted to undergo. Her following grew as a result of the flap, and her next book received both popular support and critical acclaim. In 2009, she received the well-deserved appointment, the first Scot, woman, GLBT Poet Laureate of Great Britian. Along with an annual stipend of 5,750 pounds, the poet laureate receives by tradition a "butt of sack" -- a barrel of sherry equal to about 600 bottles!

Duffy has a daughter, Ella, from her former relationship with Jackie Kay. Ella was born in 1995, and the BBC reports that the father is another writer, Peter Benson. Duffy says: "I always wanted a child. Being a mother is the central thing in my life."

Duffy's work is eloquent and accessible, passionate and plain-spoken. Her books for children (more than 20) are a delight. She says she likes to use simple words, but in a complicated way. She has also co-written a CD of songs with musician Eliana Tomkin, who recorded them under the title "Rapture" in 2005. In 2009 as part of the Edinburgh Festival she gave the first performances of *The Princess's Blankets*, with musician John Sampson and Ella Duffy, a blend of poetry, music and fairytale involving 'hilarious Queens, ancient rock'n'rollers, Mozart, Peggy Guggenheim and a sad Princess who is always cold'. Cool Britannia indeed.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Carol Ann Duffy

I have piles of poetry books in the bathroom, on the stairs, everywhere. The only way to write poetry is to read it. . . . *I write quite a lot of sonnets, and I think of them almost as prayers; short and memorable, something you can recite.*

When I've taken my daughter to school, if I don't have a class to teach, I'll sit in the kitchen from about 10am till 3.30pm, writing poems by hand. I think I'm the only person in the UK who still uses a fountain pen and ink. I change the colour of the ink depending on my mood. Today it's brown because it's autumnal and I've got that 'back to school' feeling. If I'm feeling reckless, I'll change it to scarlet. When I'm out, I keep all my notes in a black leather notebook.

I tell those who find poetry alienating to go to a poetry reading. At every event I read at, there will be a couple, one of whom loves poetry and the other who hates it. Every time, that person comes out saying, "Wow, I had no idea I loved poetry.

He Sits Down on the Floor of a School for the Retarded

I sit down on the floor of a school for the retarded,
a writer of magazine articles accompanying a band
that was met at the door by a child in a man's body
who asked them, "Are you the surprise they promised us?"

It's Ryan's Fancy, Dermot on guitar,
Fergus on banjo, Denis on penny-whistle.
In the eyes of this audience, they're everybody
who has ever appeared on TV. I've been telling lies
to a boy who cried because his favorite detective
hadn't come with us; I said he had sent his love
and, no, I didn't think he'd mind if I signed his name
to a scrap of paper: when the boy took it, he said,
"Nobody will ever get this away from me,"
in the voice, more hopeless than defiant,
of one accustomed to finding that his hiding places
have been discovered, used to having objects snatched
out of his hands. Weeks from now I'll send him
another autograph, this one genuine
in the sense of having been signed by somebody
on the same payroll as the star.
Then I'll feel less ashamed. Now everyone is singing,
"Old MacDonald had a farm," and I don't know what to do

about the young woman (I call her a woman
because she's twenty-five at least, but think of her
as a little girl, she plays the part so well,
having known no other), about the young woman who
sits down beside me and, as if it were the most natural
thing in the world, rests her head on my shoulder.

It's nine o'clock in the morning, not an hour for music.
And, at the best of times, I'm uncomfortable
in situations where I'm ignorant
of the accepted etiquette: it's one thing
to jump a fence, quite another thing to blunder
into one in the dark. I look around me
for a teacher to whom to smile out my distress.
They're all busy elsewhere, "Hold me," she whispers. "Hold me."

I put my arm around her. "Hold me tighter."
I do, and she snuggles closer. I half-expect
someone in authority to grab her
or me: I can imagine this being remembered

forever as the time the sex-crazed writer
publicly fondled the poor retarded girl.
"Hold me," she says again. What does it matter
what anybody thinks? I put my arm around her,
rest my chin in her hair, thinking of children,
real children, and of how they say it, "Hold me,"
and of a patient in a geriatric ward
I once heard crying out to his mother, dead
for half a century, "I'm frightened! Hold me!"
and of a boy-soldier screaming it on the beach
at Dieppe, of Nelson in Hardy's arms,
of Frieda gripping Lawrence's ankle
until he sailed off in his Ship of Death.

It's what we all want, in the end,
to be held, merely to be held,
to be kissed (not necessarily with the lips,
for every touching is a kind of kiss.)

She hugs me now, this retarded woman, and I hug her.
We are brother and sister, father and daughter,
mother and son, husband and wife.
We are lovers. We are two human beings
huddled together for a little while by the fire
in the Ice Age, two thousand years ago.

—by Alden Nowlan

POET NOTES

Alden Nowlan (1933-1983) was born into poverty in Windsor, Novia Scotia to a 15 year-old mother and an alcoholic father. Nowlan left school in grade 5 and during his adolescent years worked at a variety of jobs, all of them menial, manual, or both. He was a pulp cutter, a farmhand, a sawmill worker, a night watchman, a ditch digger and a logger. Primarily self-educated, he later went on to work as a newspaperman.

In <u>One Heart, One Way</u>, Nowlan's friend and biographer, Gregory M. Cook, explains that despite a lack of a formal education, there is perhaps no other poet in Canada as versatile by genre (poetry, fiction, journalism, history, drama for stage, radio, film and television and political speech writing) and as prolific as Alden Nowlan.

GREGORY M. COOK ON ALDEN NOWLAN
Alden Nowlan's eclectic devouring of available libraries (private and public) since he was a child allowed him to avoid the pitfalls of formal education – the most critical pitfall being the standardization of our thinking (brainwashing).

He had an immense capacity to identify with the "other." In fact, it is so powerful that the poet himself becomes the third person, the "other," as he says in his notebook pages, in his work and in his life. This last feat is his most complex feat, but he achieves it with a magical simplicity that nearly defies analysis. Of course, empathy (entering) is the antithesis of analysis (circling around).

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Alden Nowlan
The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent;
the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult;
the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.

As a child I had three choices: madness, death or verse.....It's hellish what the sicknesses of our culture have done to us all. So that love sometimes becomes simply protection against loneliness when it should be an exchange of gifts. Haunted by ghosts of his early life, Alden Nowlan nevertheless discovered the ultimate "exchange of gifts" in the love of his wife and son Claudine and Johnnie who appear in his beautiful poem *He Attempts to Love His Neighbors,* featured in April Gifts 2008.

Diagnosed at the age of 33 with thyroid cancer, Nolan's illness marked a major turning point in his maturity as a poet. From one of his letters during the early years of his illness: *Ever since I got sick I've become less and less hypocritical and more and more honest. Since we're all of us going to be out of the world so soon it seems silly not to tell one another what we really think and feel.*

FOOTNOTES
Ryan's Fancy (originally The Sons of Erin) was an Irish folk music group active from 1969–1983. All three of its members were Irish immigrants to Canada.

beach of Dieppe refers to a WWII attack on the German-occupied port of Dieppe on the northern coast of France. Over 3,000 men, most of them Canadians, were killed within five hours of the assault.

Nelson in Hardy's arms refers to the great naval hero Admiral Horatio Nelsen dying in the arms of Captain Thomas Hardy during the battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Frieda gripping Lawrence's ankle refers to D.H. Lawrence, delirious from the fevers of tuberculosis, pleading with his wife Frieda von Richthofen, to hold him as he lay dying.

painting of Alden Nowlan by Stephen Scott

April Gift #28—2014 **Little Owl Who Lives in the Orchard**

This is the eighth year for **April Gifts** and **Mary Oliver** has been conspicuously missing among the more than two-hundred poets I've featured. With the staggering volume of her work broadly available over the decades, I felt daunted by the task of picking just one of her amazing poems. Fortunately, today's poem chose me. It flew to the top of one of my loose leaf poem stacks and will not let go of its perch until I share it with you. The first line alone is a poem unto itself.

Little Owl Who Lives in the Orchard

His beak could open a bottle,
and his eyes—when he lifts their soft lids—
go on reading something
just beyond your shoulder—
Blake, maybe,
or the Book of Revelation.

Never mind that he eats only
the black-smocked crickets,
and the dragonflies if they happen
to be out late over the ponds, and of course
the occasional festal mouse.
Never mind that he is only a memo
from the offices of fear—

it's not size but surge that tells us
when we're in touch with something real,
and when I hear him in the orchard
fluttering
down the little aluminum
ladder of his scream—
when I see his wings open, like two black ferns,

a flurry of palpitations
as cold as sleet
rackets across the marshlands
of my heart
like a wild spring day.

Somewhere in the universe,
in the gallery of important things,
the babyish owl, ruffled and rakish,
sits on its pedestal.
Dear, dark dapple of plush!
A message, reads the label,
from that mysterious conglomerate:
Oblivion and Co.
The hooked head stares
from its house of dark, feathery lace.
It could be a valentine.

—by Mary Oliver
from Owls and Other Fantasies: Poems and Essays

POET NOTES

Mary Oliver was born in 1935, in Maple Heights, Ohio, a semi-rural suburb of Cleveland. She began writing poetry at the age of 14, and at 17 visited the home of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, in upper New York state. She and Norma, the poet's sister, became friends, and Oliver "more or less lived there for the next six or seven years, running around the 800 acres like a child, helping Norma, or at least being company to her," and assisting with organizing the late poet's papers.

Mary Oliver's poetry is grounded in memories of Ohio and her adopted home of New England, setting most of her poetry in and around Provincetown since she moved there in the 1960s. Influenced by both Whitman and Thoreau, she is known for her clear and passionate observances of the natural world. Her poems are filled with imagery from her daily walks near her home. She commented in a rare interview "When things are going well, you know, the walk does not get rapid or get anywhere: I finally just stop, and write. That's a successful walk!" She says that she once found herself walking in the woods with no pen and later hid pencils in the trees so she would never be stuck in that place again. She often carries a 3-by-5-inch hand-sewn notebook for recording impressions and phrases.

Your library and online research of Mary Oliver will bring you an abundance of enjoyment and study. Of her non-poetry books, I personally recommend *A Poetry Handbook* (Harcourt 1992) and *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse*
(Houghton Mifflin, 1998)

POET FRANK X. GASPAR ON MARY OLIVER
Mary is the most generous soul I know. She is the one who brings home the broken gull to splint its wing, who nurtures the abused pup, who takes in the destitute addict, who loves the world as she finds it. I have spent some of the happiest moments of my life in her company, in her light-filled home by the sea, where I myself have been taken in from time to time, and where I never cease to visit and feel welcome. One never knows who will walk in with an armload of books, a bottle of wine, a forty-pound lobster, a load of laundry to be done . . . The conversations go on forever and include everything. Mary can be hilarious. I remember nights when she and I and Molly (Mary's now deceased partner) have laughed ourselves foolish . . .

One day I came back from Clapps Pond and announced that I had found a box turtle and a vole. "A vole," Mary said, "really? What did it look like?" I described it. "Did it have a little beak?" "Yes," I said. "Oh," she said, "then that would be a shrew." "A shrew?" "Oh yes," she said, those amazing lovely blue eyes looking right into me, "I had four of them in the freezer one winter." Of course she did! No one blinked. No one asked why. The conversation just rolled on. It's like that. It's always like that.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Mary Oliver

Sorrow, like most things, can be denied or experienced. I live my life according to the suggestions of Emerson, one of which is to live the experienced life. Grief is part of that package, certainly. But even grief is only part of the amazing fact of each of us—we have been given the gift of a life, of some portion of Time, the gifts of the earth and the ability to love. I think it is requisite that we accept the whole gift, all the gifts, and be grateful, whatever measure of dark days or joyous days is our portion.

I very much wished not to be noticed, and to be left alone, and I sort of succeeded. I worked probably 25 years by myself, just writing and working, not trying to publish much, not giving readings.

Poetry isn't a profession, it's a way of life. It's an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.

Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.

Can't Get Over Her

My nephew is distressed that he's still
in love with the girl who went back to her boyfriend--
the one who's not good enough for her.

When he ran into her again, she had that same bright laugh,
like the shine on an apple, and the wind rose
reaching up into the limbs and fluttering
the leaves in the whole apple tree.

But when she left, it hit him all over.
She was headed for her boyfriend's house, she'd walk
quickly in the brittle March night.
He'd have a fire going. She'd unlace her boots
and offer him her mouth, her lips still cold,
her velvet tongue warm in that satin cape.

He didn't tell me all this,
of course, but who hasn't longed
for that girl? that boy? He's mad
at himself that he can't get over her.

He's young and he's got goals, quit
smoking, gave up weekend drunks. Now he tackles
model airplane kits, one small piece at a time.
He wants to learn mastery. Sweet man.
Should I tell you the truth?

That you'll never get over her. Love
is a rock in the surf off the Pacific. Life
batters it. No matter how small it gets
it will always be there--grain of sand
chafing the heart. I still love

the boy who jockeyed cars, expertly
in the lots on New York Avenue,
parking them so close, he had to lift his lithe body
out the window those sultry August afternoons.
He smelled of something musky and rich--distinctive
as redwoods in heat.

And the one I followed to Africa
where we slept on pink embroidered sheets.
Whose laugh lines I traced with a pleasure
God must have felt when He etched them in,
just before He sent him through the chute.

What can I tell you of how I still long for him?
Like a patriot exiled from the motherland?
A newborn switched in the hospital, raised
in the wrong family? Each year that passes
is one more I miss out on. His children
are not mine. Even their new
step-mother is not me. When she complains

how hard she tries, how little they appreciate it,
I think how much better off he'd be with me.
And when he has grandchildren
they won't be mine either. And when he's dying--
even if I go to him--I'll be little more
than a dumb bouquet, spilling my scent.

We don't get over any of it. The heart
is stubborn and indefatigable. And limitless.
That's how I can turn to my lover, now,

with the awe the early rabbis must have felt
opening the Torah. And when she pulls me to her,
still, after all these years, I feel like I did
the first time I stood in front of Starry Night.

I had never known, had never imagined
it was not just the flat, smooth surface
of the textbook. Had never conceived
there could be these thick swirls of paint,
the rough-edged cobalt sky, the deep
spiraling valleys of starlight.

—by Ellen Bass

POET NOTES

Ellen Bass was born in 1947 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She currently is teaching in the low residency MFA program at Pacific University in Oregon and has been teaching Writing About Our Lives workshops since 1974 where she lives in Santa Cruz, California. Ms. Bass has received several awards including the Elliston Book Award for Poetry from the University of Cincinnati. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Ellen's most recent book of poetry is *Like A Beggar*, from Copper Canyon Press.

Bass is a pioneer in the field of healing from child sexual abuse. Her non-fiction books include *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (HarperCollins, 1983) and *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (Harper Collins 1988), which has sold over a million copies and has been translated into twelve languages.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Ellen Bass

When I write a poem, I want the reader to actually understand what I'm communicating. It's not a theoretical process for me. It doesn't exist outside of relationship. The elements that I use in the poem, like metaphor or image or a particular language construct, are clearer rather than just decorative.

Poetry is, for me, a way of life as well as an art. It's the way I pay attention, the way I make a shape out of my experience, the way I praise this brief life, the way I mourn, the way I see my experience as part of the human experience. Poetry helps me to accept what I don't want to accept and to be curious about even the most terrible experiences. It's a kind of spiritual practice, a way to pray.

Getting away from our daily obligations is a profound experience for a writer. Virginia Woolf wrote about "the angel in the house", the woman (usually a wife, sometimes a sister) who made it possible for so many (male) writers to do their work unimpeded. The "angel" supplied the writer with meals, cleaned up, cared for the children, kept visitors away during writing hours. Most of us (male or female) no longer have an "angel in the house", but when we go away to a writing workshop or a residency, we are provided with this kind of spaciousness. It is nourishing to our spirits to be taken care of this way and it allows us to pour all our energy into writing.

Begging Bowl

Seeing the poem printed below his name
in a prominent magazine, the poet somehow
convinces himself that the poem is in fact
his own creation. He believes that his hours
of hard work—the joyful labor of pushing words
around on the page, of pacing out the lines
and listening to alternate rhythms—
have earned him the right to call the poem his.
How soon he forgets the mid-winter morning
of the poem's birth, when he had lurched
out into the cold, splintered begging bowl
in hand, and stumbled into the marketplace,
his belly empty as an old wineskin. And
how quickly he replaces the face
of the old merchant who took pity on him,
the wrinkled and weathered face of the one
who lifted a paddle of steaming rice
into his meager bowl, with his own face.
Somehow between that gracious moment
and this, the poet devised the heretical fiction
of himself planting the rice kernels, cultivating
the paddy, harvesting the crop, then
cooking the rice over an open fire on the night
of a full moon. But you and I both know
that even as he reads the poem now printed
below his name in a prominent magazine,
the old emptiness in his belly returns, and
the poet, like a supplicant at some ancient altar,
silently holds forth his little wooden bowl.

—by David Denny
Atlanta Review vol. 13, no. 2

POET NOTES

David Denny is the author of *Man Overboard* (Wipf & Stock), *Fool in the Attic* (Aldrich Press), and *Plebeian on the Front Porch* (Finishing Line Press). His poems and short stories have appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Sand Hill Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Main Street Rag*, *Stone Voices*, and *The Sun*. Recent honors include a 2013 Artist Laureate award from the Silicon Valley Arts Council, three Pushcart Prize nominations, and a two-year term as Cupertino's inaugural Poet Laureate. His books can be purchased on-line at Amazon.com: http://www.amazon.com/David-Denny/e/B00HHIBELW/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0

Denny holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Oregon and an MAT degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. Denny is Professor of English at De Anza College and former editor of *Bottomfish* magazine. The short bio he furnished for "Sun" magazine, which has published several of his poems says: "When not teaching or hanging with family, he can often be found scribbling in his notebook in the corner of a local coffee shop or watching old movies at the Stanford Theatre in Palo Alto."

POET LAUREATE OF CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

This month's April Gifts features several "Poet Laureates" — of Great Britian, of more than one state, and, of course, there's **David Denny**, who was the first to serve in the position he created, Poet Laureate of Cupertino, California.

For 25 years a teacher at De Anza College in this Bay Area city, Denny writes with a natural sense of place and self. "What I do as poet laureate is sponsor readings, I've done some readings in coffee shops around town, I also recently sponsored a city-wide contest for poets of all ages. And I show up at various civic events and cultural events around town, as the face of poetry, at least for a couple of years.

Teacher Debby Vanni and Libriarian Adrian Kolb, both on the selection committee for the position, sing his praises. *It's about: Hey, I love poetry, I'm honored to do this position, and I'd love to open poetry up. He can write about something very personal…he has a poem about whitewater rafting and marriage ("The River Guide as Marriage Counselor"), he connects the two, and it's a very serious poem, done very well, and then he has poems where he makes you laugh out loud. He's from Cupertino, and writes about life in Cupertino. There's a poem of his that's framed in Peet's Coffee House, he wrote sitting outside on the balcony at Peet's.*

Not surprising that Denny suffered no "Founder's Syndrome" happily passing the torch to successor Jennifer Swanton Brown, though it is clear his service to poetry is more that a two-year commitment.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—David Denny

This term, his upper level writing class has two required texts: *The American Heritage Dictionary*, and *The Hobbit*. The class listing features this epigram: *My advice to young writers is to write. It's simple really. If you want to be a cyclist, you have to ride a bike. If you want the world record for eating pork pies, you have to eat pork pies. Just do it—whenever you feel like it—just for the fun of it.*