APRIL GIFTS

2012

Created by: Susan F. Glassmeyer
Cincinnati, Ohio, 2012

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April Gift #1—2012 **Miracle Fair**

I welcome your responses to any of my postings, especially if you are so moved by a poem that it clarifies or alters your perception a bit, opens your heart, makes you sit up and take notice, stimulates your thinking, your body, or your spirit. Receiving your feedback is part of the pleasure of this annual work. Feel free to share these poems with a loved one, a co-worker, a stranger on the street. I try to be faithful to the facts in these annotated postings, but I've likely made some errors along the way. Tell me if I've missed the boat completely, or even a little bit. You can also let me know if you didn't like a posting, and why. All grist for the mill as far as I'm concerned. I think you might agree that "poem choosing" is largely a subjective activity and serves somewhat as a reflection of one's sense of life. True in my case, adding vulnerability to this process, but so worth it. Enjoy!

Wislawa Szymborska (pronounced vees-WAH-vah shim-BOR-ska) died on February 1 of this year (2012) at age 88. She was popular in Poland, which tends to make romantic heroes of poets, but she was little known abroad. Her poems are clear in topic and language, but her playfulness and tendency to invent words made her work hard to translate. She had a relatively small body of work when she received the Nobel Prize in 1996. Only about 200 of her poems had been published in periodicals and thin volumes over a half-century, and her lifetime total was something less than 400. When asked why she had so few poems, Szymborska said: *"I have a trash can in my home."*

Szymborska did her best to lead the life of a recluse. *"There's simply too much fuss about me,"* she explained, with characteristic modesty. *"Everyone needs solitude, especially a person who is used to thinking about what she experiences. Solitude is very important in my work as a mode of inspiration, but isolation is not good in this respect. I am not writing poetry about isolation."* Be sure to read her further comments on poetry in the excerpt from her wonderful Nobel Prize speech at the end of today's posting.

Originally I had planned to share one of my favorite Szymborska poems, "A Few Words on the Soul", which can be found in *Monologue of a Dog: New Poems* (Harcourt, 2006), but at last minute I was drawn to "Miracle Fair" from her book of the same title. It exemplifies her ability to use language to state the obvious, but in a way we may never have considered before, creating a Zen like moment for the reader.

Miracle Fair

Commonplace miracle:
that so many commonplace miracles happen.

An ordinary miracle:
in the dead of night
the barking of invisible dogs.

One miracle out of many:
a small, airy cloud
yet it can block a large and heavy moon.

Several miracles in one:
an alder tree reflected in the water,

and that it's backwards left to right
and that it grows there, crown down
and never reaches the bottom,
even though the water is shallow.

An everyday miracle:
winds weak to moderate
turning gusty in storms.

First among equal miracles:
cows are cows.

Second to none:
just this orchard
from just that seed.

A miracle without a cape and top hat:
scattering white doves.

A miracle, for what else could you call it:
today the sun rose at three-fourteen
and will set at eight-o-one.

A miracle, less surprising than it should be:
even though the hand has fewer than six fingers,
it still has more than four.

A miracle, just take a look around:
the world is everywhere.

An additional miracle, as everything is additional:
the unthinkable
is thinkable.

— *by Wislawa Szymborska*
(from *Miracle Fair*, translated by Joanna Trzeciak. W.W. Norton & Company, 2001)

POET NOTES—Wislawa Szymborska was born in 1923, near Poznan, in western Poland. Eight years later her family moved to Krakow, and developed deep ties to the medieval city, with its artistic and intellectual culture. After the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, she found work as a rail clerk to avoid deportation to Germany as a forced laborer. In her free time, Szymborska studied at underground universities, but never earned a degree. She quickly became a fixture of the city's postwar literary circles, which initially accepted Soviet-imposed ideology in art and literature. Szymborska joined the communist party in 1952, but eventually grew disillusioned with communism, ultimately renouncing her Stalin-era verse. She officially broke with the party in 1966. Szymborska lived an intensely private life, most of it in modest conditions in Krakow, where she worked for the magazine Zycie Literackie (Literary Life). Her marriage to the poet Adam Wlodek ended in divorce. Her companion, the writer Kornel Filipowicz, died in 1990. Szymborska had no children.

PUBLICATIONS

Szymborska has published more than a dozen volumes of poetry, as well as a collection of essays —*Non-Required Reading: prose pieces* (Harcourt, 2002). She disowned her first two volumes, which contain poems in the style of Socialist Realism, as not indicative of her true poetic intentions. Her third volume marked a clear shift to a more personal style of poetry and expressed her dissatisfaction with communism, Stalinism in particular.

EXCERPTED FROM SZYMBORSKA'S 1996 NOBEL PRIZE SPEECH

It's not accidental that film biographies of great scientists and artists are produced in droves. The more ambitious directors seek to reproduce convincingly the creative process that led to important scientific discoveries or the emergence of a masterpiece. And one can depict certain kinds of scientific labor with some success. Laboratories, sundry instruments, elaborate machinery brought to life: such scenes may hold the audience's interest for a while. And those moments of uncertainty - will the experiment, conducted for the thousandth time with some tiny modification, finally yield the desired result? - can be quite dramatic. Films about painters can be spectacular, as they go about recreating every stage of a famous painting's evolution, from the first penciled line to the final brush-stroke. Music swells in films about composers: the first bars of the melody that rings in the musician's ears finally emerge as a mature work in symphonic form. Of course this is all quite naive and doesn't explain the strange mental state popularly known as inspiration, but at least there's something to look at and listen to.

But poets are the worst. Their work is hopelessly unphotogenic. Someone sits at a table or lies on a sofa while staring motionless at a wall or ceiling. Once in a while this person writes down seven lines only to cross out one of them fifteen minutes later, and then another hour passes, during which nothing happens ... Who could stand to watch this kind of thing?

I've mentioned inspiration. Contemporary poets answer evasively when asked what it is, and if it actually exists. It's not that they've never known the blessing of this inner impulse. It's just not easy to explain something to someone else that you don't understand yourself.

When I'm asked about this on occasion, I hedge the question too. But my answer is this: ***inspiration is not the exclusive privilege of poets or artists generally. There is, has been, and will always be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits****. It's made up of all those who've consciously chosen their calling and do their job with love and imagination. It may include doctors, teachers, gardeners - and I could list a hundred more professions. Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it. Difficulties and setbacks never quell their curiosity. A swarm of new questions emerges from every problem they solve. Whatever inspiration is, it's born from a continuous "I don't know.*

Late-Bloomers

For Caitlin

It doesn't know it's time
for everything to die, this Rose of Sharon.
Late afternoon September, pink and blooming, it hugs
the sun side of the house. Whatever it is—
a weed, a tree, what the almanac calls a shrub—
it's like a woman in love, boney, too tall,
a little horse-faced even, who's accustomed to knowing
she isn't beautiful. She's surprised by this
sudden flowering, the last one before the frost.
I know what it is to be
a wallflower, a weed, the one girl nobody

danced with Friday nights. At twelve
my friend had breasts and a bad case
of cramps. On the sixth grade trip to Fair Park Zoo
Roy Presley kissed her in the darkened bus
so long I shut my eyes and prayed
I'd be changed like that.
This morning, in the library's cool vault, I held
in my hands another prayer, the book
Anne of Cleves gave Henry when, impatient

for his bride, he waylaid her
on the road to London, surprising her, he said,
"to nourish love," as if to test the truth
of Holbein's portrait—a gaze at once so frank

and so demure it seemed to promise mysteries
even a king had never guessed. On the flyleaf,
in tiny birdlike scrawl, she's written,
I beseech your most humble grace,
whenever you look on this, remember me,
but what he remembered always was only his anger,
disappointment that she was not beautiful

as the artist saw her, the golden sun surpassing
Christine of Denmark's silver moon, but a woman
no longer young, "a Flanders mare."
When he gave her 4000 pounds and freedom
not to please, she began to grow into the painting.
Holbein hasn't dreamed her
after all, had only seen something sleeping
in those hooded eyes. Oh, I know some things
don't change. At our twentieth class reunion

the same girl is still the one they judge
Most Beautiful, the one to whom the football boys,

those who came back from Vietnam, incline
their balding heads and paunching bellies. “Beauty is
in the eye of the beholder,” my mother said,
but I begin to believe it’s in the one
beheld, the way love, however late, shows us
our truest selves, the way the blossom sleeps
inside the bud. This poem, then, is for her
who doesn’t think she’s beautiful enough, for Anne,
for me, this weedy shrub, for all late-bloomers.

—by Susan Wood
(from *Campo Santo*, Louisiana State University Press, 1991)

POET NOTES—Poet **Susan Wood** was born in Commerce, Texas in 1946. She received her BA from East Texas State University and her MA from University of Texas, Arlington, before continuing her graduate studies at Rice University where she is now an associate professor of English at Rice University. Wood has taught high school and worked as a newspaper and magazine editor for *The Washington Post* and other magazines.

PUBLICATIONS
Susan Wood’s poems have appeared in such journals as *Antioch Review*, *Callaloo*, *Greensboro Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Missouri Review*, *New England Review*, *Paris Review*, and *Poetry*. Pitt Poetry Series published her fourth book, *The Book of Ten,* in 2011. *Campo Santo* (LSU, 1991) won the Lamont Prize of the Academy of American Poets and the Natalie Ornish Prize of the Texas Institute of Letters, and *Asunder* (Penguin, 2001) was a National Poetry Series selection and recipient of the Best Book of Poetry Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. A former Guggenheim and NEA fellow, her poems have been awarded a James Dickey Prize in Poetry, selected for a Pushcart Prize and included in *The Best American Poetry* (Scribner), 2000 and 2006. She is the Gladys Louise Fox Professor of English at Rice University.

POEM NOTE
Anne of Cleves was the fourth wife of King Henry VIII. After the death of wife Jane Seymour, Henry's advisers thought it would be a good idea for him to marry a German princess and make an alliance with the other great Protestant nation in Europe—Germany. Two suitable princesses were chosen and artist Hans Holbein was sent to paint their portraits. The girls were sisters and daughters of the Duke of Cleves. Based on Holbein’s beautiful painting, Henry chose the older daughter, Anne, to be his fourth wife. When they met in 1539, however, King Henry was horrified at the sight of Anne of Cleves and demanded that his ministers find him a way out of the marriage. Anne evidently was just as unhappy with Henry, and so their marriage remained unconsummated. The couple divorced amicably six months later. Anne left with her head intact!

P.S.
You can view “Portrait of Anne of Cleves” by Hans Holbein in the attachment.
INQUIRY
If any of you sleuths knows the name of the book alluded to in the poem’s second stanza, please write to me.

The God of Loneliness

It's a cold Sunday February morning
and I'm one of eight men waiting
for the doors of Toys R Us to open
in a mall on the eastern tip of Long Island.
We've come for the Japanese electronic game
that's so hard to find. Last week, I waited
three hours for a store in Manhattan
to disappoint me. The first today, bundled
in six layers, I stood shivering in the dawn light
reading the new Aeneid translation, which I hid
when the others came, stamping boots
and rubbing gloveless hands, joking about
sacrificing sleep for ungrateful sons. "My boy broke
two front teeth playing hockey," a man wearing
shorts laughs. "This is his reward." My sons
will leap into my arms, remember this morning
all their lives. "The game is for my oldest boy,
just back from Iraq," a man in overalls says
from the back of the line. "He plays these games
in his room all day. I'm not worried, he'll snap out of it,
he's earned his rest." These men fix leaks, lay
foundations for other men's dreams without complaint.
They've been waiting in the cold since Aeneas
founded Rome on rivers of blood. Virgil understood that
death begins and never ends, that it's the god of loneliness.
Through the window, a clerk shouts, "We've only five."
The others seem not to know what to do with their hands,
tuck them under their arms, or let them hang,
naked and useless. Is it because our hands remember
what they held, the promises they made? I know
exactly when my boys will be old enough for war.
Soon three of us will wait across the street at Target,
because it's what men do for their sons.

—by Philip Schultz

POET NOTES

Born in 1945 in Rochester, New York, **Philip Schultz**, was the winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. He has been celebrated for his singular vision of the American immigrant experience and Jewish identity, his alternately fierce and tender portrayal of family life, and his rich and riotous evocation of city streets. His poems have found enthusiastic audiences among readers of Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*, *Slate*, *The New Yorker*, and other publications.

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS

The God of Loneliness, a major collection of Schultz's work, includes poems from his five books (*Like Wings*, *Deep Within the Ravine*, *The Holy Worm of Praise*, *Living in the Past*, *Failure*) and fourteen new poems. Poet Tony Hoagland says it is a volume to cherish, from *"one of the least affected of American poets, and one of the fiercest",* and it will be an essential addition to the

history of American poetry. Schlutz lives in East Hampton, NY with his wife, sculptor Monica Banks and their two sons, Elias and August, and dog Penelope.

THE WRITERS STUDIO—Schultz founded The Writers Studio in 1987 after spending four years as the founder and director of New York University's graduate creative writing program. The Writers Studio utilizes a method that emphasizes technique and emotional connection, making writers aware of the distinction between the actual writer and a narrative persona. Today it features an online program, workshops in New York City, San Francisco and Tucson, as well as a celebrated reading series in New York City.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Philip Schultz

About his dyslexia, Philip Schultz says**:** *I had learned, over time, to segregate my perceptions of myself as a way of tolerating the bad and trying to appreciate the good: Yes, I could make up stories, and draw (I was a cartoonist in high school) and write poems, but I wasn't smart in most academic subjects like math and science, and I was a painfully slow reader, someone who had to carefully select each book and avoided any unnecessary reading. I was kicked out of Hebrew school in a week, and the Boy Scouts in two weeks (couldn't follow instructions or read a map). I sat alone on field trips, which I mostly didn't go on, though I could entertain my parents' friends with funny stories and tolerate large amounts of time alone in my backyard, dreaming up adventures.*

P.S.
Listen to poet Philip Schultz read today's poem
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u67nGQMj1rU

April Gift #4—2012 **The Firemen**

Today's poem is dedicated to my dear friend (you know who you are) who still gets swoony over men who've mastered the alluring mix of brawn and brains. When I worked in downtown Cincinnati in the late sixties, early seventies, you could not walk two blocks without negotiating some wild terrain of construction work—pilings of materials, gaping holes in the earth, massive concrete pours, wrecking balls swinging left and right (just prior to the governance of OSHA), and men, men, men everywhere. Hard-hatted, under-shirted (sometimes bare-chested), sweating men with delineated muscles thanks to the glorious world of sheer physical labor. No gym, tan, or pool for these guys who would openly talk (okay, some would only whistle) to the mini-skirted girls and women coming and going. What I remember was the earthy, yet unvulgarized, repartee from smart men who invited engagement, exchanged witticisms that the men in suits back at the office seemed to generally squelch. My girlfriends and I would walk a half mile up 5th street to eat at the counter of Hathaways in the Carew Tower where our favorite waitress would personally squirt ketchup on our french fries and grill us about our love life. We'd then head down 4th street to check out an altogether different crew of workers on our way back to the steno pool. Some of us had our "regulars" we'd banter with as the construction weeks wore on. It was a sweet time in my memory. Yes, I know, the backchat may have been politically incorrect, but I make no apology, and I never asked God, not once, to forgive me.

The Firemen

God forgive me—

It's the firemen,
leaning in the firehouse garage
with their sleeves rolled up
on the hottest day of the year.

As usual, the darkest one is handsomest.
The oldest is handsomest.
The one with the thin, wiry arms is handsomest.
The young one already going bald is handsomest.

And so on.
Every day I pass them at their station:
the word sexy wouldn't do them justice.
Such idle men are divine—

especially in summer, when my hair
sticks to the back of my neck,
a dirty wind from the subway grate
blows my skirt up, and I feel vulgar,
lifting my hair, gathering it together,
tying it back while they watch
as a kind of relief.
Once, one of them walked beside me

to the corner. Looked into my eyes.
He said, "Will I never see you again?"
Gutsy, I thought.
I'm afraid not, I thought.

What I said was I'm sorry.
But how could he look into my eyes
if I didn't look equally into his?
I'm sorry: as though he'd come close, as though

this really were a near miss.

—by Deborah Garrison

POET NOTES

Deborah Garrison, born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1965, earned her bachelor's degree in creative writing from Brown University in 1986. She subsequently earned her master's degree in Literature from New York University. In 1986 she married attorney Mathew C. Garrison and the same year joined the staff of *The New Yorker* where she worked for the next fifteen years, starting on the editorial staff and ultimately becoming the senior non-fiction editor. She is now the poetry editor at Alfred A. Knopf and a senior editor at Pantheon Books.

PUBLICATIONS

In Garrison's first volume of poetry, *A Working Girl Can't Win* (Random House, 1998) the poems focus on themes relating to the young female professional, friendship, love, grief and passion. Her second volume, *The Second Child* (Random House, 2007) published almost ten years after the first, deals mainly with themes related to motherhood. I've read both books and find it significant that reviews of Garrison's poetry have been mixed. While she was a working woman in New York City, *A Working Girl Can't Win* brought high praise from critics and sold over 30,000 copies. Her second book of poems, *The Second Child,* focusing on children, family and domesticity, was largely ignored.

Garrison is the first to acknowledge that her poetry would not be on Knopf's publication list and insists that her own poetry is not indicative either of her taste in poetry or in her breadth as an editor. However, her supporters suggest that the fact that her poetry is "accessible" and commercially successful does not detract from its value. Much discussion of Garrison's work has led to a debate over whether poetry that is not obscure can be considered good.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Deborah Garrison

As a poet and editor, Garrison expresses an interest in having more readers experience the enrichment that poetry can bring because, as she says: *most readers don't even know they need poetry.* She also notes that: *Poetry can be pretentious sometimes, and if people feel poetry is this high citadel that you can't get into, it's bad for poetry. . .* ***I need to feel that the language in my poems is alive, in the sense of talking on the phone to a friend, sharing gossip****.*

For a colorful article (with photos) about Deborah Garrison, go to*:*
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/06/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/06Rpoet.html?pagewanted=all

April Gift #5—2012 **Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt**

In the words of poet **David Bottoms**: *Without poetry, without art, I think we'd generally be much poorer spiritually.* I'd like to suggest that without baseball (which I consider an art), we might also be much poorer spiritually, as well. I have been following what I consider the game of games since I was in grade school, eventually persuading my first husband to teach me how to keep score. John's grandfather was a good friend of Chub Feeney, President of the National League during the years Sparky Anderson took The Big Red Machine (aka Cincinnati Reds) to its zenith, so we occasionally scored primo tickets to several historic post season and World Series games. Those were some glory days of baseball. I should stop now, before I tell you an embarrassing personal tale about an encounter with Peter Edward Rose (oh please, Bud Selig, have a change of heart!) who, as a rookie, still lived in his parent's Price Hill home, not far from my own. Okay, let me get a grip on this poetry post and give the segment back to **David Bottoms** . . .

Even if a person doesn't read poetry, he or she benefits from a culture where other people do. Even if I don't go to museums and look at great paintings, I benefit in many ways because other people do. This is true because the human imagination is being exercised. Significant questions are being examined. The human imagination is turning them into art, and every piece of art we create is witness in some unique way to our humanity, our commonality. This is the way serious literature brings consequence into the world, and it exerts an influence that is powerfully contagious. It changes people's lives. We're affected not only individually, but also collectively. Our very capacity for empathy and tenderness is being expanded. —David Bottoms

Sign for My Father, Who Stressed the Bunt

On the rough diamond,
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,
we rehearsed the strict technique
of bunting. I watched from the infield,
the mound, the backstop
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.
You could drop it like a seed
down either base line. I admired your style,
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,
no few lives. I could homer
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,
and still you stressed the same technique,
the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing
just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch
about basics never changing,
and I never learned what you were laying down.

Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,
let this be the sign
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice.

—by David Bottoms

POET NOTES

David Bottoms was born in 1949 in Canton, Georgia. His poetry is narrative free verse mainly about hardscrabble lives in small Southern towns, with poems set in bars, motels, and pawnshops featuring truckers, waitresses, vandals, and faith healers. In his vision the actual world is not transformed but illuminated. Bottoms lives with his wife and daughter in Atlanta, where he holds the Amos Distinguished Chair in English Letters at Georgia State University. He is Georgia Poet Laureate.

PUBLICATION & HONORS—Bottoms has published several books of poetry: *Waltzing through the Endtime* (Copper Canyon Press, 2004), *Vagrant Grace* (1999), *Armored Hearts: Selected and New Poems*. His first collection, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb County Dump* (1980), was selected by Robert Penn Warren for the 1979 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. His poems have appeared in many anthologies and magazines, including *The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, The Kenyon Review, The New Yorker, The Paris Review*, and *The Southern Review*. Bottoms also serves as editor for *Five Points* literary magazine. His honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Levinson Prize, an Ingram-Merrill Award, an American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Bottoms is currently the Poet Laureate of Georgia and holds the Amos Distinguished Chair in English Letters at Georgia State University.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— David Bottoms

There's a little poem by Jack Gilbert that I like. It goes like this: "The Greek fishermen do not / play on the beach and I don't / write funny poems." I like that a lot. The Greek fishermen are in the business of dredging up something from the depths. That's serious business. Poets and writers, I think, are in the same business. ***So I watch for those pieces that try to reach something deeper, try to ask the hard questions, look for some universal significance in the particulars*** *they deal with. I think this is what all serious art is about – that exploration, that seeking, which is not only an external search, but an inward search as well.*

I don't understand half of what I read by Jung, but what I do catch continues to fascinate me. I love the notion of the unconscious as the repository of the archetype, and I like to try to apply that to the creative process. I find that it's a good way to talk to students about the act of poetry,

to turn them inward, to get them thinking about their own creative process and the mysteries that process connects them to.

I'm of the old "show me, don't tell me" school. Students sometimes have trouble with that. Someone asked me once in a class, "Hey, but can't the poem be an idea?" I said no, absolutely not, and I stick by that. On the other hand, it can express an idea, and it usually will if it's any good. ***Karl Shapiro puts this well in an essay called "What is Not Poetry." He says, "If poetry has an opposite, it is philosophy. Poetry is a materialization of experience; philosophy is the abstraction of it."*** *I love that, and it's a point I try to get across to all my students.*

I am interested in many other things besides poetry, especially sports and music. A lot of my time is spent hunting and fishing. I also play a lot of golf, and used to play a lot of baseball. Though I don't play music regularly any more, a whole lot of my life has been spent playing guitar and banjo in bluegrass and country and western bands. Most of my poetry comes from these experiences and other nonacademic pursuits. That's the way I believe it should be.

P.S.
You can view a video of David Bottoms reading today's poem at
http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-1458

April Gift #6—2012 **Mary's Blood**

The beginning of Passover coincides today with Good Friday, and I am thinking of the mother whose fate it was not only to give birth to a beloved son, but to also watch him die. Poet **Anne Marie Macari**: *If you go back to Paleolithic culture, the female was the religion. Pregnancy and birth was the central rite, as opposed to death, which is the Christian rite.* ***I am more and more inspired by the sacred feminine, which has no obvious place in our culture, but which exists anyway, as an underbelly, an undercurrent.*** *No wonder there are fervent cults of Mary—because we cannot live in a world that exiles the feminine so completely;* ***we need a more balanced world in which the female energies are as valued as the male.*** *My writing life now is always in search of that missing aspect. It seems to me to be so invisible in our lives that we don't even know how to explain or define it.* . . .I'm dedicating today's poem to my secretary, Sarah, who is on the very cusp of motherhood just as I hit 'send'.

Mary's Blood

It was Mary's blood made him, her blood
sieved through meaty placenta to feed him,
grow him, though Luke wrote she was no more
than the cup he was planted in, a virgin
no man ever pressed against or urged
who could barely catch eyes with the towering
angel but felt God come to her like light
through glass, like a fingerprint left on glass;
still, it's hard to believe she never wanted
to be rid of the thing inside her, wasn't
shamed carrying him, the child's
perfect head pointing at the ground
and rubbing her cervix like the round earth
rubbing the thin wall of the sky that holds it.
All women reach the time of wanting it out
but not wanting it out, not knowing
what's coming, so she must have spread
her legs in anguish because what was inside
pressing her membranes for release
was both herself and a stranger;
and she must have cried out
as the small head crowned,
splitting her, her pelvis swung
wide to push him through the wall
of this world, till what came from her
was a child lit with her own gore,

soiled, everything open so her inside
was now outside, cracked open, it means
mother to crack open, to be rent
by what comes to replace her. Such
is love—the only way. It was Mary's
blood made him: his eyes, tongue,
his penis, her milk fattened his legs,
made hair on the crown of his head,
she grew caul to wrap him and door
to come through and nothing, not even
crying Father, Father, to the warped
blue sky can change it. *—by Anne Marie Macari*

(from *Gloryland* © Alice James Books, 2005. Reprinted with permission)

WORD NOTE
Caul: 1. The amniotic membrane enclosing a fetus. 2. Part of this membrane occasionally found on a child's head at birth, thought to bring good luck.

POET NOTES—A graduate of Oberlin College, poet **Anne Marie Macari** holds an MFA in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence. Macari is on the core faculty at New England College Low residency MFA Program and the Prague Summer Workshops. Macari raised three sons as a single mother. ***"The kids were little when I went back to school and got an M.F.A. in poetry. You should have seen the looks on people's faces. They thought I should do something more practical."*** Macari lives in New Jersey where she and poet Gerald Stern have been companions for 15 years. *"We actually have separate houses,"* Stern said from Macari's house. *"I have supper here and spend the night, and in the morning I go off to my house to work. ... We show each other things we have written, but we have our own privacy.*

IN HER OWN WORDS—Anne Marie Macari
I wrote the first poem in the book (Gloryland), "Mary's Blood," because I could see that the subject of Mary as a woman, as a living mother who gave birth with her body, as we all do, was a subject that surprisingly hadn't been touched. Mary was still the Virgin, the pure vessel who'd never experienced a sexual union, who conceived and gave birth magically, as if her body had nothing to do with it. ***Once I wrote that poem, a door opened and I felt I had access to all kinds of poems about being inside a woman's body. I had to write them.*** *. . . .Suddenly I understood that birth had to have been, at one time, our central myth, not death (as in Christianity). And yet, that central rite, that miracle, had been demeaned in Genesis (when Eve is punished by God to suffer the pangs of childbirth); and then again, in the Gospels, birth is taken away from women and becomes an ethereal event driven and controlled by the male God. In writing these poems* ***I began to understand how distant I was from my own body, and how I'd kept my own female, essential experiences, at bay.*** *. . . .We are more concerned than ever with constantly being physically attractive and young. We seem now to never relax about our bodies, and mothers too are under ever expanding pressures to be home and in the world at once. Think of how offended people get by women nursing in public. That has to be the most insane taboo of our culture, especially when every magazine has advertisements for bras! Every town has its strip bar. Billboards, TV shows, they're all full of breasts, but as long as those breasts are in the service of sex, it's ok. The minute it's about motherhood, something as necessary and natural as nursing becomes "offensive." That's a schizophrenic culture!*

Poet **Gerald Stern** reclaims things other people have abandoned. *I think I have a bone somewhere in my spine, or a wire somewhere in my system, or a feather, that attracts me endlessly to the ruined and fallen,* he's been quoted as saying. One critic has written that Stern's poems, *"explore past time and heritage, seeking to relocate them in an ecstatic present. In this quest, the poems resemble spiritual acts. They bestow attention upon all living beings and offer consolation for their senseless suffering."*

Poet Jack Ridl, whose lovely poem "*Practicing To Walk Like A Heron*" was featured in last year's April Gifts, is friends with Gerald "Jerry" Stern. Jack sent *"The Dog"* to me after I shared with him a poem I'd written about sitting with a dying dog after it was hit by a car near my home a couple of years ago. "*The Dog"* is a fierce and fearless love poem, a spiritual poem. When I heard Gerald Stern read this poem (link below) it took my breath away.

The Dog

What I was doing with my white teeth exposed
like that on the side of the road I don't know,
and I don't know why I lay beside the sewer
so that the lover of dead things could come back
with his pencil sharpened and his piece of white paper.
I was there for a good two hours whistling
dirges, shrieking a little, terrifying
hearts with my whimpering cries before I died
by pulling the one leg up and stiffening.
There is a look we have with the hair of the chin
curled in mid-air, there is a look with the belly
stopped in the midst of its greed. The lover of dead things
stoops to feel me, his hand is shaking. I know
his mouth is open and his glasses are slipping.
I think his pencil must be jerking and the terror
of smell—and sight—is overtaking him;
I know he has that terrified faraway look
that death brings—he is contemplating. I want him
to touch my forehead once again and rub my muzzle
before he lifts me up and throws me into
that little valley. I hope he doesn't use
his shoe for fear of touching me; I know,
or used to know, the grasses down there; I think
I knew a hundred smells. I hope the dog's way
doesn't overtake him, one quick push,
barely that, and the mind freed, something else,
some other, thing to take its place. Great heart,
great human heart, keep loving me as you lift me,
give me your tears, great loving stranger, remember
the death of dogs, forgive the yapping, forgive
the shitting, let there be pity, give me your pity.
How could there be enough? I have given
my life for this, emotion has ruined me, oh lover,
I have exchanged my wildness—little tricks

with the mouth and feet, with the tail, my tongue is a parrot's,
I am a rampant horse, I am a lion,
I wait for the cookie, I snap my teeth—
as you have taught me, oh distant and brilliant and lonely.

—*by Gerald Stern* (from *Love Sick*, Harper & Row, NY 1987)

POET NOTES—Gerald Stern was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1925 to Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine and Poland. After World War II, he spent time in Western Europe before taking his first teaching job in the mid-1950s. He lives in Lambertville, New Jersey, near the Delaware River, a fairly rural area for which he holds a particular affection. His companion of many years is poet Anne Marie Macari, who was featured in yesterday's posting.

EDUCATION & TEACHING CAREER—Gerald Stern earned his B.A. at the University of Pittsburgh in 1947 and an M.A. at Columbia University in 1949. He did post-graduate study at the University of Paris in 1949-50. He has taught at dozens of colleges and universities, and for many years taught poetry writing at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Stern is currently serving as distinguished poet-in-residence at Drew University's low-residency MFA Program in Poetry, along with poet Jean Valentine.

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS—Gerald Stern came of age as a poet and activist in the 1950s and 60s. He's probably best known for *Lucky Life* (now part of his *Early Collected*), which established him as a major voice in American poetry in 1977, and *This Time: New and Selected Poems*, for which he won the National Book Award. Stern has published fourteen volumes of poetry and has received many prestigious awards for his writing, including the 1996 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize and a National Book Award for poetry in 1998 for his book, *This Time: New and Selected Poems.* He was Poet Laureate of New Jersey from 2000 to 2002.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Gerald Stern—*Buddhism wants to relieve you from suffering; you're supposed to escape from suffering. But the artist's job, as I see it, is to be both attached and detached. How can he not embrace suffering?*

You know, a lot of new poets don't seem to have a subject. I don't totally understand that. I did a reading recently . . . there were some very good poets at this reading, but there were also some who seemed more interested in being funny and making cute jokes and writing endlessly about nothing. It was narcissism, indulgence, no social consciousness, no sense of… We're destroying the earth! We live in a country that's governed by confusion and lies and that operates through greed and selfishness and cruelty. We've killed or forced into exile two million Iraqis. Where is the poetry? What are our important poets doing?

I feel that my job, as an artist, is to disturb the peace. And to disturb it intellectually, linguistically, politically and literally.

AUDIO LINK
Listen to Gerald Stern read today's poem. If you are not duly moved, please consult your local healer.http://lyrikline.org/index.php?id=162&L=1&author=gs02&show=Poems&poemId=4036&cHash=46f8c5224e
P.S. In a brief correspondence with Gerald Stern, he told me: *In case you don't know this story, I discovered the dog in the poem lying dead on the side of the road in 1985 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.*

April Gift #8—2012 **Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia**

Do you fall in love with words? Not only what they mean, but also how a word takes physical shape in your mouth, and sometimes just the way it sounds in your ear*?* I took a survey recently and my family and a few friends made these contributions: *organelle* and *alveoli* (medical)*; gabion* and *adiabatic* (engineering)*; apogee, perigee* and *syzygy* (moon related)*; ice apron, sluice, hammock* and *ajuga; scalene, inexorable, skirmish* and *olive.* How about you? If enough of you send in your current fave words, I'll compile a list and share it with you.

Today's poet, **Aimee Nezhukumatathil,** has this to say: *I confess I fall in love with words, the sound and color and flavor of words every day, or at least the days I get to spend reading and researching. How can you come across words like okapi, kakamora, dousing, and wentletrap and not fall madly, hopelessly in love? How can you not ache to write them, let your speech be infused with them like herbs in a delicate oil? . . . My fave words would change depending on how high the sun is in the sky, but right now, on this sultry day, I'd say: soap. hulabaloo. portmanteau. crepuscular. pantaloons. sabotage*.

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia
—the fear of long words

On the first day of classes, I secretly beg
my students Don't be afraid of me. I know
my last name on your semester schedule
is chopped off or probably misspelled—
or both. I can't help it. I know the panic
of too many consonants rubbed up
against each other, no room for vowels
to fan some air into the room of a box
marked *Instructor*. You want something
to startle you? Try tapping the ball
of roots of a potted tomato plant
into your cupped hand one spring, only
to find a small black toad who kicks
and blinks his cold eye at you,
the sun, a gnat. Be afraid of the X-rays
for your teeth or lung. Pray for no
dark spots. You may have
pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis:
coal lung. Be afraid of money spiders tiptoeing
across your face while you sleep on a sweet, fat couch.
But don't be afraid of me, my last name, what language
I speak or what accent dulls itself on my molars.
I will tell jokes, help you see the gleam
of the beak of a mohawked cockatiel. I will
lecture on luminescent sweeps of ocean, full of tiny
dinoflagellates oozing green light when disturbed.
I promise dark gatherings of toadfish and comical shrimp
just when you think you are alone, hoping to stay somehow afloat.

—by Aimee Nezhukumatath

POET NOTES—Aimee Nezhukumatathil was born in Chicago, Illinois, to a Filipina mother and a father from South India. She is associate professor of English at SUNY-Fredonia where she teaches creative writing and environmental literature. Nezhukumatathil lives in Western NY with her husband and two young sons and is at work on a collection of nature essays and more poems. Peacocks, paper, jellyfish, and brown paper packages tied up with string: these are a few of her favorite things.

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS—Aimee Nezhukumatathil is the author of three poetry collections: *Lucky Fish* (2011); *At the Drive-in Volcano* (2007), winner of the Balcones Prize; and *Miracle Fruit* (2003), winner of the Tupelo Press Prize, ForeWord Magazine's Book of the Year Award, the Global Filipino Award and a finalist for The Glasgow Prize and the Asian American Literary Award. Her first chapbook, *Fishbone* (2000), won the Snail's Pace Press Prize. Other awards include a poetry fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pushcart Prize, the Angoff Award from *The Literary Review*, the Boatwright Prize from *Shenandoah*, and multiple fellowships to The MacDowell Colony.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Aimee Nezhukumatathil —*I keep an image journal. It's a whole mish-mash of things—recipes I want to try, things I want to jot down that I don't know will ever be a poem but like the sound of. It's almost like one of those old fashioned commonplace books where I write down quotes that I like or maybe a couple lines that I've been playing with while I'm loading the dishwasher or something. And then later, when I get time to write, I flip through and something usually will pop up from there.*

For me, incorporating metaphors with a natural bent always freshens it up. So even if I'm writing about first love, it still feels new to me if I'm using the medusa jellyfish as a metaphor for first love—for me, that's exciting and new. I think it's almost intertwined; it's almost hard for me to divorce that because I watch so many of these documentaries and read so much. ***The majority of what I read is actually field guides or nonfiction nature books—it's kind of my dirty secret—I read much more of that than I do actual poetry.*** *So when it comes down [to it], when I'm actually composing, that vocabulary's already embedded in me. So it's hard for me to say I'm not going to write about nature, because that's the thing that's already been stirring around in my head. I feel like the natural world is full of metaphors that are very much applicable in 2012, just as much as they were in 1912.*

Aimee Nezhukumatathil and her work, please visit **www.aimeenez.net/.**

April Gift #9—2012 **So Gay**

One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. —Clarissa Pinkola Estes

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In the past five years of posting **April Gifts**, I don't think I've ever singled out a poetry publication to favor or tout. However, the time has come to highlight one of the most enjoyable and memorable poetry journals I've read in a long long time. *RATTLE: Poetry for the 21st Century* (Studio City, California) has been operating (ad-free) for 17 years. The editors feel that poetry has become so obscure and esoteric that most people learn to find their feelings in music, movies, and novels, while poetry languishes. They believe it shouldn't take a scholar to be moved by the written word, that great literature has something to offer everyone.

RATTLE 's goal is to promote a community of active poets which means they care about their submitters as much as they do their subscribers. Most literary magazines solicit more than half the content for their publication, meaning that the "slush pile" of unsolicited work doesn't offer you much of a chance to get published. According to *RATTLE*'s editor, Timothy Green: *Every poem we publish starts in our "slush pile," and has to rise through the same process of careful consideration. We don't ask for or publish the standard credit-listing bios; we don't even read them. If we like your poem better than the Poet Laureate's, we'll publish yours. If a poem is accessible, interesting, moving, and memorable, if it makes you laugh or cry, then it's the kind of poem that rattles around inside you for years, and it's our kind of poem.*

I came across "So Gay" (a Pushcart Prize Nominee) by **Christopher Crawford** in the Summer 2011 edition of *RATTLE*. Read the notes following the poem to get an idea of the kind of refreshing poet *RATTLE* publishes. To get permission to use his poem for these April Gifts, I eventually tracked down Chris in Prague, in the Czech Republic, on Facebook (!) a fun first in all my years of poem sleuthing.

So Gay

How gay is it
for two men
to stroke
the same dog
at the same time.

What if they're both
sitting on a sofa watching
When Harry Met Sally.

How about two men watching
the same gorgeous sunset
from the same high ridge.

And if a man daydreaming
on a bus ride finds his eyes when focus returns,

quite accidentally, on the crotch
of the man seated opposite.

How about two men riding
a bus into a gorgeous sunset
or two gorgeous men watching
a sunset in silence. How about
two men daydreaming and stroking
a gorgeous dog and the dog makes
a strange deep sound of pleasure.

What if the men are old friends.
What if they're brothers.
What if there's music playing.

—by Christopher Crawford
(from *RATTLE: Poetry for the 21st Century, Summer 2011*)

POET NOTES—Christopher Crawford was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1974. He studied mechanical engineering and has worked on various oil rigs and seismic exploration vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. Crawford has lived in the Czech Republic since 2002 and works for the Czech Coal Group.

PUBLICATIONS
Crawford's poetry, fiction, essays and translations have appeared in many publications in addition to *RATTLE*, including *Evergreen Review, Ekleksographia, The Prague Revue, Rakish Angel, OVS Magazine*, *Now Culture, Evergreen Review, The Cortland Review, Envoi,* the anthology *The Return of Král Majáles: Prague's International Literary Renaissance 1990-2010*.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Christopher Crawford—*How gay is it to write poems?* ***I like to make people uncomfortable with my poetry; I like to make myself uncomfortable.*** *I like to use the truth to provoke, to handle strong themes in a contemporary manner. Once the opening stanza entered my mind from wherever these things come from, the rest of the poem came without too much trouble. I pinned "So Gay" to the bathroom wall of my old apartment in Ho Chi Minh City in July 2010, perhaps it's still there.*

EXTRA! EXTRA! Poem "So Gay" with accompanying audio file in *RATTLE*
http://rattle.com/blog/2011/12/so-gay-by-christopher-crawford/

Poet/Dancer Lynn Shapiro

Sloan-Kettering

One thing they don't tell you about Sloan-Kettering
is how beautiful the workers are, shepherdesses, sirens,
brawny football players, ready to lift the heaviest bodies. One,
rosy as a mountain child moves like the most even glare of light,
never turns away till you have risen to follow her.
She holds your paper file near her breasts, but not too tight.
Walls are paved with photographs, scenes of mountains, forests
carved by light. The chemotherapy suite is a skylight, a bubble.
You pass posters for support groups presented on easels like paintings
in progress. There are private rooms for each patient with chairs
and blankets and a straight-backed chair for a companion if you have one,
and a little television with its snake arm, riveted into the wall.
In the center of all these private rooms are gatherings of high stalked flowers,
magenta, purple, amber, bursting higher than churches, in golden vases
everywhere, and the carpet is gold, too, so padded you can hear
no sound of walking. There are so many workers here,
and your surgeon, Alexandra, is the most beautiful worker of all.
Her office where you wait is the color of cool green and mountain cream.
A computer pulses out deep blue insignias, next to it
is a magazine, half the cover missing, torn, or half-eaten,
waiting for you to touch it in the same place as the person before you.
You don't and this decision, its stillness, its inability to reverse is profound
and stagnant. Outside, in the hallway other doctors stand leaning, writing
with the concentration of animals eating food, whose only purpose
is to become blind to everything but their own sustenance.
And she is the Sun. She is beautiful when she enters, says *How
are you?* You lean on her *are*. She opens your robe like the earth,
and you say, *I used to have beautiful breasts*, and she says, *You still
do*, and she cups your breasts. This is her special way. She cups

each one, then combs down, down with her fingers as if down
the side of a mountain she is scaling tenderly so as not to fall
once. She half-closes your garment and you close the rest.
You watch her fingers leave your robe how they arc in the air
to papers on her desk, and you realize that at various times
in the past five years you have thought of her fingers, their short
nails, and how she called you and said into the mouth of her phone,
really as an afterthought, that *in the site of the malignancy we found*
a little milk. A little she said, like the purr of a cat, and you could see
her fingers, her surgeons fingers holding her own children's milk bottles,
and then as you will always, you will want to be like her, to save lives
during the day, then go home, feed your children at night.
You remember the way out on the soundless carpet.

—by Lynn Shapiro
from *Rattle: Poetry for the 21st Century,* #26, Winter 2006, Pushcart Prize Winner

POET NOTES
Lynn Mayson Shapiro was born in Washington D.C., and raised in Cambridge, MA. She attended Smith College and graduated from NYU with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts (Dance). She choreographed for her own company, The Lynn Shapiro Dance Company, and won several awards for her work, among them fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, The Jerome Foundation, and The New York Foundation for the Arts.

After the birth of her daughter, Ava, in 1998 Ms. Shapiro focused exclusively on writing. Today's poem, *Sloan Kettering*, won The Pushcart Prize in 2008. Other poems have appeared in *Rattle: Poetry for the 21st Century*, and *Mudfish*. An excerpt from her memoir entitled, "Savage Love at Beth Israel," was published in the literary journal, *Fifth Wednesday*, and was nominated by board of editors for a Pushcart Prize.

Ms. Shapiro died November 19, 2011 at the age of 54 at Beth Israel Hospital, succumbing to complications from breast cancer, which was diagnosed in 2000. She left her memoir unfinished and is survived by her daughter and her husband, Erik Friedlander, a cellist with whom she often collaborated.

Poet/Dancer Lynn Shapiro with her daughter Ava

APRIL GIFT #11 —2012 **Gratitude**

I trust the plain, spare, statements in today's poem. They create an intimacy that allows me to somehow be alone with the speaker, resonating with her thoughts one by one as she states them, watching the same thick curtain of rain alongside her, making me forget I am even reading a poem. I especially find appealing, and useful, the frame of white space that embraces the three single, lonely lines. There are the major separations and losses that can linger for weeks, months, longer. Then too, there are the instructive little deaths of every day—saying goodbye to a friend over the telephone, not getting the promotion you wanted at work, the law mower running out of gas; it never ends. How to be gracious in the midst of it all is a lesson today's poem offers.

Gratitude

The grass seems lusher
in the wet gray air,

but less approachable now—
thick curtain of pouring rain.

The day before I leave your home,

crimson urn on the dark cherry
coffee table, picture windows
framing the lagoon—

all seem more beautiful,
knowing I won't see them
for another year.

As though I look at them
through something like

this curtain of rain.

More beautiful, but beautiful
still on all the days before.

I used to envy the simply grateful,
who, without needing

separation or loss,

would lift their heads
from their busy supper or book

and revel in the steam from a teacup
winding its slow way
to nothingness in the air,

or just the teacup
catching the window's tiny
parallelogram of light.

—by Sally Bliumis-Dunn

POET NOTES

Sally Bliumis-Dunn teaches Modern Poetry and Creative Writing at Manhattanville College. She received her B.A. in Russian language and literature from U.C. Berkeley in 1983 and her MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College in 2002. She lives in Armonk, New York with her husband John with whom she shares four children.

PUBLICATIONS

Bliumis-Dunn's poems have appeared in *BigCityLit*, *Lumina*, *New York Times, Nimrod*, *The Paris Review*, *PBS News Hour, Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry London*, *RATTLE*, *Rattapallax*, *Spoon River Poetry Review* and *Chance of A Ghost*, an anthology put out by Helicon Nine in 2005.
Wind Publications published her first book, *Talking Underwater* in 2007. Her second book, *Second Skin*, in which today's poem appears, was also published by Wind in 2010. Both collections can be found on Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com.

AWARDS & HONORS

In 2002, Bliumis-Dunn was a finalist for the Nimrod/Hardman Pablo Neruda Prize. Her manuscript, *Talking Underwater*, which has been a finalist in three contests, was published by Wind Publications in 2007. In 2008, she was asked to read in the "Love Poems Program" at the Library of Congress.

POET WEBSITE

You can learn more about Sally Bliumis-Dunn and read more of her life lesson poems at:
http://sallybliumisdunn.com/content/

April Gift #12—2012 **Telemarketer**

I give up. I cannot find one biographical note about the author of today's sweet poem which had been sitting in a "random good poetry" file on my desk. **Brett Garcia Myhren**, if you are out there, please phone home, tell us something about yourself. Don't live in the murky realm of anonymity, invisible like the telemarketer you write about. You know, the one who calls out of the clear blue, interrupting the final round of *Jeopardy*, pressing us to buy more collision insurance, maybe speed-selling us the next best phone plan or better windows with a U-factor that will rock our world. What we all need is a method to temper our irritation when the unwanted telemarketer cheerfully mispronounces our name soon after we pick up and say *Hello*.

This poem makes me think of the inherent principles of The Feldenkrais® Method. Although I never had the chance to study with the master, Moshe Feldenkrais, several of his devoted students became my teachers. They taught us how to become more fully awake and aware in order to move ourselves and others when stuck in habitual patterns that no longer served. It was my good fortune to have teachers who themselves remained students for life, always willing to learn from anyone and any situation. Today's poet, **Brett Garcia Myhren**, appears to be such a teacher, offering us a practical way to engage with "the unwanted". Thank you, Brett. I'd like to try this out some time.

Telemarketer

I'm reading on the couch
when she calls, asks for me by name.
I smile at her scripted intimacy,
imagine her cubicle with photos of pets,
the long bend of light
on her lacquered nails.

"Listen to this," I reply,
"*David kissed the soft inner banks*
of women's thighs."

"Pardon?"

"Oh, there's more," I say,
"*Thighs like loamy earth*
that cup the rivers, or lilies
blooming in rose and mint."

"Is this a bad time for you, sir?"

"Is it for you?
Tell me something," I insist.
"Tell me anything."

A quiet unfolds between us
as though we'd spent our breath
on withering arguments
or lost it
in the scented air of sweat.

Finally she says,
"I'm in Lincoln, Nebraska.
Outside, leaves are turning
in the cold."

—by Brett Garcia Myhren

THE FELDENKRAIS® METHOD
Since I have nothing to offer on our early morning poet, you might be curious to explore the world of the Feldenkrais Method®. There are over a hundred thousand 'hits' on Google, but you could start with: http://www.feldenkrais.com/

This info later sent to me from one of my readers, my very own sister and sleuth, Donata Glassmeyer: Brett Myhren received both an MFAand an MA from McNeese State University in 2003. While teaching English at Loyola Marymount University, he is complet- ing his first poetry manuscript, *Far Shore*. He recently won Waasmode Fiction Contest from Passages North magazine.

April Gift #13—2012 **Poem in Search of a Horse**

When revising a poem, you scour it line by line, combing through each stanza, fine-tuning what works but could work better; being honest about what distracts, what needs tweaking, what wants a clearer adjective, line break or verb. Often enough it comes down to just one word, the precise word you know will complete the poem, the word on the tip of your tongue hiding just behind your eye tooth. I hunt down words by moving, walking, pacing and muttering out loud to myself: *exalt? enchant? convey? transport?* trying each word out in the line, fishing for exactitude. I read somewhere that poet Donald Hall puts a multitude of unfinished poems in his desk drawer, pulling them out periodically, working on them sometimes over the course of years. What's your recipe for revising poems?

Several postings ago, I asked readers to send me their current favorite words. Words that feel good in the mouth, sound good to the ear, words that delight or perturb, zing and zap, make the hair on the top of your head whirl counterclockwise or anchor you like lead to the ground. First, read today's poem about a poem, then read the luscious list I've compiled for 'Words That You Love'.

Poem in Search of a Horse

Time is not reading the poem as you
read the poem, but rest assured he's slipped
inside the room in his soft, polished shoes,
with his little cough, his bowler hat in hand,
so sorry to disturb. It isn't that he doesn't like
to read, he loves to lean across your shoulder,
let you feel his breath, a delicate subzero
on your neck, but he's impatient with anything
but haiku. Ignore him. He'll pretend
he doesn't care, proceed to wind the clocks
with tiny keys or stretch out on a sofa, tap
a tree branch on a pane and wait you out.
Meanwhile, the poem persists in its solitary
business of resisting being made, trying
the usual tactics: silence, tantrum, argument
over rules of play until the stuck mind panics,
a tarantula in hot tar, shouts words out
like charades: moon! anapest! plumage! boat!
desperate to drown out that silence accompanying
the figure in the well-cut suit who's polishing
the gold case of his pocket watch, remarking
how words pile up like big rigs on a fogged-in
freeway: apple! rainfall! pasture! bell! and even
when the poem finds some purchase, scrambles
up a narrow footpath through a field and stands
inside a grassy insect buzz, holding out
a shaky palm of sugar to conjure up a horse,
a distant train will whistle, spooking anything
half wild. You're back exactly where you started.
Cough-cough. Soft shoes. Tick-tock. No horse.

—by Hayden Saunier

POET NOTES

Poet **Hayden Saunier** is a writer and actress living in the Philadelphia area. She is the winner of the Pablo Neruda poetry prize given by Nimrod International Journal and the 2011 Rattle Poetry Prize. She has been nominated twice for a Pushcart prize. She has poetry published or forthcoming in the following literary journals: *5 A.M., Bellevue Literary Journal, Beloit Poetry Journal, Drunken Boat, Fox Chase Review, Freshet, Mad Poets Review, Margie, the American Poetry Journal, Nimrod, Philadelphia Stories, Rattle, Smartish Pace, Schuylkill Valley Journal, U.S. 1 Worksheets, Verse Daily*.

TEACHING & EDUCATION—Hayden Saunier is a graduate of the University of Virginia and holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. She completed her MFA with a concentration in the genre of Poetry. Her thesis was: *"Wislawa Szymborska: Transcending the Obvious with Thought."* Since 2006, Saunier has taught English Composition I and II, Acting I at Delaware Valley College.

ACTING

As an actress and voice-over artist, **Hayden Saunier**'s film and television credits include *The Sixth Sense, Philadelphia Diary, Hack* and *The West Wing*, as well as numerous theatre productions.

POET WEBSITE

Hayden Saunier's collection of poems, *Tips For Domestic Travel*, was a finalist for the St. Lawrence Book Award and was published by Black Lawrence Press in Spring, 2009. Read about it on Saunier's website at: www.haydensaunier.com/

Flirtation

After all, there's no need
to say anything

at first. An orange, peeled
and quartered, flares

like a tulip on a wedgwood plate.
Anything can happen.

Outside the sun
has rolled up her rugs

and night strewn salt
across the sky. My heart

is humming a tune
I haven't heard in years!

Quiet's cool flesh—
let's sniff and eat it.

There are ways
to make of the moment

a topiary
so the pleasure's in

walking through.

—by Rita Dove

POET NOTES

In 1952, **Rita Dove** was born in Akron, Ohio. She served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 to 1995. Dove graduated summa cum laude with a B.A. from Miami University in 1973 and received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa in 1977. In 1974 she held a Fulbright Scholarship from Eberhard Karls University in Germany. Dove is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia, where she has been teaching since 1989. Dove married Fred Viebahn, a German-born writer, in 1979. Their daughter Aviva Dove-Viebahn was born in 1983. The couple are avid ballroom dancers, and have participated in a number of showcase performances. Dove and her husband live in Charlottesville, Virginia.

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS

Among her many honors are the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in poetry, the 1996 Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities and the 2006 Common Wealth Award. President Bill Clinton bestowed upon her the 1996 National Humanities Medal.

Dove's books of poetry include *Sonata Mulattica* (W. W. Norton, 2009); *American Smooth* (2004); *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), which was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Mother Love* (1995); *Selected Poems* (1993); *Grace Notes* (1989); *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry; *Museum* (1983); and *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980). In addition to poetry, Dove has published short stories, a novel, and a book of essays.

IN HER OWN WORDS— **Rita Dove** (from an interview by poet Camille T. Dungy)
If one is going to succumb to the spell of writing, then it seems to me that poetry is the purest love. *It's adoring the very syllables on which everything hinges. And not only the syllables, but the breath between the syllables. It verges on the first utterance ever made by Homo sapiens that was understood by other Homo sapiens. Therefore, writing poetry approaches anthropology. And it embodies music, because it relies on sound, sound that has been made to spawn an emotional response. And then history comes in, and linguistics. History because words change their meaning, and the way that they make us feel changes with that meaning. All those layers!*

If I were to couch it in the negative, I would say that poetry satisfies so many of my other interests. Though it goes deeper than that. I mean, I could say it takes on music, for example, or that I string words into sentences that spiral down the invisible central axis on the page, the thrill derived from fitting things together—which in turn becomes a third, larger entity—is similar to sewing or doing crossword puzzles, two of my passionate hobbies. Gosh! Then there's the lure of history with its event trajectories and my general love for books—the feel of pages turning, the discovery of little-known facts, philosophy of why we are here and keep insisting on proclaiming, "We are here! We are here!" Poetry can contain all those things. ***To me it's the noblest of the arts.***

Dear Leonard Cohen,
Apparently someone does "keep track of each fallen robin". In a recent issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, current statistics show that worldwide, 6,462 people die every hour. That's more than 150,000 deaths each day, 56,597,034 deaths per year. I mention this because mortality is on my mind, perhaps yours also. Both of my parents are gone now, and most of my friend's parents are going, going, gone.

This existence of ours is as transient as autumn clouds. To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance. A lifetime is like a flash of lightning in the sky, rushing by like a torrent down a steep mountain. —Gautama Buddha

Dirge in Woods

A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so.

—by George Meredith

POET NOTES
George Meredith was an English novelist and poet of the Victorian era (1828-1909). His first home was in Portsmouth, where his father was a tailor. When George was only five years old, his mother died. His childhood after her death was not happy. After his father was forced to file bankruptcy, George was sent to stay with relatives in the country and eventually to a Moravian boarding school on the Rhine where he developed a love of German music, poetry and the German countryside. It marked the end of his formal schooling.

Despite the fact that his wife inspired some of Meredith's most insightful work, from Modern Love to The Egoist, the marriage was not a success. Frequent pregnancies and miscarriages added to the family stress. His second wife was a practical, domestic woman who was willing to put her husband's needs and interests ahead of her own. Publicly, Meredith gave an impression of self-confidence and ease, but many who knew him well recognized that it was only a mask. He relied heavily on the psychological support of his second wife, having been deprived of maternal care at a very early age.

An extremely energetic man, he was fond of long walks and physical exertion, including, as a release for tension, the throwing around of a heavy weight, eventually developing symptoms, which crippled him. Even in old age, Meredith was known as a great conversationalist, a riveting storyteller who could talk for hours without boring his listeners. Although, as he grew older, Meredith became increasingly deaf and so crippled that at times he could not stand up, visitors to Box Hill (his home) continued to come until the end of his life. He died on May 18, 1909.

PUBLICATIONS
George Meredith's first book of poetry came out in 1851. After 1895 he stopped writing prose, but continued writing poetry. His last collection of poems A Reading of Life, with Other Poems was published in 1901. In 1905 he was awarded the Order of Merit.

Critics have compared Meredith with Thomas Hardy as a "poet-novelist" who considered poetry his true literary vocation but turned to writing novels for financial reasons. Meredith's poetry has received increasing attention in recent years. He explored new meters and stanzaic forms and experimented dramatically with syntax and grammar. Although "Modern Love" is considered his most important poetic achievement, several of his late poems provide important perspectives on his fiction writing. In his poems as well as his prose, Meredith attempted to challenge and overcome what he perceived as narrow and constrictive world views.

CAREER
Meredith was both an author and journalist. He apprenticed as a law clerk in London, 1846; founder, with others, of Monthly Observer, late 1840s; was a literary critic for Westminster Review; journalist for Ipswich Journal, a Tory newspaper, around 1858-68, and contributor to other Conservative papers; was a manuscript reader and literary adviser for Chapman and Hall, 1860-95; a war correspondent for Morning Post, covering Italy's battle for independence from Austria during the summer of 1866; became active in politics, 1868; published series of dialogues in Graphic, December, 1872, to January, 1873; lectured on comedy at London Institute, 1877; London Library, vice president, 1902; and continued to write occasionally for newspapers and magazines until shortly before his death at age 81.

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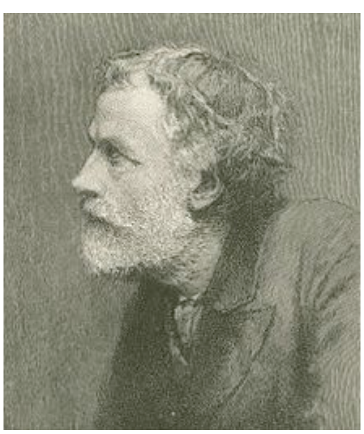
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?
—Mary Oliver



George Meredith and his house on Box Hill
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"It will take all your heart, it will take all your breath
It will be short, it will not be simple"—Adrienne Rich (May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012)

From an Atlas of the Difficult World

I know you are reading this poem
late, before leaving your office
of the one intense yellow lamp-spot and the darkening window
in the lassitude of a building faded to quiet
long after rush-hour. I know you are reading this poem
standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean
on a grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven
across the plains' enormous spaces around you.
I know you are reading this poem
in a room where too much has happened for you to bear
where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed
and the open valise speaks of flight
but you cannot leave yet. I know you are reading this poem
as the underground train loses momentum and before running
up the stairs
toward a new kind of love
your life has never allowed.
I know you are reading this poem by the light
of the television screen where soundless images jerk and slide
while you wait for the newscast from the intifada.
I know you are reading this poem in a waiting-room
of eyes met and unmeeting, of identity with strangers.
I know you are reading this poem by fluorescent light
in the boredom and fatigue of the young who are counted out,
count themselves out, at too early an age. I know
you are reading this poem through your failing sight, the thick
lens enlarging these letters beyond all meaning yet you read on
because even the alphabet is precious.
I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove
warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your
hand
because life is short and you too are thirsty.
I know you are reading this poem which is not in your language
guessing at some words while others keep you reading
and I want to know which words they are.
I know you are reading this poem listening for something, torn
between bitterness and hope
turning back once again to the task you cannot refuse.

I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else
left to read
there where you have landed, stripped as you are.

—by Adrienne Rich

SCRIBE NOTES

After the rich "sorting month" of January, these select 30 "April Gift" poems find their place in the order of things somewhere by mid February every year. The next six weeks is crunch time when I research and compile the material for the individual poems, including gathering permission (not always successfully) from poets and/or publishers. By the end of March, I'm setting up the pages so that they appear orderly in your April daily emails. While there is a real sense of purpose and direction, a plan I plan to follow, I have learned to expect the unexpected. Sometimes, one chosen poem gets bumped by another for any number of reasons. This year, today's poem by Adrienne Rich trumps one I had already chosen.

POET NOTES

On the Internet alone, there are literally millions of references for poet, activist, lesbian, Jew, feminist Adrienne Rich who died last month on March 27. She has left an indelible mark on the world. She wrote about oppression, poverty, relationship, power and love. After several hours at the computer, and sitting with a stack of books, I simply could not find a way to adequately summarize this remarkable woman's life in a two page posting. Instead, I'll suggest this well-written obituary from the Huffington Post—**Adrienne Rich Dead: Feminist Poet And Essayist Dies At 82**— http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/28/adrienne-rich-dies_n_1386586.html

IN HER OWN WORDS—Adrienne Rich
Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you...*it means that you do not treat your body as a commodity with which to purchase superficial intimacy or economic security; for our bodies to be treated as objects, our minds are in mortal danger. It means insisting that those to whom you give your friendship and love are able to respect your mind. It means being able to say, with Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre: "I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all the extraneous delights should be withheld or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give.*

Responsibility to yourself means that you don't fall for shallow and easy solutions--predigested books and ideas...marrying early as an escape from real decisions, getting pregnant as an evasion of already existing problems. It means that you refuse to sell your talents and aspirations short...and this, in turn, means resisting the forces in society which say that women should be nice, play safe, have low professional expectations, drown in love and forget about work, live through others, and stay in the places assigned to us. It means that we insist on a life of meaningful work, insist that work be as meaningful as love and friendship in our lives. It means, therefore, the courage to be "different" . . . ***The difference between a life lived actively, and a life of passive drifting and dispersal of energies, is an immense difference****. Once we begin to feel committed to our lives, responsible to ourselves, we can never again be satisfied with the old, passive way.*

Today's poet, **Dorianne Laux**, was a single mother of a nine-year-old daughter living in Berkeley, California in 1983 when she decided to go to college. A "late bloomer", Laux was 36 years-old before she received a B.A. in English from Mills College in 1988. Prior to her brave dive into a life as a poet, Laux was a sanatorium cook, a maid, a donut holer, and a gas station manager.

Fast Gas
for Richard

Before the days of self service,
when you never had to pump your own gas,
I was the one who did it for you, the girl
who stepped out at the sound of a bell
with a blue rag in my hand, my hair pulled back
in a straight, unlovely ponytail.
This was before automatic shut-offs
and vapor seals, and once, while filling a tank,
I hit a bubble of trapped air and the gas
backed up, came arcing out of the hole
in a bright gold wave and soaked me—face, breasts,
belly and legs. And I had to hurry
back to the booth, the small employee bathroom
with the broken lock, to change my uniform,
peel the gas-soaked cloth from my skin
and wash myself in the sink.
Light-headed, scrubbed raw, I felt
pure and amazed—the way the amber gas
glazed my flesh, the searing,
subterranean pain of it, how my skin
shimmered and ached, glowed
like rainbowed oil on the pavement.
I was twenty. In a few weeks I would fall,
for the first time, in love, that man waiting
patiently in my future like a red leaf
on the sidewalk, the kind of beauty
that asks to be noticed. How was I to know
it would begin this way: every cell of my body
burning with a dangerous beauty, the air around me
a nimbus of light that would carry me
through the days, how when he found me,
weeks later, he would find me like that,
an ordinary woman who could rise
in flame, all he would have to do
is come close and touch me.

—by *Dorianne Laux*

POET NOTES

Dorianne Laux was born in Augusta, Maine, in 1952. She grew up as a navy brat in San Diego, living in Quonset huts with other kids from all over the world. As an adult, she waited tables and wrote poems in San Diego, Los Angeles, Berkeley and Petaluma. Laux has taught at the University of Oregon's Program in Creative Writing. She now lives with her husband, poet Joseph Millar, in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she teaches poetry in the MFA Program at North Carolina State University. Laux's free-verse poems are sensual and grounded, compassionate and fearless. They are poems that honor life by being a reliable witness to the ordinary.

PUBLICATIONS & PRIZES

Laux is the author of *The Book of Women* (Red Dragonfly Press (2012), *The Book of Men* (2011) winner of The Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry, *Superman: The Chapbook* (2008), *Facts About the Moon* (2005) winner of the Oregon Book Award. Laux is also author of *Awake, What We Carry*, and *Smoke* from BOA Editions. Her poems have been translated into French, Italian, Korean, Romanian and Brazilian Portuguese. Among her awards are a Pushcart Prize, an Editor's Choice III Award, and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

I can recommend *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*, Dorianne's book of guidance, techniques, and exercises for aspiring authors, co-authored with poet Kim Addonizio.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Dorianne Laux—*When we write a poem of personal witness, a poem about an ordinary day, an ordinary life, seen through the lens of what Whitman called "the amplitude of time," we're struggling to find the importance of the individual who is stranded in the swirling universe, a figure standing up against the backdrop of eternity. I think of the fisherman's prayer: Dear Lord, be good to me / the sea is so wide / and my boat is so small.*

There is nothing like finding a new love at an old age. ***Poetry will go underground for a time, but will also pop up when I least expect it, fresh and new again, and more importantly, when I seem to most need it****. Poetry saved me early on, and it continues to save me, just at longer intervals.*

I want poetry that tells the truth with compassion. *I see so many poems of which anyone could say: There is absolutely nothing wrong with this poem. Or this poem is interesting. Or this poem is so smart. What does that mean? Smart? Was Neruda a smart poet? Or this is so well-crafted.* ***I'm looking for poems that leave me speechless. Breathless. Slayed.***

My imagination is a monastery and I am its monk.
—John Keats

Keats

When Keats, at last beyond the curtain
of love's distraction, lay dying in his room
on the Piazza di Spagna, the melody of the Bernini
Fountain "filling him like flowers,"
he held his breath like a coin, looked out
into the moonlight and thought he saw snow.
He did not suppose it was fever or the body's
weakness turning the mind. He thought, "England!"
and there he was, secretly, for the rest
of his improvidently short life: up to his neck
in sleigh bells and the impossibly English cries
of street vendors, perfect
and affectionate as his soul.
For days the snow and statuary sang him so far
beyond regret that if now you walk rancorless
and alone there, in the piazza, the white shadow
of his last words to Severn, "Don't be frightened,"
may enter you.

—by Christopher Howell

POEM NOTE

The painter Joseph Severn sailed from England to Italy with John Keats when no one else would agree to accompany the ailing poet to Rome. The hope was that the trip would cure Keats's lingering illness, suspected to be tuberculosis. In Rome, Savern and Keats lived in an apartment at number 26 Piazza di Spagna, just at the bottom right of the Spanish Steps and overlooking Bernini's famous Barcaccia fountain. Severn was devoted in his friendship to Keats who he nursed until his death on February 23, 1821, three months after they had arrived in Rome.

POET NOTES

Christopher Howell was born 1946 in Portland, Oregon. He served as a journalist for the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War. Since 1975, Howell has served as the director and principal editor for Lynx House Press. He is also editor of Willow Springs, director of the Eastern Washington University Press, and on the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing at Eastern Washington University (Cheney, Washington). He lives in Spokane, Washington.

EDUCATION

Christopher Howell earned a B.S. from Oregon State University in 1968, an M.A. from Portland State University in 1971, and an MFA from the MFA Program for Poets & Writers at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in 1973. He also attended Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington.

PUBLICATIONS & PRIZES—Christopher Howell is the author of eight books of poetry and the recipient of several awards including three Pushcart Prizes. He has also been widely anthologized, and his poems have appeared in many journals including *Harper's*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Iowa Review* and *Poetry Northwest*.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Christopher Howell—*So I think teaching is important and I am continually pleased to find that I am able to do it. I should also say that teaching has frequently been a great deal of plain old fun. I like my students, even the wooden headed ones sometimes burst into blossom or flame, suddenly alive with realization or devilment or compassion which it is then my task and privilege to tend.*

When I write I am open to anything: any style, tone, trope, structure, language, or proposition. This keeps the poems lively, but it also means that I often have a very imperfect view of the overall arc of a given body of work.

***I like poems to cut close to the bone, emotionally. I will risk sentimentality anytime, to work a poem into the embodiment of powerful feeling**. This is what I admire most in the work of the late James Wright, the risk. And it is not solely the risk one might associate with turning off the reader or calling upon oneself the charge of general sappiness. The real risk lies in going deep enough to nearly lose one's way, deep enough to find the intuitive jet stream with its unpredictable language and the pain and joy that is very, very nearly unbearable.*

In June I'll be spending a week of intensive study on Cape Cod, in Wellfleet, with eleven other writers under the direction of today's esteemed poet, **Marge Piercy**. I'm still pinching myself. I was introduced to Ms. Piercy's poetry more than twenty-five years ago and immediately resonated with the struggles of her younger years: her independence from home at age seventeen; her determined efforts to work at mostly poor paying part-time jobs while trying to secure an education; her devotion as a political activist. In the midst of it all, Ms. Piercy remained a passionate writer. I particularly love her bold use of simple language to write about women and working class people, who in her words "were not as simple as they were supposed to be". Piercy's poems never stray far from embracing "the body", a theme close to my heart.

The tao of touch

What magic does touch create
that we crave it so. That babies
do not thrive without it. That
the nurse who cuts tough nails
and sands calluses on the elderly
tells me sometimes men weep
as she rubs lotion on their feet.

Yet the touch of a stranger
the bumping or predatory thrust
in the subway is like a slap.
We long for the familiar, the open
palm of love, its tender fingers.
It is our hands that tamed cats
into pets, not our food.

The widow looks in the mirror
thinking, no one will ever touch
me again, never. Not hold me.
Not caress the softness of my
breasts, my inner thighs, the swell
of my belly. Do I still live
if no one knows my body?

We touch each other so many
ways, in curiosity, in anger,
to command attention, to soothe,
to quiet, to rouse, to cure.
Touch is our first language
and often, our last as the breath
ebbs and a hand closes our eyes.

—by Marge Piercy

(from *The Hunger Moon: New & Selected Poems*, 1980-2010, Alfred A. Knopf, 2011)

POET NOTES

Today's biographical notes, gathered directly from online searches, are more extensive than most entries because the back story of Marge Piercy's life is unusually rich and clearly informs so much of her poetry.

Marge Piercy is an American poet, novelist, and social activist. Born in Detroit in 1936 to a family deeply affected by the Great Depression, she was the first in her family to attend college, studying at the University of Michigan. Winning a Hopwood Award for Poetry and Fiction (1957) enabled her to finish college and spend some time in France, and her formal schooling ended with an M.A. from Northwestern University.

Piercy credits her mother with making her a poet. She read voraciously and encouraged her daughter to do the same. Halfway through grade school, Piercy almost died from the German measles and then caught rheumatic fever. In the misery of sickness, she took refuge in books and lavished love on her cats. As Piercy grew older and became more independent, she left home at seventeen.

After two marriages ended in divorce, Piercy lived in Chicago, trying to learn to write the kind of poetry and fiction she imagined but could not yet produce. She supported herself at a variety of part-time jobs; she was a secretary, a switchboard operator, a clerk in a department store, an artists' model, and a poorly paid part-time faculty instructor. She remembers those years in Chicago as the hardest of her adult life. As a woman writer, she was entirely invisible. She wrote novel after novel but could not get published. Piercy remarks that at that time she knew two things about her fiction: she wanted to write fiction with a political dimension (Simone de Beauvoir was her model) and she wanted to write about women she could recognize, working class people who in her words "were not as simple as they were supposed to be".

From 1965 to 1969, Piercy's main focus was political. She always continued to write but only in the time not used up by political organizing. She became active in SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), starting an MDS chapter in Brooklyn that was the adult off-campus SDS. In 1967, she became an organizer with the SDS regional office in New York. The movement community eventually split into warring factions, taking a toll on Piercy's health.

In 1971, Ms. Piercy moved to Cape Cod where her creativity seemed suddenly liberated as she regained health and a measure of peace. She began gardening almost immediately. Over the years that she has lived on the Cape, she has sometimes been politically centered in Boston and sometimes on the Cape, depending on which issues she has been involved in. Piercy thrives as a writer in part due to the enduring support of her husband, author Ira Wood. She does not understand writers who complain about writing, not because it is easy for her but because it is so absorbing that she can imagine nothing more consuming and exciting at which to labor. So long as she can make her living at writing, she will consider herself lucky.

PUBLICATIONS

A prolific writer, **Marge Piercy** is the author of numerous volumes of poetry, among them *The Moon is Always Female* (1980, considered a feminist classic) as well as more than a dozen novels. She has also written a memoir (*Sleeping with Cats,* 2002), a play, a collection of essays and a book on writing (*So You Want to Write*, 2001, co-authored with her husband, Ira Wood). Her most recent book is *The Hunger Moon: New and Selected Poems*, 1980-2010, Knopf, 2001.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Marge Piercy

The real writer is one who really writes. Talent is an invention like phlogiston after the fact of fire. Work is its own cure. You have to like it better than being loved.

The pitcher cries for water to carry and a person for work that is real.

Writing sometimes feels frivolous and sometimes sacred, but memory is one of my strongest muses. I serve her with my words. So long as people read, those we love survive however evanescently. As do we writers, saying with our life's work, Remember. Remember us. Remember me.

April Gift #20—2012 **Pier**

The active verbs in today's poem are a great device to help us feel absorbed in the poet's description of the physical activity of jumping off a pier. The rhythms and syntax of the poem further carry us into an embodied experience that practically shouts at us to "come on into the poem" and enjoy ourselves. That said, I think this poem is far more than the telling of a happy moment. Here is a decisive woman, unencumbered by what others may think of her "no holds barred" choice to be daring. The diction is crisp and economical, suggesting not only purposeful movement in the poem, but also a purposeful movement and rebellious spirit in the life of the narrator. I feel invigorated by some sort of layered challenge inherent in this poem.

The noun "snout" in the first line threw me a bit until I read a review of Irish poet **Vona Groarke**'s style. It seems she likes to contrast gristly, Germanic words, like "snout", with more intellectual, Latinate words such as "America". "Snout" suggests the shape of the land, and maybe even the speaker's orientation: the nose leads when you are following an instinct.

Pier
Speak to our muscles of a need for joy
—W H Auden, "Sonnets from China" (XVII)

Left at the lodge and park, snout to America.
Strip to togs, a shouldered towel, flip-flop over
the tarmac past the gangplanked rooted barge,
two upended rowboats and trawlers biding time.
Nod to a fisherman propped on a bollard,
exchange the weather, climb the final steps
up to the ridge. And then let fly. Push wide,
push up your knees so the blue nets hold you,
wide-open, that extra beat. Gulp cloud;
fling a jet-trail round your neck like a feather boa,
toss every bone and sinew to the plunge.
Enter the tide as if it were nothing,
really nothing, to do with you. Kick back.
Release your ankles from its coiled ropes;
slit water, drag it open, catch your breath.
Haul yourself up into August. Do it over,
raucously. Head first. This time, shout.

—by Vona Groarke
(from *Spindrift*, 2009, reproduced with permission from the author and The Gallery Press)

POET NOTES—Vona Groarke was born in the Irish midlands in 1964, and attended Trinity College in Dublin, the University College in Cork. Groarke has taught at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and now teaches at the Centre for New Writing at the University of Manchester.

PUBLICATIONS
Groarke has published five collections of poetry with the Gallery Press (and by Wake Forest University Press in the United States): *Shale* (1994), *Other People's Houses* (1999), *Flight* (2002), *Juniper Street* (2006) and *Spindrift* (2009). Her *Selected Poems* will be published by

Gallery Press in 2012, and a sixth new collection, *The White Years*, is scheduled for 2014. Recent poems have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Yale Review*, *The Irish Times*, *P.N. Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry London*, *Poetry* (Chicago) and *Arete*. Groarke's poems have been translated into seven languages, including French, Spanish, Chinese, Portugese and Japanese.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Vona Groarke

Asked if writing poetry is something that can be taught, **Vona Groarke** responds: *No one ever asks "Can you teach sculpture?" Or music. Or acting. It's recognized that there's an element of craft involved in the other branches of the creative arts, but for some reason, people seem to question that when it comes to literature. Of course, there is a degree of craft involved and, of course, a good teacher can help students acquire this.*

This poem is dedicated to
all the Veronicas named at birth
first-named, mid-named, nicknamed, or confirmed

to Vera Icons in the open, or veiled in secrecy
to truthsayers and revelators
to the fearless ones in the crowd

stepping forward,
to those Veronicas known
and unknown, and as yet unborn.

Veronica (Vera Icon)

I was walking on Via Veneto.
Va-va-voom! he said, and I laughed out loud:
it was all in the verve of the gesture.

I was a green-eyed blonde, I was a girl.
Vainglory! Will you give me some of it,
garrulous, god-struck, full of vinegar.

This might have been a visionary stance,
a revision of Isis and Venus,
reversion to a vision of grandeur,

or desire in a raw and vital state,
another variant of verismo
and as vivid as a green valentine.

Viva! Some green blood running in my veins,
te quiero verde (I want you green),
which didn't mean I want you virtuous

if virtue meant veiling your truer thoughts.
Or maybe virtue was Veronica,
an adventure in the vernacular,

passing her handkerchief, tossing her cape.
One was a swinger, one was a saint,
one was devoid of all vanity and

one was standing in the path of the bull:
it was all in the quest for victory.
There was vanitas, there was veritas,

I hoped I had both guts and godliness.
Some of us had more and some had less—
this was the true truth we were green about.

—by Sarah Arvio

POET NOTES
Sarah Arvio was born in 1954 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and grew up near New York City among radical Quakers. She was educated at schools abroad and later attended Columbia University, where she studied writing. She has lived in New York, Paris, Caracas, Rome and Mexico. For many years she was a translator for the United Nations in New York and Switzerland.

Today's poem is one in a series that have been written in pithy, often playful tercets, frequently beginning with a simple string of words that serves as the basis for assonant riffing; *"I was wandering in a quandary"* becomes *"and never without a qualm or a pang, / and thinking of taking a quantum leap / out of my quondam life and into yours."* Arvio's writing deploys insights from philosophy, psychology, and physics, and language studies.

PUBLICATION
Arvios' poems are widely published, in such journals as *The New Yorker, The Paris Review, Southwest Review, The New Republic, Literary Imagination, Boston Review, The Kenyon Review* and *Poetry* and in many online reviews. Composers have set some of her poems to music. Her writing has won her several awards and fellowships. *Visits from the Seventh* was published in June 2002 by Alfred A. Knopf. The first eleven poems in this collection won *The Paris Review's* Bernard F. Conners Prize and were reprinted in *The Best American Poetry 1998*. *Sono: cantos* was published in 2006 by Alfred A. Knopf.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Sarah Arvio could not envision herself as a creative writer, she told Borzoi Reader for its website, until she began undergoing psychoanalysis and studying her dreams. *"When I thought about writing my own words, I imagined pressing down so hard on the pen that I broke the nib,"* Arvio said. *"When I looked inward I saw nothing but turmoil and grief. I couldn't realize my thoughts; I had a voice but couldn't use it."* Soon after turning forty, Arvio found her poetic voice, the product of an *"open, amazed mood"* that allowed her to listen to her thoughts.

EXTRA! EXTRA!
Listen to Sarah Arvio read today's poem: http://www.archipelago.org/vol10-12/arvio-vera2.htm

When we look for one thread of motive, we are, in all likelihood, deceiving ourselves.
—Baron Wormser

A Quiet Life

What a person desires in life
  is a properly boiled egg.
This isn't as easy as it seems.
There must be gas and a stove,
  the gas requires pipelines, mastodon drills,
  banks that dispense the lozenge of capital.
There must be a pot, the product of mines
  and furnaces and factories,
  of dim early mornings and night-owl shifts,
  of women in kerchiefs and men with
  sweat-soaked hair.
Then water, the stuff of clouds and skies
  and God knows what causes it to happen.
There seems always too much or too little
  of it and more pipelines, meters, pumping
  stations, towers, tanks.
And salt--a miracle of the first order,
  the ace in any argument for God.
  Only God could have imagined from
  nothingness the pang of salt.
Political peace too. It should be quiet
  when one eats an egg. No political hoodlums
  knocking down doors, no lieutenants who are
  ticked off at their scheming girlfriends and
  take it out on you, no dictators
  posing as tribunes.
It should be quiet, so quiet you can hear
  the chicken, a creature usually mocked as a type
  of fool, a cluck chained to the chore of her body.
Listen, she is there, pecking at a bit of grain
  that came from nowhere.

—by Baron Wormser

POET NOTES—Baron Wormser was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1948. He grew up in Baltimore and went to college at the Johns Hopkins University. He did graduate studies at the University of California, Irvine and the University of Maine. In 1970 he moved to Maine with his wife Janet. For twenty-five years he worked as a librarian for SAD 59 in Madison, Maine. Also he taught poetry writing at the University of Maine at Farmington.

From 1975 to 1998 Wormser lived with his family in Mercer, Maine, in an off-the-grid house on forty-eight acres with no electricity or running water. They grew much of their own food, carried water by hand, and read by the light of kerosene lamps. They considered themselves part of the "back to the land" movement, but their choice to live off the grid was neither statement nor

protest: they simply had built their house too far from the road and could not afford to bring in power lines. Over the years, they settled into a life that centered on what Thoreau called "the essential facts." Wormser now lives with his wife on twenty-six acres in Cabot, Vermont.

Wormser teaches in the Stonecoast MFA program and the Fairfield University MFA program and directs the Frost Place Conference on Poetry and Teaching in Franconia, New Hampshire. From 2000-2005, Wormser was the Poet Laureate of Maine.

PUBLICATIONS

Baron Wormser is the author of nine books of poetry. He is also the co-author of two books about teaching poetry and the author of a memoir. His collection, *The Poetry Life: Ten Stories* invites us to reconsider the connection between poetry and our lives, that we have a hunger to fulfill our inner vision one small insight at a time. His memoir is titled *The Road Washes Out in Spring: A Poet's Memoir of Living Off the Grid* (UPNE 2006)

Wormser's latest book is ***Impenitent Notes***, now available from CavanKerry Press. From a press release: *"Wormser writes of darker themes—a mother dying of cancer, the bilking of Americans by the gurus of Wall Street, torture in Latin America, the faceless life of prostitutes, the anger and despair of the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq—but even in the most solemn of moments, he never fails to identify the absurdity, the fundamental quirk that accentuates our universal human imperfections."*

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Baron Wormser

From an essay on teaching poetry: *A poem is a series of careful word choices. Any discussion of the words is bound to generate connections among the poem's words that show how the poem coheres and generates meaning. Our analogy for discussing a poem is that the poem is a pebble dropped into the pond of consciousness. Like a pebble, the poem makes concentric circles that radiate outward. Those circles reach toward infinity. So the model for discussing is expansive. We want to show students how art reaches toward the infinite and how the words of the poem can demonstrate the poem's richness. What we seek to avoid is the reductive approach—that is, narrowing the poem down to a kernel of meaning.* ***People go to art to expand their feelings.*** *In our discussion of a poem we seek to show the poem's natural expansiveness and how the connections among the words are simultaneously infinite and genuine.*

Poet **Eamon Grennan** explains that his poems: *try to establish a kind of range of commitment to the domestic on the one hand, to the erotic on the other, to the natural world, the simple, observed world, and at the same time stay fairly clear.* I like today's poem, which suggests a haunting glimpse of someone with particular significance.

Shard

After the ravages that took the bees by storm
and cleansed the clotted ceiling space
so they'd be no danger to the kids who slept
in the bedroom there all summer, I discovered
in the charred ruins of their intricate city
a hand-size fragment of honeycomb, still
clear gold and filled with pure honey celled
in its stiff, papery hexagonals, which I took
the tip of my tongue to and tasted the true
spirit alive there, like words from a letter
you'd thought destroyed — just a scrap of
common phrases, but enough to call back
exactly what happened, and the good of it.

—by Eamon Grennan (from *Poetry: Oct/Nov 2002, Vol. 181 Issue 1*)

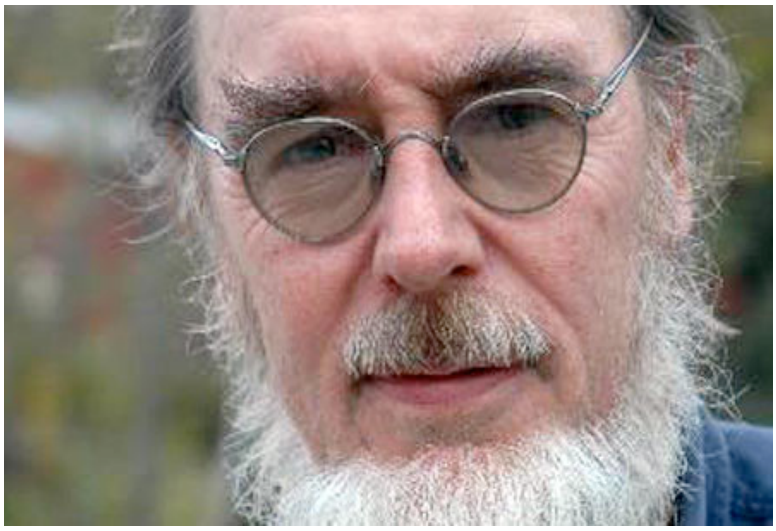
POET NOTES
Eamon Grennan was born in Ireland in 1941, but the trajectory of his life carried him to America where he continued his studies and eventually became a teacher. He didn't write any of his serious poems until after he arrived in America. Grennan lives in the United States but returns frequently to western Ireland. Despite his travels to two very different environments, Grennan has lived a rather contemplative life as a writer.

EDUCATION
Eamon Grennan attended boarding school at a Cistercian monastery. He says: *I suspect living close to a monastery with monks as teachers, an all-boys' boarding school with its mixture of loneliness and gregariousness, solitude and crowds, was important for the person I became.* He was educated at University College Dublin, where he studied English and Italian, and Harvard, where he received his PhD in English. Grennan was the Dexter M. Ferry Jr. Professor of English at Vassar College until his retirement in 2004.

PUBLICATIONS
Eamon Grennan is the author of more than 10 collections of poetry and a book of essays, *Facing the Music: Irish Poetry in the 20th Century* (1999). His most recent book of poems is *Matter of Fact* (Graywolf, 2009). Grennan has won many literary awards including several Pushcart Prizes.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Eamon Grennan—*I would like to be able to continue paying attention, and to continue finding a language to register, to record that. It's an interesting phrase, isn't it, "to pay attention." Because what do you get in return? You get a return of knowledge in the broadest sense. Somebody said that God only wants our attention. Another way of putting it is that attention is a form of prayer.*

As far as I'm concerned poetry is about elegy. Every poem is a memory of some kind, a celebratory elegy. *Poems are like shells. Something is gone and that's why you write.*



Poet **Lisel Mueller**, who turned 89 earlier this year, was featured in the 2009 April Gifts series with her poem, *The Laughter of Women.* I've seldom repeated a poet in the last five years of 150 poems, but today is an exception. Mueller's book, *Alive Together,* has been a comfort to me since my mother died last fall at age 88. Mueller's poems are complex and layered, often embedded with a certain sadness. I was moved by today's poem, however, because it is also filled with beauty and mystery.

Sometimes, When the Light

Sometimes, when the light strikes at odd angles
and pulls you back into childhood

and you are passing a crumbling mansion
completely hidden behind old willows

or an empty convent guarded by hemlocks
and giant firs standing hip to hip,

you know again that behind that wall,
under the uncut hair of the willows

something secret is going on,
so marvelous and dangerous

that if you crawled through and saw,
you would die, or be happy forever.

—by Lisel Mueller

POET NOTES

Lisel Mueller was born in 1924 in Hamburg, Germany. Her father, Fritz Neumann, was a German intellectual whose opposition to Hitler forced the family to flee to America in 1939 when Lisel was only 15 years old. Out of necessity, English became Mueller's second language, which she mastered beautifully. She studied the accessible language of Carl Sandburg's poems and had a start/stop/start relationship with writing poetry, putting it aside for nearly a decade at one point, and beginning again after her mother died at a relatively young age.

Ms. Mueller won the **Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for "Alive Together,"** a collection representing 35 years of her work. She graduated from the University of Evansville in 1944 and has taught at the University of Chicago, Elmhurst College in Illinois, and Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. She and her husband, Paul Mueller, built a home in Lake Forest, Illinois in the 1960s, where they raised two daughters and lived for many years. Ms. Mueller currently resides in a retirement community in Chicago.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Lisel Mueller

Everything is autobiography, even if one writes something that is totally objective. The fact that it's a subject that seizes you makes it autobiographical.

Poetry, for me, is the answer to, 'How does one stay sane when private lives are being ransacked by public events?' It's something that hangs over your head all the time.

Scenario: You are learning a new skill and it's slow going. Your frustrated teacher tells you, matter-of-factly, that you are "inept". What if instead you are told you are simply "ignorant". How about "unknowledgeable"? Do "inept", "ignorant" and "unknowledgeable" all mean the same thing? Do the speed, volume and intonation of the teacher's voice have any bearing in the communication? And what if the slightest eye-rolling, lip-screwing or sighing is involved? Research has shown that in the understanding of a received communication, 7% is contained in the words used, 38% is contained in the tone and style of voice, and 55% is contained in the physiology of the deliverer. Have empathy then for the efforts of the poet whose work is usually read in a book rather than spoken directly by the poet in the presence of an audience.

The Forgotten Dialect Of The Heart

How astonishing it is that language can almost mean,
and frightening that it does not quite. Love, we say,
God, we say, Rome and Michiko, we write, and the words
get it all wrong. We say bread and it means according
to which nation. French has no word for home,
and we have no word for strict pleasure. A people
in northern India is dying out because their ancient
tongue has no words for endearment. I dream of lost
vocabularies that might express some of what
we no longer can. Maybe the Etruscan texts would
finally explain why the couples on their tombs
are smiling. And maybe not. When the thousands
of mysterious Sumerian tablets were translated,
they seemed to be business records. But what if they
are poems or psalms? My joy is the same as twelve
Ethiopian goats standing silent in the morning light.
O Lord, thou art slabs of salt and ingots of copper,
as grand as ripe barley lithe under the wind's labor.
Her breasts are six white oxen loaded with bolts
of long-fibered Egyptian cotton. My love is a hundred
pitchers of honey. Shiploads of thuya are what
my body wants to say to your body. Giraffes are this
desire in the dark. Perhaps the spiral Minoan script
is not language but a map. What we feel most has
no name but amber, archers, cinnamon, horses, and birds.

—by Jack Gilbert
(from *The Great Fires: Poems*, 1982-1992, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994)

POET NOTES
Born in 1925, **Jack Gilbert** was raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He attended Peabody High School then worked as a door-to-door salesman, an exterminator, and a steelworker. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, where he and his classmate Gerald Stern developed a serious interest in poetry and writing. He retreated from his earlier activity in the San Francisco poetry scene (where he participated in Jack Spicer's famous Poetry as Magic workshop) and moved to Europe, touring from country to country while living on a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Gilbert's work is distinguished by simple lyricism and straightforward clarity of tone. Following the publication of his first book of poetry, he adopted a self-imposed isolation which some consider to be a spiritual quest and alienation from mainstream culture, while others have dismissed this as an extended vacation allowing Gilbert to live off of the generosity of wealthy literary admirers.

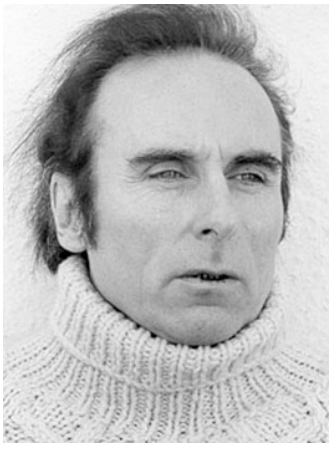
Although subsequent books of poetry have been few and far between, Gilbert continued to write and has occasionally contributed to *The American Poetry Review, Genesis West, The Quarterly, Poetry, Ironwood, The Kenyon Review*, and *The New Yorker*.

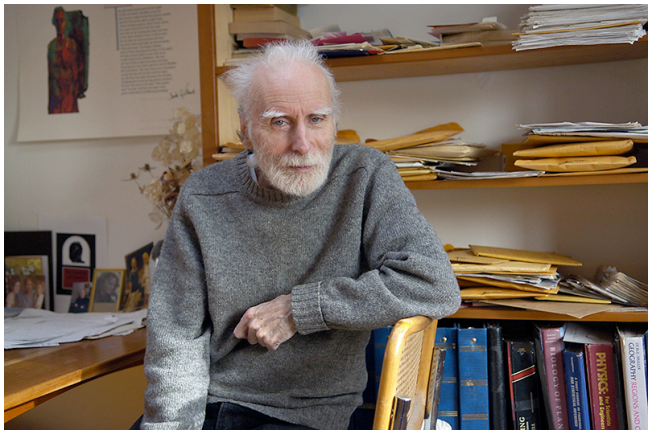
Gilbert is a close friend of the poet Linda Gregg who was once his student and to whom he was married for six years. He was also married to Michiko Nogami (a language instructor based in San Francisco, now deceased, about whom he has written many of his poems; and referenced in today's). He was also in a significant long term relationship with the Beat poet Laura Ulewicz during the fifties in San Francisco.

PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS—Soon after publishing his first book, *Views of Jeopardy*, in 1962, Gilbert received a Guggenheim Fellowship and subsequently moved abroad, living in England, Denmark, and Greece. During that time, he also toured fifteen countries as a lecturer on American Literature for the U.S. State Department. Nearly twenty years after completing *Views of Jeopardy*, he published his second book, *Monolithos*. The collection takes its title from Greek, meaning "single stone," and refers to the landscape where he lived on the island of Santorini.

Gilbert is also the author of *The Dance Most of All* (Knopf, 2009); *Transgressions: Selected Poems* (Bloodaxe Books 2006); *Refusing Heaven* (2005); winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *The Great Fires: Poems 1982-1992* (1996). He has been awarded a Lannan Literary Award for Poetry and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. *Monolithos* won the Stanley Kunitz Prize and the American Poetry Review Prize, and *Views of Jeopardy* won the Yale Younger Poets Series. Both books were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

P.S.
Listen to Jack Gilbert read today's poem at:
http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19351





April Gift #26—2012 **After Ritsos**

A quote today from Hazrat Inayat Khan, the founder of the Sufi Order of the West—*Sleep is comfortable, but awakening is interesting. In the East, there is a saying that it is a great sin to awaken anyone who is asleep. This saying can be symbolically understood. There are many in this world who work and do things and yet are asleep; they seem awake externally, but inwardly, they are asleep. The Sufi considers it a crime to awaken them, for some sleep is good for their health. The work of the Sufi is to give a helping hand to those who have had sufficient sleep and who now begin to stir in their sleep, to turn over. And it is that kind of help which is the real initiation.* . . . Dear poetry lover, have you noticed how you cannot make other folks love poetry? It seems they are either awake to it, or not. But some are stirring in their sleep and may be ready to welcome your helping hand. One feature of National Poetry Month is to carry a poem (or two) in your pocket or your purse and share it with someone in your life. Feel free to copy any of these April postings and share them with someone waking up near you.

Swedish poet **Malena Morling** is awake with a passion for seeing everything—blind women in buses, changes in the weather, bleached blonds with botox, little dogs in hotels—all with a penetrating and compassionate eye. In one of her poems she says:*"It is amazing / we're not more amazed, / The world / is here / and then it is gone."*

After Ritsos

You know that moment in the summer dusk
when the sunbathers have all gone home to mix drinks
and you are alone on the beach

when the waves begin to nibble
on the abandoned sand castles—
And further out, over the erupted face

of the water stained almost pink
there are a few clouds that hold
entire rooms inside of them—rooms where no one lives—

in the hair
of the light that soon will go
grey and then black. It is the moment

when even the man who mops the floor
in the execution room of the prison
stops to look up into the silence

that grows like smoke or the dusk itself.
And your mind becomes almost visible
and you know there is nothing

that is not mysterious. And that no moment
is less important than this moment.
And that imprisonment is not possible.

—by Malena Morling
(from *Ocean Avenues*, New Issue Press, 1999)

POET NOTES.—**Malena Mörling** was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1965. She is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Creative Writing at The University of North Carolina, Wilmington and Core Faculty in The Low Residency MFA program at New England College.

PUBLICATIONS

Malena Morling is the author of two books of poetry, *Ocean Avenue*, which won the New Issues Press Poetry Prize in 1998 and *Astoria*, published by Pittsburgh Press in 2006. She has translated poems by the Swedish poet Tomas Transtromer, a selection of which appeared in the collection *For the Living and the Dead*, published by Ecco Press. She has been awarded several prestigious poetry prizes. Her work can be found in numerous publications and anthologies. Morling is currently working on a third book of poems, and is editing *Swedish Writers On Writing*, an anthology that is part of The Writer's World Series, from Trinity University Press.

FOOTNOTE

"Ritsos" refers to the Greek poet Yiannis Ritsos (1909-1990) who was a left-wing active member of the Greek Resistance during World War II.

Throughout much of her career, **Edna St. Vincent Millay** was one of the most successful and respected poets in twentieth century America, along with her contemporary, Robert Frost.
Today's offering, an obvious love poem, is unusual in its strength and boldness. Fresh and evocative, it seems to reflect the unorthodox life St. Vincent Millay led.

Modern Declaration

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never
having wavered
In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the
rich or in the presence of clergymen having denied these
loves;
Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having
grunted or clicked a vertebra to the discredit of these
loves;
Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by
a conniving smile; or when befuddled by drink
Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers
of their alert enemies; declare

That I shall love you always.
No matter what party is in power;
No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied
interest wins the war;
Shall love you always.

—*by Edna St. Vincent Millay (*from *Selected Poems*)

POET NOTES
Edna St. Vincent Millay was born in 1892 in Rockland, Maine. Her single mother, a strong, independent woman, raised Edna and her sisters in an atmosphere that promoted cultural development even though they had little money. The family settled in a small house on the property of Edna's great aunt in Camden, Maine where Millay would write the first of the poems that would bring her literary fame. Millay's middle name derives from St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, where her uncle's life had been saved just before her birth. In grade school she preferred to be called "Vincent", much to the consternation of one of her male teachers who badgered her about it.

At Vassar, Millay developed her talents and reputation as a dramatist and actor. After graduating in 1917, she moved to Greenwich Village in New York City where she led a notoriously Bohemian life, giving poetry readings and exercising her freedom of thought and feminist views. Millay was known for her activism and her many love affairs with both men and women. She eventually traveled to Europe to write and travel. Upon her return, she married Eugen Boissevain with whom she had an open marriage. Millay's most significant relationship during this time was with the poet George Dillon, and for whom she wrote a number of her sonnets.

Millay began to go on reading tours in the 1920s, but oddly enough was afflicted by neuroses and a basic shyness; she thought of these tours—arranged by her husband—as ordeals. As the result of several misfortunes, including an auto accident, Millay endured hospitalizations, operations, and treatment with addictive drugs. She died of a heart attack in 1950, at age 58.

PUBLICATIONS
Millay's poetry was published in several magazines, including *Vanity Fair, Poetry,* and *Forum*. Her first book, *Renascence and Other Poems* (1917), was followed in 1920 by *A Few Figs from Thistles.* All in all she published more than two dozens books of poems and plays. In 1923, upon her return from Europe, Millay received the second annual Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and published a new collection, *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems*.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Edna St. Vincent Millay
I am glad that I paid so little attention to good advice; had I abided by it I might have been saved from some of my most valuable mistakes.

Soar, eat ether, see what has never been seen; depart, be lost, but climb.

The longest absence is less perilous to love than the terrible trials of incessant proximity.

Edna St. Vincent Milay

In 1997, I made my maiden trip to Europe to visit one of my truest friends. Norway is perhaps the sanest place I have ever known. Despite navigating mountains and fjords via sophisticated systems of tunnels, bridges and ferryboats, I felt we were traversing a benevolent pre-industrialized kingdom. Even in the capital of Oslo, people moved about with a certain quiet dignity I find lacking here in America. One evening, our pilgrimage took us to a remote island chapel, its walls of rock three-feet thick. As I sat inside the thousand-year old shrine which was lit only by hundreds of candles, I had the magical sense of occupying a great noiseless shell on the bottom of the sea.

Today's poem by **Rolf Jacobsen** is about such a living silence. I dedicate it to Odvar and Inger who live in the city of Trondheim. Founded in 997, Trondheim was the capital of Norway during the Viking Age.

The Silence Afterwards

Try to be done now
with deliberately provocative actions and sales statistics,
brunches and gas ovens,
be done with fashion shows and horoscopes,
military parades, architectural contests, and the rows of triple traffic lights.
Come through all that and be through
with getting ready for parties and eight possibilities
of winning on the numbers,
cost of living indexes and stock market analyses,
because it is too late,
it is way too late,
get through with and come home
to the silence afterwards
that meets you like warm blood hitting your forehead
and like thunder on the way
and the sound of great clocks striking
that make the eardrums quiver,
because words don't exist any longer,
there are no more words,
from now on all talk will take place
with the voices stones and trees have.

The silence that lives in the grass
on the underside of every blade
and in the blue spaces between the stones.
The silence
that follows shots and birdsong.
The silence
that pulls a blanket over the dead body
and waits in the stairs until everyone is gone.
The silence
that lies like a small bird between your hands,
the only friend you have.

—*by Rolf Jacobsen* (translated by Robert Bly)

POET NOTES

Rolf Jacobsen (1907-1994) was born in Oslo (then called Kristiania) and is one of Scandinavia's most distinguished poets who launched poetic modernism in Norway with his first book, *Jord og jern* (Earth and Iron) in 1933. The central theme in his work is the balance between nature and technology. Jacobsen's poetry explored modern subjects such as urban life, automobiles, and the industrial machine. His view of the technological 20th century expressed a melancholy sensitivity of how nature, solitude, and the interior life were overlooked in a world hell-bent on moving forward at a fast pace.

EDUCATION & PUBLICATION—Jacobsen was "home schooled" as a child by his mother and later studied several years at the University of Oslo, although without graduating. His career as a writer spanned more than fifty years and his work has been translated into over twenty languages. In the course of this long career, Jacobsen wrote many books of poetry and received a great number of honors, among them membership in the Norwegian Academy of Language and Literature, and the Grand Nordic Prize (1989) from the Swedish Academy.

WORLD WAR II INFLUENCE—World War II was a dark period in Jacobsen's life. Norway was invaded by Germany in 1940, and while the Norwegian population remained firmly anti-Nazi, many Norwegians became members of the Norwegian Nationalist Socialist Party in order to get by. When the Germans were defeated, Jacobsen was imprisoned for nearly four years for his affiliation with the occupiers. After the war, he worked as a bookseller, a journalist and a night editor for a newspaper**.**

NOTE—

Today's poem is from *The Roads Have Come to an End Now* (Copper Canyon Press, 2001), translated by Robert Bly, Roger Greenwald and Robert Hedin.

April Gift #29—2011 **Doing Laundry On Sunday**

It's Sunday. The Sabbath. Your day of rest, unless you plan to mow the lawn, work in the garden, wash the car, or hang your laundry outdoors on the line. I'm hoping my neighbors wait at least until noon before they rev up any gas-powered tools. While it's still quiet, read **Brigit Pegeen Kelly's** poem—out loud. Its short breathy meter drives the poem from the ordinary into the sublime. Like most of Kelly's poetry, there is abundant music, lavish imagery, and a complexity of emotion. Kelly's poems are not only detailed and well-crafted, they provide great pleasure as well. Her subjects include the glories of nature, the capacity for evil, and the doubts stirred in her by religion.

Doing Laundry On Sunday

So this is the Sabbath, the stillness
in the garden, magnolia
bells drying damp petticoats

over the porch rail, while bicycle
wheels thrum and the full-breasted tulips
open their pink blouses

for the hands that pressed them first
as bulbs into the earth.
Bread, too, cools on the sill,

and finches scatter bees
by the Shell Station where a boy
in blue denim watches oil

spread in phosphorescent scarves
over the cement. He dips
his brush into a bucket and begins

to scrub, making slow circles
and stopping to splash water on the children
who, hours before it opens,

juggle bean bags outside Gantsy's
Ice Cream Parlor,
while they wait for color to drench their tongues,

as I wait for water to bloom
behind me—white foam, as of magnolias,
as of green and yellow

birds bathing in leaves—wait,
as always, for the day, like bread, to rise
and, with movement

imperceptible, accomplish everything.

—*by Brigit Pegeen Kelly* (*Poetry*, June 1985)

POET NOTES

Brigit Pegeen Kelly was born in Palo Alto, California, in 1951. She teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. She has taught at the University of California at Irvine, Purdue University, and Warren Wilson College, as well as numerous writers' conferences in the United States and Ireland. In 2002 the University of Illinois awarded her both humanities and campus-wide awards for excellence in teaching. Kelly is married to Michael Madonick, a poet and fiction writer.

PUBLICATION & AWARDS

Kelly's poems have been anthologized in five *Pushcart Prize* volumes and six *Best American Poetry* collections, and have appeared in numerous literary journals, including *The Nation, The Yale Review, New England Review, Poetry, The Antioch Review, The Massachusetts Review, and The Southern Review.*

Kelly's first volume of poetry, *To the Place of Trumpets*, was awarded the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize in 1987 and published by Yale University Press the following year. Her second book, *Song*, published by BOA Editions Ltd., was the 1994 Lamont Poetry Selection from the Academy of American Poets. Her third book, *The Orchard*, also published by BOA Editions Ltd. in 2004, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Her work has appeared widely in journals and anthologies and she has been awarded many prizes and fellowships, including a Whiting Award, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Witter Bynner Prize from the Academy of Arts and Letters, and grants from the Illinois Arts Council and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Brigit Pegeen Kelly

As much as I like today's final posting, I like this three-minute film even better. Do yourself a favor and step into the world of Samuel Menashe, a fascinating, nearly forgotten poet: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EefUhL2kHkM&feature=related

I hadn't heard of today's poet until after his death in August of 2011 when he surfaced like a fresh ghost from the grave while I was randomly searching for "short poems" on the internet. I discovered a youtube link to **Samuel Menashe**, an engaging writer whose concise poems are accessible and often profound. For 55 years Menashe lived in a disheveled bohemian 5th floor walkup—three tiny rooms in Greenwich Village with no closets. Having unplugged his refrigerator in order to use it for storage, he ate out every day at a neighborhood diner. In the center of the largest room in his apartment stood a huge tree grown from seeds the poet had saved from a grapefruit. He traveled by subway several times a week to Central park where he walked and wrote and memorized his short masterful poems.

Menashe was a friendly eccentric who hated the downbeat and the depressing, saying that WWII taught him to live in the moment. In a single day during the Battle of the Bulge, all but 29 members of his company of 190 men were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. After the war, Manashe returned home thoroughly changed at age 20.

What To Expect

At death's door
The end in sight
Is life, not death.
Each breath you take
Is breathtaking.
Save your breath
Does not apply.
You must die.

—*by Samuel Menashe* (*The New Yorker,* November 13, 1995)

POET NOTES
Samuel Menashe Weisberg was born on Sept. 16, 1925, in Brooklyn and grew up in Queens where his father, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, ran a laundry and dry-cleaning business. He wrote unpunctuated poems of less than 10 lines, often with a religious or metaphysical bent. He focused on compression of imagery and experience in his poems and employed tightly controlled rhyme, assonance, and wordplay. The British scholar P. N. Furbank called them "perfect little mechanisms, minute cathedrals."

Unexpectedly, in 2004, Menashe was given The Poetry Foundation's first ever Neglected Masters Award, an event that sparked what he called a "Cinderella-esque" transformation—at the age of 80, he was suddenly the toast of the New York literary scene. He said he was a deserving representative of thousands of other dogged and neglected poets, scribbling and dreaming at their windows in all the cities of the world.

EDUCATION, TEACHING & WORK EXPERIENCE

Menashe (pronounced men-AHSH) studied biochemistry at Queens College, thinking of perhaps becoming a doctor. In 1943 he left college to enlist in the Army. As an infantryman with the 87th Division, he fought his way through France, Belgium and Germany. His poetry first sprung up out of his prose writing about his experience as a soldier in World War II. He returned to Queens College but left without taking a degree and sailed to France, where he earned a degree at the Sorbonne in 1950.

Although he taught literature at Bard and C. W. Post College for short periods in the 1950s and 1960s, Menashe remained largely outside the academic world, the usual support system for American poets. Instead, he worked an assortment of pickup jobs: as a waiter, a tour guide on Gray Line buses, French tutor, and lecturer on cruise ships.

PUBLICATIONS
The Many Named Beloved (1961)
No Jerusalem But This (1971)
Fringe of Fire (1973)
To Open (1974)
Collected Poems (1986)
The Niche Narrows (2000)
New and Selected Poems (2005)

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Samuel Menashe Weisberg
I find I like to walk a poem to its completion, even before I write it down. I don't feel that I am writing—maybe sculpting. You know, "poet" means "maker" in Greek. Sometimes I feel like someone working on an algebra problem, and you're coming to the conclusion, and it has to be perfectly balanced.

When I came back (from the war), I heard people talking about what they were going to do next summer. I was amazed that they could talk of that future, next summer. As a result, I lived in the day. ***For the first few years after the war, each day was the last day. And then it changed. Each day was the only day.***

Most editors do not read poetry. The poetry editor is almost invariably the house poet or a person who is working with the interlocking directorate of establishment poets. Government censorship could not be more effective, but here you can't be sent to Siberia—you are just kept out of print.

Menashe's poems resonate like fine haiku as in this brief piece titled *Now*.

There is never an end to loss, or hope
I give up the ghost for which I grope
Over and over again saying Amen
To all that does or does not happen—
The eternal event is now, not when

Samuel Menashe Weisburg

Thank you for your love of poetry and for your support of this project throughout the month. Your many kind responses through emails, cards and phone messages confirm our mutual belief that poetry, as Audre Lorde pointed out, is a necessity, not a luxury. Stay in touch and send me a poem *you* cannot live without!