

# di-vêrsé-city 2013

AUSTIN INTERNATIONAL  
POETRY FESTIVAL

## ANTHOLOGY



*Edited by*  
BARBARA YOUNGBLOOD CARR



# di-vêrsé-city

2013

## Anthology

of the

Austin International

Poetry Festival

Celebrating

the

Twenty-First “Lucky” Celebration

**Edited by**

Barbara Youngblood Carr

**Co-Edited by**

Nancy Fierstien

Susan Beall Summers

Lynn-Wheeler Brandstetter

Elneta Owens

Jos Mason-Mazzu

**Cover Art**

Front Cover: Jake Bryer

Back Cover: Jill Bingamon

Design by Rebecca Byrd Bretz



Cultural Arts  
Division  
CITY OF AUSTIN



Texas  
Commission  
on the Arts

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No longer in our lives to share, but in our hearts you're always there.

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Front Cover by Jake Bryer

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## Preface

Poets are like a box of chocolates...a feast of words, phrases and thoughts that you don't know what flavor you will taste until you take the first bite. And poets are like birds...they all flock together like the groups you see perched on light wires along roads and byways; their words fly high and low and land on anything; they look up and down and write about what they see—or hear. Poets listen to each other's words and then create their own verse-nests with their own magic words.

There are lots of things/subjects that inspire poets—but three things in life that always keep poets going are Dreams, Love, and Lady Luck. We all have dreams of finding soul-mates and eternal love; of getting “Lucky” by inheriting a fortune, winning the lottery or receiving fortunes in glitzy casinos or even of finding a long-lost treasure trove like King Solomon's Mines. Not the least of a poet's dreams is to create a best-seller book and be immortalized like Emily Dickinson or Poe and the other greats.

We are nearly all born into this life with an even chance with the ability to achieve our dreams or of getting wealthy from Lady Luck. And although poets dream about all those things, too, they are different because they write about their dreams and of hitting it big with Lady Luck. Fantasy voices of muses fill their minds and creative worlds.

It has been said that “if we build it they will come,” meaning if we believe strongly enough, our dreams can come true. We, as writers, dream of not only changing our own world and luck but changing that of the rest of the world, too.

On this twenty-first “Lucky” year all we poets involved in the Austin International Poetry Festival (AIPF) are feeling “Lucky” that we are still going strong and able to gather with our poetry tribes, friends and families to enjoy another great poetry-banquet. We have a full feast of Invited and Featured poets with us this year to entertain us with their special words and insight at their readings and performances about every aspect of human life. Plus we can see and hear most of our favorite local poets as well, the stalwarts who keep poetry alive and well in Austin, Texas. We still salute the Four Founders: Unlimited Thom; Herman M. Nelson; John Berry and Sue Littleton who had the dream of Austin holding an AIPF over twenty years ago—and that vision has held, over the years, to make us the largest un-juried Poetry Festival in the U.S.

Throughout these twenty-one years (of which I have been fortunate to be involved with AIPF for twenty of those years since my husband and I moved to Austin in what was supposed to be our retirement years)—many

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others—both changing API Board members and volunteers—have given freely of their time and service to ensure that our unique Festival continues.

Our chosen front cover art is a reminder of how eclectic our great, beautiful city of Austin, Texas is that we are privileged to live in where art and music are what make Austin one of the liveliest cities bursting with creativity in the U.S. And the back cover art is a silhouette that spoke the quote to me that “Poets are like birds of a feather and all flock together—especially during AIPF each year.”

Among the poems I, as Editor, with my co-readers, have chosen to be published in this year’s di-verse-city Anthology, you will find many unique poems reflecting old, new relaxed and modern life situations with poems from familiar voices as well as new, frenetic poetry from some first-time poetic voices as well.

Choices of those selected (from over 500 submissions) for inclusion in this Anthology from our blind reading were decided upon by six readers, including myself. The poems printed here are just a sampling of many fine poems submitted. As we read them we discovered many metaphors for life, luck and love. We wish we could have published them all—but time and funding will not permit us to do that.

I would like to thank my Co-Editors/Readers: Nancy Fierstien; Susan Beall Summers; Lynn-Wheeler Brandstetter; Elneta Owens and Jos Mason-Mazzu whose assistance greatly shaped this collection. Among all the many fine poems entered for consideration, we searched for artistry, candor, ingenuity, uniqueness, etc. and great endings that left us with a sense of wonder and wanting more.

We hope, dear readers, you will enjoy the selections in this edition and be inspired to create your own new poetry now and forever.

And always remember this: “Today is fair. Tomorrow it may be overcast with clouds. My words are like the stars that never change.”

—Chief Seattle

Barbara Youngblood Carr  
Editor, 2013

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## **Subtraction**

It's a simple picture,  
a woman in a cotton dress  
pushes the family mower  
into tall grass  
between the ditch  
and the fence line.  
It's early morning,  
or early dusk,  
because the shadows  
float at her back.  
Wind billows her dress,  
pushes her hair  
away from her face,  
and you can see she isn't pretty,  
but there is a homeliness  
you'd be comfortable with.  
Like a warm supper,  
soft laughter, fresh air on  
a summer night.  
She strains dutifully at the task,  
pushing the machine  
through the tangled weeds,  
in an imagined arithmetic,  
subtracting today  
from tomorrow,  
tomorrow from yesterday,  
right now  
from never.

**Carolyn Adams**

---

## **Lunar Sighting**

When I look at the moon  
it squares me.  
I do not talk about my soul.  
I am not  
a spiritual person. I simply  
do not see properly.  
I do not see a circular orb.  
The glasses I wear are old  
and scratched.  
When the light of the moon  
hits them, it is bent  
and sent back into the void  
angry, and at peculiar  
angles. My sight  
is full of starbursts  
and tangents and angular  
impropriety  
when it should be circular  
like an eyeball, a full moon,  
a quiet soul.  
But I do not talk of the soul.  
I speak of  
a square peg, a round hole.

**Robert Allen**

---

## **Blackbirds in Drought**

Suddenly, blackbirds swirl and land on cut grass  
sixty or a hundred, the birdbath ringed in blue-black

fringe. Away from the glass barrier, I make a slight,  
noiseless movement and the iridescent flickering carpet

whirls as one away into the blue stream, a pattern  
of dark lace disappears. Two or three return

to the water and like fish, glitter away in moments.  
Now a lone squirrel hops on the fence in slant light.

An inescapable forward movement—dinosaurs,  
birds, mammals, humans—

perhaps not even a black feather will remain.

## **Gloria Amescua**

### **When She Prays**

dear God,  
my belly is a museum of rivers. ?lungs, a pair  
of burning bridges.  
show your hands, show your hands.  
build my spine an upturned skyline of brick.  
i already know how to crumble. ?teach me to rise

## **Sasha Banks**

---

## Searching

With wings beating in endless flight,  
Taken over lands by night,  
My query for years yet eludes,  
My skill that now exudes,  
The wither of time gone by,  
Yet still I yearn to see it fly.

**James Bell**

## Poet Circle

Pulling thorns from each other's flesh  
we sip measured breaths  
finding cadence in our circle  
longing for skill and elation

Travelers in this unframed fog  
we write cloud-clap compositions  
padding our feet in continuity;  
a duty to the metronome

Inside our banded culture  
we split spirit-beats  
tapping open orbs of wonder  
within ourselves; within each other

**Jan Benson**

---

## **Tight Spot**

Feeling claustrophobic  
the walls seem to close in  
as I huddle in a near fetal position  
wanting only to take care of business  
but the constant noise that surrounds me  
is a reminder  
that I am just a small part of a larger movement  
the bottom seems about to fall away  
as I feel the turbulent bumps and drops on the journey  
and even the simplest of tasks seems  
difficult in this small amount of space allotted for such things

Finally  
with some luck  
and a whole lot of determination  
I am able to accomplish what I set out to do  
despite the restrictions imposed  
and as I stand  
a last reminder to the skull  
tells me not to get too cocky....

as I exit the airplane lavatory

**Chris Billings**



---

## **Tears To Ink**

(for Cindy Gatlin)

She reads her memoir  
of her lover's death  
to her critique group as if  
correctly aligning the words  
will ease the sense of loss  
and fix the memories against  
time's voracious appetite.

Every word of correction  
or suggestion treasured  
as the sense of literary effort  
creates some healing distance  
between the writer  
and the pain.

**Del Cain**

---

## **I've Got Love in My Eye**

Berowne: As love is full of unbefitting strains;  
All wanton as a child, skipping and vain;  
Form'd by the eye, and, therefore, like the eye,  
Full of straying shapes, of habits and of forms,  
Varying in subjects, as the eye doth roll  
To every varied object in his glance...

—William Shakespeare,  
*Love's Labour's Lost*, V.2.799-804

Love fritters everything and anyone away,  
no matter how perfect for the moment,  
bread on the waters of consciousness,  
here, here, most certainly here but gone.

I'm in charge, I tell myself,  
rattling the chain of your smile,

but surfing your face's wave,  
I wobble in the tub of connotations,  
I fasten on what floats, I ride.  
I sink into your design.  
What I want matters not at all.

I bring unimportant gifts,  
a section of an orange,  
a cookie coated pink,  
and, without any coating at all,  
the rest of my life.

**Elzy Cogswell**

---

## Passages

Long after music crossed 12th  
and Main and long after  
some of its echoes bounced off  
walls of poor neighborhoods

or simply put: long after music came  
and went, Sunday started walking  
toward Monday, at dusk  
its dark hair sweeping the curbs.

Absent minded passersby thought  
they saw the sun going down  
a bit early, slowly warping  
and then erasing all shadows.

In this late hour, if you really listen  
you'll hear yourself talk in your sleep,  
sentences turning slow and awkward  
when you remember all that fog

surrounding the many high  
and low points of your life while the moon  
quietly ticks, its face breaking into pieces  
through your window screen, recording

earth's uncertain path. Awake you wonder  
what deity passing by carelessly shredded  
time into small silver coins  
on the rough surface of your floor.

**Andre de Korvin**

---

## **Moving In**

No, it is not new.  
The old owners left their mark,  
And the ones before them.  
They swept, scrubbed,  
But could not delete their ghosts.  
They remain, like a permanent shadow.  
There, in the left upper corner,  
The imprint of a ball  
Bounced rhythmically,  
The boredom shade still plain.  
And the brushstroke of blue,  
Long painted over in its turn,  
Never razored off the windowpane.  
The puttied crack along the doorframe,  
The house settling still on its foundation,  
Accepting the weight of new furniture,  
New footsteps with a different gait,  
A new cadence of a different life.

**Charles Darnell**

---

## Lost Luxury

Bubbly waitress teases  
fewer diners nowadays  
Vacant booths scream out  
inner tensions less money means  
Every penny counted  
once, twice, more...  
She smiles at man in shirt and tie  
who relishes daily special  
His hollow chuckles  
cover stress of empty cupboards at house  
Not to mention  
past-due bills, months behind mortgage  
Three meals  
not guaranteed anymore

Waitress subtracts with  
painful math too  
Quick wit trusty defense  
when favorite customer  
Notices threadbare sweater  
Thank God baggy pants  
stayed on hips when she turned

Bubbly waitress  
teases with ease;  
Nervous manager finally delivers  
knockout blow  
Last day checks given  
Christmas Eve  
Customers lament  
during teary farewells  
New year rings in  
job hunt scramble  
In a town where economy  
is frozen in time

**Marcie Eanes**

---

## Vita

She said yes to my grandfather  
only if her mother could come, too.  
She said yes often enough to have four children.  
The last—after only 12 years—as a widow.  
She said yes, my life is over without you,  
not even my babies can ease this pain.  
She said yes when they said she had to move out of the fort  
soon as the baby was born,  
yes to a small house that took all his back pay,  
yes to raising her children alone  
and later some grandchildren, too.  
Yes to taking in strangers,  
Yes to waiting months after Pearl Harbor  
to hear their son was in Australia.  
She said yes to church every Sunday morning  
after putting a roast in the oven,  
yes to getting the most out of a potato -  
barely peeling the skin away,  
yes to some quarters in the collection plate,  
yes to bingo once a month playing for pennies,  
yes to laundry on a wringer washer  
and hanging clothes on the line.  
Yes to sitting beside the caskets of a son and a daughter.  
When the doctor said if you have another heart attack -  
we might have to operate to save your life, is that what you want?  
Only then did she take advantage of the opportunity finally to say no.

## Rose Marie Eash

---

## Poetry Remains

I saved your poems.  
An indecent burial  
might have been better—  
tossed to the compost  
hauled to a shredder  
pitched with kitty litter  
fodder and filler—  
Catharsis in a catbox

Maybe you gave me  
a wake, wished away  
my lint on your memory  
dust on the spectacles  
you couldn't find

Perhaps you said  
sometimes good goes bad  
life runs awry

Still  
Poetry remains.  
Your poems are fine with me—  
keeper of clutter and lovers and dreams.  
They're the hair I burn in my candle  
the cord buried under my tree —  
your offerings my longings this shrine—

I saved them.  
I made them mine.

**Kelly Ellis**

---

## **In Praise of a New Poet's Heart**

A new poet's heart,  
cocooned from the start  
in a cage made of rib-tickled bone,

laughs its way  
to center stages  
in fresh gardens, where the sage is –

gently molds a way of life  
all of its own.

That poet's heart flutters,  
its densely rich colors  
adhering to fragile, thin wings.

In silence it settles  
on nectar-like petals  
and gratefully, rhythmically sings.

**Nancy Fierstien**



---

## **Supersternal**

A blush of a whisper  
tumbles into a delicate ear,  
stirring an impromptu symphony  
of allegro swells and adagio retreats.

An elegant refrain  
brushes the drum  
and grazes the neck,  
nestling into the hollow  
where it quietly confides:

“This piece is mine.”

## **Karen Foster**

### **February in Houston**

I stagger through the park pursuing Spring.  
Bulging buds, even a green weed  
would encourage my hope for a warm day.  
Winter has become too comfortable  
in this coastal prairie, which is usually  
just a brief vacation spot.  
I hope our high temperatures are reported  
in Celsius, not disappointing Fahrenheit.  
All my furniture has been rearranged,  
walls painted, pictures and drapes hung.  
Old bookcases have been replaced  
with a new TV stand—black like my mood.  
Kill that damn groundhog,  
scatter birdseed for the robins.

## **Adamarie Fuller**

---

## DESIDERATA

Desperate want.

To wake you at dawn,

hands aflame, tongue fervent,  
skin blood burnished

slake morning thirst with your sweet sweat  
scrawl my desires on your skin  
write my name on your mind.

I want you to look at me in the dark  
see me here  
reborn

Body hungers.

Lips still, tongue fat, ears cold,  
I want to stay  
a while longer

evade the desolation of your absence  
evoke your ghost to stroke skin, caress breast,

assuage scorched spirit

to hold and have without end  
your face in my hands

A great eagle  
keen talons outstretched  
soars over

**Susan Gardner**

---

## **Occasionally**

Occasionally she rises early to pray  
Occasionally she dreams of houses  
Occasionally she slips away  
Into an alternate universe  
Occasionally she sighs

Occasionally she sets goals  
Occasionally she forgets to call her mother  
Occasionally she falls down rabbit holes  
Where she complains and refuses  
Occasionally she tries

Occasionally she swats a fly  
Occasionally she pictures horses grazing  
In a green field under an orange sky  
Occasionally she dances  
Occasionally she cries

## **Christine Gilbert**

### **Dreams**

The Fires took their dreams.  
Not just singed around the edges  
but burnt black as coal.  
Too soon now to be pressed into diamonds.  
The scent of smoke lingers.  
The scent of Fear smolders.  
How much time must pass  
before their dreams may sprout again  
Green? Green!  
The Fires took their dreams  
but their Dreams will grow  
Again.

## **Mary Beth Gradziel**

---

## **The Poetry Workshop**

Ribbons of words  
weave three lives together.  
Like scavenged twigs  
they form a nest  
where pent-up poems  
can incubate

Grosgrain  
textured rich with storied drawl  
Velvet  
brushed with gentleness and pain  
Satin  
polished smooth by shiny rhyme

Ribbons clipped  
or spooling long and fertile  
Guided by a weaver  
who teaches words to fly

**Amy Greenspan**

---

## **Visiting Kin in Rwanda**

The ascent, not for the weak.  
Trekking hours in mists where  
muddy trails wind up, always up,  
into dense bamboo, and thinner air.

So few of them for the future ?  
guards with guns trail the groups,  
protecting gorillas from humans,  
and humans from guerilla troops

Finally we stop, legs quivering.  
An opening reveals gorillas at rest,  
eating, nit picking, preparing to nap —  
a large family's midmorning nest.

We involuntarily gasp in awe ? quickly  
shushed by guides. We're unnoticed yet  
by a mother watching toddlers  
play, pull hair and fret.

The silverback male stretches lazily,  
at ease with watchful humans.  
His family maintains their nonchalance  
adored for an hour by their cousins.

An hour is all humans are allowed,  
but leaving wretches our souls.  
A final image of freedom must last  
as we'll never again be so close.

**Barbara Randals Gregg**

---

## **A Tribute to our Favorite Spot**

Our life, lived fully  
is a tribute, better left unsaid  
for fear, a thief, Nosferatu's shadow?  
might envy our joy enough  
to spitefully sabotage, or plot  
to steal our secret...  
Imagine your life blood, my soul's marrow  
sucked greedily until we, You and I  
no longer survive. Imagine, Imagine  
our favorite spot on the stair,  
Imagine our physical selves no longer there.  
As we join the undead, become smoke and ash  
all that's left of our flesh and bone.  
Now imagine our spirits holding hands  
on the stairway from heaven  
halfway up, halfway down  
holding hands, holding hands  
where our journey began.

**Joyce Gullickson**

---

## **QUANTUM LEAP**

My energy levels are strange I can do nothing  
Yet I feel I ought to spin the world on one finger  
Where do I go from here?

“Jump”, I hear.  
“JUMP!!!” I hear again  
I’m so startled I jump without thinking  
3-G’s hit me and I hear a crush  
I land

I love it here  
Just as I am beginning to think everyone understands  
I feel daggers in my back  
Lotsadaggers  
Friends and foes alike have chosen to wound me

For forty years I have turned around  
And offered my jugular as well  
This time around I will keep on keeping on  
If you want to be my friend  
Jump

**Sonali Gurpur**

---

## **Poems in Chalk**

Poems in chalk,  
On the sidewalk.  
Say what you want -  
Let everybody talk.

Poetry was lost  
When the rain stayed.  
I sat in my room  
And I cried all day.  
When the sun came back,  
I went out to play.

Now, my work is gone;  
The boy is a man.  
As old as I am,  
I have to start again -  
Tears on my face,  
Chalk in my hand.

Poems in chalk,  
On the sidewalk.  
Say what you want -  
Let everybody talk.

**Randy Hall**



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## **Ruta Maya**

Oh, dark, dusty, noisy cavernous rectangle  
With exposed gray insulation clinging to the ceiling  
Fringed by pipes dangling provocatively overhead.  
The scent of incense sloshing the walls  
And loud music competing with many conversations.  
Yes, the Austin coffeehouse  
Screams creativity  
As it hosts poets, dancers, artists, revolutionaries  
Writers and parents seeking partners.  
Throughout a poetry program the air is drenched in  
Pity, remorse and anger.  
Then the mood shifts suddenly to humorous  
Lamentations of romantic expectations  
Or peaceful nostalgia longing for a happy childhood spent in the park.  
Spectators sip coffee or drink beer,  
Listen intently or tap out college homework on a laptop.  
Others whisper softly, hoping to make a new friend  
Or swap stories about what fateful string of events  
Lured them here today.

## **Fatima Hirsi**

---

## **At the Hospital in Dallas**

I am told of people who instruct  
children to swim by dropping tots  
in water: they must learn to swim  
or they drown. Hospitals bring that  
to mind when patients are given all  
modern medicine has to offer, then  
the patient must learn to stay alive.

Fluids flow like bubbling brooks  
through machines strapped together  
to keep my friend, Bart, surviving.  
Doctors call it large-cell lymphoma,  
tell Bart chemotherapy will work  
to save him from cancer. Chemo  
shrinks tumors, but blood vessels  
break loose and run like wild rivers  
beyond their banks, out of control.  
The doctors know what to do, apply  
machines that can feed Bart, remove  
his waste, help him to dangle above  
the precipice without succumbing.

I sit with him, move the blanket  
around his shoulders, summon  
nurses when machines sound,  
help Bart in cursing the chemo  
that nearly killed him, in praising  
the chemo that killed the tumors.  
Bart is beginning to dog paddle.

**J. Paul Holcomb**

---

## **Guerrero Viejo**

Street signs  
have vanished.  
Beneath our boat,  
a broken bicycle frame,  
tables rotting  
in the corners  
of houses, junk cars  
rusting in yards.

Through the water's green murk  
I see a square of bare earth—  
a garden, long emptied—  
beside it *nuestra casita*  
a wild sort of flower  
opening, opening  
into the swept, fenceless yard.

**Cindy Huyser**

---

## **Far Beyond This Midnight**

I pass through the furrowed arena  
of a garden which divides my home from an uncertain forest.  
Nearby wind chimes sing praise  
below the sluggish muffled wail of a distant locomotive.

As a string of fast clouds crosses the mantle of night,  
briefly shielding specks of prismatic starlight,  
Orion seems snagged in the branches of an elderberry tree.

And straight above, like a Pantheonic Oculus,  
is the shifting stigmata-blush of an ecliptic moon,  
both solemn and chaste.

I pause astonished  
as a meteor slashes her shrouded lunar face.

**Glynn Irby**

---

## **The Death of a Thousand Wounds**

Inspired by Michael Parfit's *Chasing the Glory*

I have seen fencing  
pushing westward  
enclosing open land.

Birds and animals banished by towns and cities  
from the dancing floor of the Goddess.

I have seen mountains  
slashed through  
with power lines  
and massive super highways.

Forests clear cut into agro-business  
as farms are turned into sub-divisions.

I have seen the swamps drained,  
for amusement parks.  
Where otters once cavorted  
mini-zoos treasure what we lost.

Seen factories attended by a hundred trucks  
suckling the freight docks like piglets.

All around me the evidence is in:  
We have damaged this land  
until she is quietly bleeding  
The Death of a Thousand Wounds.

**John Irving**

---

## Timing

After the night's rain  
extended grey morning  
grants respite, space  
not exactly sought  
but, it seems, needed

that when sun does break  
scattering the grey  
into afternoon blue,  
a heart sufficiently quietened  
alights to rejoice

in sudden sparkle of dust  
patient on tiny red beads  
that dangle from leather cords  
wrapping the cedar flute  
at window's edge

a miracle manifesting  
long hence his choosing  
this spot to hang this flute —  
these beads since inviting dust,  
all in wait for these sunbeams

a transitory work of art  
beheld by a heart opening just in time

## Jazz Jaeschke

---

## Coconuts

I don't know where the cat has been,  
but when I rest my nose against his neck  
he smells like coconut.

The inanity of personal expression,  
it has been called, and I agree  
the unmythical life lacks power,

that the ordinary drags us down,  
the world becomes only worldly,  
the stars' hum, hum-drum.

The cat cannot have long to live,  
three or four more years at most,  
then an eternity of nothing to be done.

I leave a closet door open for him,  
I fold his blankets on a corner of the bed,  
I turn down the heat if he is too hot.

When he wakes up he is hungry,  
when he is full he goes back to sleep,  
when the wind blows we watch it.

His diary would fill with such events,  
a paradise of days lived as if to last,  
going nowhere but to the window

to see the small birds flying south,  
stopping here and going on,  
passing through again headed north,

domesticity down to a ritual, except,  
when he draws near, this island smell  
of coconut, of chocolate, of mango.

**Monty Jones**

---

## **A Child**

What is a child but the morning side of life  
So small yet its radiant shadow  
blinds the night

What is a child but a young plant  
green enough to belie the darkness  
it sprang from

What is a child but a naïve time keeper  
sent down to wind up faltering hearts

**Marcelle Kasprovicz**

## **unwritten status update**

I wait for response. These small icons seal  
the bond. These links disguise what's left unsaid-  
an update vacant of what I conceal.

So I say "went to the store to buy some bread"  
and saw a baby. Left in tears and then  
I wrote that I'm impatient for some show,

some gig. And maybe you'll reply again.  
And what are you withholding? How do we  
go back, or forward, making pure the blend

of fact and fiction? How can we maybe  
just dwell without the glare of screens, the space  
of safety? Or must I let go, release?

I see a friendship in a smiley face  
I'm forcing burlap into the form of lace.

**Elizabeth Kropf**



---

## Hamam

As I'm naked on a marble slab,  
veiled in soapy bubbles—  
a chant,  
intoned in the chamber,  
vibrates,  
reverberates,  
pops the frothy foam.

More melodic than a muezzin,  
the sacred sound of Om  
lifts the Turkish bath  
to hypnotic levels  
of pure pulsating energy,  
cleansing the spirit,  
soothing the soul,  
calming the mind.

The masseuse,  
scrubs my body,  
pours ritual bowls  
of cold water over me  
to rinse the suds.

I slip-slide  
on the soapy floor—  
she signals farewell,  
singsonging,  
Bomba Gibi: You are great!  
Bomba Gibi: You are great!

**Kathryn Lane**

---

**China 1013 A.D.**

Again and again, people unwrap,  
unwind, violate the treasures placed

to honor ancestor spirits in ancient graves.  
Pry open the past—

to one thousand years ago. It rains.  
A wet breeze moistens the grasses,

while ancient men without souls—determined—  
shovel, break the clay on a moonless night,

willfully seize gold rarities. Jade burial vessels  
symbols of purity, nobility, crack as they fall.

Gone. Heated dogs yelp with throats inflamed.  
Villagers race on strong skinny legs, brandishing

sharp poles, the earth of their ancestral tombs fresh  
with digging and despair,

perhaps hungry ghosts rise, mouths open to be appeased,  
unhappy as the robbers escape.

The peasants' duty no longer met, their tears are endless,  
they turn to the south—wailing.

A lone girl bends her fingers to the grass, the rain gentle.  
Before and after, is night and daylight.

**Becky Liestman**

---

## **What she said**

What she said  
was indiscernible  
questionable  
ambiguous.  
Something you couldn't  
wrap your head around  
no matter how  
you cut it or angled it  
or measured it.

What she said  
didn't fit neatly  
into your box of expectations.  
And don't lie to yourself-  
you had expectations.  
You expected more  
or, at the least,  
you expected something  
which is why you got nothing.

What she said  
threw you for a loop  
and after days of searching  
you still hadn't found right-side up  
so you said nothing-  
something she couldn't  
wrap her head around  
or fit into her box of expectations  
which is what started the whole thing  
or, at least, that's what she said.

**Melissa Lumpkin**

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## **Misplaced**

I'm a rose garden  
Along the highway,  
With no one to stop  
And enjoy my display.

I'm a thunderstorm  
In a desert so dry,  
With no one to taste  
The sweet drops I supply.

I'm a tumbleweed  
In a city tossed about,  
Earth mother misplaced.  
Roots I do without.

**Heidi Maldonado**

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## Winter Walk With Charley

Another ice-kissed morning  
beneath cloudless skies blue and  
spacious enough to inspire an anthem?  
The sun lies laughing on lawns freckled with snow  
The air is cold enough to crackle?  
And lording over it all, the mountains.  
Charley and I take his favorite path  
through the park and around the bay,  
the sun-gilded air milder than I'd expected.  
A couple bundled in fleece leans over the boardwalk rail  
enticing gulls that soar and swoop  
to snatch the offered bread mid-air.

We hurry on to where trees  
stripped of their finery bend the light  
into shadows frozen  
in the awkward geometry  
of empty branches.

Charley sniffs their trunks for the latest news  
Then lifts a leg to leave his update.  
His morning ritual is now complete  
And eager as I to be warm and fed  
He leads me home again.

**Frances Malone**

---

## **Adoption**

Invest in absurdity!  
Take home a cheshire cat today!  
Eats grins and bathes in laughter!  
Sleeps when the moon is fallow!  
Haunts canary cages when song has flown!  
Drives out old habits!  
Sticks tail between two cities!  
Hangs upon the dripping clock of naptime!  
Find it in a tree,  
in a drawer of delicate underclothes,  
between the pages of a scrapbook!  
Believe this stitch in your side  
will save nine lives!  
Learn how to smile, and only smile!  
Today! Today! Today!

## **Wade Martin**

### **Hush**

Remember when we shook the elements  
And rudely woke the night  
We found out...  
The darkness is merciful to creatures  
Sometimes  
And the warm earth pads their fall from grace

### **Jos Mason-Mazzu**

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## **From a Car Window**

This thing called love can break apart  
like a couple in a Sam Shepard play  
you wish you were that stoic old woman  
crossing the street alone wearing a red cape.  
You admire her confidence  
the way she steps quickly  
her silver hair cropped short  
a defiant crimson swirl  
cutting through the fog  
how quickly the heart can fracture  
splintering into little black wings  
that fly you places you don't want to go.  
Cocooned inside this cab  
you swear not to remember  
anything else about the blue  
bite of this winter day,  
not the closing of a door,  
not seeing him walking  
across the Congress Avenue bridge  
hands in his pockets, head down,  
walking south as you ride by.  
You toss your one last chance  
into the gray river and watch it drown.  
He had on a faded denim jacket,  
and grackles were scattered in flight overhead.

**Darla McBryde**

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## TAKING DOWN THE TREE ON VALENTINE'S DAY

My fingers bleed, pine needles now  
Welded to the wood and sharp as pins.  
The bright balls slip into their boxes.  
The cat wants to help but she too  
Finds herself wounded. How could we let  
This go so long? And only the silly cupids  
Getting me into it now—the bright fabric  
Heart full of chocolates waiting on the table.

I knew a semi-hoarder once who let  
Everything stay up forever, the tree and the  
Cupids and Easter bunnies and cornucopias,  
The snow geese and baskets of plastic eggs.  
Going in her house did something strange  
To your head: a holiday museum  
Where the four seasons crashed against other  
And time screeched to a halt. Not Miss Havisham

Exactly, more like the back room of some struggling  
Country store where they never threw anything out  
Or gave ninety percent off. Me, I am just  
Busy and lazy and old—the days rush past.  
I haul the tree to the curb—too stiff to collapse, it lies  
On its side, thick as it was when standing tall.  
One last forgotten ornament gleams, and tinsel  
Flutters in the February breeze.

**Janet McCann**



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## **“the woods”**

we did not wander into the woods  
because there was nothing to fear.  
we did not create our own path  
because no one offered their own.

we entered the woods, alone, together,  
because shadows weakened by our number.  
we went into the woods, uncertain of certainty,  
because the allure of understanding  
never stopped growing at our hiking feet.

we did not sneak into these woods  
because our forefathers forbid it.  
we did not venture into the unknown  
because what we knew was unfulfilling.

we worked through the woods,  
individually, hand in hand,  
because strength is created, and strength is lent.  
we never gave up in the woods,  
because our story wants for a good ending.

**Michael McClanahan**

---

## **Bridges Like Rumi's**

Bidge to eternity  
friends of all creation:  
plant, animal, mineral,  
human, water, food.  
Breaking the bread  
bridges the gaps  
of disbelief with belief  
finding friends in  
unlikely places  
where prayer seems  
infinitely intangible.

**Donella McLean**

## **ALICE'S FATHER**

Farther and farther he sank  
below the surface of dementia

And yet like a salmon  
in his homeland of Scotland  
he would rise to the words  
of a favorite poem

Grab the hook and leap  
the length of the line

**Neil Meili**

---

## **In the Fog**

Bring me back to myself  
Back to my deepest heart  
To the inspiration that flows  
Through me and onto a page  
Or a blank canvas  
Spokes and studs on the ground  
Can't see in front of me  
There is a chill in my bones  
Come out of the fog  
Come see me and be with me  
Make some tea we will keep  
Each other warm  
Relate and philosophize with me  
Be my truest ally  
Encouraging my dreams and hopes  
Feel my heart feel my Soul  
Allow me into you  
Let my heart permeate your Soul  
Pain will fade away and only  
Peace will remain  
Read the clues in my eyes  
Something bigger than me  
Lives in me and spreads out to others  
Who am I?  
I belong to the Fog  
I belong to the Wind  
I belong to the Sun  
I belong to the Rain  
I belong to the Earth  
I belong to Spirit and  
I belong to me

**Sharon Meixsell**

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## **Fly Lesson**

I am supposed to be working,  
Writing the soul's vicissitudes,  
When this fly appears,  
Popping right onto my page.  
Hello little fly, I've got work to do.  
But he seems content right where he is.  
He moves a centimeter here  
A centimeter there.  
Then stops and rubs his hands  
Real fast  
As if saying Aha – what's next!  
Warming up for take-off,  
Rub, rub, rub – Poof!  
Off he goes  
Faster than the eye can see  
More twists and turns  
Than a writer full of longing.  
He lands upside down on the ceiling,  
Moves in little leaps,  
Like Schrodinger's particle  
With no in-between.  
I turn back to my big thoughts  
And my blank page.  
Then he's back,  
That flicker of energy,  
Rubbing his little hands furiously  
Aha – what's next!  
He cocks his head.  
I don't know.  
Rub, rub, rub – poof!  
Off he goes.

**John Menkedick**

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## **If We Lived at Sarah Oppenheimer's D-17**

you'd paint the switch plates  
under the hammered aluminum roof  
even though there is no electricity.

Jutting through glass and brick is what broke apart  
as if snow fell and drifted against alleyways.

You'd say we're living under a white, sleek jet wing,  
and I wouldn't disagree.

I don't know where you'd hang your dresses.  
We've never opened closet doors together.

Windows, who ever needed windows? You'd want rain  
droplets falling onto your face even though I'd spiral  
into a weathered personality disorder.

I'd want to ski a slope into the entrance  
of your heart, but what I learned in  
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin failed.

Every elevator pretends I'm an elephant slowly  
descending into corners with busted flaps.

Yet this is where we're magnificently crashed.

You'd awaken under a rhombus lifting off mornings.  
I'd crust open imbedded parallelograms,  
and we'd break boundary layers under the long  
neck of this swan.

**John Milkereit**

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## News

They said it took an instant  
In the paper  
Where the facts made front page.  
The stricken father spoke of waste, rage, moving on.  
The lovely, vibrant boy is gone.  
Streaking across the sand, solo, full throttle,  
He crested a dune and vanished  
But for what he had to leave behind.  
Like Icarus  
Flying too well  
To keep the altitude in mind—  
So tragedy must snare the rarest kind.  
And the mythic mode will rest at that  
Or close the tale with a warning to all  
(soaring pride, negligence, youth, the fall).

These headlines read the same  
Except for whom the name halts breath.  
Who imagine horror on the shore  
And cannot stop.  
First the ancient scene—  
A woman folding grape leaves, looking twice.  
And this child's mother  
Giving birth  
To grief  
As wild and indomitable as the sea.

## Judith Austin Mills

### Age

Age.  
A feather floating by  
on a stream  
once was winged  
flying in the sky.  
Age is more about the floating  
than where you have been

### Bob Mud

---

## **Porch Step Philosopher**

I am he, the Porch Step Philosopher  
born before the Great War began,  
patriot who prayed for victory and peace  
and destruction of our enemies. Amen!

After that Vast War ended  
I joined up, became a soldier –  
to be of service –when the next brouhaha  
became more than an inconvenience.  
I was not called to fight, but my thoughts could kill.  
I have passed that stage here in my old age.  
I am walking back to zero or as close as I can get.  
Zero! What a concept! More than nothing,  
yet less than anything.  
Zero – all potential like a seed – like a still stone  
waiting to roll down some steep incline,  
full of unused energy like the universe  
before that fateful bang.

Whatever the convention of my youth  
found me a willing participant.  
In or out of school or work,  
my whims and my base desires governed me.  
Heart and body first, mind next, but soul,  
if such there was, was all but excluded.  
Thus, I carry my past around like Marley's chain;  
all my ancient sins: my youthful avarice,  
my multitudes of lust, my overzealous hates –  
but most emphatically my giant-dragon pride  
still hobble me as much as Marley's chains  
hobbled Marley's ghost.  
Little by little now, I do my best to let them go.  
Forgive (not others) but forgive myself.  
Every day I try to get at least an iota closer to Zero.

**Herman M. Nelson**

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## **Odeto that Road**

Diverged at a time and among those wood,  
And at both I stood so long, yet so reposed  
And diverged by a turn and one I so stood  
And those two I did look, suppose as I should  
As they did both bend without my eye so exposed  
Distant do they look with such a glare  
And the other was not or was more, as such shame  
When such wear I did see was so clear and bare  
Though the grass had etched such roads so fair  
As such, I did not heed to such a claim.  
All roads come to a narrows of such bays.  
Oh such roads of a kind so bred and so cracked!  
And the other so beaten and sewn yet so laid,  
Not knowing of way to ways, or of astray,  
Hence forth, I look at it so way away back.  
For such I need not so gracefully sigh  
If such roads of age do become forth hence  
For all such roads do not decide, for I—  
I look back at such a road, did not I idle by?  
Such that I have made...has been that difference.

**Danny Nguyen**



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## **Woven Words**

Weave your words poet  
That your crafted blanket of flattery and half-truths  
May warm me during weathered days  
Half-hearted and discouraged.  
Let me be the muse to your musings  
And you mine to better days.  
I will gently fold them into my heart  
I promise they'll not tear  
By my gentle grateful hands.  
And if you should find fault with me  
I pray you not shut up your pen  
And leave me cold in the silence of your empty thoughts  
For I'll not make it long  
In the harsh freeze of winter days  
Without your woven words to warm me once more.

**Shae O'Brien**

---

## **And We Marry**

Sometimes we marry to escape ourselves, the self that is petty and thieving and still ashamed of the requisite sea foam green tutu from a botched dance recital in third grade. We flee the downcast eyes, the subtly bruised palms of a lifetime of self-protective encounters. We marry thinking the other is somehow better, more than all the selves we could ever dream up. But maybe that's not so criminal, so foreign – this notion. However, just as often we attach only to sever the very joints meant for clinging. We silence the part that weeps at injustice (of any kind), the part that, just this morning, stopped short of sending a thank you note to Mister Coppola, the winemaker who most likely stained all ten of his toes in honor of last night's dinner party. Oh, what folly. There is nothing the other can give us. Nothing. And yet, we open our greedy mouths and anticipate the filling. I bet we've all been known to wait months for a kind word, or, perhaps, a decently packed picnic lunch. We marry because we have hope (or are in want of it). And each time we stand before our invited audience and earnestly pledge, both publicly and privately, to be kind, honorable and, most of all, reasonably obedient to this new beloved of ours. But we rarely are. Instead, we are ourselves. And we marry anyway.

**Jenna Opperman**

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## The Lake

We should have gone with you  
To the summer field with unnoticeable flowers –  
Trefoil, chamomile, cornflower.  
The field between the debris  
And the reconstruction  
Of that white church on the shore of the lake,  
Reconstruction led by the bearded priest,  
And a group of architects and painters,  
Some of them have summer girlish faces.  
They keep their brushes dry,  
Their heads covered with white handkerchiefs,  
That do not conceal the braids.

We should have been sitting  
On the shore, in front of the silent mirror of the lake,  
Which is so clear that in the eventide  
It goes up to the cloudless sky,  
So that it feels, doesn't it,  
Like sitting on the shore of the edge of the earth.  
On this lake the frogs start their "ribbit" symphony in B flat major,  
opus number 20  
For the full orchestra  
With the wind instruments,  
Willow harps, strings, and percussion.

In the twilight,  
The cupolas look like spacecrafts  
Ready to start their voyage to other planets.  
The wooden boats are chained  
To the improvised mooring line,  
Namely, to the wooden fence.  
Someone splashes the water  
Near the bushes,  
In the twinkling last light on the wave.  
Silver laughter is scattered above the surface.  
We should have been sitting there,  
But we weren't and wouldn't, because we couldn't.

**Vasilina Orlova**

---

**Torn [a Triolet]**

For something other than this emptiness  
tearing holes in photo books, I begin  
to turn out of step; into wilderness  
for something. Other than this emptiness,  
little pin pricks guide me through the darkness.  
You never told me what I was in  
for, something other than this emptiness  
tearing holes. In photo books, I begin.

**Jennifer Ozak**

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## Justifiable Homicide

A criminal was thrown into a pit with the lid slammed shut.  
The guard's aim was for him to "accidentally" suffocate;  
she then could wash her hands of murder.

He had indeed committed a crime,  
but to him the crime was a matter of survival.  
Now survival had taken on a whole new meaning.

He would crawl to the top of the pit  
where just a little air seeped around the rim.  
Each morning he could hear the heavy footsteps,  
then the large hand would remove the lid.  
The guard would then immediately knock him down  
to the bottom of the pit again and close the lid.

How long could he survive with no food or water?  
How long would he have the strength to crawl  
to the top just to get a little breath of air?

One morning he was clinging to the underside of the lid,  
hoping perhaps he could jump to freedom  
once the lid was removed.

Before he could muster up the strength to jump,  
the guard loosened his grip and he lay at the  
bottom of the pit once again thinking

if only he could get out of there to warn all  
his friends and relatives in the woods  
that they should never bite a little old lady.  
He got a good taste of her medicine but could not survive.  
The little old lady, elevated to the guard position,  
did survive without ever contracting Lyme's disease.

**Elneta Owens**

---

## **For Miles**

Holding horn,  
Transcending style,  
Defying definition  
I stand, back arched, turned away from the audience of the world  
Miles away, Miles ahead, Miles to go  
Blowing my song for the moon and myself, not for anyone else  
Tonight, without muffle, a cacophony rings loud and raucous.  
As a young man stalking the night, looking for love craving conquest  
Jazz so free, sheet music turns tail as the rapidity of rounds reveal  
sounds never known before  
Sweat dripping, sounds tripping,  
& violent musical madness threatening to tear a hole in the seam of  
the universe

And then  
Body weary, song slows, soul sweetens  
A chorus of sorrow and joy and melancholic mournful moaning  
A ballad of the blues tearing my heart asunder lifting notes across the  
mist of the moon  
As if notes had substance and could carry clouds  
Competing with the waves I play to the pull, I play for the moon, for  
myself, and no one else  
Into the darkness of the night, to lessen the darkness of my soul  
I play notes and songs and melodies  
and some sounds not so melodic  
And the moon listens, and I listen, and no one else

**Jim Parker**

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## **Loss**

Co-existing within me are two selves, desperate and disparate.  
They disagree; they barely speak the same language.  
One is reasonable, accepting;  
The other is frightened, unwieldy.  
First one and then the other is in control

My body serves two different masters.  
The transitions back and forth between them  
Tear my self apart.  
Bleeding, confused, I seek something to which I can cling  
While an undertow of tears erodes my moorings.

**Jane Steig Parsons**

---

## **take the rise out of my sunset**

tattoo fingers on my chest to cover  
the gashes from the day i stopped  
believing in miracles—my bones were  
too different, and for every year of color  
brought another burn to my skin because  
i never wanted to change. sometimes the  
heart is too shy to meet the earth waiting  
to greet it underneath this body.

take my ashes and toss them into the lawn  
seats of the next big rock concert because  
they've had too much coffee to be drowsy.  
let the people twist and stumble over my  
spine, helping me to lose sight of the world.

we are all jumping for an answer, only  
we don't speak the same language as the sky;  
thunder can only grace our ears before a few more  
souls are mourned because they lost their vibrance.  
someone forgot to tell them that some days you have  
you have to plunge into the ecstasy to see where the  
love had escaped to. some of the body bags we carry  
have too much weight in their hearts.

guilt is only a verb if you want it to be,  
and there are days where we all wish that it could  
be seen as one. being good is only a part of life;  
being whole, is the ability to experience it.

**Larry Patterson**



---

## The Elephants Graveyard

The old bull elephant,  
Dying,  
Trudged slowly,  
Until, by instinct,  
He had arrived at the entrance.

His wrinkled, baggy skin,  
The deep grey worn away,  
Burdened his flanks  
As he entered the valley  
Between the emerald mountains.

He stepped among the blanched bones of his ancestors,  
Ponderously treading green velvet earth  
Which contained treasured remains of the ancients.  
Great white tusks,  
Beyond the reach of the ivory hunters,  
Laid priceless in rippling sable grass,  
Scattered beyond the range of his dimming sight.

He sank to his knees beside a lulling cataract,  
White spray and chalk-colored stones,  
And surveyed the valley with its dried bones.  
Silence was complete:  
No songs of jungle birds,  
No chatter of monkeys,  
No grating drone of flying shiny metal.  
He was the sole living creature in the wind-swept vale;  
This strip of land the tribesmen had known of  
But the new men will never find.

His eyes flickered.  
Mastering the pain hammering from within,  
This aged bull elephant lifted high his long graceful trunk  
And roared a last, proud cry.  
His eyes shut, he tumbled on his side,  
And he lay still.

**Benjamin Pehr**

---

## **A Voice along the Rio**

There is no herb, no prayer, no space  
To take the place of words

La Poeta

Burning piñon soothes the senses  
A poet speaks into the crackling of the flames.  
Words burst, then turn to glowing embers.

Sitting in a plastic white chaired circle  
On a raw black night, the plainsong rhythm  
Of her English/Spanish canto, born imperfect,  
Sings old wounds.

Secret skeletons shake the vieja's bones  
Gaze into the smoke and wonder where he went,  
All she knows is north,  
'Cross a river neither Styx nor Jordan.

Maybe he's lost in a cantina,  
Listening to sad accordion songs  
Walking a line divided life.

Fire feeds the anger  
she speaks into the crackling of the flames

**Oscar Peña**

---

## **Fat Frog Cake**

When it came time to buy  
a cake for Max's first birthday  
it had to be the most unusual one  
I could find at the bakery store.

No balloons, clowns or  
muppets for my child's  
first birthday party.

I found a big, plump, vanilla  
green bodied, yellow bellied,  
white bug eyes with black pupils,  
and a long red tongue  
in icing—the perfect cake

Max's plump eager fingers  
gouged out one frog eye.  
Red tongue icing mixed  
with white eye icing,  
a bleeding delicious mess.

Max laughed, face and fingers  
covered in cake and icing,  
captured by my camera.

Fifteen years later  
I realize the frog cake  
wasn't for Max.

It was for me.

**Laura Peña**

---

## **Weekdays**

When you win a case after months of a research  
that no one would do better than you, but are left unpaid,  
you come home, brown eyes darker than usual,  
almost apologetic, downcast as if you deceived  
the old dream of a house: the fireside, the terrace  
where you'd breathe in spruce air while I read to you  
my book with not one sad poem in it – the house  
we would finally bring children in from afar,  
where they need us as much as we need them here,  
to share remains of the day filled in with a glow  
like a glass of strawberry juice, pierced with the sunbeam.

And when you still stand lingering with a tie in your hand,  
the lump in my throat is nothing but tenderness.

I embrace you. Your racing thoughts hush.

We stand still, smolder as two candles melting together,  
and then smile, move on to a dinner that's never scant.

Lulled by bustles of a three-piece-suited hero on the screen,  
we cave in darkness, holding on to hands as if we were  
life rafts for each other, shipwrecked, or stitched  
plush puppies left over after the Valentine sale.

**Elina Petrova**

---

## **Like Proust**

I want to tell you each time I see you  
that your eyes look like sleepy children:  
that your lids nearly close, and my tears fall.

How could I tell you that love races  
in my bones and creates palpitations  
of my heart, wakes my eyes from dewy  
slumber? I respect your tender beams,  
joyous and alert. I want to touch you  
tenderly like a drop of rain  
caressing a tiny living leaf.  
Those eyes are tender children

waiting for a midnight kiss like Proust.  
How much I want to be the mother  
who takes you in comfortably...  
reads you poetry, and sleeps near you.

## **Dustin Pickering**

---

## **Chasing Butterflies**

A Light flickers, catches your eye.  
Follow it, it flutters, then flies.  
There's a sparkle in another place.  
Silently, slowly, reach out to touch it.  
Again it flutters, flies, then escapes.  
The colors are brilliant, entrancing  
The movement is revealing, alluring.  
Reach to touch it, just one finger.  
It flutters, flies on again.  
You follow, reach.  
It takes hold and sits calmly.  
You wait, it remains.  
Will it be there forever?  
Comfort in the light touch.  
It must be captured, it's yours.  
Enfold it with both hands.  
It tickles as it flutters to be free.  
You know inside it's not yours to hold!

**Donna Pierce**

---

## **[bones]**

lay these bones down

lay them upon the damp dewy earth  
lay them out in the silver splashes of the moon  
lay them under the sun to bleach out dry  
lay them here on the shore, let them be swept up by the sea  
lay them in a deep pine wood upon a bed of needles fallen  
lay them in a meadow lush among the thistles and thorns  
lay them out to be woven into nests, crafted into shelter  
lay them bare, let them return to dust, a circle complete

lay these bones down

## **Jenuine Poetess**

### **Thoughts of an Agnostic**

I sit on the fence when it comes to God.  
Cognizant of Death I try not to think.  
The realities of life give me little choice.

In a crisis I superstitiously call out for help.  
I am not sure though how high the sound goes.

If God exists he/she must be hiding.  
The drama of a flawed humanity plays  
century after century. And we are the same.

O God, what lies beyond?  
The Sky... my only clue...of immortality.  
One can only.... hope... to life!

## **Mary Riley**

---

## **Not Impressed**

At a party

The conversation was more about impressing  
Rather than getting to know each other

People talking about their heritage  
Their families coming over on the Mayflower  
Talking about their relatives being great artists  
Stating their gene pool superiority

As far as I know  
Half of the people who came on the Mayflower  
Died in the first winter  
I question creativity being a guaranteed gene

When it was my turn  
I said  
My family has a long history  
Of being optimistic  
Since my first relatives  
Came over on the Titanic

Grandpa is credited  
For the family's appreciation of theater  
For none of us would be here  
If he hadn't put on such an amazing performance  
In the life boat  
As a woman  
They weren't impressed

**Paul Richmond**



---

## **HAIKU HAVEN**

Hell. In increments  
Of seventeen syllables  
Is how poets cry

It's astonishing  
Pain's pure physicality  
My chest aches for you

Don't know how to fix  
What he has broken in me  
There's no glue for trust

She's considering  
Satisfaction in bleeding  
Letting her wounds show

Paper cuts can kill  
The oasis is mirage  
Darkness swallows light

Self-inflicted wounds  
Watch as they weep and fester  
Add shroud to mirror

Clinging to the edge  
Resisting oblivion  
Breath is exhausting

Sometimes my poems  
Feel like a hurt little girl  
Asking for a kiss

**Giselle Robinson**

---

## **Dueling Drive Ins**

Hot summer nights might mean  
A trip to the drive-in—  
Celluloid heroes 50 feet high—  
In the Austin of my childhood,  
Two theaters dueled for patrons  
The Burnet and the Chief.

The Burnet sported a cowboy,  
The Chief an Indian—  
Even on their facades,  
They battled on like giants.

The drive-in was a treat  
Rare enough to be special.  
Sleeping bags in the rear of  
The station wagon...  
Lying on the hood, back against  
The windshield...  
There were many ways to “watch,”  
Preferred to sitting on the seat like church.

Popcorn and pickles,  
Cola and candy,  
Theater food with  
Outdoor spice.

The Chief and Burnet are long, long gone.  
The towering screens torn down,  
A magic era ended by  
A city growing up.

**Rie Sheridan Rose**

---

### **... Lost Love**

I lost love in a supermarket  
I pushed a trolley full of canned goods  
up and down aisles laden  
with all sorts of tempting things  
and while I was distracted  
love left me

I have a cupboard  
full of preserved tins  
memories  
and loneliness...

### **Candy Royale**

---

## **Kite Flying in Spring**

My brother  
maneuvered the kite  
to cut the strings of others  
with our own line  
sharpened by a coating of glass powder  
that I was allowed to apply  
though I really longed  
to do the flying

lifted by spring wind  
like a falcon  
and spinning beneath a Frisbee sun  
our paper bird snapped the wings  
of another paper bird

We cut it, we shouted  
at the somersaulting  
as we ran faster and faster  
to claim the corpse  
which we found tangled  
in a tree as unreachable  
as a squirrel's nest  
or my dreams  
of flying the kite myself

while my brother  
climbed the tree in the silence  
of a golden sky  
i returned home holding a spindle  
wondering  
why girls could not fly the kites

**Shubh Schiesser**

---

## Terezín

Former Gestapo Prison, Czech Republic

Fortress full of cobblestones, how do you keep your dead?  
This place is full of song—

In tombstones and pebble prayers. In walls of interrogation cells.  
Door handles, broken and the ones that still turn. And the German  
words  
on faded signs. And in the concrete reservoir. Gun holes and execu-  
tion blocks.

And the bars and the bars and the bars.

It sings of the tree with mottled leaves. And the evergreens and birch  
bark.

The spiders in their webs. And the bees that beg for us to go. The  
swallows  
in their nests. And the one that came to sing—

In footfalls and boot steps. The shutter of a camera lens. Sharpened  
pencils  
and notebooks. And the careful tour guide. So many long exhaled  
sighs  
and gasps of stolid air.

It is here, in your graves marked with numbers. And the roses all in  
a row. Raindrops and cricket song. And the river that still flows. The  
bent knees  
and cupped palms. Prayer beads and pocket stones. In the paper-fed  
flames.

And the names and the names and the names.

**Kelsey Shipman**

---

## **Legacy**

Iron rusts in the muddy delta

Where a raised hand issues  
Breeding

And under the white magnolia  
Garden gates are broken by

Roots grown thick in  
Generations of silence

Decay passed down in a legacy of  
Fertile hips

To my fingers  
Mending bone

My daughter  
Broken

My hands in soiled fists too late  
Unearthing buried fragments of our  
Shattered lives

My voice rising  
Above the scarlet blossoms

Calling you to stop and

Hear the wrenching sorrow  
Hanging in our willow trees

**Susan Stockton**

---

## Songs

My goddess of song is  
a terrified angel  
who blots out my eyes  
but whispers truth  
beached against  
the sea.

Gulls cry and sway  
at stilted shambling  
as I feel  
for a purchase  
of grass or soil,  
anything but  
grains of sand  
bleeding between fingers.

It's then the angel  
asks if I'm a god,  
"to create is to breathe is to live"  
I counter,  
and fall into  
the cruel surf,  
laugh through the pain  
of nascent vistas  
in one breath  
and blinding light  
the next.

I climb out of  
the healing tide,  
avert Death's gaze,  
alive in my Cantos.

**Rod Carlos Stryker**

---

## **Under the Bridge**

Under the bridge a homeless man shivers  
On a cardboard mattress he hopes will keep  
The frigid cement from chilling bones.  
The cold, overcast day dims his shelter.  
In tattered overcoat he hugs himself tightly to quiet  
Fine tremors spreading from bowel and marrow.

Under the bridge he gazes up,  
Burrowing into shadows with blood-shot eyes.  
There is a seething in the shaded corners  
Causing a tide of fear to engulf him:  
Is something moving there  
In the umbral underbelly of the overpass?  
He has seen the dark recesses jitter before  
Then coalesce into wraiths and demons.  
The obscure niche seems to swirl like muddy water  
In Chocolate Bayou after a deluge.  
He rubs his eyes now watery from the effort,  
But his vision only becomes more animated.  
It reminds him of litter eddying in a wintry wind.  
But finally he sees the bats huddling body to body.

At dusk clouds clear, leave the sky washed clean.  
The bats rise en masse like thick plumes of smoke;  
And with them the high-pitched chatter  
And rodent smell of the colony  
As it smudges the perfect cobalt blue  
Of this autumnal twilight.

**Lillian Susan Thomas**



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## RUBBER AND GRAPHITE

Writing was great  
in school because  
you could erase

your clumsy errors,  
get it correct  
before you turned it in,

great especially for  
a “little left-handed sucker”  
pulling his C’s in art  
from Mrs. Opal Fenton.

That big eraser  
on the number 2 pencil  
crumbled my leaden wrongs  
into graphite-smearred shavings.

At some point,  
dragging my smeared left paw  
across the page,  
the writing itself

became erasure  
rubbing away the voices  
of Teacher-Mummy-Daddy-Preacher,  
the friction drawing

smoke from the page

**Hugh Tribbey**

---

## **There Are Two Islands in Two Oceans**

They will be there for a long time.  
They consist of plastics drifting together  
in the Pacific and Atlantic  
the endless ocean as a myth  
of sailing ships and steam  
has given way to warships  
and nuclear submarines.  
Now beach whales and dolphins as  
Romantics sing of Tennyson.  
Drones now patrol oceans  
and seas of depleted fish stocks  
and radioactive Fukushima waste.  
Watch! as beaches bring in parts of Japan  
destroyed by hurricane.  
Here is where engineering meets poem  
Only one will win.

## **Unlimited Thom**

---

## Haikus

In the breathing spaces  
Between mountain peaks  
sunrises radiate peaceful energy,  
Earth's daily blessing

Sacred Earth writes verses  
On the membrane of my heart  
Metrical beats, POEMS

Autumn wind grounds leaves  
Squirrels dabble in colors  
Canvassing for acorns

On forest paths trees sing to me,  
impart nature's wisdom,  
a glimpse of heaven.

Read poetry aloud  
Word Beauty  
Second silence between words  
Enchantment

After dark storms  
Rainbows promise new beginnings  
Somewhere over, a homecoming

**Suzanne Vance**

---

## **Soul Splash**

Whitecaps tip their brims  
as windsurfing ladies skim  
their jaunty waves

laugh at fish  
jumping in their wakes  
flashing silver tails

let the wind  
brush their hair  
billow their sails – and

veer through plumes of surf  
that settle like shimmery shawls  
about their spirits.

**Claire Vogel-Camargo**

## **Chocolate haiku**

Milk and cocoa treat  
Chocolate dreams are sweet  
Have a kiss on me

**Conchita Walker**

---

## Cracks in my coffee mug

the tentacles of its crack were devouring my coffee,  
my precious Brazilian ground beans,  
sucked the milk to make it more brash,  
I'm glad I prefer it sugarless.

The distributaries formed reminded me of geography lessons,  
carried my beverage to unexplored caves within,  
forming gorges secretly,  
I'm glad I paid attention in classes.

Its sarcastic secretive smile, conspiring,  
forming a caffeine society in the crevices,  
swelling it further with plans and me with suspicion,  
I'm glad I watched the detective series; diligently.

Its branches spreading or opening,  
sometimes scaring me with the sound I dreaded,  
mostly playing with psyche,  
I'm glad I'm not suffering from insomnia.

Its obese now, divulging those brown stretch marks,  
a blink of my eye would break it any moment,  
and blip! A drop on my book sucking intellect from words,  
I'm glad I'd bought a backup already.

Ah! So fresh and a flavor I'd craved for long,  
yet a void; made me miss a void,  
Of tentacles, of distributaries, of branches, of stretch marks,  
I miss the treasured cracks that prevented me Alzheimer,  
I'm glad I named my book in its memory—cracks in my coffee mug!

**Vaibhav Wadhwa**

---

## Smile

There's a snapshot of you  
clipped to the bedroom mirror.

I see it whenever I stand nude  
looking for underwear in your sock drawer.

The old-film colors have faded some  
yellow tinted

showing the back of your head,  
the disheveled hair  
black with some red  
as you moved towards the door.

I can't remember if you were smiling

though I picture it  
from so many times of feeling  
the curve your lips pressed against mine.

But then,  
that is how I suppose everyone sees the past,

imagining how it must have been  
how we want it to always be

even if now  
it should not matter  
which way you face in my memories.

**Akeith Walters**

---

## Summertime Jazz

Summertime Jazz blowin' in the breeze  
sweet little things, walkin' down the street,  
swinging and shakin' to the sound of a cool blowin' sax  
diggin' the feelin' of being laid back  
Tasty Jazz sounding as smooth as Lemonade & Markers VSOP  
tenor sax sounding like a Grover Washington melody  
lovin' on the sounds, hanging in the shade  
listening to the sounds as the sweet Jazz plays  
little honies hair shining in the sun as the players play & the horn blows  
shorties leaning on their cars parked in the park while Jazz sounding  
good, going into the dark,  
tunes havin' you swayin', the beat have you sayin', oh ya, oh ya  
Jazz flute singing, making the breeze feel cool  
That's how it does ya  
That's how it do  
That's how it feels when Jazz is in you  
oh ya, oh ya  
Jazz in the summer is like love in the air  
sweet tasty melodies takes you there  
oh ya, that's Summer  
oh ya, that's Jazz  
oh ya, that's Summer Jazz  
that Summer Jazz flowin' in the air  
summertime breeze blows through your hair  
sittin' back, sippin', relaxin', restin' on Sweet tasty beats  
feelin' the groove  
letting the Jazz get into you  
oh ya, that's how it does, that's how it do  
it's that summertime beat  
it's that summertime groove  
it's that summertime Jazz  
that gets you to move

**Skye White**

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## **The Writing Life**

starting with a Dickinson line (#581)

I found the words to every thought I ever had—but one.  
A simple philosophy: for each door I open, I must shut one.

Oh author, this time you'll have to earn your capital A.  
Will you knock one out of the park, or will you putt one?

Wishes and lies: the soul is green, the spirit stings.  
Give me two false statements, but I will only rebut one.

Feed the starving body before you feed the ravenous soul.  
You can't know what the catfish eats until you gut one.

Lines ran through my head throughout the restless night.  
I mouthed the words for memory, yet by morning, what? One?

You think you're so original, a demi-god of literature.  
I, too, have slept with a dictionary, the great uncut one.

Who knows what depths lie inside the curds of gray matter?  
Size is overrated: Gulliver, zero. Lilliput, one.

The elm has lost its syllables. I gather what I can.  
Through fallen piles of sounds, I rake from the glut, one.

**Scott Wiggerman**



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## The Pumper

A pumper is cleaning up his wells, spraying everything down  
Keeping it clean and worrying about the earth being polluted  
He's opened a new well today

A farmer pulls in and says, what about them 3 acres over there?  
They ain't using them no more, I could be planting on it.  
The pumper says, have you been paid, for it, what did you get?  
The farmer says oh, 'bout \$15,000. The pumper asks him, what  
Was it worth before. The old guy says, oh 'bout \$425,  
but I could be plowing on it since you ain't using it.

How many barrels did she pump today, the old man says as he leans  
out of  
His King Ranch pickup, and pulls another plug from his tin.  
1150, says the pumper. Remember though, it's a new well, it'll settle  
down in a day or so. When am I gonna' start gettin' my money, can't  
you guys  
hurry it up, the farmer says.

Yeah, they got fresh water down there n the McAmos place, he adds,  
They're puttin' in a tank for fracking. The pumper looks  
At him curiously, don't you know our bodies are made of water,  
they're gonna'  
Salt it down with chemicals and then run it off in the ditch when  
they're done  
If they can get away with it. Don't you realize there's radioactive  
material in  
That chemical wash. We can live without oil, but we can't live with-  
out water.

Whatchou' doing working for them then son the old man growls,  
I'm not really sure sir, I'm asking myself that every day, maybe  
Maybe it's because I want to keep it clean and feed my family.

**Connie Williams**

---

### **How Light is the Line**

Here on Texas shore  
watching fish dangle  
from that thin strand of line  
I am for a moment  
the water the wind  
a bit of purple paper  
left over  
from *quinceañera*  
left to hang  
from gazebo pillars  
pendulum  
butterfly trapped  
in spider web  
left to hang  
like the smooth grey stone  
at the Menill  
a large dark figure  
above a tiny circle  
moved by a bit of breeze

**Vanessa Zimmer-Powell**

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## Manifesto

I want to be the next Grandma Moses,  
But of poetry not painting.  
I want to be the lady who  
Finally found her shouting voice  
At age seventy plus and was able  
To make people sit up and listen;  
To make people laugh and cry;  
To make people say: Yes, I like poetry.

At last I throw away  
Old rules of grammar and usage and say:  
Yes, I can make a poem any way I want.  
Yes, poems still can mean something.  
Yes, poems can be joyful and make us sing.  
Yes, poems are not just for the over-educated  
Graduate school poets formed in writing seminars,  
Bound by the artifice of artificial voices droning on  
About unending pain and dreadful madness,  
About agonized love, and the sorrow that surrounds each crafted word.

Why not give the folks something they can understand?  
Something they can put in their pipe and smoke.  
Something that will make them sit up and say:  
Finally something that makes me glad I learned to read.

**Olga Wise**

---

## Road Trip

We rode our stiff legs and necks  
in the silver Toyota hatchback  
from Albuquerque to Alabama,  
melted Snicker bars on our pants  
and the road was our shepherd.

In Roswell, we sat on the ruptured  
green asphalt of the old tennis court  
behind the Dairy Queen eating  
Peppermint Blizzards like it wasn't December  
and we hadn't seen snow  
up the highway in Vaughn.

In Texas, we complained about the small  
pancakes at the I-HOP in Fort Stockton  
and perused the library books in Ozona,  
with our Skittle-stained palms.

We left our son's wind up toy  
at a dusty rest area outside Dallas  
and in Shreveport, Louisiana took  
that friend I once knew, with her large  
gold gong earrings out to dinner.

I have loved the many long driving hours  
beside you, far better than the short plane trips  
that quickly whisk us to our destination.  
I remember each town like a palm reading  
and each day undressing itself  
in all its colorful glory, to make way for night.

**Liza Wolff-Francis**

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## **Differphobia**

A world where the synonym for difference, is disorder.  
Where exploration equals deviation, and deviation  
leads to destruction.

A world where the Legos must top one another in perfection  
And be in one color to signify  
unification.

In Differphobia,

The diversity of your thoughts means you are destined to isolation,  
because you, you are

A threat, a cure to the virus that infects the entire population.

You are an attack to the stability of a one way nation.

Don't challenge the system, in Differphobia.

Because planting different trees means you are a disease that must be  
seized and deceased.

Let us not live,  
in Differphobia.

**Rozanna Yousef**

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# Poetry of 2013 Featured Poets

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Another Space.**

I look into speckled eyes  
flecked green and blue,  
a cosmos of stars and planets.  
The large black holes  
of inner space,  
glazed mirrors  
reflect a world observed  
that is myself  
viewed from  
other's space  
who is  
what is.

**Bob Mud**

---

## X

You are aware of only breath  
and the impending tempest  
who is the ship  
when truth is the storm  
Somewhere lies an island  
and you are heading for it  
X marks the spot  
stolen treasures calling you  
what glitters is gold  
what was sold into slavery  
was the heart  
which learnt to beat  
in a rhythm  
that blew sails  
raised at half mast  
but this was not enough

You cannot find  
the holy grail  
if you are less  
virtuous than the angels  
you are denouncing

Oh heart  
oh creature that  
moves in the chest  
and is pressed against  
lungs  
you restrict the breath  
when breath is what is needed most

X marks the spot  
where you gather yourself  
to go on.

**Candy Royalle**

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## **A Lie**

A lie just disrupted the equilibrium,  
Caused a blister on my tongue,  
And another one on soul,  
Sowed seed of distrust,  
Skepticism in attitude,  
A cloud of cold silence,  
Deception of bold looks,  
Unfamiliar rawness,  
In humid, murky air of smile and frown.

A perception of truth,  
Wrapped under truth,  
Bred a society,  
Brimming with fear,  
Of being caught,  
Of a consequence,  
Not of lying,  
But of untruth.

A grey, hidden beneath rainbow,  
Foul behind pleasantries,  
Knitted with the wool of guile,  
Embroidered with a hollow promise,  
Of another lie.

Opaque yet brittle,  
Contagious in mankind,  
An epidemic with no vaccine,  
Dilapidated the faith,  
respect too.

A cold, devoid of effects of global warming,  
Sucking the warmth of hearts,  
Freezing the feelings,  
A lie just disrupted the equilibrium.

**Vaibhav Wadhwa, India**



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## NATIONAL

### Watering Day

Any water is fine; he travels  
Between the two,  
A bucket and a blue hose  
Drenching cactus in its broad  
Pots, and patches of rosemary.  
From geraniums with their pink  
And red blossoms, near houses close  
So as not to lose out to the courtyard.  
Water is scarce here,  
To Sebastian, with his brown skin  
And half-smoked cigarettes, watering  
Just enough to ease the drought

For the tomatoes, the pimentos, the  
Ancient almond trees inside the  
Parameters of a sandy garden.  
There are figs, most plants straggly  
with dust.  
Planted alongside wilted lettuce,  
In the nearly desert-like sun, the garden  
Is slow and unimportant; there is just  
Enough water to go around each season.  
Sebastian's work, mostly focused  
At the bottom of a grove of almond  
Trees, the trunks only a quarter kilometer

The women watch Sebastian and mop  
The adobe floor every eight or nine days.  
Sweeping scorpions along with the dead flies.  
The dust the shutters, opening them roughly in the tiger  
wind, showing their distain. The women have come  
With their full buckets to clean.

**Millicent Borges Accardi,**

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## Humming Room

—for my daughter

Humming room  
tube twists of plastic carry  
false pink of new blood  
the lie of another promise.

Eyes open round to compass the midnight crisis.  
Inch long black hairs comma the white sheet.  
No blue milk taste on lips or tongue. No tears  
fall on falling lashes.

Muscles starve for oxygen.  
Fingers unfist, swell, open.

Skin peels back  
fiery flesh  
too fragile to contain.

Through roughened surface,  
the bloody serum  
seeps through blistered layers.

Breaths frail. Thread-thin muscles  
do not lift the three inch ribs.  
Cries whimper to silence.

White box, blue dress —  
less than one square yard of cotton to keep  
the brown dirt at bay.  
Rotted together now.  
Dirt. Dress. Girl.

**Susan Gardner**

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## **My Stepfather is Not the Kind of Man Who Weeps**

When we heard that your mother was dying,  
we stood in silence until the truth rooted itself into our back teeth  
and all we could taste was the silent agony of knowing.  
I heaved the big skillet onto the flame  
coaxed the Crisco down from the top of the pantry,  
dropped generous spoonfuls until it shined a welcome.

This is how we family sometimes.  
Grandmothers whispering in paprika pinches and dry mustard dash,  
recipe woven into creases of callused hands.  
A cluster of collards cooked slow when we need to still.  
A touch of cumin or cayenne when it is time again to move.  
A peeled potato for every word caught just behind a throat's tickle.

My stepfather is not the kind of man who weeps.  
He stares into the mossy grass, silently says  
Earth, if you open your mouth and call me home  
I will fold easy into your sturdy batter,  
I will swell and stiffen to a cake of you, and I will rest.  
His shoulders do not shake.

**Suzi Q. Smith**

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## STATE

### **Under the Double Eagle**

I open the back door and tiptoe  
to the center of the back yard  
not wanting to break the spell,  
jinx the greatest golf shot ever.

That must be the explanation:  
Tiger Woods has smash-lifted  
his ball toward a distant green  
with a fairway wood, the ball  
climbing beyond our planet's  
atmosphere where its speed  
has slowed. It seems content  
to glow red and patiently wait.

Through my binoculars I study  
the golf ball's dimples, then  
remember the weather man  
announced the coming lunar  
eclipse for tonight. He said we  
would experience its wonder  
from our back yard for an hour,  
wait two years before seeing

another. I ignore weather  
science, try to understand  
this sky magic as an event  
I can comprehend. Sometimes  
the truth is too far-fetched to be  
embraced. I consider pinkish  
shading, know that Woods has  
really smoked his white Titleist

this time. As the moon gives  
up all the sun's light, settles  
for the little indirect light  
our Earth provides, I know

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Tiger Woods has made a two  
on a par five— a rare double  
eagle— as his golf ball drops  
into a hole beyond the clouds.

## **J. Paul Holcomb**

### **As of Late**

I wish I could clean my conscience with a single cap full  
From the same bleach that I use to clean my bathroom  
Swallow it like a single shot while sitting on a bar stool  
And pray I get drunk on honesty

Get so wasted I throw up on everyone I've lied to  
Truth is so much uglier when it ferments inside you  
Pillow talk with a trashcan in case I think of something new  
The hangover will be such a relief

Then I'd feed my heart some Alka-Seltzer  
Like a duck in water I'd feel so much better  
Watch it expand in every direction  
There would be so many pieces of me

I'd hand myself out like Halloween candy  
To every girl at my door expecting something from me  
I could finally sleep when my chest was empty  
They still can't tell if it's a trick or a treat

But instead I just hand out wrappers that say I love you  
Take something off to keep the cold from coming through  
The heat of the moment is enough to make anyone feel used  
I'm sorry this really isn't me

I'm just tired of helping girls flip through their calendars faster  
When time flies so fast you feel like nothing matters  
When you opened your legs I was reborn a bastard  
I pulled out not knowing the man I want to be...

## **Daniel Ramos**

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## Angel Inside Me

Angel inside me

Finally expanding its wings  
My Soul is extending beyond the borders  
of my transparent skin

Extending from my shoulders  
Weightless Wings that I never knew existed  
Previously crumpled and crushed  
Are Finally Free!

Energies of my expanded soul  
extending several feet on either side  
of my transparent skin

My body does not end with the skin – no.  
My true size is much wider, much fuller  
It is all Joy. It is all Happiness  
It is all my Soul.

Expanding wings and an expanded soul  
Ah! such Space!  
It feels so much better  
to be so free

Like a mythical creature  
I am half human and half angel  
This Angel inside me  
has finally been uncaged.

**Mark Fennell**

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AUSTIN

**On a Theme by William Stafford**

If I could be like Wallace Stevens,  
I'd fold my clothes into the bureau  
drawer instead of living  
from a suitcase. I'd hang up my long  
coat in the closet and really move  
in.

I'd cook food in my room on a hot  
plate, then open up the window for  
the neighbors. With my tongue  
pursed like a stick, I'd push my ice  
cream all the way down to the end,  
so that even the last bite contained  
both cone and cream.

**Danny Strack**

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## Scribbled Conscience on Abortion Clinic Letterhead

I do not hate children.  
The judgment lingering on some naysayer's breath  
Dissipates as it reaches my ear,  
Too full yet of sorrow, anguish  
With each appointment I speak  
Feathered whispers against frail skin.  
She loves you, she loves you not  
Let the debate not weigh upon your tiny heart.  
You may not live long enough for cuddles and kisses,  
Sonnets and vows,  
The last hands, the only hands  
To ever hold you will be mine  
But dear child know I cradle you  
In the nook of my heartbeat  
Even as you lose yours.  
For if your lungs had ever begun to breathe  
They would be filled only with distress of  
Past regrets, failed promises, empty dreams  
A heaviness too great to place on infants' shoulders.  
I do not hate children.  
Though the Pharisees may cast me down  
The question begs  
Do they not deserve heaven without enduring hell first?  
So gently I will perform the task  
Condemning myself with each sterile scrape  
Of a tool made to end life  
Against a body begging not to make life  
As I solemnly hold in my hands life...  
God might say I am saving life.  
Or maybe not.  
But I pray we change the world into one worthy of life  
Before forcing one to exist here.

**Shae O'Brien**



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## Special Guest Poets

### TO MY BIG BROTHER (AN EXCERPT)

I remember when you beat Mom in the Face with a Frying Pan  
When you busted her lip and drove her to try suicide  
When you kicked her and left huge bruises on her thigh  
When you stole from her purse, slapped her, and lied

How you'd glory in humilaiting her and me  
Temper tantrums on Xmas morning-broken presents and tree  
When you kicked Dad in the groin  
He rolled under the den coffee table in pain  
How you never visited him as he lay dying  
He said, "I've given up on him." without crying  
You mercilessly bullied and mocked my soul  
Like the way you filled our walls with holes  
You slammed the back door on my 3 year old finger  
Then I slid on the seawall, sliced open my thumb, years later  
But your problems were all they cared about  
Both scars on my body today are a memory shout

When you'd wrestle me, pin me to the ground as I cried  
You'd hold gobs of spit above my face that landed in my eyes  
You locked me in the closet, fed me bread and water as my self-  
esteem would melt  
Then you strapped me to a bare steel cot and beat me with belts  
Me screaming, "For the Love of God, no, please, No- I beg you"  
No one believed me when I told them, no one listened, but it was all  
true  
NOW YOU LISTEN TO THIS! I REMEMBER! I REMEMBER!  
Finally I am free of you forever  
And the pain I've nursed  
Since the childhood I lost and cursed  
Is purged--NO MORE HURT! NO MORE HURT!  
Your life is not my fault-Abuser, Loser  
You were the chooser

Carry it with my hate to your grave

**Ken Jones**

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## **Rainbow Tribes and Pensioners.**

I have no wish to flirt with violence.  
There is enough around me  
In Africa  
In Indonesia  
In the television tubed in from far east of Europe  
In the town squares and churchyards of Ipswich.

I have no wish to discuss the colour of violence  
When it is clearly seen in the white heat of the moment  
In the strike of white lightning  
In the aftermath of the whitewash.  
I have no wish to run my fingers  
Up and down the barrel of a gun.

I know my history  
And have seen my former selves  
Enter the houses of strangers and shoot them.

I know my present  
And am hearing the perversion of language  
And am feeling the perversion of spirit  
And am seeing the mass graves on the oblong screen  
Detached from their source.

I am touching some things that also please me.  
Rainbow tribes and pensioners  
Linking arms and shouting  
"Enough is enough  
It is time to join a different dance."

Poets and revolutionaries  
Chanting "U.N.I.T.Y.  
We gave you your chance  
And all you have done in five hundred years  
Is perfect the art of killing."  
For together we are  
The squatters.

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Travellers  
99%ers  
Occupying  
Verse shouting  
Bad mouthing  
Backlash  
You have been afraid of for centuries  
And we are of different minds  
In love with  
Di verse city  
And taking it all back.

**John Row**

### **The Eternal Now**

Who are you to  
call me a child?  
Me, called by God  
to verse,  
static and senseless?

I do not care.  
I do not care  
about  
contrition.  
The large opening  
in the eternal now;  
that past forsaken,  
bent by limber hands;  
no man can surrender  
to deadliest force.

Each window opens--  
the rain is let in,  
the past lost,  
those nomadic wanderers  
are tearful now.

**Dustin Pickering**

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## **The Game Table**

You are seated round a table, chips piled  
High before you, a winning streak flushed  
With expectation. The green felt, brushed  
Almost to a shine, clicks as each smiling

Chip falls. It is here your past and future  
Meet. This moment: the cards that you've been dealt,  
The unknown cards that will or will not help  
Your hand, the turn from hope to certainty.

Your greatest wish was to be a flighty  
Soprano with a chorus of Best Friends  
Forever, an entourage, undisciplined,  
Living off your luck and generosity,

Clubbing from game to game. But smoke, booze  
And extra pounds darkened the diamonds  
Of your voice. Older, middle-aged, you've grown  
Mezzo, moderate, more likely to excuse

Yourself from the game than risk an inside  
Straight. Young men come to you for secrets,  
Cheap advice, a cheater's guide to betting,  
And threaten you when you refuse to bid

The limit on their fate. But your heart's  
Not in the game. There was a time. . . you fold.  
The young man needs an ace. He gets a spade,  
The queen. The dealer reshuffles the cards.

**Lyman Grant**

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## Poetry of 2013 Board of Directors

### To Mother With Love

You've helped me in so many different ways.  
You've done many things that I can't repay.  
You've always been there through thick and through thin.  
You gave me a life, that's where I'll begin.

As the years passed by I looked up to you.  
You helped me daily and guided me through.  
Through all life's challenges easy and tough.  
You were especially there when times were rough.

I know I didn't always listen to you.  
There were things I had to go out and do.  
As time passed on you proved to be right.  
Only I wasn't ready to give up the fight.

The support love and kindness you passed onto me.  
It was just what I needed, today I can see.  
The happiness you gave me I feel from my heart.  
We've developed a bond that won't fall apart.

I trust in one person, today that is you.  
You've given me suggestions and you've always been true.  
It took many years for me to see.  
You're one special person that has been there for me.

Today I have love to give back to you.  
Through the years you've shown me just what to do.  
I will be there for you through thick and through thin.  
Love from my heart is where I'll begin.

**Lynn Wheeler-Brandstetter**

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## **Alley Cat**

Grey  
Beat up and smoking cigarettes  
More loyal than any lover  
What a hard life you had

Next time it will be easier  
You won't have to start on the street  
You get a warm and safe house  
Free of animal control and dogs

Carry on my friend

## **James Jacobs**

### **Negative**

Please be negative for me -  
not negative toward yourself,  
not negative for others.  
Be negative for me.

Please just be a little more negative when we walk together.  
As I stop and notice something interesting, unusual, beautiful  
pay attention to what is unpleasant  
focus on what is threatening.  
See what I am not seeing.

Help me see what you are seeing.  
Teach me the dangers that you know.  
Guide me to want to protect you more.

Let me be the one who looks out for what is unpleasant, threatening  
so that you can enjoy the peaceful beauty.  
Let me be negative for you.

## **Mark My Words**

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## THOSE WHO PAUSE

when i walk  
beneath trees  
i step softly  
and stop often

i listen to wind  
whispering  
to the leaves  
such secrets as man  
cannot hear  
in his daily charge  
through city streets  
where buildings  
overshadow life

i am careful  
to step around  
fallen leaves  
and study shadows  
where light has slipped  
through branches

deciphering the messages  
written there  
in script which is visible  
only to those  
who pause  
and breathe deeply  
of the future

**Dr. Charles A Stone**

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**“forever loved”**

i felt the wind turn sooth  
smooth me out into a new  
a different being a seeming  
of feeling he took my breath  
and made me feel like i could  
love again like i could smile  
and feel the way it feels  
when the skin is met  
with skin wanting  
to be loved i can  
feel what he feels like  
i can see the sky and it is  
good he has all the cards  
in his hand i am with him  
and i want to be i wish we  
could swim in this forever

**Jill Bingamon**



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## **The Pacific January 1, 2013**

Here we stand  
beside a  
new ocean,  
Chasing horizons all year  
has brought us to this shore.  
She doesn't offer pretty shells  
or the lure of gold doubloons.  
I don't think she wants us  
and we are wary of her.  
We see her sweep  
a child off her feet  
and grab for her,  
but the father's hand is swift and sure.  
She is cold and hides monstrous fish  
with no promise of tropical islands.  
She is beautiful, but not my type.  
My love and I make promises  
to each other, share a kiss,  
turn our backs to her,  
and begin the journey  
back to where we began  
so we might find the place  
called home and know it  
for the first time.

**Susan Beall Summers**

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**Poetry Here, Over There  
and  
Down Under**

The English poet-storyteller,  
Long, white hair and beard  
Wafting from side-to-side  
In warm, spring Texas breezes,  
Wears top hat and tails  
With colorful, striped vest  
And red shoes.  
He stands, kneels, and sits down  
In pools of Bluebonnets,  
Marvels, with his cockney brogue,  
About Texas hill country blue vistas  
Patchworked together with pink Primroses,  
Maroon Winecups and red-orange  
Indian Paintbrushes.  
We take his photo,  
He takes our Texas beauty  
Into his heart and makes a poem of it.

The Australian poet/musician,  
With razor-thin body and eyes  
Like an owl, blows his didgeridoo  
With one of Austin's premiere jazz bands.  
He mixes water with local dirt samples  
To make colored, thin, clay  
And paints a mural of Austin  
And our poetry with his mud.  
We take his photo, he paints our words  
And taken-for-granted scenery  
On his mud painting.  
We all receive keepsakes  
To treasure.

**Barbara Youngblood Carr**

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### **Flying without wings**

It is the closest that anyone is to flying  
It beats being on your knees or all fours.  
And I found it to be quite true. No lying!  
With each stroke the body forward soars.

But I found it to free my mind and soul  
Lifting my spirits with each stroke,  
Erasing gloom. That in itself is a goal.  
No special powers anyone needs to invoke.

Just stroke left, right, breath in, breath out!  
Let your body soar forward over the water!  
Unless there is an unseasonal drought  
But that would be a different matter.

**Luis Cuellar**

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## Editorial Staff

### **Barbara Youngblood Carr, Editor**

Author of 17 books of poetry/prose and short stories about her Native American Cherokee heritage and growing up in Texas, the South and Southwest (9 books in her Ancestor Series partially funded by the City of Austin Arts Commission); served as an active API Board member for twenty years, published in several editions and Editor of the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 editions of the AIPF Anthology Di-Verse-City (was Co-Editor for seven years), 2012 AIPF Festival Director, Editor of the 2012 and 2013 Di-Verse-City Youth Anthology; a member of many other creative/writing organizations; Editor for A Galaxy of Verse (2004-2010); owner and Editor of Dreamers Three Press and Little Chicken Fried Books; venue host, motivational speaker and workshop facilitator in Austin for twenty years. Barbara has been appointed the National Poet Laureate for the Military Order of the Purple Heart in Washington 2005-2008. She received the first National White Buffalo Native American Poet Laureate Award for her Native American writing. Visit her websites at [ancestorpoet.com](http://ancestorpoet.com) and [PoetryPics.com](http://PoetryPics.com) for a complete list of publications.

Austin, TX

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(512) 343-7940

### **Nancy Fierstien, Editorial Assistant**

Nancy Fierstien is the editor of Best Austin Poetry 2011-2012 (and BAP 2010-2011) published by the Austin Poetry Society. You've had multiple chances to read her work in Texas Poetry Calendars published by Dos Gatos Press and in several di-verse-city anthologies put out by the Austin International Poetry Festival since 2002. The new Southwest Haiku anthology to be released this year by Dos Gatos Press will include her work. Nancy hosts "Thirsty Thursday," a monthly venue for poets, musicians and storytellers in Dripping Springs, Texas.

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### **Susan Beall Summers, Editorial Assistant**

Susan Beall Summers has been writing poems since she was twelve. Most of her poetry is straightforward with a bit of humor and is very accessible and relatable for everyone. Her style has been described as having “gentle sarcasm.” She’s influenced by her spirituality and love of the ocean. [www.tidalpoolpoet.com](http://www.tidalpoolpoet.com)

Hutto, TX

### **Lynn Wheeler-Brandstetter**

From the Rocky Mountains of beautiful British Columbia to the good old south Texas heat, Lynn came to Austin in the 80’s. She started writing poetry at a very young age and enjoys writing poetry based on current and past experiences with the hopes of touching the lives of the people she encounters. Lynn is a definite workaholic and it’s hard to convince her to slow down. She is a true Piscean and has an intrinsic love for water, the ocean and anything that lives or swims in water. Imaginative, compassionate, kind and giving, she has spent several years volunteering her time for nonprofit organizations. She is loyal, dedicated and has been committed in making a difference in the poetry community. This is Lynn’s seventh festival and she has been an active API Board member for six years. Lynn has two beautiful daughters, Megan and Kaitlan, and three grandsons, Hunter, Garrett and Caleb. She is happily married to a wonderful loving husband, Curtis Dale Brandstetter, who supports all her endeavors.

Hutto, TX

### **Elneta Owens**

Has dabbled in poetry since high school but never took it seriously nor tried to develop it until 2011; took a Creative Writing Course at ACC in Spring 2011; published in ACC’s Fall 2011 Literary Journal; joined two Critiqued groups; member of Austin Poetry Society, Austin International Poetry Festival Society, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators; Writers League of Texas; attended Writers League of Texas Poetry Retreat in Alpine TX in July 2012; writes for fun.

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## **Jos Mason-Mazzu**

Jos Mason-Mazzu is relatively new to the Austin poetry scene but is very active in attending venues, as a member of the Austin Poetry Society, writing her poetry and bonding with other poets in the community. She was a former reader in Portland, Oregon and is an invited reader to attend poetry readings at the University of New York and Greenwich Village, New York.

## **Cover Photographer, Artists, Cover Designer and Judges**

### **Jake Bryer, Photographer, Front cover Artist**

Jake Bryer resides in Austin Texas and is the Co-Founder of the Austin Art Garage, a gallery for local emerging artists. Bryer's art consists of digital composite photography – a process of cutting and layering several images together. The entirety of his work can be seen at [www.AustinArtGarage.com](http://www.AustinArtGarage.com) or in the gallery at 2200 South Lamar Boulevard, Austin, Texas.

### **Jill Bingamon, Photographer, Back Cover Artist**

Jill Bingamon is an Austin poet who believes in the power and beautiful depth of self-awareness that poetry offers. She is currently vice-chair of Austin Poets International. She provided the artwork for Preoccupied with Austin anthology and the cover artwork for Forrest Fest's 2012 website, flyers, and anthology. She has poetry in each of these anthologies. During the 1980's and 1990's, she co-published the quarterly magazine Art-Core, self-published a poetry chapbook entitled Hand, performed in a one-woman, one-hour live poetry show for cable television, and was featured at Mexic-Arte Museum for a Tennessee anthology emceed by the late local Austin poet, Susan Bright and filmed by an NBC affiliate. She wrote, directed, acted in, and produced a comedy-variety cable television show entitled Angels and Mermaids. She was poetry reader for the New York-based spoken word The Listen to Your Mother Show, [www.listentoyourmothershow.com](http://www.listentoyourmothershow.com), on the grounds of the University of

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Texas at Austin on April 28, 2012 that was aired on webcam. Notable footnotes to her biography include being an extra in the film *Dazed and Confused* and teaching Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones how to two-step at a local honky tonk. Her future plans involve writing more poetry and making more art.

Austin, TX

### **Jane Steig Parsons, Inside Program Photographer, Artist**

Has worn many hats: teacher, educational psychologist, bassoonist, photographer, artist, poet, writer, dancer, wife, mother, and grandmother. Jane's life began, and nearly ended, in a small town near Spokane, WA. During her childhood, and early adulthood, Palo Alto, CA was her home, followed briefly by NYC, San Francisco, Boston and, for the last 45 years, Austin, TX. She has two children, a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law and four grandchildren ranging in age from 3-16 years of age, living in Austin and San Jose, Ca. Jane earned three degrees from Stanford and Columbia and has owned a one-person photographic business, Prints Charming Photography, since 1987. Currently, she is working on her memoirs, writing poetry, photographing, volunteering, and enjoying life.

Austin, TX

### **Kali Parsons – Youth Anthology Cover Artist**

Kali Parsons began painting in July of 2011. Since then she's created a painting each and every day. In August of 2011 she expanded by blogging daily about her paintings, life with her family, and many other random things that popped into her head. You can dip your toe into her adventures and artwork at [kaliparsons.blogspot.com](http://kaliparsons.blogspot.com). Kali lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, two teenage boys, two very large dogs, and one really tough cat.

Kali

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### **Rebecca Byrd Bretz Arthur, Cover Designer**

Rebecca Byrd Bretz Arthur is an award-winning cover designer and artist who makes her home in the Texas Hill Country. View her art online at [www.rebeccabydbretz.com](http://www.rebeccabydbretz.com) [www.rebeccabydbretz.com](http://www.rebeccabydbretz.com). Inquiries welcome at [re.creative.hub@gmail.com](mailto:re.creative.hub@gmail.com)

### **Jeremy M. Downes, Guest Judge – for the Adult Anthology**

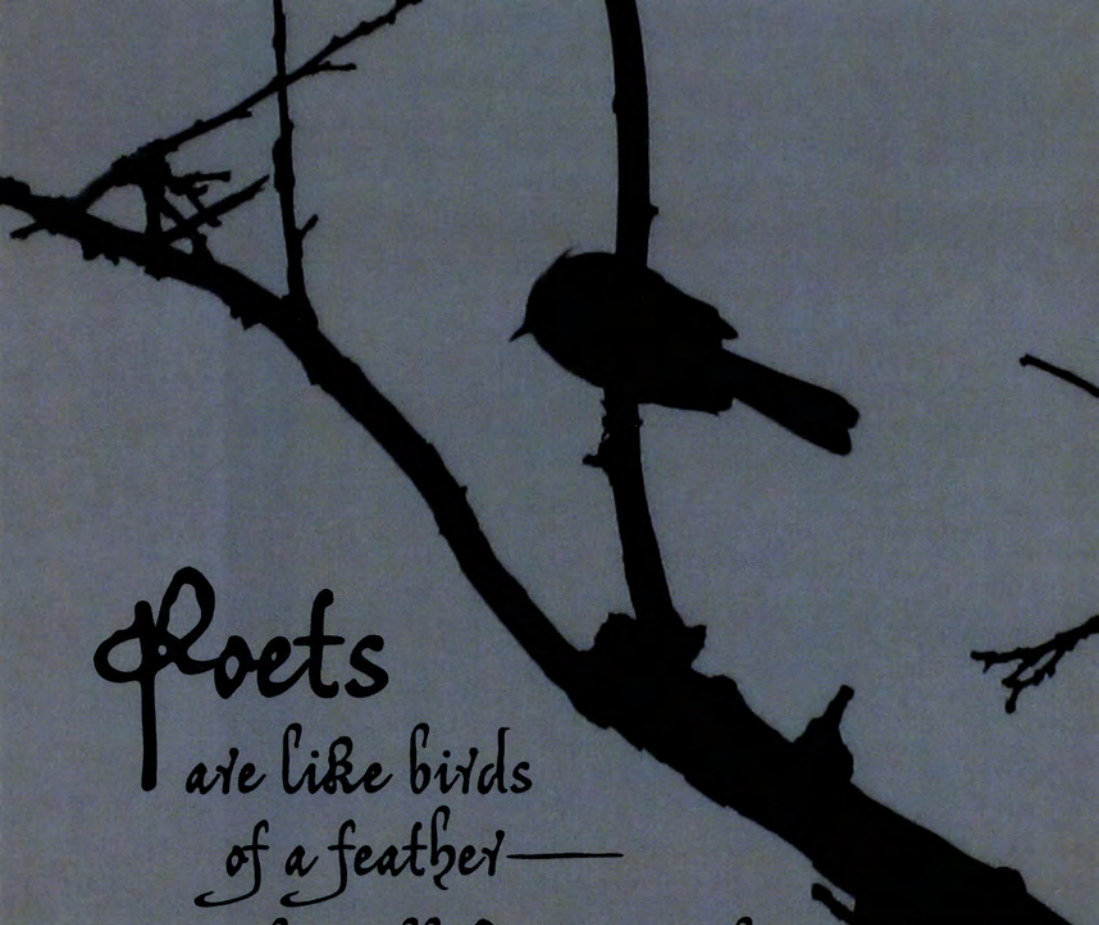
Professor and Department Chair at Auburn University, AL, Jeremy M. Downes received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A specialist in epic poetry (beginnings to the present), he is the author of two studies of epic, *The Female Homer* and *Recursive Desire*, and of three collections of poetry. He also manages the web directory *HyperEpos*, a substantial collection of links to epic texts, resources and materials, and serves as Vice President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. He is currently at work on a study of American local and regional epic.

### **Jena Kirkpatrick – Guest Judge – for the Youth Anthology**

Author of poetry and participant in performance poetry circles, Jena Kirkpatrick is a Poetry Instructor, and Publisher Writing for Positive Change. She is a tireless and dedicated teacher of children. Working with Badgerdog, she uses her gifts for children in Central TX Boys and Girls Camps and working in classroom settings with other school teachers. Through her classes, students learn to fully express their creativity, self-expression and how to find their own unique voices. She believes that children achieve true self-realization when they are accepted for who they are, what they have to say and in the words or music they create. Contact [jena@jennapoetforhire.com](mailto:jena@jennapoetforhire.com) for further details.







Poets

are like birds  
of a feather—

they all *lock* together—  
especially at the  
Austin International  
Poetry Festival!



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