APRIL GIFTS

2010

Created by: Susan F. Glassmeyer
Cincinnati, Ohio, 2010

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So, let's begin April with a kiss! Today's poem, written by **Diane Ackerman**, is full of Amazonian images. "Beija-Flor (Hummingbird)" was first published in *Poetry Magazine* (July 1988) and can be found in Ackerman's collection *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter: New and Selected Poems* (Random House, 1991). The Portuguese title is pronounced "beige uh floor". It is the Amazonian word for butterfly, which literally means "flower kisser."

Beija-Flor (Hummingbird)

When you kiss me, moths flutter in my mouth;
when you kiss me, leaf-cutter ants lift up
their small burdens and carry them along
corridors of scent; when you kiss me,
caymans slither down wet banks in moonlight,
jaws yawning open, eyes bright red lasers;
when you kiss me, my fist conceals
the bleached skull of a sloth; when you kiss me,
the waters wed in my ribs, dark and pale
rivers exchange their potions-- she gives him
love's power, he gives her love's lure;
when you kiss me, my heart, surfacing, steals
a small breath like a pink river dolphin;
when you kiss me, the rain falls thick as rubber,
sunset pours molasses down my spine
and, in my hips, the green wings of the jungle flutter;
when you kiss me, blooms explode like land mines
in trees loud with monkey muttering
and the kazoo-istry of birds; when you kiss me,
my flesh sambas like an iguana; when you kiss me,
the river-mirror reflects an unknown land,
eyes glitter in the foliage, ships pass
like traveling miracle plays, and coca sets
brush fires in my veins; when you kiss me,
the river tilts its wet thighs around a bend;
when you kiss me, my tongue unfolds its wings
and flies through shadows as a leaf-nosed bat,
a ventriloquist of the twilight shore
which hurls its voice against the tender world
and aches to hear its echo rushing back;
when you kiss me, anthuria send up
small telescopes, the vine-clad trees wear
pantaloons, a reasonably evitable moon
rises among a signature of clouds,
the sky fills with the pandemonium
of swamp monkeys, the aerial slither
and looping confetti of butterflies;
when you kiss me, time's caravan pauses
to sip from the rich tropic of the heart,
find shade in the oasis of a touch,
bathe in Nature carnal, mute and radiant;

you find me there trembling and overawed;
for, when you kiss me, I become the all
you love: a peddler on your luminous river,
whose salted-fish are words, daughter
of a dolphin; when you kiss me, I smell
of night-blooming orchids; when you kiss me,
my mouth softens into scarlet feathers--
an ibis with curved bill and small dark smile;
when you kiss me, jaguars lope through my knees;
when you kiss me, my lips quiver like bronze
violets; oh, when you kiss me....

—by Diane Ackerman

POET NOTES

Diane Ackerman caught my attention many years ago while I was studying Sensory Awareness® and reading her non-fiction book about the five senses— *A Natural History of the Senses*. Her work in poetry as well as non-fiction is largely a marriage of science and poetry, both laden with the most luxurious descriptions. Born Diane Fink on October 7, 1948, Ackerman was raised in Waukegan, Illinois. She received her B.A. in English from Penn State and an M.F.A. and Ph.D. in English from Cornell University in 1978. Her many awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship. Ackerman has published books about gardening, psychology and neuroscience, animals on the verge of extinction, working in
a crisis-call center, and a history of love. She has been married to novelist Paul West since 1970, and currently resides in Ithaca, New York.

OBSCURE FOOTNOTE

Diane Ackerman has the rare distinction of having a molecule named after her to honor her *"exquisite writings in the field of natural history (that) have increased our awareness of the value of biodiversity and of the urgent need to protect endangered species"* (Crocodile Conservation Service). The "dianeackerone" molecule plays a role in the mating and nesting activities of the crocodile.

IN HER OWN WORDS— Diane Ackerman

When I was at Cornell as a student, I worked with a poet and a scientist on my MFA and on my doctoral committees. I had A. R. Ammons, the poet, and Carl Sagan, the astronomer. Even when I was a student, I didn't really want to have to choose between the arts and the sciences. For me, science—we're using the word science because that's easy to use—I don't want to be a scientist, but I love the revelations of science. Science, for me, is just another word for nature.

April Gift #2—2010 **The Inarticulate**

Unlike yesterday's lush poem with its endless descriptions of a kiss, the speaker in today's poem professes to be lost for words when it comes to "touching your face". I appreciate how each poem heightens sensory awareness by two very different means.

The Inarticulate

Touching your face, I am like a boy
who bags groceries, mindless on Saturday,
jumbling cans of wax beans and condensed milk

among frozen meats, the ribboned beef
and chops like maps of continental drift,
extremes of weather and hemisphere,

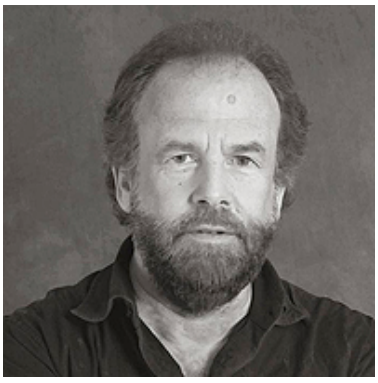
egg carton perched like a Napoleonic hat,
till he touches something awakened by water,
a soothing skin, eggplant or melon or cool snow pea,

and he pauses, turning it in his hand,
this announcement of color, purple or green,
the raucous rills of the aisles overflowing,

and by now the shopper is staring
when the check-out lady turns and says,
"Jimmy, is anything the matter?"

Touching your face, I am like that boy
brought back to his body, steeped
in the moment, fulfilled but unable to speak.

—by Michael Waters



POET NOTES
Born in Brooklyn, New York in1949, poet **Michael Waters** attended SUNY-Brockport (B.A., M.A.), the University of Nottingham, the University of Iowa (M.F.A.) & Ohio University (Ph.D.).

Michael Waters has been the recipient of several residency fellowships, and three Pushcart Prizes. His books include several collections of poetry and numerous anthologies and critical

works—among them, *Darling Vulgarity* (2006-- finalist for The Los Angeles Times Book Prize) and *Parthenopi: New and Selected Poems* (2001), both from BOA Editions, as well as *Contemporary American Poetry* (2006) from Houghton Mifflin.

Waters has traveled widely, spending time in Greece, Thailand, Costa Rica, Romania, Belize, and Iraq. He teaches at Monmouth University and in the Drew University MFA program, and lives in Ocean, NJ.

Why We Speak English

Because when you say cup and spoon
your mouth moves the same way as your grandfather's
and his grandfather's before him.
It's Newton's first law: A person in motion
tends to stay in motion with the same speed
and direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force—
scarcity or greed.
Is there a word for greed in every language?

Because the ear first heard
dyes furs pepper ginger tobacco cotton timber
silk freedom horizon
and the tongue wanted to taste
all these fine things.

And when my son asks why his father speaks Danish
and he and I speak English and Carlos—
at kindergarten—speaks Portuguese:

because Denmark is and has always been.
Our ancestors tracked north and Carlos'
tracked south. What's left in their wake
is language.

Because it comes down
to want, to latitude and longitude as ways to measure
desire, invisible mover of ships—
great clockwise gyre of water in the sea—
like some amusement park ride where boats seem to sail
but run on tracks under the water.

Because to change course now would be like diverting
the Arno, this centuries-long rut we've dug ourselves
into, and how would it be to wake up one morning
with bird oiseau or another word entirely?

—by Lynn Pedersen
(from *Theories of Rain*, Main Street Rag, 2009)

POET NOTES
Lynn Pedersen is a graduate of the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA in Writing Program. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Her poems, essays and reviews have appeared in *New England Review, Poet Lore, Southern Poetry Review, The Palo Alto Review, The Comstock Review, The Chattahoochee Review* and *Cider Press Review*.

Ms. Pedersen's poems are preoccupied with science, and she often uses the images, facts and the language of science as a vocabulary for exploring other things—the nature of grief, parenthood,

communication, the concept of distance. If you enjoy history, science, and philosophy as it seeks a deeper connection with human emotion, with shadow along with light, you will appreciate her chapbook *Theories of Rain* available at Main Street Rag:
www.mainstreetrag.com/LPedersen.html

IN HER OWN WORDS— Lynn Pedersen
Lately, I see language through the wrong end of a telescope; a distant figure on a hillside, walking away; not a child but reduced to the size of a child. Left me with a pocket of words like five scant beans. I used to know remonstrate, peremptory, emolument; I can't read Hawthorne now without a dictionary. ***I recycle syllables like a wilted mantra: Keep your feet off the couch. Keep your feet off your brother. No going outside with bare feet. You see what I mean, what I've painted myself into.*** *The fences I construct with language. It wasn't always this way, filing synonyms away like socks in a drawer. Which five words do I teach to my children--work, pinnacle, feather, root, love? How to grow back a world from five dried beans? If I'm to start over, where is the manual that tells me under which sign of the zodiac to plant, how deep to furrow, and where-even-is the garden?*

Kind of Blue

Not Delft or
delphinium, not Wedgewood
among the knickknacks, not wide-eyed chicory
evangelizing in the devil strip—

But way on down in the moonless
octave below midnight, honey,
way down where you can't tell cerulean
from teal.

Not Mason jars of moonshine, not
waverings of silk, not the long-legged hunger
of a heron or the peacock's
iridescent id—

But Delilahs of darkness, darling,
and the muscle of the mind
giving in.

Not sullen snow slumped
against the garden, not the first instinct of flame,
not small, stoic ponds, or the cold derangement
of a jealous sea—

But bluer than the lips of Lazarus, baby,
before Sweet Jesus himself could figure out
what else in the world to do but weep.

—*by Lynn Powell* (*Poetry*, May 2004)

POET NOTES—Lynn Powell is the author of two prize-winning books of poetry, *Old & New Testaments* and *The Zones of Paradise*. In 2007, Powell was awarded Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (in poetry) and the Ohio Arts Council (in prose). Her poems have been published in *Poetry, Shenandoah, The Paris Review,* and in numerous anthologies. Powell worked as a writer in the schools for over 20 years—in grades K-12, in urban, suburban, and rural schools—for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and the Ohio Arts Council. Drawing on that expertise, Powell created Oberlin's Teaching Imaginative Writing workshop, CRWR 450, a community-based learning course in which Oberlin students work collaboratively with her in poetry residencies in the Oberlin public schools.

- MFA, Cornell University, 1980
- BA, Carson-Newman College, 1977

IN HER OWN WORDS—Lynn Powell
Living in America, poets can sometimes feel lonesome and beside-the-point. Our culture, which thrives on commerce and entertainment, places little value on the slow, contemplative pleasures of poetry or on its reach for complex truths.

April Gift #5—2010 **Mrs. Caldera's House of Things**

I grew up in a tidy Germanic home where the trash cans were emptied daily and certain days of the week, month and year were routinely dedicated to cleaning projects. Around the corner from me, my girlfriend lived in a dark museum of "stuff" stacked and stored everywhere—school books on the toaster, soup cans on windowsills, beds covered with outgrown clothing and dirty laundry, old newspapers collecting dust under the end tables. It was a strange and fascinating environment. Today we have professionals to help us face our psychological barrier to letting go of clutter. Five official levels of hoarding have now been set forth by the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization, including subtypes for book hoarding (that would be me), digital hoarding and even animal hoarding. Not surprisingly, the wealthiest nations host the largest number of hoarders. (See: *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* by Menzel & Mann, Sierra Club Books). I'm glad today's poet got over to Mrs. Caldera's house before the television crew of "Clean Sweep".

Mrs. Caldera's House of Things

You are sitting in Mrs. Caldera's kitchen,
you are sipping a glass of lemonade
and trying not to be too curious about
the box of plastic hummingbirds behind you,
the tray of tineless forks at your elbow.

You have heard about the backroom
where no one else has ever gone
and whatever enters, remains,
refrigerator doors, fused coils,
mower blades, milk bottles, pistons, gears.

"You never know," she says, rummaging
through a cedar chest of recipes,
"when something will come of use."

There is a vase of pencil tips on the table,
a bowl full of miniature wheels and axles.

Upstairs, where her children slept,
the doors will not close,
the stacks of magazines are burgeoning,
there are snow shoes and lampshades,
bedsprings and picture tubes,
and boxes and boxes of irreducibles!

You imagine the headline in the Literalist Express:
House Founders Under Weight Of Past.

But Mrs. Caldera is baking cookies,
she is humming a song from childhood,
her arms are heavy and strong,
they have held babies, a husband,
tractor parts and gas tanks,
what have they not found a place for?

It is getting dark, you have sat for a long time.
If you move, you feel something will be disturbed,
there is room enough only for your body.
“Stay awhile,” Mrs. Caldera says,
and never have you felt so valuable.

—by Gregory Djanikian

POET NOTES

Gregory Djanikian was born on August 15, 1949 in Alexandria, Egypt of Armenian parentage. At a young age he moved with his family to Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He received his undergraduate degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania and then went on to graduate from Syracuse University's Creative Writing Program. Djanikian is Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Pennsylvania, where he has taught since 1983. Djanikian's award winning poetry is available in several book collections, and many journals.

Gregory Djanikian’s work is part history, part autobiography and part anthropology, including the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the forced expulsion of his family from his homeland. His poems often investigate how language, especially the American idiom, is enriched or reinvented. He has a keen ear for what he calls the *“unexpected syntactic constructions”* and *“surprising turns of phrase”* that immigrants contribute to English.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Gregory Djanikian
The desire to write did not come to Djanikian until he became inspired about poetry by his freshman English professor at the University of Pennsylvania. He says: *“I feel that poetry is a communication between people on the most intense level, even if it’s only between two people, writer and reader. This relationship may be one of the most intimate we might experience, when one intuitively and deeply speaks to another.”*

Sisters

My friends are dying
well we're old it's natural
one day we passed the experience of "older"
which began in late middle age
and came suddenly upon "old" then
all the little killing bugs and
baby tumors that had struggled
for years against the body's
brave immunities found their
level playing fields and
victory

but this is not what I meant to
tell you I wanted to say that
my friends were dying but have now
become absent the word dead is correct
but inappropriate

I have not taken their names out of
conversation gossip political argument
my telephone book or card index in
whatever alphabetical or contextual
organizer I can stop any evening of
the lonesome week at Claiborne Bercovivi
Vernarelli Deming and rest a moment
on their seriousness as artists workers
their excitement as political actors in the
streets of our cities or in their workplaces
the vigiling fasting praying in or out
of jail their lighthearted ness which floated
above the year's despair
their courageous sometimes hilarious
disobediences before the state's official
servants their fidelity to the idea that
it is possible with only a little extra anguish
to live in this world at absolute [minimum?]
loving brainy sexual energetic redeemed

—by Grace Paley
Gulf Coast Summer (Fall 2008)

POET NOTES

Grace Paley was born Grace Goodside in the Bronx on December 11, 1922. Her Russian Jewish parents anglicized the family name from *Gutseit* on immigrating from Ukraine. Paley began her writing life as poet and she found the voice for which she would be known when she started writing fiction in her thirties, drawing heavily on her childhood in the Bronx and her experiences in her neighborhood in Greenwich Village. She entered Hunter College in New York City when she was only 15 and later attended New York University, but did not stay for a degree. In the early 1940's, she studied with W.H. Auden at the New School for Social Research in New York.

Paley lived in Manhattan and Vermont. She taught at Sarah Lawrence College and the City College of New York, serving as the Poet Laureate of Vermont from 2003-2007. Paley has published a number of volumes of poetry, including *Leaning Forward* (Granite Press, 1985) and *New and Collected Poems* (Tillbury Press, 1991). She published three volumes of short stories and is also the author of a collection of essays, *Just As I Thought* (FSG, 1998). Her final poetry collection, *Fidelity*, was completed just before her death in August of 2007.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Grace Paley

When asked what advice she had for writers, Grace Paley said: *Have a low overhead. Don't live with anybody who doesn't support your work. Very important. And read a lot. Don't be afraid to read or of being influenced by what you read.* ***You're more influenced by the voice of childhood than you are by some poet you're reading. The last piece of advice is to keep a paper and pencil in your pocket at all times****, especially if you're a poet.*

Much of Grace Paley's life has been spent in political action. A member of the War Resisters League, she opposed American involvement in the Vietnam War. In a May 2007 interview with *Vermont Woman* newspaper – one of her last – Paley said of her dreams for her grandchildren: *It would be a world without militarism and racism and greed – and where women don't have to fight for their place in the world.*

Wedding Poem For Schele and Phil

A marriage is risky business these days
Says some old and prudent voice inside.
We don't need twenty children anymore
To keep the family line alive,
Or gather up the hay before the rain.
No law demands respectability.
Love can arrive without certificate or cash.
History and experience both make clear
That men and women do not hear
The music of the world in the same key,
Rather rolling dissonances doomed to clash.

So what is left to justify a marriage?
Maybe only the hunch that half the world
Will ever be present in any room
With just a single pair of eyes to see it.
Whatever is invisible to one
Is to the other an enormous golden lion
Calm and sleeping in the easy chair.
After many years, if things go right
Both lion and emptiness are always there;
The one never true without the other.

But the dark secret of the ones long married,
A pleasure never mentioned to the young,
Is the sweet heat made from two bodies in a bed
Curled together on a winter night,
The smell of the other always in the quilt,
The hand set quietly on the other's flank
That carries news from another world
Light-years away from the one inside
That you always thought you inhabited alone.
The heat in that hand could melt a stone.

—by Bill Holm

POET NOTES

Bill Holm was an American poet, essayist, memoirist and musician. He was born in 1943 to Icelandic immigrants on a farm north of Minneota, Minnesota. Holm taught at Southeast Minnesota State University in Marshall from 1980 until he retired in 2007. Known both regionally and nationally as a humorist, writer, and prairie radical, Bill Holm died on February 26, 2009. At six and a half feet tall and red-haired, he was considered a literary giant with gigantic appetites for good art, public honesty, and social justice.

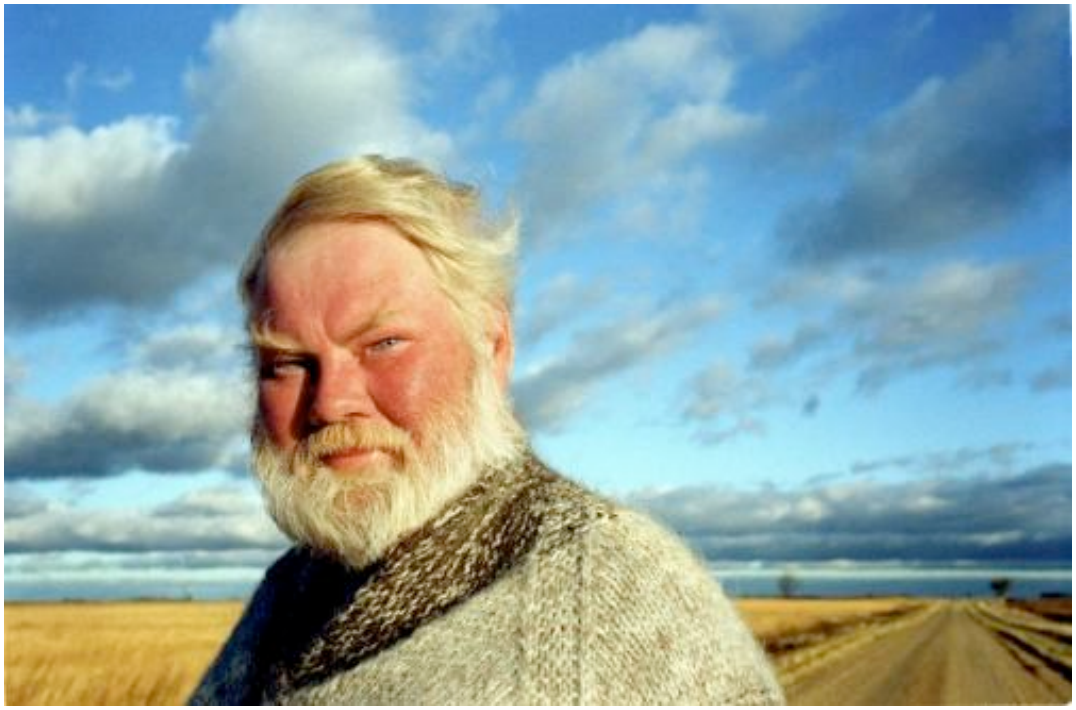
Friends said he preached the virtues of careful attention, spiritual energy, integrity, and civic responsibility. He saw himself as a missionary out to turn back the forces of narrow-mindedness

and selfishness. His personal generosity extended from the smallest of courtesies, to personal loans to friends suffering setbacks, to financial contributions to community causes, to hours of effort in support of public projects.

Writer Gretchen Lee Bourquin said *"Bill absorbed the best of everyone he knew, and longed for humanity to do better because he knew we had it in us. It was almost as pleasurable to watch him as a spectator at someone else's reading, on the edge of his seat, draining the nectar out of every word."*

PUBLICATIONS

Bill Holm was never afraid to say what was on his mind, and the readers of his more than a dozen books—many of which have been published by Milkweed Editions—were loyal throughout his career. He was undoubtedly the only person to publish a volume of poems about boxelder bugs. *Boxelder Bug Variations* (his first book published in 1985) came about because of an assignment he gave his students who complained that they had nothing to write about, out there on the prairie. He told them, *'That's ridiculous! You can write about anything!'* Emilie Buchwald, his editor at Milkweed said a boxelder bug was crawling across his desk, and he said, *'You can write about this!'* And he gave them that assignment. And then he gave it to himself.



IN HIS OWN WORDS—Bill Holm

For it is life we want. ***We want the world, the whole beautiful world, alive—and we alive in it.*** *That is the actual god we long for and seek, yet we have already found it, if we open our senses, our whole bodies, thus our souls. That is why I have written and intend to continue until someone among you takes up* ***the happy work of keeping the chain letter of the soul*** *moving along into whatever future will come.*

April Gifts #8—2010 **Crossing Over**

In our corner of the world, the muddy brown Ohio River is the wide water column separating Kentucky, "the south" from Ohio, "the north". Crossing its bridges by car or on foot, traveling by boat, riding the Anderson Ferry low on the water, we take its easy passage for granted. Some of us have watched it flood a few times and have even stood on the river when it was frozen. Most of us have never feared its crossing. Today's poem is a river poem and a love poem, written by someone who knows the conditions of the world, who has loved many times, failed many times, and still has found the courage to love again despite love's perils.

Crossing Over

It was now early spring, and the river was swollen and turbulent; great cakes of floating ice were swinging heavily to and fro in the turbid waters. Owing to the peculiar form of the shore, on the Kentucky side, the land bending far out into the water, the ice had been lodged and detained in great quantities, and the narrow channel which swept round the bend was full of ice, piled one cake over another, thus forming a temporary barrier to the descending ice, which lodged, and formed a great undulating raft… Eliza stood, for a moment, contemplating this unfavorable aspect of things.

—Uncle Tom's Cabin (Chapter VII, "The Mother's Struggle") Harriet Beecher Stowe

That's what love is like. The whole river
is melting. We skim along in great peril,

having to move faster than ice goes under
and still find foothold in the soft floe.

We are one another's floe. Each displaces the weight
of his own need. I am fat as a bloodhound,

hold me up. I won't hurt you. Though I bay,
I would swim with you on my back until the cold

seeped into my heart. We are committed, we
are going across this river willy-nilly.

No one, black or white, is free in Kentucky,
old gravity owns everybody. We're weighty.

I contemplate this unfavorable aspect of things.
Where is something solid? Only you and me.

Has anyone ever been to Ohio?
Do the people there stand firmly on icebergs?

Here all we have is love, a great undulating
raft, melting steadily. We go out on it

anyhow. I love you, I love this fool's walk.
The thing we have to learn is how to walk light.

—by William Meredith

POET NOTES

William Meredith was born in New York City in 1919. He graduated from Princeton University with an A.B. in English, Magna Cum Laude. His senior thesis was on the work of Robert Frost, a major influence for Meredith throughout his career. He worked for a short while as a reporter for the New York Times, then served as a pilot with the US Navy during World War II, and later served in the Korean War. Between the two wars, Meredith taught at Princeton and the University of Hawaii. He taught at Connecticut College from 1955-1983, when he suffered a stroke that left him unable to speak clearly and affected his ability to use language at all.

He published several books of poetry, including his final book *Effort at Speech* (TriQuarterly Books, 1997), for which he won the National Book Award. Meredith's best work combines a haunting, brooding quality with a kind of gentle sweetness that led the poet Edward Hirsch to suggest Meredith be appointed *"in charge of morale in a morbid time"*.

Meredith died in 2007 at the age of 88 in New London, Connecticut, near his home in Montville, where he lived with his partner of 36 years, the poet Richard Harteis. A film about his life, *Marathon*, premiered on November 19, 2008 in Mystic, Connecticut.

My friend and writing colleague, Valerie Chronis Bickett, introduced me to the curious work of poet **Lucia Perillo**. Her poems take on deeper meaning knowing that Perillo, once a fearless park ranger in the Cascade Mountains, has been living for many years with a disabling form of multiple sclerosis, keenly observing the world from her four-foot-high wheelchair without the use of her legs. Much of her writing, including her non-fiction, embodies a dark, edgy, at times sardonic tone. Today's poem offers a gentler view.

On the Chehalis River

All day long the sun is busy, going up and going down,
and the moon is busy, swinging the lasso of its gravity.
And the clouds are busy, metamorphing as they skid—
the vultures are busy, circling in their kettle.

And the river is busy filling up my britches
as I sit meditating in the shallows until my legs go numb.
Upstream I saw salmon arching half into the air:
glossy slabs of muscle I first thought were seals.

They roiled in a deeper pocket of the river,
snagged in a drift net on Indian land.
Trying to leap free before relenting to the net
with a whack of final protest from the battered tail.

They'll be clubbed, I know, when the net's hauled up
but if there were no net they'd die anyway when they breed.
You wonder how it *feels* to them: their ardent drive upstream.
What message is delivered when the eggs release.

A heron sums a theory with one crude croak; the swallows
write page after page of cursive in the air. My own offering
is woozy because when their bodies breached the surface
the sun lit them with a flash that left me blind.

—by Lucia Perillo

POET NOTES

Lucia Perillo grew up in the suburbs of New York City in the 1960's. She graduated from McGill University in Montreal in 1979 with a major in wildlife management and subsequently worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She completed her M.A. in English at Syracuse University, while working seasonally at Mount Rainer National Park. She has taught at Syracuse University, Saint Martin's College, Warren Wilson, and Southern Illinois University.

Lucia Perillo has written five books of poetry, most recently *Inseminating the Elephant* (2009). I recommend her collection of essays, *I've Heard the Vultures Singing,* which was published in 2007. Although her illness continues to haunt her, she doesn't let it define her. A woman of resilience, hope and true grit, she uses her heightened senses to give a vivid portrayal of her current life and reflections on her bipedal past. In her own words, Lucia Perillo *"now decomposes in Olympia, Washington"* where she lives in good humor with her husband, James Rudy.

Today's "poem" is a found list written by author Peter Matthiessen. Mourning the death of his wife in 1973, Matthiessen set off on a 250 mile trek across the high Hymalayan region of Dolpo, *"the last enclave of pure Tibetan culture on earth."* There he hoped to glimpse the elusive snow leopard, a creature so rarely spotted as to be nearly mythical. In addition to his search for the revered Buddhist emblem, he went to find the even more elusive teacher that his soul was seeking.

Matthiessen's list of what he took during one month of that trek can be found in *Journeys of Simplicity by* Philip Harnden, vignettes of forty travelers and the few, ordinary things they carried with them on their journeys.

A month of trekking

sausage
crackers
coffee
  all gone

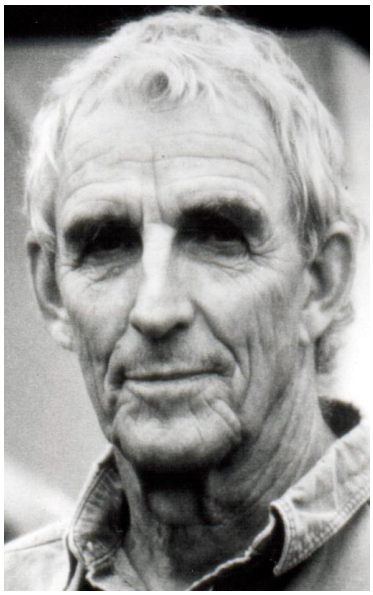
sugar
chocolate
tinned cheese
peanut butter
sardines
  nearly finished

soon down to
  bitter rice
  coarse flour
  lentils
  onions
  a few potatoes, without butter

now the common miracles
  murmur of friends at evening
  clay fires of smudgy juniper
  coarse dull food

one thing at a time

—by Peter Matthiesen



POET NOTES

Peter Matthiessen (born in 1927 in New York City) is an award winning novelist and nonfiction writer as well as an environmental activist. His first National Book Award was won in 1980 for ***The Snow Leopard***. Along with George Plimpton, Harold L. Humes, Thomas Guinzburg and poet Donald Hall, Matthiessen founded the literary magazine *The Paris Review* in 1953. At the time he was a young recruit for the CIA.

ABOUT THE BOOK *The Snow Leopard*

A few years ago I had a significant dream about a white leopard which ultimately led me to Matthiessen's book, *The Snow Leopard*. Guiding his readers through steep-walled canyons and over tall mountains, Peter Matthiessen offers a narrative that is spare and yet filled with rich metaphor and mysticism. His arduous search for the snow leopard becomes a vehicle for reflections on all manner of matters of life and death. Matthiessen's unflinching honesty about the inner journey in the midst of stark beauty at times made me weep. If you can't manage a trip to the Himalayan region, consider reading this classic of modern nature writing. You won't be disappointed.

Eating

They fed us soft-boiled eggs, six
in a basket covered in a dishcloth. Our mother
with one swift crunch could slice off the tops.
Ralston, grits, cornmeal mush; steel-cut
oats, cooked for a night on the back
of the stove; split-pea soup, heaving
and gumming in the iron pot; cole slaw:

cabbage shredded, peppered and tossed
in mayonnaise; and someone in the kitchen
gnawing on the cabbage stub (for years
I thought it was "costs low"); cod and potatoes,
the fishy-smelling box with the sliding lid
that we all wanted, and the cod soaking
in a bowl, a chunk of dirty snow; the pot
of minestrone our father dropped

coming into the dining room, spectacular,
noodles everywhere, the dog ecstatic, and us
staring down at our placemats not
daring to laugh. And kale, kale
that stayed green and bitter until November,
leaves frosty when we snapped them from
the woody stems. Our mother splitting pods
of cardamom on Sundays and baking
pulla; rowing with our father to an

island where we waded in the chill salt,
pried mussels and periwinkles
from dark rocks, and steamed them in weeds
on a smoking driftwood fire, but that
was long ago, when we crouched
on the beach, sharpening rose twigs
and digging out the meat.

—by Talvikki Ansel

POET NOTES

Talvikki Ansel grew up in Mystic, Connecticut. She attended both Connecticut College and Mount Holyoke College, and received an M.F.A. from Indiana University (1993). Her poems have appeared in many magazines and journals, including *the Missouri Review*, the *Iowa Review, Poetry East*, and *Shenandoah*.

I found today's poem in *My Shining Archipelago*, selected by James Dickey as the 1996 recipient of the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize. Many of the poems in the second half of this book are sonnets reflecting on a season spent in the Amazon Rainforest. Strong poems about delicate subjects told in a matter-of-fact manner—the study of bats, the dissection of a bird, the attention given to a pear down to its very core. These are poems filled with fresh insight into the natural world.

Talvikki Ansel is also the author of *Jetty and Other Poems* (Zoo Press, 2003). A slim online bio mentions that Ms. Ansel teaches at the University of Rhode Island, but so far I have been unable to verify that. I'm still waiting for a response to an email sent to her several weeks ago.

In The Workshop After I Read My Poem Aloud

All at once everyone in the room says
nothing. They continue doing this and I begin to know
it is not because they are dumb. Finally

the guy from the Bay Area who wears his chapbook
on his sleeve says he likes the poem a lot
but can't really say why and silence

starts all over until someone says she only has
a couple of teeny suggestions such as taking out
the first three stanzas along with

all modifiers except "slippery" and "delicious"
in the remaining four lines. A guy who
hasn't said a word in three days says

he too likes the poem but wonders why
it was written and since I don't know either
and don't even know if I should

I'm grateful there's a rule
I can't say anything now. Somebody
I think it's the shrink from Seattle

says the emotion is not earned and I wonder
when is it ever. The woman on my left
who just had a prose poem in Green Thumbs & Geoducks

says the opening stanza is unbelievable
and vindication comes for a sweet moment
until I realize she means unbelievable.

But I have my defenders too and the MFA from Iowa
the one who thinks the you is an I
and the they a we and the then a now

wants to praise the way the essential nihilism
of the poem's occasion serves to undermine
the formality of its diction. Just like your comment

I say to myself. Another admires the zenlike polarity
of the final image despite the mildly bathetic
symbolism of sheep droppings and he loves how

the three clichés in the penultimate stanza
are rescued by the brazen self-exploiting risk.
The teacher asks what about the last line

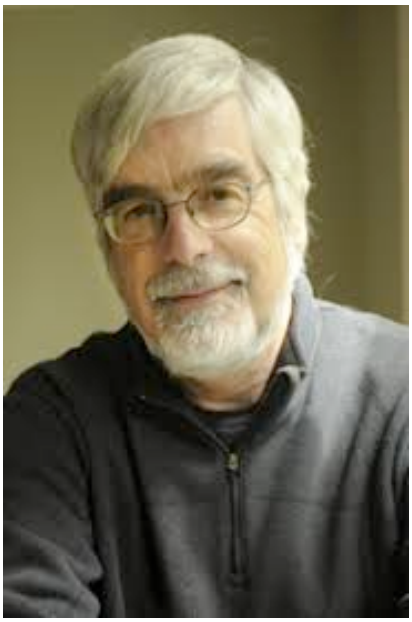
and the guy with the chapbook volunteers it suits
the poem's unambitious purpose though he has to admit
it could have been worded somewhat differently.

—by Don Colburn
first published in *The Iowa Review*

POET NOTES

Don Colburn is a poet and retired newspaper reporter in Portland, Oregon. He has published four poetry collections, most recently a chapbook called *Tomorrow Too: The Brenda Monologues*. His poems have appeared widely in magazines and anthologies, and won the Discovery/*The Nation* Award, the Finishing Line Press Prize and the Cider Press Review Book Award. During his newspaper career, he was a reporter for *The Washington Post* and *The Oregonian*, and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing. lives in Portland, Oregon, where he is a reporter for The Oregonian. He had two collections of poetry published in 2006. His chapbook, *Another Way to Begin*, won the Finishing Line Press Prize. His full-length book, *As If Gravity Were a Theory*, won the Cider Press Review Book Award.

He has an MFA in creative writing from Warren Wilson College. A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing, he worked for many years at The Washington Post. He is a board member of Friends of William Stafford.



Nude Model

The first time her tangerine kimono slips
from her shoulders, I think she looks pretty

good for her age and I should know because
she's about my age, but the dark and limber

girls in my drawing class, suck in
their gasps, and I find them tittering

during their cigarette break on the steps outside.
They are most concerned with her breasts, their droop,

and brown sag. The zig and zag of stretch marks,
the way pulled nipples glance down. But what

do I have to throw back but the yellowish
ooze of colostrum and the toothy joy

of small things that find their own snuffling
ways to the heart? Their smooth bland faces

tell me not to bother. I know this would be nothing
to them but the moth-eaten and rag when compared

to the way their boyfriend's wet mouths
slip up on them in the middle of night.

When, for critique, our drawings go up
on the wall, I see the girls have chosen

to draw the soft folds of her orange robe,
the philodendron's shiny leaves which trail

behind the pose. The high tight arch of her
foot is the only part of her body they have considered

as art. But I've returned again and again to her
breasts; with slip of charcoal in my hand, I do study

after study. Fluid ink. I give into
paint pen, conte. Wild sweep of pink pastel.

Each class I come back to her slandered
curves and color her green and blue, sometimes

rose, sometimes purple; I portray her
as turned land and falling water,

though I know even if it were
possible for these fallow girls to imagine

it, this is no garden
they would choose to enter.

—by Kathleen Driskell

POET NOTES
Award-winning poet and teacher **Kathleen Driskell** serves as Associate Program Director of Spalding University's brief-residency Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program in Louisville, Kentucky. In addition to the nationally best-selling *Seed Across Snow* (Red Hen Press, 2009), she is the author of one previous full-length book of poems, *Laughing Sickness* (Fleur-de-Lis Press, 1999, 2005).

Ms. Driskell has published poems in a number of literary magazines and has received two Pushcart Prize nominations. She received her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Kathleen also serves as the Associate Editor of *The Louisville Review* and has taught creative writing and literature at Spalding University, the University of Louisville, Elon College, and the University of North Carolina Greensboro, as well as many writers' workshops and conferences. She lives with her husband and two children in an old country church built before The American Civil War.

WORD SEARCH
"CONTE"— *I give into / paint pen, conte.*
PRONUNCIATION: KAWN-tee
DEFINITION: Trademark. a brand of crayon made of graphite and clay, usually in black, red, or brown. Also known as Conté sticks or Conté crayons.
ORIGIN: In 1795, Nicholas Jacques Conte (a French officer in Napoleon's army) patented the modern method of kiln-firing powdered graphite with clay to make graphite rods for pencils.
The French Republic was at that time under economic blockade and unable to import graphite from Great Britain, the main source of the material. Conté was asked to create a pencil that did not rely on foreign imports. After several days of research, Conté had the idea of mixing powdered graphite with clay and pressing the material between two half-cylinders of wood.
Thus was formed the modern pencil.

Did I Miss Anything?

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 percent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz
worth 50 percent

Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning
Take as many days off as you like:
any activities we undertake as a class
I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light suddenly descended and an angel
or other heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter
This is the last time the class will meet
before we disperse to bring the good news to all people
on earth.

Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered

but it was one place

And you weren't here.

—by Tom Wayman

POET NOTES—

Tom Wayman was born in 1945 in Hawkesbury, Ontario, a pulp mill town on the Ottawa River. When he was 7 his family moved to Prince Rupert, a fishing and pulp mill town on the B.C. coast just south of the Alaska Panhandle. Wayman's father was a mill chemist. In 1959, the family moved to Vancouver, B.C., where Wayman finished high school and attended the University of B.C. Wayman received an M.F.A. in English and writing from the University of California at Irvine. He subsequently worked at a range of manual and academic jobs in Colorado, Ontario, Michigan, and Alberta, as well as a variety of teaching positions.

For many years Wayman was interested in people writing about their own workplace experiences, and about how their jobs affect their lives after work. He is a co-founder of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, a work-writing circle, and has participated in a number of labor arts ventures. Wayman has published more than a dozen collections of his poems. He raises flowers and vegetables, likes to cross-country ski and canoe. In summer he occasionally can be found paddling slowly up Slocan Lake or the Slocan River.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Tom Wayman
Overall, my intention is that the complexities revealed by my poems should be the complications of our everyday existence, rather than newly-created difficulties or mysteries generated by tricks of language or poetic form. Clarity, honesty, accuracy of statement have been my goals--subject to, naturally, the limits of human discourse found in every genre or means of communication. ***My aim is that my poems should be useful: to myself, and to others who share my community and world. I mean these poems to be a gift; I want my poetry to be a tender, humorous, enraged, piercing, but always accurate depiction of where we are--as individuals functioning in a society,*** *and as members of a rawly self-conscious species now occupying the third planet from a nondescript star.*

If you make any money, the government shoves you in the creek once a year with it in your pockets, and all that don't get wet you can keep. —Will Rogers.

Sex and Taxes

Plum black and the blush white of an apple
shoulder, melon & cream, in tones to list
the flesh; in light, washed colors off at last
and textures sheer with damp I slowly pull
from you with your quick help. Weekend's ample
procrastinations to forget the least
of what we want to do. April, half a blast
of cold, half new light, green and simple.
Now dusk. Now fear. We pencil what we owe
on this short form, our numbers good enough.
The goose-neck glare undoes how we spent the day.
Each bite each bee-sting kiss each bitten O
all aftertaste. Later, at the drop-off,
postmark queue, we joke: "Now we can die!"

—by Kevin Cantwell

POET NOTES—**Kevin Cantwell** award winning poems have appeared in many poetry journals and magazines. He lives in Georgia where he teaches creative writing, composition, professional writing, the literature of the workplace, and print history at Macon State College. Professor Cantwell is currently exploring connections between the Incunabula of the 15th Century (the earliest pages printed on presses before 1500) and the emergent Digital Incunabula, focusing on his idea of *"thumb printing," the relationship between standard typographical conventions and the new conventions of type and abbreviation engendered by text messaging.* When I told this to my son Jake, a college student, he grinned and said, "Hey, I'm leading a revolution".

Jake also told me about www.ratemyprofessors.com where college students rate their professors. I looked up Cantwell and found these amusing comments: *Cantwell Rules. Very helpful, very friendly, probably the best teacher at MSC. But if you choose his class, be ready to use your brain. . . . Mr. Cantwell is by far one of my most favorite profs. He really gives me an understanding of the literature that we're studying, and always makes time to help with any problems. He is very passionate about poetry, but hey, HE'S A POET!! . . .Easy, but boring. And yeah, he does take his poetry too seriously. He picks out the worst stuff from the book for the class to read. . . . Very dry humor. Super hot. Kevin rocks!*

I had the pleasure of attending a lecture by poet Fleda Brown a couple of summers ago on Old Mission Peninsula (22 miles long in Northwest Michigan) that divides Grand Traverse Bay into East and West Bays. Fleda provides help for poets through the Michigan Writers Cooperative. See her comments on a first draft poem at "Revisionist Corner Work" www.michwriters.org/revcornerwork.asp?workid=3
She lives in Traverse City and has an essay about her dad's Michigan cabin in the current issue of *Traverse Magazine*.

Through Security

I take off my boots because of their steel shanks.
I take out my orthotics, place my coat and purse in the bin,
place my carry-on on the belt. I take off my shirt, my jeans,
my bra. I take out my contacts. I take off my makeup
and earrings, strip the dye from my hair. I relax my stomach
to its honestly protruding shape. Still, it's all over the TVs
about me. I'm buzzed again as if there's been no progress at all
since the club-carrying, the dragging-by-the-hair. I take off
my skin, veins flying like ropes, organs dropping away
one by one. I address the additional matter of bones:
unfasten ball from socket, unhook ligaments,
leave the electronic eye no place to rest.
I am almost ready to go, if I could quit
thinking, the thinking that goes on
almost without knowing, the tiny person
crossing her legs in the back
of the mind, the one who
says, "I still love you,
dear guilty flesh."

—by Fleda Brown
(from *Reunion*, 2007)

POET NOTES—Fleda Brown was born in Columbia, Missouri, and grew up in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She earned her Ph.D. in English (specialty in American Literature) from the University of Arkansas, and in 1978 joined the faculty of the University of Delaware English Department where she founded the Poets in the Schools Program. Her books, essays, and individual poems have won many awards, among them a Pushcart Prize. Her sixth collection of poems, *Reunion* (2007), was the winner of the Felix Pollak Prize from the University of Wisconsin. Her collection of memoir-essays, *Driving With Dvorak*, was released in March 2010 from the University of Nebraska Press.

Fleda Brown served as poet laureate of Delaware from 2001-2007. After retiring from the University of Delaware, she moved to Traverse City, Michigan, where she writes a monthly column on poetry for the Record-Eagle newspaper.

When I was a high school sophomore, the value of geometry was lost on me. I squeaked by in that class because I was good at the art of memorization, but theorems and postulates didn't thrill me the way poetry did. I hid a copy of *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning inside my Geometry textbook—a poem taught to my freshman English class by a male teacher who had a flair for the dramatic. I was enchanted by the characters in the poem, and by the skill of the poet, so out of boredom in geometry class, I memorized Browning's 28 heroic couplets that hung together like a juicy conversation perfect for an eavesdropper.

Today's poem, *My Ex-husband*, by poet Gabriel Spera is an amusing mirror image of *My Last Duchess*. I've had fun comparing the two dramatic monologues and invite you to do the same. The speakers in both poems say more about themselves than they do about "The Duchess" or the "The Ex-husband".

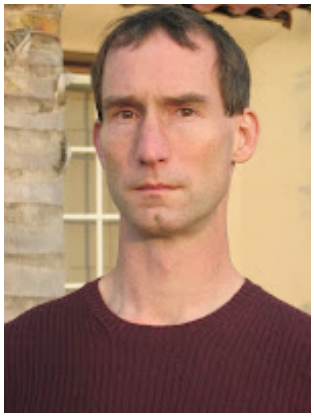
Note the fact that none of the rhyming sounds at the ends of the respective couplets are repeated throughout either of the poems. Each couplet presents two new and unique rhyming words, making the rhyme scheme aa bb cc dd ee, and so on.

My Ex-Husband

That's my ex-husband pictured on the shelf,
Smiling as if in love. I took it myself
With his Leica, and stuck it in that frame
We got for our wedding. Kind of a shame
To waste it on him, but what could I do?
(Since I haven't got a photograph of you.)
I know what's on your mind—you want to know
Whatever could have made me let him go—
He seems like any woman's perfect catch,
What with his ruddy cheeks, the thin mustache,
Those close-set, baggy eyes, that tilted grin.
But snapshots don't show what's beneath the skin!
He had a certain charm, charisma, style,
That passionate, earnest glance he struck, meanwhile
Whispering the sweetest things, like "Your lips
Are like plump rubies, eyes like diamond chips,"
Could flush the throat of any woman, not
Just mine. He knew the most romantic spots
In town, where waiters, who all knew his face,
Reserved an intimately dim-lit place
Half-hidden in a corner nook. Such stuff
Was all too well rehearsed, I soon enough
Found out. He had an attitude— how should
I put it—smooth, self-satisfied, too good
For the rest of the world, too easily
Impressed with his officious self. And he
Flirted—fine! But flirted somehow a bit
Too ardently, too blatantly, as if,
If someone ever noticed, no one cared

How slobbishly he carried on affairs.
Who'd lower herself to put up with shit
Like that? Even if you'd the patience—which
I have not—to go and see some counselor
And say, "My life's a living hell," or
"Everything he does disgusts, the lout!"—
And even if you'd somehow worked things out,
Took a long trip together, made amends,
Let things get back to normal, even then
You'd still be on the short end of the stick:
And I choose never ever to get stuck.
Oh, no doubt, it always made my limbs go
Woozy when he kissed me, but what bimbo
In the steno pool went without the same
Such kisses? So, I made some calls, filed some claims,
All kisses stopped together. There he grins,
Almost lovable. Shall we go? I'm in
The mood for Chez Pierre's, perhaps, tonight,
Though anything you'd like would be all right
As well, of course, though I'd prefer not to go
To any place with checkered tables. No,
We'll take my car. By the way, have I shown
You yet these lovely champagne flutes, hand blown,
Imported from Murano, Italy,
Which Claus got in the settlement for me!

—by Gabriel Spera



My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

—by Robert Browning

POET NOTES

Gabriel Spera grew up in New Jersey, and was educated at Cornell University and the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He lives in Los Angeles, where he works as a technical writer for an aerospace research group.

Gabriel Spera's poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies. His first collection of poems, *The Standing Wave*, was a National Poetry Series selection and received the Literary Book Award for Poetry from PEN-USA West. A book packed with metaphor, Spera's poems ask big questions, but also provide answers to serious and troubling issues of the day. He received a 2009 Literature Fellowship in Poetry from the NEA.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Gabriel Spera

Of course, the problem of being a compulsive buyer of poetry books means that when I do find myself in a book store with a book in hand, I often can't remember whether I already own it.

I am occasionally asked by folks who don't read poetry if I can name any musicians who might qualify as poets. I begin by explaining that ***music and poetry strive for different ends, and have different tools and methods for achieving those ends****. I generally find that setting poetry to music destroys it—in the same way that reading a song on the printed page destroys it, too. Music and literature are animated by different geniuses—and while they may share a common ancestor, they occupy different and distinct branches on the phylogenetic tree of human expression. Still, in terms of poetic musicians, I might start with Bruce Springsteen (and not just because of my Jersey roots). Many of his lyrics stand alone in their grittiness and angst, and their occasional delight in wordplay (cf, "Blinded by the Light"). Even better, John Darnielle of the Mountain Goats has written many lines that I wish I had written myself; that's high praise from a poet. I've never heard anyone say the same thing about Dylan.*

Prose poem: contradiction in terms, right? I've never been quite sure what to make of the prose poem. One gripe I have with many contemporary poems is that they seem to be prose chopped up to look like a poem, with no rhyme or reason (pun intended) as to what constitutes a line. The prose poem, of course, doesn't even try to look like a poem, at least not in the typical sense. And yet, on the other hand, they do have an odd visual appeal, appearing as a self-contained brick-like edifice on the page (assuming they don't go on for more than a page). Sometimes, I wonder whether the poem would achieve the same effect if it had some sort of line break. And sometimes, I decide that the answer is no. ***At its best, the prose poem achieves a certain urgency, an immediacy, which comes from stripping away all pretense and ornament,*** *all the traditional trappings of poetry. Yet even this can be deceiving, for the prose poet, like the concrete poet, must be attuned to mechanical process of putting words on page, on typesetting and font styling.*

April Gifts #18—2010 **Tenderness**

When poet **Stephen Dunn** was a young man, he worked as a copywriter for the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco's original name) from 1962-1963. In his words: *I wrote in-house brochures that went to the sales force of (the) corporation. Even with that kind of writing, my soul was in danger, which was why many years ago I quit, and tried to see if I was good enough to take a chance at becoming the kind of writer I wished to be. What I hate about most commercials is what I hate about society-speak and political cant. The debasement of language.*

Today's poem, *Tenderness*, considers Dunn's relationship with an older woman who worked with him at the National Biscuit Company.

Tenderness

Back then when so much was clear
and I hadn't learned
young men learn from women

what it feels like to feel just right,
I was twenty-three,
she thirty-four, two children, a husband

in prison for breaking someone's head.
Yelled at, slapped
around, all she knew of tenderness

was how much she wanted it, and all
I knew
were back seats and a night or two

in a sleeping bag in the furtive dark.
We worked
in the same office, banter and loneliness

leading to the shared secret
that to help
National Biscuit sell biscuits

was wildly comic, which led to my body
existing with hers
like rain that's found its way underground

to water it naturally joins.
I can't remember
ever saying the exact word, tenderness,

though she did. It's a word I see now
you must be older to use,
you must have experienced the absence of it

often enough to know what silk and deep balm
it is
when at last it comes. I think it was terror

at first that drove me to touch her
so softly,
then selfishness, the clear benefit

of doing something that would come back
to me twofold,
and finally, sometime later, it became

reflexive and motiveless in the high
ignorance of love.
Oh abstractions are just abstract

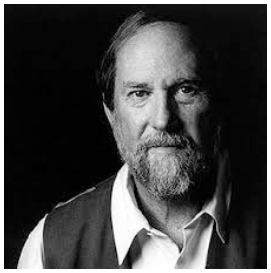
until they have an ache in them. I met
a woman never touched
gently, and when it ended between us

I had new hands and new sorrow,
everything it meant
to be a man changed, unheroic, floating. *—by Stephen Dunn*

POET NOTES—Stephen Dunn, born in 1939 in New York City, has written many collections of poetry, and has won numerous awards including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his 2001 collection, *Different Hours*. His most recent book is *What Goes On: Selected and New Poems 1995-2009* by Norton. He has taught poetry and creative writing and held residencies at several universities. Since 1974 Dunn has taught at Richard Stockton College of NJ, where he is Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing.

IN HIS OWN WORDS— Stephen Dunn—*The good poem illuminates its subject so that we can see it as the poet wished, and in ways he could not have anticipated. It follows that such illumination is twofold: the light of the mind, which the poet employs like a miner's beam, and the other light which emanates from the words on the page in conjunction with themselves, a radiance the poet caused but never can fully control.* From the essay "The Good and Not So Good" in *Walking Light: Essays and Memoirs.*

In the presence of a good poem we remember/discover the soul has an appetite, and that appetite is for emotional veracity and the unsayable. —Stephen Dunn



I'm lucky to live with someone who shares my love of poetry. My husband, David, saves his favorite poems that appear in JAMA (the Journal of American Medical Association) and passes them along to me. I appreciate the unique poetic perspective of writers working in the field of science—doctors, nurses, physical therapists, hospice counselors, and the like. Today's poem, which appeared in the September 23/30 issue of JAMA, is written by physician Molly O'Dell.

Upturned on Virginia Route 311

I've misplaced your face among ox-eye
daisies studding hayfields west of Salem

and I've forgotten your name, too,
the one I learned standing in a ditch

on the side of the road, early one morning
headed to clinic in New Castle

during hay season. Just past the new mound
system at the Moose Lodge, I slowed for bales

in the road, your car upturned, doors smashed
stuck. I instructed your husband to warm you

with the sun-bleached towel protecting the back-
seat upholstery—he stuck behind the wheel down-

side, you upside slung from your seatbelt. His fingers
found your radial pulse for me. He counted the beats

out loud as I watched the second hand circle
my watch, cars whizzing by. I learned your daughter's

phone number through stellate windows while waiting
on the Jaws of Life. You asked me to describe

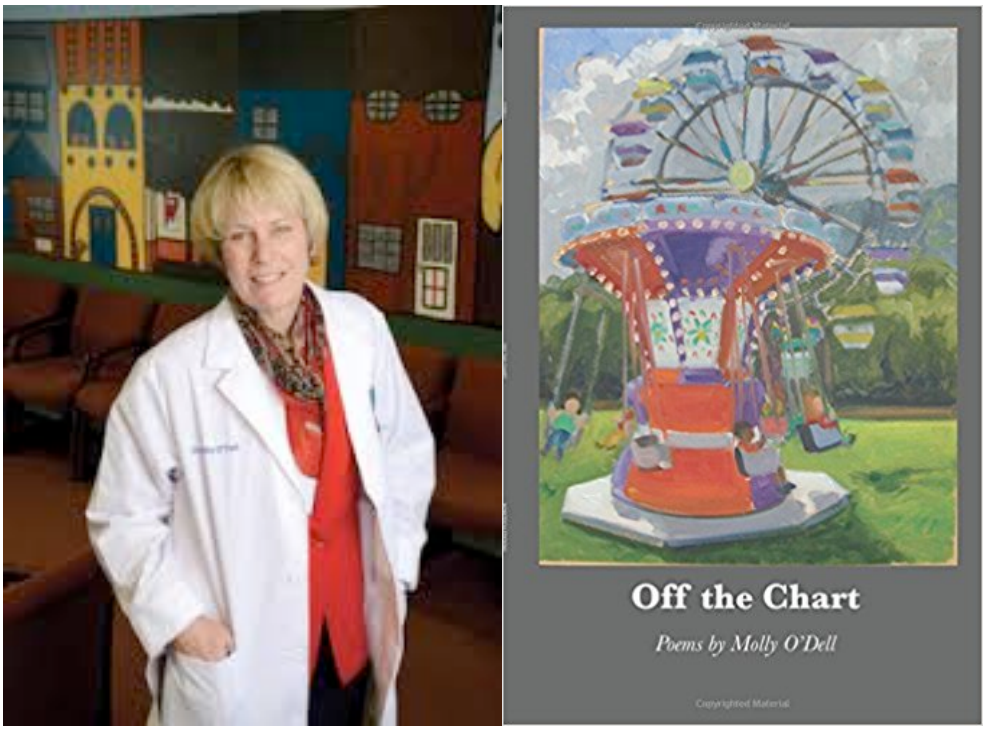
the pieces of glass in your face. We compared
the specks to wildflowers in the still standing hay.

—by Molly O'Dell, MD

POET NOTES—
Dr. Molly O'Dell is a practicing physician and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Lincoln. Dr. O'Dell has been a significant community health resource and advocate for over twenty years. In 1987 she became the Public Health Officer for a multi-locality public health district in the southern Appalachian Mountains for the Virginia Department of Health. Molly completed her MFA in poetry in July 2008 at University of Nebraska and has poems forthcoming in *Chest* and *JAMA*.

Dr. O'Dell began her practice of medicine as a solo family physician in a medically underserved community in Southwest Virginia where she enjoyed every aspect of primary care including house calls. Evidence of O'Dell's compassion, enthusiasm, creativity and willingness to take risks and forge partnerships can be seen in the many health care initiatives she has been involved in over the years, her colleagues say. *"She's a consummate teacher, she's a consummate partner, and she's willing to entertain anything that will improve health."*

"The idea of the practice of medicine as an art is not new."
Dr. Molly O'Dell



Off the Chart is a collection sparked by encounters with everyday patients in rural Virginia, where the James River cuts between the Appalachians and the Blue Ridge, just below Purgatory Mountain. Molly O'Dell's poems provide a glimpse of the practice of medicine before health systems reigned and document the foundation from which one ordinary girl learned, with her patients, the art of healing materializes when hearts converge, in a shared place and time, off the chart. These poems are a tribute to the places and people who transformed her along the way.
(from Amazon.com)

Poem of Mercy

No one poem is enough. No
one poem contains the mercy
I seek, the forgiveness. There are no
words that can adequately approach
the tufts of fine black hair
on the backs of the doctor's hands
as he dialed my home that night
from one of the side rooms,
then choked, looking out into the hallway
at the blood-drenched gurneys,
then handed me the phone
as if to say, "You tell them.
Tell them what you saw, what happened"—
as if only a son could utter
the words that would burn
in a father's ear that night.
Please, a mercy for the doctor.
His courage failed him.
He could not look at me again that night.
And mercy too to the others
who dialed, who fell back
onto their simple faiths, their jobs,
and spoke what few words they knew
so totally without hope.
Have mercy: on the dialers, the phones.
Have mercy on the words they used.
And mercy too to the nurses,
the ones who ran down flights
of stairs, only to stare and weep.
Please, a mercy on the quickness
of their gasps. Have mercy too
on the instruments that were used,
what the doctors touched flesh with
and then removed. The coarse towels
and linens. The scalpels, clamps.
The numerous sponges. Have
mercy on the sutures that were never used.
Have mercy too on the light
in the room which was man-made
and all around us in banks.
Have mercy on the detonations
in the bulbs. I think forgiveness
can go this far: to the coffee cup
spiked with pencils, to the navy blue pens,
to the clipboards and spiral notebooks,
to the engraved plastic tags the nurses
and doctors wore like ribbons.

So too to the loose bolt in the rail
on the gurney. To the gurney's one
skewed wheel. Mercy too to the tear
in the mattress, the one
which had become partially untapped
and through which I ran my middle finger
into the matting just to feel it.
Mercy too to the cold medallion they used
to gauge the whip-like action
of the veins in my chest. Mercy
to the pinpoint dots of light.
To the delicate rubber loops
that hung from the suspended bottles.
Even to the dust and bits of windshield glass,
the pieces of the car that had infused me,
a mercy. Mercy to my pant cuffs
and bloodied jacket. To the scissors
because they felt they had to cut away these clothes.
Mercy, therefore, particularly to the scissors.
To the aluminum rods ringed
with curtains, even to the clock
on the wall. My parents finally arriving—
and the curtains yanked—
an opaque sheerness that hid us—
the three of us staring at one another
with the embarrassment of survivors.
Finally, mercy to the bitterness of that sound.

—by Dennis Hinrichsen
Poetry (May, 1990)

POET NOTES
Dennis Hinrichsen was in a car accident in high school in which four students died. Today's poem is a courageous look at the emotional aftermath of the tragedy, told in what might be called a list poem. This listing creates a manageable container to "hold" the painful story, offering an imposed meditation for the reader, and suggesting that even one well-written poem can begin to heal suffering.

Dennis Hinrichsen earned a M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Iowa. His collections of poetry include *The Attraction of Heavenly Bodies*, *The Rain That Falls This Far*, *Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights*, and most recently *Kurosawa's Dog* by Oberlin College Press. Hinrichsen has been the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and two grants from the state of Michigan. He lives in Lansing, Michigan and teaches at Lansing Community College.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Dennis Hinrichsen
From interview with Geosi Gyasi

How do you begin a poem? *Sometimes I court a poem as I've just described. This one intrigued me from the beginning so it was easy to follow through. More often though poems begin with a whisper of something. An idea, an image, a piece of language, a formal question. Sometimes poems come from a response to whatever I'm reading. Or as off-shoots to poems I'm currently working on.* ***I always have a list of 5-10 poem ideas that I'm thinking out. I generally have 2-3 poems in some stages of drafting****. They key is that invitation: something in the idea needs to intrigue me and lure me on. And then I'm hooked.*

Is it often difficult beginning a poem? *Sometimes not hard at all. Once I have that critical mass–the materials–I abandon myself to them and just riff through a pretty messy and expansive draft. Then I start fine-tuning.* ***I try to move from the incandescence of those first moves to something more laser-like in the finished piece*** *where that tension between content and form hums like a tuned guitar string.*

How do you often end a poem? *I wait for an audible click when I read the poem out loud. One of my teachers,* ***Marvin Bell, says somewhere, "At heart, poetic beauty is tautological: it defines its terms and then it exhausts them."*** *So that click occurs when I read the poem out loud and recognize that there is nothing left for me to do but move on to the next poem. Find new stuff, work to new exhaustion.*

Are there times you feel like not writing? *I never feel like not writing. I am always thinking about poems, seeking new ideas, thinking about interesting formal constraints. There are times, however, when I choose to not write. The idea hasn't reached critical mass, so I let it stew, collect more material until a pressure builds and I can go to the blank page with some ideas and energy. But there is always something to work on, a new idea, or a poem still in draft stage. On one level it's my work, my blue collar work, so I just keep at it.*

When I get down to the annual business of choosing the 30 poems for this April project, one of my criteria is how each poem sounds when I read it aloud. The ghazal is an elegant form for the topic of loss and love, and so utterly beautiful to the ear. I read this poem to my son, Jacob, but when I came to the last couplet I could barely speak. I was overcome with sorrow for the mother's loss—the poem feels that fresh to me—and I was simultaneously aware of the good fortune of having my son alive, giving me a hug that was more hardy than usual. What a blessing a poem can be. How it can touch a life unexpectedly.

Summer Whites

I want old-fashioned metaphor; I dress in black.
My son was murdered. I bear witness in black.

The graveyard shocks with rampant green.
In a rusted chair sits grief, enormous in black.

Died, July 16, 1983.
Navy's white headstone, christcross in black.

A cardinal flames — sudden visitation.
Holy spirit? Surcease from black?

Grackles keen in mad falsetto.
Treeful of banshees. Fracas in black.

It should be told, of course, in small details
and with restraint (artfulness in black).

He was a sailor in summer whites in a port city.
He was walking, the streets dangerous in black.

The bullet entered right shoulder, ricocheted.
In the ground his dress blues decompose to black.

I am Isabel. He was Jerry John. The dead
are listening for their names, soundless in black.

—by Isabel Nathaniel
Poetry (July 1998) & *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English*

POET NOTES
Isabel Nathaniel was born and raised in New York City, and is currently a book reviewer for the Dallas Morning News. Her poems have been published in *Poetry, The Nation, Ploughshares, Southwest Review, The Iowa Review, Field, Prairie Schooner, Southern Poetry Review, The Texas Observer, The Journal,* and included in the anthologies *Ravishing DisUnities* (Wesleyan), *Poetry in Motion from Coast to Coast* (Norton), *Best Texas Writing* (Rancho Loco Press), *Texas in Poetry 2* (TCU Press), and *Literary Dallas* (TCU Press).

I recommend Isabel Nathaniel's *The Dominion of Lights* (available through publisher Copper Beech Press www.copperbeechpress.com) which won the Texas Institute of Letters Award for Best Book of Poetry. These poems encouraged me to look more honestly at things I would sometimes rather not see. They serve to lift the reader with their beauty even when the subject matter is shadowy.

Other honors include a Discovery/*The Nation* Prize, five Poetry Society of America awards, and *Southwest Review's* McGinnis-Ritchie Award.

ABOUT THE GHAZAL

Today's poem is a ghazal, an important lyric form in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poetry written in couplets using a single rhyme (*aa*, *ba*, *ca*, *da* etc.). Each line must share the same meter. Etymologically, the word "ghazal" literally refers to the mortal cry of a gazelle.

Ghazals are traditionally expressions of love, separation and loneliness, for which the gazelle is an appropriate image. The Arabic word is spoken roughly like the English word "guzzle", but with the ġ pronounced without a complete closure between the tongue and the soft palate.

The final couplet of a ghazal usually includes the poet's signature, referring to the author in the first or third person, and frequently including the poet's own name or a derivation of its meaning. In today's poem, Isabel Nathaniel also invokes the name of her beloved son, Jerry John.

Through a correspondence with the poet I was gifted with her book, The Dominion of Light, which contains another

Poet **William Stafford** appeared in this collection of April poems in 2007. I was tempted to offer one of his poems in 2008 and again in 2009 because I never tire of his work. For as much of Stafford's work I've read, I only recently came across today's poem in a book I purchased for a friend who is a hospital chaplain. The book is titled *The Poet's Gift: Toward the Renewal of Pastoral Care* by Donald Capps (Westminster John Knox Press; 1993). Capps, a professor of pastoral theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, makes no claims to be a literary critic. He writes as a pastoral counselor whose own self-understanding has been deepened by literary encounters. He invites readers to examine the insights of two contemporary American poets: Denise Levertov and William Stafford. He has chosen these two not simply because both are "personal" and "direct" but because they illustrate his conviction that *"there is a certain affinity between poets and pastors."* Poems are parables, Capps says, that *"create openings for self-disclosure."* Stafford's poems are often deceptively simple, but they reveal a writer who is willing to embrace self-examination and consequently, the human condition.

Confessor

The girl hiding in the hall on the ferry
from Alaska, the old man who kept his face
in shadow, that matron shuddering over
the market basket in the parking lot—
scores of these follow me into my dreams,
and I can't tell more because I promised.

I carry their burden. When I go down
the street my memory is a vault that no one
need see opened. I am their plain
unmarked envelope that passes through the world.
People tell me what they don't want to carry
alone. They have felt singled out by some
blow: not always at fault but still
ashamed for a human involvement, they want
someone else to know, to bear with them
and not blame. I am their stranger and will pass
out of their life . . . .

All right. I listen. My life sinks a little
farther, for the pity; from now on I know it
with them. We'll take a stand, wherever the end is.
We go forward by this quiet sharing,
they one way, I another. I am their promise
no one else is going to know.

—by William Stafford

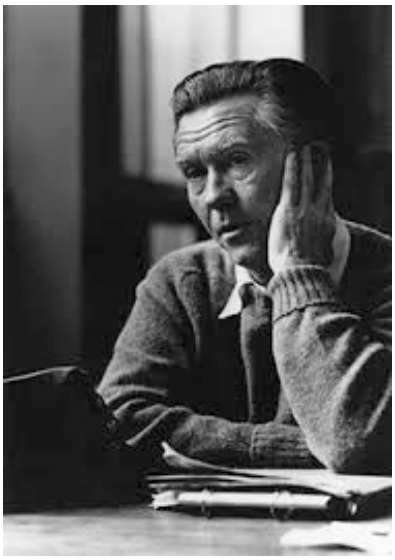
POET NOTES

William Edgar Stafford was born in Hutchinson, Kansas, on January 17, 1914, to Ruby Mayher and Earl Ingersoll Stafford. The eldest of three children, Stafford grew up with an appreciation for nature and books. His family moved often so his father could find work. Stafford helped his family by delivering newspapers and working in farm fields. William Stafford died at his home in Lake Oswego, Oregon, on August 28, 1993.

Stafford managed to graduate from college and earned a master's degree in English from the University of Kansas. As a registered pacifist, Stafford spent 1942-1946 working in camps and projects for conscientious objectors in Arkansas, California, and Illinois. His pay was $2.50 a month for assigned duties such as fire fighting, soil conservation, and building and maintaining roads and trails.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—William Edgar Stafford

A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them." This sentence begins an essay first published in Field (1970) in which Stafford reports that he sits alone in the early morning and writes down whatever occurs to him, following his impulses. *"It is like fishing,"* he says, and he must be receptive and *"willing to fail. If I am to keep writing**, I cannot bother to insist on high standards.... I am following a process that leads so wildly and originally into new territory that no judgment can at the moment be made about values, significance**, and so on.... I am headlong to discover.* —William Stafford



Today's poem reminds me of the message in Joan Osborne's song, "What If God Was One Of Us" . . .

Lost and Found

That afternoon, a retarded boy wandered into the cloister.
I found him in the washroom. Short, awkward, incongruous,
he shuffled past the long line of urinals. I followed him
into the hall. I almost said Can I help you? like a salesman;
instead, Who are you looking for? He seemed to ignore or
not hear me at first, but when I touched him gently on the arm
he said, My father. He was unhurried, not upset that he was
lost, curious even. He gazed at me, looked down the hall,
then stared through the window to the autumn light,
the last few bees in the linden. No fear. As though the place
belonged to him. And it did; far more than to me or the other
scholars of the law who lived there, dozing over our
scriptures. We talked, walking slowly through the cloister.
I asked him questions, and some of his answers
astonished me. I steered him back to the porter's desk
out front. When I opened the door, his parents looked up
eagerly, relieved, but not altogether surprised—that he'd
wandered off, or found his way safely back to them.

—by John Slater

POET NOTES—John Slater, born in Toronto, is a Cistercian monk (Brother Isaac) at the Abbey of Genesee in New York, where he works as a baker, plumber, gardener and caregiver for the infirm. His love and study of poetry has been lifelong. "Lost and Found" was the winner of the 2007 Foley poetry contest.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Brother John Slater
Cloistered monastic life is something like living in a sonnet. There is a definite skeleton, a strict set of norms and limits given. For the poet, the rhyme scheme and so on can challenge and stretch his imagination in fresh and surprising ways; they force him to question what is essential to the work and to prune away the superfluous. The rules exist to secure and support a certain inner liberty—at the same time the very freedom unleashed, intensified by confinement in such tight quarters tests and pulls against the edges.

April Gift #24—2010 **The Chaos of Fatwas**

"Poet of Millions", an Abu Dhabi televised poetry contest, is as popular in Saudi Arabia as "American Idol" is here. This spring, six contestants (narrowed down from forty-eight) competed for First Prize—$1.3 million! Funded by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Heritage and Culture, the program has been part of a greater effort to invest oil money in reviving local culture through modern format.

Today's poet, **Hissa Hilal**, a forty-three year old mother with four children, is the first woman to reach the "Poet of Millions" finals. Her recent third prize winnings of $800,000 was turned over to her husband because she is unable by law to receive or spend her prize money. But that is the least of Hilal's concerns. In a region where clerics are as powerful as the political leaders in shaping public and private life, Hilal's blistering poem against Muslim preachers "who sit in the position of power frightening people with their fatwas" (religious edicts) and "preying like a wolf" on those seeking peace, has brought her death threats.

Hissa Hilal, entirely hidden in a burqa except for the eyeslits in her black niqab (face veil), bravely recited her 15 verse poem titled "The Chaos of Fatwas". Here is as best a translation I could find.

The Chaos of Fatwas
(an excerpt)

I have seen evil from the eyes of the subversive fatwas
in a time when what is lawful is confused
with what is not lawful.

When I unveil the truth, a monster appears
from his hiding place; barbaric in thinking and action,
angry and blind; wearing death as a dress
and covering it with a belt [referring to suicide bombing].

He speaks from an official, powerful platform
terrorizing people and preying on everyone
seeking peace; the voice of courage ran away
and the truth is cornered and silent,
when self-interest prevented one from speaking the truth.

—by Hissa Hilal

POET NOTES

Since the age of 12, **Hissa Hilal** has been writing poetry both in the classical Arabic style as well as the colloquial form (Nabati) which is native to nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. Hilal is the former editor of poetry for the Arab Daily Al-Hayat. Her poetry of defiance is being hailed as an act of courage. To witness and hear Hilal reciting her own poetry on "Poet of Millions" go to: news.yahoo.com/video/world-15749633/19070412

IN HER OWN WORDS—Hissa Hilal

My poetry has always been provocative. It is a way to express myself and give voice to Arab women, silenced by those who have hijacked our culture and our religion. Extremist fatwas are subversive thinking, terrifying thinking, and everyone should stand against it. One should not kill or call for the killing of people because they do not belong to their system of thought or to their religion.

At first, I was adamant about wanting people to view me as a poet, only. But I expect now for people to view me as a female poet. ***I am part of a long tradition of female Arab poets. I am not setting a new trend.*** *Throughout Arabic history – including pre Islam and after Islam – there was the female poet. Women have always participated in poetry.*

My message to those who hear me is love, compassion and peace. We all have to share a small planet and we need to learn how to live together.

Following the rape, murder and burning of "an innocent" in the Cincinnati community, there was a discussion in one of my writing groups about "poems of outrage". How does one write a successful poem about horror? Why even attempt to create a poem about heinous subject matter when the writer and the reader already agree that the subject matter is evil. Certainly what can be expressed successfully in a compelling essay, can sound like a rant in a poem, failing miserably. In Stephen Dunn's essay, "Complaint, Complicity, Outrage, Composition", he says: *Most poems of outrage are too earnest to do anything but say what the author knew before the poem began. They're preformulated. Or they're just screaming. They rarely take us by surprise.*

In today's political poem, **Protocols**, poet Jarrell Randall's challenge was, in Dunn's words, *to find language and rhythms that would approximate the confusion the children felt with the machinery of death and the familiar but desperate warmth of their mothers.* The arrangement of the children's voices breaks our hearts in this beautiful poem.

Protocols
(Birkenau, Odessa; the children speak alternately.)

We went there on the train. They had big barges that towed.
We stood up, there were so many I was squashed.
There was a smoke-stack, then they made me wash.
It was a factory, I think. My mother held me up
And I could see the ship that made the smoke.

When I was tired my mother carried me.
She said, "Don't be afraid." But I was only tired.
Where we went there is no more Odessa.
They had water in a pipe--like rain, but hot;
The water there is deeper than the world

And I was tired and fell in in my sleep
And the water drank me. That is what I think.
And I said to my mother, "Now I'm washed and dried."
My mother hugged me and it smelled like hay
And that is how you die. And that is how you die.

—by Randall Jarrell

POET NOTES

Randall Jarrell (1914-1965) is best known for his WWII poetry, documenting the intense fears and moral struggles of young soldiers. Born in Nashville, his family moved to the west coast where he spent most of his childhood in Long Beach, and Hollywood, California. When Jarrell was 11 years old, his parents divorced and he was sent to live with his grandparents. In high school, Jarrell took business courses, but he soon came under the influence of poet John Ransom and realized that he wanted to write poetry instead. Jarrell attended Vanderbilt University and received a bachelor's and master's degree. He then went to teach English at Kenyon Collage where he met Robert Lowell. Following the war, Jarrell accepted a teaching position at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and remained there until his death.

Even more than for his poems, Jarrell Randall is highly regarded as a peerless literary essayist, and was considered the most astute (and most feared) poetry critic of his generation. In my research, I discovered that Randall was a George Elliston Lecturer at the University of Cincinnati from 1958-1965.

POEM FOOTNOTE

I was curious about the reference to "hay" in the second last line of this poem and discovered that Phosgene, the poisonous gas used at Birkenau in Odessa, smells like clover or hay.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Randall Jarrell

A poet is a man who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times.

Read at whim! read at whim!

Art is long, and critics are the insects of a day. . . . There is something essentially ridiculous about critics, anyway: what is good is good without our saying so, and beneath all our majesty we know this.

One of the most obvious facts about grownups to a child is that they have forgotten what it is like to be a child.

Pain comes from the darkness. And we call it wisdom. It is pain.

Most poets, most good poets even, no longer have the heart to write about what is most terrible in the world of the present: the bombs waiting beside the rockets, the hundreds of millions staring into the temporary shelter of their television sets, the decline of the West that seems less a decline than the fall preceding an explosion.

The safest way to avoid the world is through art; and the safest way to be linked to the world is through art.

Commencement

Like the boys I once saw in Homs
flinging themselves from the topmost
turn of a Roman waterwheel—

their arms and legs wildly akimbo,
caterwauling, graceless,
yet full of a coltish grace—

my son casts his eyes to the ceiling,
speculates about the plants, wolfs
his food, restless, ready to reach

the top of this one wheel's turning,
his first outward launching
making him nervous, skittery,

unwilling to answer even the most
direct question. How the waterwheel
must have creaked and groaned then,

beneath those Syrian boys.
It was amazing, a monument
turned plaything. Over and over

they climbed and sailed out, shrieking
through the bright air, catching the turns
just so, spilling with the water

but disdaining for the moment
its gravity. Circumscribed
by today, and less a parent

than a tourist in a dusty land,
I'm amazed to think of those boys
as I watch him finding his foothold

nearing the apogee, asking nothing,
poised above the pool, casting about
for the finest way down.

—by Terry Blackhawk
First published in *America*, as winner of the 1990 Foley Poetry Prize.

POET NOTES

Terry Blackhawk, Ph.D. is the founder and director of Detroit's acclaimed InsideOut Literary Arts Project, a poets-in-schools program serving over 5,000 youth per year. She began teaching English in 1968 after graduating from Antioch College, and took up writing poetry, herself, when she was already teaching it to her students. *"I thought, 'If I'm asking them to do this, I should have the same experience myself.' I fell in love with it. I became a poet. It's who I am."*

Terry's poetry collections include *Body & Field* (Michigan State University Press, 1999); *Escape Artist* (BkMk Press, 2003), selected by Molly Peacock for the John Ciardi Prize; and *The Dropped Hand* (Marick Press, 2007). She has published two chapbooks, *Trio: Voices from the Myths* (Ridgeway Press, 1998) and *Greatest Hits 1989-2003* (Pudding House Press). Her poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and journals. In addition, Dr. Blackhawk has received many recognitions for her teaching, including Creative Writing Educator of the Year from the Michigan Youth Arts Festival (2008). She is the mother of historian Ned Blackhawk. For more poetry from Terry Blackhawk, go to: www.TerryBlackhawk.com

IN HER OWN WORDS—Terry Blackhawk,

Poetry matters ... to refresh the language, to reclaim it from ad-men and the language of the market place. It reaches kids directly, brings emotion into the classroom, touches the inner lives of kids . . . An e e cummings poem begins 'since feeling is first …' Those words have always stayed with me and I read them in high school!

The Hug

A woman is reading a poem on the street
and another woman stops to listen. We stop too,
with our arms around each other...

Suddenly, a hug comes over me and I'm
giving it to you, like a variable star shooting light
off to make itself comfortable, then
subsiding. I finish but keep holding
you. A man walks up to us and we know he hasn't
come out of nowhere, but if he could, he
would have. He looks homeless because of how
he needs. "Can I have one of those?" he asks you,
and I feel you nod. I'm surprised,
surprised you don't tell him how
it is -- that I'm yours, only
yours, exclusive as a nose to
its face. Love -- that's what we're talking about, love
that nabs you with "for me only" and holds on.

So I walk over to him and put my
arms around him and try to
hug him like I mean it. He's got an overcoat on
so thick I can't feel
him past it. I'm starting the hug
and thinking, "How big a hug is this supposed to be?
How long shall I hold this hug?" Already
we could be eternal, his arms falling over my
shoulders, my hands not
meeting behind his back, he is so big!

I put my head into his chest and snuggle
in. I lean into him. I lean my blood and my wishes
into him. He stands for it. This is his
and he's starting to give it back so well I know he's
getting it. This hug. So truly, so tenderly
we stop having arms and I don't know if
my lover has walked away or what, or
if the woman is still reading the poem...

Clearly, a little permission is a dangerous thing.
But when you hug someone you want it
to be a masterpiece of connection, the way the button
on his coat will leave the imprint of
a planet on my cheek
when I walk away. When I try to find some place
to go back to.

—by Tess Gallagher

credit: © Brian Farrell

POET NOTES—Tess Bond Gallagher was born in Port Angeles, Washington, in 1943, and was the oldest of the five children of Leslie O. and Georgia Marie Morris Bond. During her childhood, her father worked first as a logger and then as a long-shoreman. As a child, she helped her father with logging and later did farm work on the small ranch her family owned. References to the natural beauty of Washington State and childhood memories, such as salmon fishing with her father in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, appear consistently throughout her poetic work. From age sixteen she worked as a reporter for the Port Angeles Daily News.

Gallagher attended the University of Washington, where she studied creative writing with Theodore Roethke and later Nelson Bentley as well as David Wagoner and Mark Strand. Her honors include a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, two National Endowment for the Arts awards, the Maxine Cushing Gray Foundation Award, and the Elliston Award for *"best book of poetry published by a small press"* for the collection Instructions to the Double (1976).

Her third husband, author Raymond Carver, encouraged her to write short stories, some of which were collected in *The Lover of Horses* (1987) and *At the Owl Woman Saloon* (1996). Her book *Moon Crossing Bridge* is a collection of poems written after the death of Raymond Carver, who died from cancer in 1988.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Tess Bond Gallagher
I can remember those early poems I wrote in Theodore Roethke's class. One in particular was about going hunting with my father and his having shot a deer that didn't die. We had to follow this trail of blood through the woods and it was a very moving experience for me. Finally, when we were about to find the deer, my father made me stay back. He wanted me to be a part of the hunt, but he didn't want me to see the actual dying, in case the deer wasn't dead yet. It was a very defining moment, and I tried to write about that. That may be the first real poem. I thought I was getting into the idea of what a poem might be. But, I don't know that I "woke up." I think poetry did rather kidnap me; that I just, poem by poem, was baby-stepping my way into the great, large cathedral-or forest-of poetry.

***I don't like poems that are just decor**. If the poet is sitting in bed in his ratty sweater, his elbows out, writing about the act of writing poetry or whatever music is playing, I'm not going to be interested probably. There is a lot of this sort of schmoozing going on. I have to feel that the poet has some stake in the matter. **The questions always lurking with me are "What does it matter? Why are you writing this?"** I test my reading, I test my own writing against those phrases. Make me care. I must be awful, I think, as a teacher, because I say it to students as well. **Make me care about what it is you had to write about.** You have to make me care in the rhythms, the images, the subject matter, what it is you're willing to take up to grab my attention with. I think it's a good test to think **if that person were on their death-bed, would that piece of work have any relevance.** But maybe it wouldn't. And maybe that's the wrong test too, because there are some pieces you just want to write that have a melodic or an incidental appeal.*

And though she be but little, she is fierce

And though she be but little, she is fierce.
—A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare

And though her car is old and missing parts,
and though the weeds grow up through her porch,
and though she is acquainted with Revolutionary War
re-enactors,
and though she lapses into bouts of cursing,
her cursing is the songline of canaries.

Said Cleopatra to the asp,
said Napoleon to rocky Elba:
Though she is fierce she is but little.

So the river from an enormous height might seem
the flank of a whippet,
so the bee is more likely to attack us than the whale,
so it's her smallness that gives her
the leaping prowess of a flea.

It's the infant that holds dominion in the nursery.
It's the cutter that intersects the ocean liner.
Like to the ant, the tick, the beetle.
Said the decimal point to the numerals, You all depend on me.
Though she be but little, she is fierce.
Though she be but little, she takes the lion's part.

—by Lee Upton
Winner of the Lyric Poetry Award in 2005

POET NOTES

Lee Upton is the author of nine books including her third book of literary criticism, *The Muse of Abandonment* (Bucknell University Press, 1998), and her fourth book of poetry, *Civilian Histories* (University of Georgia Press, 2000). She is the recipient of numerous awards and her poems have appeared in many fine journals. She is currently professor of English and writer-in-residence at Lafayette College.

Born in 1953 in St. John's, MI, Lee Upton was reared on a 140-acre farm in the middle of Michigan. She was a voracious reader and a product of a family that encouraged independence. In her early childhood, she became mesmerized by a book entitled *Gods and Goddesses in Art and Legend,* by Herman J. Wechsler. It greatly influenced her because of the poetic freedom innate in mythical stories. Consequently, her poems often have allusions to mythical beings.
Upton holds a B.A. degree in journalism from Michigan State University and an M.F.A. from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In 1986, she earned a Ph.D. in English literature from State University of New York at Binghamton.

SUSAN WHEELER ON TODAY'S POEM

Tacking out from its foreparent (one of the language's best 18th century lyrics that sings the praises of Christopher Smart's cat), this poem has more than enough rumbling thunder on its own: it seems to put no foot in the wrong place (literally, as well). It breaks **ANAPHORA**S *when they need to be broken; manifests a stellar* **SYNECDOCHE***; and makes sparkling comparisons, both apt and unexpected. Though it be modest, the poem be steel.*

WORD SEARCH

ANAPHORA: From the Greek, meaning "carrying back", is a rhetorical device that consists of repeating a sequence of words at the beginning of neighboring clauses, thereby lending them emphasis. In contrast, an "epiphora" is repeating words at the clauses' ends.
***SYNECDOCHE*:** From the Greek, meaning "simultaneous understanding", is a figure of speech by which a part of a thing is put for the whole, the whole for the part as in "*Lend me a hand"*.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Lee Upton

Which non-writing-related aspect of your life most influences your writing? *An embodied sense of the natural world is very much a part of my writing—including sense impressions of the fields and the meadows where I wandered as a child. Incidences of cruelty and violence inform my work also, sometimes in subterranean form, never quite in documentary form.*

What is either the best or the worst piece of writing advice you've received or given? *The worst advice I've heard came shaped as speculations and future projections. I remember being told that writing amounted to being "driven" and that I should write less and enjoy myself more. The person giving me that advice didn't understand that I was already enjoying myself by writing, that writing gives me a form of exhilaration that, ironically, defies expression.*

Here are some other unhelpful words I've heard: "That's beneath you." (Well—good.) "If you want to be taken seriously you shouldn't try to be funny so often." (Oh no—I wasn't trying to be funny—I feel embarrassed—but being serious can be especially funny.) And the following is something I was told when I was a very young writer: "I think that you will have a future where you'll only see your work published on the backs of cereal boxes. In your own handwriting."

(This sentiment, paraphrased, appeared in the form of a poem dedicated to me.) As you can see, I've never forgotten that last speculation despite how long ago I heard it, but at the time I felt largely a sense of wonderment. Cereal boxes: what would it be like to write on cereal boxes?

I'm always looking for good advice about writing, and I like to read prose about other writers and their habits, with the hope of gaining a bit more strength. So here are some ideas that have been useful to me: ***We can write like we speak—it's just a more enhanced version****. Writing should convey urgency, even if we can't quite figure out why we're experiencing so much urgency. While there are those who may feel contempt for what we write, there may be others who need what we've written.* ***It's best to respect the possibilities that the work offers and to be patient.*** *(One of my books I continue to care for most, a novella called The Guide to the Flying Island, was accepted by its publisher a week after I convinced myself that I ought to abandon it.) More advice: we shouldn't force-feed our work with our intentions or put our work in a stranglehold to make it conform to ideologies. Instead, we should give the work our kind attention, respecting the potential of writing to open up new and unexpected pathways of many sorts.* ***Always I try to remember: have faith and be grateful and devoted.*** *Writing is about love and endurance. Then again, just about everything is about love and endurance.*

For almost 30 years I have received *Poetry Magazine*, marking on the contents page "poems I love most" in each issue. When I was younger I had a romantic notion that when I came to linger in old age, propped up comfortably on my deathbed at home, afternoon light filtering through white lace curtains, friends and family would read to me all my favorite poems. Ah well, as Bob says—*I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now*. Now. I want the poems I love NOW.

In reviewing those old *Poetry* journals this winter, I came across today's poem in the April 1990 issue. At that time it was titled "Primapara" (A woman who is pregnant for the first time. A woman who has given birth to only one child.) Poet **Celia Gilbert** has renamed that poem "First Labor" and it now appears again in her most recent book of poems, *Something To Exchange*.
See notes below.

First Labor

Pigeons on the ledge, midwives,
  iridescent motion, a babble
of fates.

A loneliness bigger than my belly,
  the waters,
the mystery indwelling.

Nobody talk, nobody sees,
  spread-eagled on the clock counting.
Sun flames and sets, moon swells.

Omicron to omega, cervix dilates,
  flicker of memory: sand and furrow,
cave and castle.

Trays rattle in the hall.
  No sky now, just pressure, hammer.
I'm a creature that ripples, pants,

struggles, to get free,
  a snake with swallowed wealth,
an engine primed to change,

a cartwheel, head over heels
  to the burning ghats.
I hear them say, "She's crowning"—

crowning a wrinkled head,
  a new, royal personage
descending, trailing

its corded bridge,

its rainbow afterbirth.
And my body—the long ship—

the ark—rises up watchful
and light, wide-eyed
above the foam.

—by Celia Gilbert

POET NOTES
Celia Gilbert's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Southwest Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The New Yorker*. Her work has been frequently anthologized and has won several prestigious awards. She studied with the noted poet Robert Lowell, as well as Anne Sexton and Robert Fitzgerald. Her books of poetry include: *An Ark of Sorts*, winner of the first Jane Kenyon Chapbook Award; *Bonfire*; and *Queen of Darkness.* A bilingual new and collected poems was also published last year by a Polish publishing house.

I would like to recommend Celia's newest book. *Something To Exchange* (BlazeVOX [books] 2009) offers mature poems rich with images. Ms. Gilbert bravely embraces both love and loss and continues to make that costly exchange. Her poems cry out with meaning and hold a mirror to our own minds as we read them. I feel strengthened by these poems that offer a structure for speaking openly and beautifully about life, of course, but also about the death and dying of our loved ones—a fine art in my opinion.

A printmaker and painter as well as a poet, Gilbert grew up in Washington, D.C. After living abroad in England and France, she now lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

IN HER OWN WORDS—Celia Gilbert
My art is concerned with the possibility of transformation: in portraits, nature, and abstracts I look for the transcendent, the place where the real merges with the ideal. —Celia Gilbert

My thanks to everyone who took time to read and enjoy the poems in this 2010 April Gift series. I heard from many of you, some more than once. Responses to the poetry, poets, and my commentaries, ranged from single word remarks to paragraphs of feedback. I was educated, entertained and inspired by your emails, even politely chided once or twice for my choices. One NYC reader responded to many of the poems by introducing me to complementary pieces by writers who were often new to me. An English Lit. professor occasionally fleshed out my research, broadening my knowledge or further piquing my curiosity about a poet. Two poets who gave permission to use their work shared personal stories about their poems and gifted me with their books. Several of you got heated up over the subject of poetry groups and criticism, poems of rage and horror, and even what makes a poem a poem. You let me know which poems made you laugh and which ones made you cry. It was a remarkably full month and I thank you all. — Susan

I dedicate the last poem of this series to a dear friend in Norway whose family lost a loved one to sudden death in March. Even after death the love and the dream continue.

This Is The Dream
Det Er Den Draumen

This is the dream we carry through the world
Det er den draumen me ber pa
that something fantastic will happen
at nook vedunderleg skal skjee,
that it has to happen
et det ma skje—
that time will open by itself
at tidi skal opna seg
that doors shall open by themselves
at hjarta skal opna seg
that the heart will find itself open
at dorer skal opna seg
that mountain springs will jump up
at berget skal opna seg
that the dream will open by itself
at kjledor skal springa—
that we one early morning
at draumen skal opna seg,
will slip into a harbor
at me ei morgonstund skal glida inn
that we have never known.
pa ein vag me ikkje har vsst um.

—by Olav H. Hauge
from *The Dream We Carry* translated by Robert Bly & Robert Hedin

POET NOTES—Olav Håkonson Hauge (1908-1994) a largely self-educated man, was a great Norwegian poet who lived quietly all his life in the western part of Norway on the Hardangerfjord. He worked as a gardener in his own orchard, and in his solitary way contributed considerably toward bringing Scandinavian poetry into the forefront of modern, world literature. His writing career spanned nearly fifty years during which he produced seven books of poetry, numerous translations (of Alfred Tennyson, William Butler Yeats, Robert Browning, Stephane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, Stephen Crane, Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Trakl, Paul Celan, Bertolt Brecht and Robert Bly to Norwegian) and several volumes of correspondence.

In *The Dream We Carry*, Robert Bly includes the best poems from each of Hauge's seven books, as well as a gathering of his last poems. A plainspoken sage, Hauge writes spare, restrained, psalmlike poems reflecting perhaps his love of winter and solitude.

You can enjoy Hauge reading a poem about the September Harvest on
www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XbqJ5Z3VYM

ROBERT BLY ON OLAV HAUGE—*What is it like to spend your whole life on a farm with no support from your family or from the community? IT would be lonely, something like walking in a marsh in the middle of the woods.*
If you have a tiny farm, you need to love poetry more than the farm. If you sell apples, you need to love poetry more than the apples. It's good to settle down somewhere and to love poetry more than that.

IN HIS OWN WORDS—Olav Håkonson Hauge
It is that dream we carry that something miraculous will happen that it must happen - that time will open that the heart will open that doors will open and that the rock face will open that springs will gush forth - that the dream will open and that one morning we'll glide in to a harbour we didn't know was there.

Don't bring the ocean if I feel thirsty, nor heaven if I ask for a light; but bring a hint, some dew, a particle, as birds carry only drops away from water, and the wind a grain of salt.

I, too, have stars/ and blue depths.