

Poetry South

2013





Poetry South

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Poetry South

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Richard Jones

The Tantalus

My mother never had a drink
until she married at twenty-three

and visited her in-laws. When
the family ritually gathered at dusk,

she tried a sweetened cocktail,
but the sugar made her sick.

So my father's father took her arm,
said to her, "If you wish

to join the family in the evening,
this is how it's done,"

and graciously escorted her
to the kitchen, where he poured

a single ounce of bourbon, filled
the glass with ample water and ice,

and instructed her to take all evening
to sip her drink.

For the next sixty-three years,
that is what mother did—

a family tradition called "toddy time,"
drinking Virginia Gentleman

at five with my father,
lifting heavy Waterford glasses

that caught the light and sparkled.
I remember my parents

displayed their bourbon
in my grandfather's tantalus,

a locked oak liquor caddy
that held three square crystal decanters

with engraved sterling bottle tags.
The tantalus graced the English,

hand-carved, twist-turned legged,
walnut and leather desk

my father had found
after the war in a London shop

and had traded for
a bottle of American whiskey.

That was long ago,
in 1953,

the year I was born.
The year my mother turned eighty-six—

the year of my father's death—
she stopped drinking.

She set her glass in the cupboard.
The tantalus and trinity of bottles

are sacred objects now,
vessels for her memories,

and the old desk is the place
she sits alone, penning

in her Victorian hand
long letters to her son,

telling him to live a sober
and quiet life, to mind

and watch his own family
and their rituals and traditions,

and on some still night
to find a moment to write her back,

which I do, now that I am older,
like the aged tantalus, filled with stories to tell.

Richard Jones

Rhapsody

My widowed mother lives
in a small wooden cottage
built on dunes by the sea.
Like the tide I come and go,
and after each brief visit
to the Virginia coast, I
back out of the driveway,
wave good-bye, and begin
the long drive home.
To leave town I must cross
many bridges over inlets
and rivers, watersheds
and marsh estuaries.
Before the final bridge
that takes me across the bay
into the pine forests that climb
the Piedmont to the Blue Ridge,
I drive past the cemetery
where my father is buried.
I could turn down the lane,
kneel and touch his name
etched in the polished stone
or stand a moment beneath
the sky he loved, but instead
the most I ever do is
ease my foot off the gas
and cruise slowly past,
gazing out the open window
at the stately oaks, their crowns
trembling in the summer breeze.
The cemetery is as peaceful,
I imagine, as the Cotswolds town—
honey-colored stone church,
sheep grazing on green hills—
my father told me he saw

from the sun-streaked window
of a swiftly rolling troop train
in the first days of peace
after the war, when the world
lay in ruins and he knew
the difference between death
and what it means to live.
My father recalled high,
passing clouds, an angled
beam of light that touched
the high-pitched slate roofs.
“That small town,” he said,
“was heaven—a place
where you could be whole.”
I remember such rhapsodies,
my father’s Tidewater voice
saying, “One look was enough
to break a soldier’s heart,”
and I still recall his face,
almost beautiful as he wept,
thinking of that lost time,
telling me of a faraway place
he knew he’d never see again.

Richard Jones

Cake

After walking Sarah to the corner,
holding hands in morning snow,
and waiting for the yellow bus,
I stand in the lonely kitchen
and lean on the white counter,
rubbing my chin, eyes fixed,
resisting the temptation to eat
the last small delicious piece
of Sarah's pink birthday cake,
which on a heart-shaped plate
she has saved to enjoy when
she comes home from school.
I study the cake, illumined
by the kitchen's spotlights,
and ponder the way sweetness
excites and ensnares. I imagine
I could blame her brothers,
and with the tip of my finger,
pluck the smallest blue flower
and lift the blossom to my lips.
Then I notice the puddle of snow
melting under my boots, tracks
from the front door to the cake.
I get the mop. Soon I am mopping
the entire house, cleaning each room,
scrubbing the floors, down on my knees.

Richard Jones

Bedtime Story

*I would like to sing
someone to sleep,
have someone to sit by
and be with.
—Rilke*

My sister and my daughter
are sitting on the edge of Sarah's pink bed
and when I climb the stairs
I see they've plugged in the string of fairy nightlights
and in the warm glow
the two of them are talking.
All week during my sister's visit
Sarah has been asking questions
about her cousin, whom she would never meet
or get to know,
who many years ago,
one beautiful summer
before Sarah was even born,
drowned in the river behind my sister's house.
I stand in the hallway shadows, unseen, and listen.
"Did he cry?" she asks,
hugging her heart-shaped pillow
and I realize they are talking about me.
"Do you know what your father did?"
my sister says, her voice soft and low,
like she's telling a bedtime story.
"He lived in the mountains
and each day
he'd walk to a hidden meadow
and lie in the warm tall grass,
quiet, unseen,
clouds floating above,
and dragonflies hovering or alighting
on the grass heads ringed around him."
Sarah, her voice a little song,

says she once saw a darting
dragonfly with turquoise wings
and thought it was a fairy.
She says fairies and sprites are hard to see—
so shy and secretive.
A sparkling time fairy
could fly time backwards—
fairies can do that, she says with authority—
and make sad things not ever happen.
My sister—knowing it's late—
tucks the blanket around my daughter's shoulders.
She holds Sarah's gaze a moment longer,
then gently lets her go,
but not before telling her
how content she is tonight
to sit by and be with Sarah,
quiet on her many-pillowed bed.
I turn and walk to my room,
stand in the dark by the window.
The night outside is cold.
I know that later tonight
when my children are sleeping
my sister and I will sit up late by the fire,
sharing our memories,
telling stories like we always do,
and like the time fairies my daughter believes in,
we'll go back in time,
not to make it not happen,
but to make it happen again.

Richard Jones

Home

As I grow older,
and older still,
my wife will look at
my white hair
and say that I increasingly
resemble my father,
that elderly gentleman in a tie,
the man who could talk
all day about the war,
his years as a pilot,
life's long flight, the sky he loved.
Soon I'll look like him at the very end
in his bedroom at the cottage,
the years stripped down to nothing,
when on his white bed he lay
like the soldier he was,
his arms by his side, ready.
In his final hours
my mother and sister attended him,
anointing his brow with cool drops
from a white washcloth,
touching his arms, his hands.
From his mouth
they took his false teeth,
set them on the bedside table
next to his glasses.
In the stillness they sang
his favorite hymn—
His voice is so sweet
the birds stop their singing—
as they waited for the moment,
its arrival in the room.
That day
over the house by the ocean
the sun blazed

and noon's all-encompassing light
cast no shadow.
When he died,
my mother and sister saw
on the windowsill looking in, a bird,
not the common black-masked cardinal,
but a rare red finch,
humblest of birds,
its black eyes shining,
wings crossed behind its back,
small bird sent to gather
into the tiny hollow of its crimson breast
my father's last breath.
One moment the bird was there,
a presence;
the next it vanished into empty sky,
my father's true home,
the light,
O my beloved, O beautiful country of air.

Richard Jones

Good-bye

My aged and infirm father's health
faded over the course of three years,
so that when I'd fly to Virginia Beach
to see him in his house by the ocean,

I had occasion at the end of each visit—
knowing each visit could be the *last*—
to repeat my final farewells yet again.
In the sunroom I would take his hand

and tell him things I had never said.
He would slightly shake his head *no*
when I confessed I was not a good son,
that I was sorry, but would lie quietly

when I tried to express the depth
of my gratitude. For my father was
a good father to me, and at the end
I was able to look him in the eye

and thank him for all he had taught me.
Our last visits were surprisingly happy.
I'd said all my heart could think to say,
and we were free to enjoy the light

pouring warm through the windows,
to luxuriate in the sweet slowness of time.
I think that was his final gift to me,
his comfort with time and silence,

and I was reminded of days when
under the hanging lamp at the kitchen table
he and I built model airplanes.
We'd unfold the directions and lay out

all the interrelated parts I found
so difficult to understand or deal with,
and with perfect equanimity he'd explain—
in clear terms a boy could understand—

how the jet engine fit together,
or the aerodynamics of a riveted iron wing.
But mostly we worked in silence,
my father advising to go slow

and think things through,
then fit each piece together exactly,
telling me, sitting beside him, never to rush—
we had all the time in the world.

Richard Jones

Tribulation

Years of tribulation did not open my eyes.
I lived in a farmhouse in the mountains
and tried to create a heaven of words.
I stood under stars with arms spread wide.

I lived in a farmhouse in the mountains.
I knew silent woods and clear streams.
I stood under stars with arms spread wide,
and prayed by the lake's black water.

I knew silent woods and clear streams.
I knew the moon. I knelt by the lake
and prayed by the lake's black water,
the weight of the past a heavy stone.

I knew the moon. I knelt by the lake.
I climbed crooked stairs to a desk,
the weight of the past a heavy stone.
I'd write all night. The lamp burning,

I climbed crooked stairs to a desk,
and tried to create a heaven of words.
I'd write all night, the lamp burning.
Years of tribulation did not open my eyes.

John Zheng

An Interview with Richard Jones

Richard Jones is a poet. His books include *Apropos of Nothing* (Copper Canyon Press, 2006) and *The Correct Spelling & Exact Meaning* (Copper Canyon, 2010). His poems are published in such popular anthologies as Billy Collins's *Poetry 180* and Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems*, and he has been heard on National Public Radio. His collected poems, *The Blessing* (Copper Canyon, 2000), won the Society of Midland Authors Award for poetry. For thirty-three years he has been editor of the literary journal *Poetry East*, which celebrates poetry, translation, and art from around the world. Currently he is Professor of English at DePaul University in Chicago.

John Zheng: Poets live a life of language and use language in an honest way. When their feelings are honest, their language can be honest. Do you think it's true?

Richard Jones: First, a poet must believe that language *can* be honest. This choice, this problem goes far back, to Socrates and Plato. In this day of relativism, many who learn poetry from theory-drenched professors no longer believe that words can mean or be "honest" or represent "feelings." That's why so many poems today can only be allusive, fragmented, nonsensical, private, and narcissistic. Unbelief certainly makes the writing easier—anything goes and the more obscure the better. And why work to revise a poem? To what end? An honesty that doesn't exist?

Secondly, it's a question of what one means by using language in "an honest way." Verlaine and Frost use language differently and make different poems, both of which, to my mind, are "honest" works of art. Their poems sound different, even look different on the page, yet both are marvelous poets. It's important to remember that art is made from the stuff of technique, formal design, rhetorical strategies, and the discerning intelligence. I think of the artist who said, "I don't paint what I see. I paint what I want you to see."

All that given, yes, I believe in words. About fifteen years ago I edited an anthology of poems in translation with the title, *The*

Last Believer in Words. Sometimes I feel that way, like I'm the last believer in words. Every poet should feel that way.

"Poet." There are many ways to define the poet. One is "maker." The poet is like a carpenter. Who wouldn't want an honest carpenter? Another is "the namer of flowers." Who would want a florist or a botanist that can't be trusted, that doesn't know a chrysanthemum from a daisy? Finally, a poet is someone who stands by his or her words. Why stand by words—*give your life* for words—you don't believe in? Who would do that?

So the question of honesty is a good one. It's of the utmost importance. Yes, I stand by my words. Poetry, the Chinese say, is a temple of words. Perhaps we stand inside the words, inside the poetry, as ones who worship.

The thing is this: the final poem, which exists separately and beyond the poet, is so much more than language, or honesty, or feelings. It ultimately conveys such mystery, such profundity, that as readers of a great poem we at once doubt ourselves and find ourselves. We lose ourselves and discover ourselves, simultaneously. Poetry is the guide to a new place, what we might call a more "true" place. This, I think, is the "honest way" you are speaking of. That is certainly the path I'm on, even though sometimes I stumble, lost and blind. Trying to be true is very hard. Poetry writing is very humbling.

JZ: You begin "*OED*" with "In the dictionary one finds the word / *lucubrate*..." and end with "turning the page to find the correct spelling / and exact meaning of / *lugubrious*." How does looking up the words inspire you for a whole poem?

RJ: Words always inspire. I like to know all the possible meanings of words—denotations, connotations, obsolete meanings, etymologies. Words are the doors of discovery; words are the doors of perception. We're made of words. The mind is an engine of words. All one needs is a single word to be inspired.

OED

In the dictionary one finds the word
lucubrate, meaning "to study
by artificial light late at night
that one might express oneself
in writing," on the heels of *luctiferous*—

“bringing sorrow,” and this immediately preceded by *lucrous*, which, of course, is “pertaining to lucre” and suggests “avaricious.”

To the right of *lucubrate* is *ludibrious*—
“subject of mockery”—
and the familiar *ludicrous*—
all that which is “laughably absurd.”

And in the far right column, variations on two small words, *luff* and *lug*,
“to bring the head of a ship nearer the wind,”
and “to pull and tug heavily and slowly,”
two tiny words that describe what I am doing here at my desk late at night, turning the page to find the correct spelling and exact meaning of *lugubrious*.

JZ: You begin “Bedtime Story” with a quote from Rilke, “*I would like to sing / someone to sleep, / have someone to sit by / and be with.*” How does this quote become an inseparable part of the poem?

RJ: The opening lines from the Rilke poem put me right back into those days after the loss of my little nephew, Andrew, who drowned in the river behind my sister’s house when he was five. Those lines—“I would like to sing / someone to sleep, / have someone to sit by / and be with”—can be very potent for someone with the wound of a deep loss, the loss of someone dear and special. Some yearn for companionship and love—it’s the stuff of love poems and romance. But some struggle with loss and grief. The question for me is about “singing.” For me, the question is, can one sing anymore, can I “sing” and “be” in the world after such a tragedy?

JZ: Your father seems an important figure in your poetry. In “This Blue World” the father, who had the urgency of instruction, always asked the boy to be “checked-out with the controls.” How did the thought of father generate the poem?

RJ: Any thought of my father can generate a poem. He was an amazing man, a pilot, a hero of World War II. In the war he logged over a million miles. He survived one hundred and eighty-nine missions. The Distinguished Flying Cross hung on the wall by his bed. He understood the importance of being ready. He had a certain Zen wisdom, as if he were always telling me to be aware of the winging death-arrow, to be ready and able to catch it in mid-flight just before it pierces my heart and kills me. *All* this was my father, who was also a Southern gentleman, a kind man who spoke with a slow and soft, honeyed voice.

This Blue World

When I was a boy, my father was forever
asking if I was
“checked-out with the controls.”
“Are you checked-out with the controls?”
Before I would undertake
the smallest task—
hammering a nail,
turning a screw,
polishing my shoes—
or when I embarked on the most modest mission—
going to school in the morning
or grabbing my glove to play baseball
in a field near our house
in the failing light
of an August evening—
he’d ask the same question:
“Are you checked-out with the controls?”
As a boy, I understood his meaning,
the urgency of my father’s instruction.
A decorated army air corps pilot,
my father flew over the “hump,”
and looked down on the Himalayas.
“It was,” he said,
“like spending an hour near God.”
The controls meant the electrical panel,
the oxygen pressure gauge and flow indicator,
the cowl flap handles,

and windshield de-icing control valve handle
in the cockpit of a C-47.
It was exhilarating,
and a little terrible,
the way a skilful captain,
heedless of weather
and black bursts of flak,
could lift heavy loads
into the air above the earth.
The cloudless day we buried my father—
a perfect day for flying—
I gave thanks at graveside
for the lesson the captain tried to teach the boy,
the miracle that was my father's life,
and his hope
that I safely fly through this blue world
knowing the terror of wings, the sweet gift of flight.

JZ: Father shows up again and again in other poems of yours, such as “Home” and “Good-bye.” How were you so intrigued by the image of father?

RJ: In spite of the love we shared—my father's pride in his son, my admiration for him—there was still a great distance between us. We were very different. We came from different times. He was a man of action and deed and hope. I was a child of words and dreams and melancholy.

JZ: The red finch seems mystic with both literal and figurative meanings. It's like an angel to come and take the father's soul onto his flight to his true home. How did you come up with this bird image?

RJ: I wrote that poem exactly as it happened. Pure reportage. It was indeed unusual for a red finch, a rather shy bird, to linger at the window and stand vigil at my father's deathbed. We couldn't help but see. And isn't that what is asked of us, to see the literal and figurative meanings all around us? To be able to read the signs? To know that God is with us?

JZ: You have been editor of *Poetry East* for thirty-three years. What joy do you find in editing a poetry journal?

RJ: I like making art. I like making books. Editing *Poetry East* all these years has been a good way to learn things, a way to always be studying. Recently I devoted a feature to Rembrandt, so I had the opportunity to study the artist again, to really give him the time he deserves, to luxuriate in his paintings, to learn about his life.

Also, it is a good way for me not to fall completely into a life of solitude, which is my greatest temptation—to sit alone pondering only my own poems and writing. I still fall into that pattern, but *Poetry East* doesn't let me live that way for long. There's work to be done. I mean, the journal just doesn't make itself or fall from a tree. So when over the years and decades one reads literally tens of thousands of poems—maybe a million poems!—it's kind of hard to remain solipsistic and untouched by the world.

I guess I'd say that editing has become for me a way of knowing myself and knowing the world, at the same time. And the poems I publish—they say things I can't say in my own poems, but that still need saying. I feel at the service of something greater. The poems need to be published. Published with love and care for the poet, the poem, and the reader.

The joy? It's the joy of love and work. Work and love—they're the same.

JZ: And what joy do you find in poetry-writing?

RJ: Too hard a question! Or maybe the same answer: the joy of love and work.

JZ: Allow me to come back to the father figure. How did you reconcile the joy of writing poems about father and the reality of losing him, especially when such a loss was so painful?

RJ: The poems help me to remain close to him, even as the fact of his life fades away. They help me to see him more clearly, to see how he loved me, what he was trying to teach me, his farsighted concern for me. It helps me be a good father. It redeems the love, which doesn't die, but is passed on to my children. Thinking about my father helps me think about God, to believe in and rest in God's love, which is at once transcendent and immanent and forever.

JZ: In "Good-bye" you write "we were free to enjoy the light /

pouring warm through the windows, / to luxuriate in the sweet slowness of time” and “under the hanging lamp at the kitchen table / he and I built model airplanes,” connecting such sweet things in memory with the sadness of “knowing each visit could be the *last*— / to repeat my final farewells yet again.” How did the association come about?

RJ: Wordsworth said that memory is the ground of poetry making. I think this is often true. Poetry works in the way memory works: it connects things and brings them together. These associations of the heart and mind, memory and imagination, are natural for all of us. All people do this, not just poets.

JZ: How did you come to write “Good-bye”? Was your father still living when you wrote this poem?

RJ: No, he had passed away. But my father’s life dimmed before our eyes over the course of several years. He lived in Virginia. I’m now in Chicago. Writing the poem, I kept thinking about how he and I had rehearsed our good-byes over the course of years, each time I’d visit. It’s like living a life in preparation for that moment of death, being ready to sing one’s swan song, like the dying monk who at the final hour speaks his death poem. I think we were ready, my father, and my sister, and I. My mother’s is a different story. She lost the companion of her soul, and that’s a different test and sorrow altogether. My father has gone home, but my mother’s song, the widow’s song, goes on still today.

JZ: What do you hope a reader to take away from this poem?

RJ: The desire to be truly alive in the moment and to love others more fully, I suppose.

JZ: I feel there is always a smooth, narrative tone in your poems, especially the ones about parents. Can you talk a bit about it?

RJ: The clear narrative and consistent tone don’t come to me easily. That comes through (rather obsessive) revision. What the first draft does is point to the poem—like a finger pointing to the moon, or a distant mountain. There are koans about this: first there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is. The finger points at the moon, but there’s no moon there. So the first draft

points to the poem inside the heart; and during the actual writing *that* becomes a hoped-for poem; and after time *that* becomes, with luck, the final poem in the world. Readers only see the last incarnation, when all is seamless and looks so “natural.”

Right now I’m working on a longer poem. It’s gone through so many drafts! Not only lines are dropped, but entire passages. Not to mention shifts in character or the recasting of main ideas that are in the first draft “black” and in the final draft “white,” or some shade of gray, if you know what I mean. Ultimately it’s that balance one is seeking between trusting the unconscious wisdom and beauty of the original impulse, and a strong faith in the artistic process, the constant rewriting and re-envisioning. It’s like every draft becomes a new poem, a fresh poem that needs to be rewritten—and that can be maddening or exciting, *thrilling*, depending on which side of the bed one got up on that day. It often seems the poem will never be done. But finally it is, and one knows it is done because at last it has that “smoothness” you are talking about, like polished stone.

JZ: Do you think that poetry gives people a second chance to look at the world, reality, and their personal life?

RJ: Lord, let’s hope so.

Angela Ball

Arrangements for Eternity

Cemeteries resemble islands.
It might be nice to stay forever in one,
Like Joseph the Provider. When visited,
There is a clear envelope
In which people have left messages.
“Hello. I hope you are
Fine and having fun.”
And a valentine.

Nearby, a field in harvest.
Ready apples.
How would it feel
To be a Macintosh resting in a cart
With brothers. A close softness
That the skin begins to take, the cause
Of all trouble and confinement. “This man
Is spoiling other men.”

Though we are not
Talking about improvidence,
Joseph, you may wish you had saved the dust
To which you returned, not
To mention the water that ran
In the camp, and a list: Red pliers,
Mittens.

If you escape you could salt many things.
The book far away as you read
Its enviable long letters. The slow
Heart, thumping imaginatively, the
Interminable pleasure
Of biting another tree fruit.

Angela Ball

Ways to Attain the Simple Heart

The boy came to your house
(You were sixteen)
For some kind of club meeting.
You saved a cigarette end,
Damp, and curls of peel
From a tangerine.

Later, the accident
Of his hip brushing yours
On the bus.

He loved a girl in Drama
With a fall of her own jet hair
That could be removed,
But perhaps

You were his real love.
You put on your bravest shirt
And drove to his house
Though you failed to knock.

In college you learned Beckett
And imagined the two of you
Buried in sand, side by side,
Or inhabiting adjacent bins.

In a convalescent home now,
With spring without, glamorous
As Paris,
You contemplate a letter.

Angela Ball

Self-Contained Community, Painterly

Running out from her body, a provisional street
With signs on wheels, façades
Strung on clothesline.
A squat brown army flies
To and from her foot.
A palm reading emporium
Has rented her head, to predict
Planes of cognition, dreams
Distantly related on all sides. A floating zoo
Detains a velvet-bellied lantern shark,
Disguising itself by counter-illumination
Which can also attract a mate.

Angela Ball

Lesson of Reconnected Events

Sister: *If the pony bucks you off, you must get back on.*

After four times, she let herself stay off. Since then she has tried
to stay off,
But others push her back on. In this way, she has traveled a
measurable distance
Downward.

Sister: *Don't wear white—it exhibits the dirt.*

Nothing she is has been well concealed, whatever her garment.

Husband: *You may remain in the dusty rear.*

Would sooner have the scenery unobscured by heaving and pant-
ing.

Sister: *Always keep one foot on the floor.*

Someone kissed her underwater but her eyes were open so that she
could see the people standing at the edge of the pool.

*Dry friction resists relative lateral motion of two solid surfaces in
contact.*

*Dry friction is subdivided into static friction between non-moving
surfaces,*

And kinetic friction between moving surfaces.

Most instances are considered reconnected events.

John Bradley

The Fall of Srebrenica

In the refugee camp, one woman
when asked to describe what
happened flees. Hand on her head.

Hands behind his head, heavy feet
Upon his heavy desk, the President ponders.

For two or three hours, NATO jets
circle. A forest that resembles
an army. Army that resembles a ravine.

One survivor finds what's needed.
A sturdy tree. With her scarf, hangs herself.

Nibbling on his thumb, the President
confers. His senior staff members
nibble on their thumbs.

Near an empty vodka bottle, a UN soldier
vomits into his baby blue helmet.

In Chicago, I stand dumbly in line
at the Art Institute, anxious to view
a new exhibit of Monets.

Richard Cecil

Prayer in a Time of Mild Anxiety

There's a slight risk of weak tornados, warns
the smiling weatherman on channel 8
as power flickers, lightning trips the horn
on my next-door neighbor's car alarm. Great!
Only slight. Only weak. And brief—
he said *brief* weak tornados. Small disasters,
tiny cataclysms. What a relief!
But what if one of these puny twisters plasters
my rickety wooden house with Force 1 winds
of less than 150 miles per hour,
shatters its windows, turns it into kindling,
and kills me with its unimpressive power?
Please shield me from this despicable storm.
Let me be crushed by more impressive harm.

Kendall Dunkelberg

North Key

At the confluence
of Mississippi River
and the Gulf, islands
formed, remnants of the delta
mud from Mid-America

Oysters and mussels
made their beds in the rich silt.
The waves brought in shells
forming beaches and a ridge
that held the high tide at bay

The low islands soon
teemed with life: pelicans, terns,
gulls, man o' war birds,
white egrets, oystercatchers
herons, geese, and cormorants.

All found nesting grounds
in bulrushes and mangroves.
All found good fishing
on the oyster banks or in
shallow inlets and lagoons

Kendall Dunkelberg

Birdfall

When April's sweet breeze
becomes a cold nor'wester,
migrating thrashers,
waxwings, grosbeaks, and buntings
can be caught in nets of wind.

Worn out from their trek
across the Gulf, they tumble
through the air in search
of safe harbor, a refuge
from the unrelenting wind.

By hundreds they land
using their last ounce of strength
to reach the island.
Some make the dunes and survive.
Others founder in the waves.

In the sea, the crabs
will bury their carcasses
or they will be cast
ashore like wet handkerchiefs
that the artist finds and draws.

On land, they regroup
in small flocks, adorning shrub
and tree with flashes
of color. Together they
avoid the hungry falcon.

Their main goal, find food,
refuel for their next journey
across the wide sound.
They wait for the wind to shift,
sing a symphony to life.

Rebecca Morgan Frank

The Book of Bells, Chimes, and Carillon

I wonder about the untouched skin of a bell.
The way it swings, it is dark-marked

by the hard slap, packed melodious
wallops strung against it, leaving scars.

I want to palm it like the inside of a mouth.
My touch will choke its sound or force a call.

The chimes hold nothing; they bump
and grind, find a way to move in air, even

when the hand, the instrument is not there.
The carillon is vermillion sound,

sets its stakes as the sum of its parts.
A warning serving as the city's conductor.

Together, the bells are cold and rich, their gold
grappling and crackles thunk across highways,

fields, a train yard and whistle.
They sing a loneliness I long from.

Close the covers. Cover my ears.

Rebecca Morgan Frank

Pyre

He folded me into a paper boat and launched
me down the Providence River. Lit the match

and tossed it into my origami mast, watched me
burst into my journey. Drowning and ashing

in every breath, I held on to the letters stamped
across me. The ink doused the ignition, but words

buoyed me along. I hung from the vowels
like a monkey in an artificial jungle, swinging

as if there were somewhere to jump off
to. From the shore, other dead girlfriends

waved, as if to beckon me into their ranks.
They hadn't aged a bit, and I was all crease

and fold. I dove down to the bottom of the river
where the city's history had sunk into itself,

and the fish stared back at my intrusion.
Grief didn't belong anywhere, but I wore it

like an outraged barnacle bursting from my skin
like I was some grotesque creature made immortal.

Rebecca Morgan Frank

Earthbound

A star should not miss the earth.
Daylight should never be waited out.

These are the maxims of a chattering
angel, one who plants, digs,

batters, and sounds. The one who misses
the bus to the church, slips on the wooden

ramp, and smooths over the lumpy nails
so that no one's sweater will be caught.

The one who retrieves the hazards, the rock and pen.
These are the earthly favors. We are told

to look up, build. To level the unknown
habits of other peoples' waking.

Trina Gaynon

Wanderers

Crossing Texas in a station wagon
took days. We didn't even stop

at night, but kept moving
along the dark flat lands.

My father saw them first
and woke us. Stars fell.

Not just one at a time,
but too many, all at once, to count.

Distanced from one another—
father, mother, sisters—

we had no words for this rain
of light, never touching earth.

Just as rain drops streak sideways
along the window of a speeding car,

they burned beyond our reach
on a late summer night.

Dawn Gorman

Fisherman

On the rocks, close to the sea,
gazing out, day and night
at the island,
is a memorial cross.
Here, a fisherman stood
with his rod,
a son, a brother, a father,
out for a night's
innocuous pleasure,
some time for him,
some time to think,
be calm,
steady himself.
Then the big wave,
lost balance,
pull on the rod,
everything together,
everything quickly,
and the fall,
sharp rocks
soft skin
the nowhere-to-catch-hold-of
flash-of-the-past
everything and nothing
street light water moon water mother
the sea inside
the rush the push.
The black.
The bait box still
on the rock.

Dawn Gorman

Pig in Kapsi¹

He is alive when the cousins bring him to the village, wedged between them on his back on the motorbike seat, black legs and snout tied with string.

Alive, but with the meaning of being a pig already gone from his eyes; the old men sit in the shade and say pigs know when they are going to die.

They tie him to a tree overnight and in the morning the swallows line up on the telephone wires and a hummingbird dances brightness above him.

Death comes slowly. The old knife is razor sharp, but it is the man's first pig and he misjudges the angle to the heart, does not push deep enough.

He has one sandaled foot on the pig's head to keep it steady, careful not to let the blood splatter on his lungi². His cousin rams the blow home.

The screech is almost that of a child. Neither flinches. They carry the body to a bridge over the canal suspended by the feet from a long pole.

They pour boiling water on him, shave him; blood, mud, traces of pig vanishing through the concrete slats, leaving meat, bone, offal, fat.

They dump him on a tarpaulin on bare ground; the man slices head to tail with the same knife, quickly, before the tang of the blood stirs the flies.

Half the men from the village, the youths, the boys, in clean, impeccable clothes, sit or stand in rows, three deep, arms folded, watch the show.

One cousin has an axe and a tree stump, divides up the bones; shards fly, chickens chase them, squabble over them. Ants' feet dimple the dust.

They weigh out portions, sell a mix of everything to each of the men; some argue over the contents of their bags. The cousins take theirs as wages.

Within an hour the men are stoking earth ovens with spent corn cobs; they mix the meat with turmeric from the fields, their fingers turn orange.

After the feast, at dawn, a goat, tethered at that same spot, gives birth to twins. They cut soft green swathes of grass for the mother, she eats.

One of the kids, black with white, new knees, stares at the leaves of the banana tree, the blue sky, like a child reading an old book for the first time.

¹ Kapsi: a locality in the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh state in India.

² Lungi: a traditional garment worn around the waist in India.

Ted Haddin

Grass, Raspberries, and Milk

It's always sudden green, a whole field of grass, so green right up to a gray building with no windows. It could be a barn or a house. The grass is always long, and nothing is at home. The grandparents are somewhere, but you can't see them. It's summer, a warm afternoon that makes the green intense and fragrant. I've tried to think of what this means, always coming to me as if some meaning waits in this incredible green. The grandfather's new Hudson Terraplane (1936), a great metalwork with huge bulbous fenders speaks of earth and sky but doesn't match the car's outrageous purple. He's somewhere shining it as if Sundays go on forever. The yard beyond this grass has a garage with a fence, and raspberry bushes, red and black. I pick some of them that belong to the neighbor, a little black woman who calls me sweetly to ask if I'd like some berries with milk and sugar. Then I remember the grandmother doesn't like her and won't let me go in her house, but I go anyway. The kitchen smells warm like sweat. She is so kind, she pours the milk and loads the sugar. I remember her name, Myisha. I am little, too, just three. I remember the grass now, deep and rich, with my bare feet. Maybe the building I see is the grandmother's house. Something says I don't want to go back into it.

Ted Haddin

Frog

In Vestavia Hills, in Birmingham, you might have
walked along a quarter-mile track at evening
and been so lucky to hear a *croak* from a small
pond fed by a tiny stream. If you answered back
in frog you heard another and another all the while
you walked. It was like a secret in the shadows
of the trees where song spoke a human need.
A kind of song *he* heard, I know, to no greater
end it seems than frog had found a human friend.
We kept this up from spring to spring
and all the summer long. A frog in the city
could only be if someone thinks he belongs.
But then they came, with dozers and earthhogs
to take the trees and burn their trunks,
and shove the pond and turn the stream.
The light of the glint of the pond
was gone, and I found him flattened
in the dust of the dozer's track, his
one eye still looking up for the one time
I would see him, and say what I could.
I lifted him on a piece of newspaper
and placed him on the back seat of my car
and slowly drove him home and held him
a few moments under the persimmon tree.
The eye closed over. I decided to turn him free
so placed him in the garden among soft leaves
and plants, there, still be of use, silent and calm,
a king of frogs in the kingdom of ants.

Ted Haddin

Arvo Pert Plays from the Radio

Arvo Pert plays from the radio
Fratres, and the old cricket sings feebly
from the furnace, heat is on, he finds
himself still singing sleepily. I hear him
in the night bleeper bleep,
and the long strains of *Fratres* come
groaning in the cellos violas viols,
ascending ever so slow, linking
each groan each note old hymn in him,
a church where a crowd of people, their
dark coats come, they are about to sing
fratres, will you come fratres fratres.

Patricia L. Hamilton

Homeless

With the warm weather the white cat is back.
As I draw water for coffee at the kitchen sink
I spy it sleeping on the broken black canvas chair,

a jigsaw-puzzle-snug cat-wrap.
That tattered tail has seen better days.
Where did the vagrant shelter all winter?

Last year it simply showed up,
staking out sunny spots, or shading
under eave-shadows, aloof.

One searing mid-summer day
I set out water in a red dish, but the rascal
disdained my charity, left the drink untouched.

Later my neighbor complained the white cat cadged
his kitty's food. Who can fathom the ancient instinct
that weighs dignity against need?

The squatter stretches on its makeshift bed, then begins
its morning ablutions, licking a paw to swipe its ear,
its white fur dingy, a smudge atop its head unreachable.

Soon the old derelict will drowse again, sun-drenched,
a slack sack of bones, its breathing so soft
it might barely be alive.

Mack Hassler

Late Bearing for Our Friends the Leinonens
across the Lake

With an old trolling motor,
New battery and dreams of youth,
We set out in the canoe to cross
The lake one last time this summer.

I watched you sitting bravely
In the front and felt your trust.
But, suddenly, there was chop, and
Water and sky together darkened.
I turned the boat slowly
Into the west, faced the wind,
And hugged the shore
Back around to home.

At the start heading south,
Or maybe just a little east,
You turned and got my picture.
I do not look too old,
But woke this morning early,
Just a little off my bearings,
Wondering how many shores
Are yet to reach.

No authentic
Voyageur nor ancient wood
Runner loved this northern
Frontier as stubbornly as we,
Nor were less native.

Our discovery comes late
In life. That death we hate
Sadly is the home shore
As active lakes we still explore.

Mack Hassler

Traveling with Vergil in Northern Michigan

Our peaceful lake fronts the house.
Our little boats lie waiting at the shore
And how we got this far defies belief.
Our narrative like vaudeville wanders far
Afield. I cannot sing the canon now
And books are buttresses hiding all my work.

More than once a curious bear has crossed
Our field by the lake, looked up the hill at us,
Wondering, perhaps, who looked back.
The bear is home. We sojourn summers and think
We possibly could settle here. But the haunt
Of imagery like this we can't get off our back.

So we delegate our sons the heavy burden
For that time when our solemn oak
Goes down like Dixie in this frontier land.
They shall forge our forward path
And order movements in a lesser tongue,
Beat the drum and swear their Dad has sung.

Laura Lamm

The Pink Vase

The pink vase
with the dark pink flamingo, standing
on one leg
is gone.

It fell from the window sill
in my grandmother's stark bedroom.
The only pink thing she had.

I was six when
I put it there to watch
sunlight shine through it
to make my hands, legs, dress pretty pink,

like the women shoppers in the A&P
whom I watch by the coffee machine,
in the big picture window at the front
where the check-out girls grind the Eight-o-Clock
that smells so good I could get it by the spoonful.

I tell my grandmother I am sorry
her gift is broken.
I stare at her long little finger,
picking at the fabric of her cotton work dress.
She looks down on me
through horn-rimmed glasses.
It don't matter, she says
and sets her jaw a little tighter,
sweeps the glass onto a dustpan
she keeps by the back door, then settles in front of
the small black-and-white television that sits on the table
between the front window and the screen door.
I stand by her side.
She and I watch.

Ken Letko

River Resume

once I was a beam
of moonlight
touching the river

another time
a hoof track
on a sandbar

yet another time
a willow leaf
fallen into a rapids

want a free ride
to the ocean?
without prejudice

I provide lodging
for cutthroats
and suckers alike

with a small splash
I bring out the color
and pattern in granite

years at current
position?
a geologic epoch

though I can
be cool and quiet
on a summer day

I've drowned
more than a few
pairs of cousins

no one can step
into me
the same way twice

my thesis wears
down mountains
am I clear enough?

William Miller

My Dad and Bob Dylan

When my dad was twenty-five,
he lived in New York,
a wunderkind at Met-Life,
in training for top management.

A born salesman, work boots
and burial policies,
he sold his way off
the dirt farm, a future
behind a plough.

In the city, he worked hard
to lose his accent, dress,
drink and smoke
like the other young agents.

One night, he and three
salesmen went out for drinks,
hit the bars on Bleeker,
their doors open to the street.

In one, playing for free,
was a scruffy kid with a nasal
voice, guitar and mouth harp.

My dad listened to him sing
a kind of music he'd never
heard before—raw like country
or blues but his own.

The songs made him restless,
a call to rebel, live your own life,
not the one that money promised.

He wanted to be twenty-five
and free to go anywhere,
do anything...

At last, the kid left the stage,
and they walked back
to their hotel joking about
how easy beatnik girls
must be...

My dad was a manager
a year later, back
in Birmingham, the south
he almost escaped.

But he drank too much,
gambled, cheated on
his wives, died slowly
of cirrhosis.

Sometimes, when he
was drunk, he talked about
that night on Bleeker Street.

He saw Bob Dylan before
he was famous and heard music
that might have changed
everything.

We'd lived in a leaky, railroad
flat, poor but happy,
free as the music that played
through open doors.

Charlotte F. Otten

Plaster Creek

this creek
is no place for humans
let alone for birds

its murky slimy bottom
does not reflect
the darkness in my face

even a moonlit night
cannot illumine
what is fundamentally clay

I dream rain
that blows its sullen banks
swallows all boundaries

turns creek into a torrent
flowing from its tributaries
lapping up their frenzy

ducks bouncing
on its waves
and all that comes between us

is a great blue heron
searching for
his Ganymede

to swoop up
his cupbearer
and deliver him

to heaven

Jean-Mark Sens

Buddhist Rain

The rain pinches the end of your nerves
inside your ears occupies a lake
the front wheel offers a tête à tête with the sky
sieved through the music of the threads
boundless, no east, no west
as Buddha says distinctions people make
and then believe to be true.
Looking at the eye of the fish through its bowl
for a moment you are behind the glass within it
the rain drips at the corner of your lips—a bit salty,
your brain needs sugar to feed its electricity.

Jean-Mark Sens

Trespassed

Five pairs of eye, red and luminescent,
scampering on the top of the fence
they come from the greater dark beyond,
back streets, culverts and neighbors' yards.
In a 3 a.m. depth of sleep and dead of the night
screeching, scavenging, skittering under our bedroom window
and rummaging boisterously under the house
to stir us awaked with a demi-curse under our breath.
Mother ahead, and four little in tail,
they fret across the gate to the oak
caught in the flashlight
froze, blinded in their ascent
and scale down a tree fork
huddling their five charcoal bristled faces,
noses pointing, shoulders heaving heads at us
a bit cold and sleep bleary in our underwear
trespassers staring at trespassers
in a mutual arrest in our steps
as we ogle them close—curse and fascination
both in awe and a little bit scared, repulsed
the five in their crayon furs against the corrugated trunk
feral and human encounter
each to regress the path of our night.

Jean-Mark Sens

In the restaurant of our departure

we had to sit not very far from the door
after having been waiting the purgatory of long yelled out list
and walked ourselves in conversations around the block
as companions to the flustering gusts hunting at street corners,
arm in arm in February grey blanketing mystery.
How we placed orders with the same generalizations of desires
to specific spices and ingredients in evocations
and equivocations beyond our present conversations—
you stirred and sipped on your Colibri Cocktail
and elected Barn Yard Succulent—Aurora sauce
reduction topped with a coddled egg—
a bit transgressive as a lamb cooked in its mother's milk.
Could we inoculate throbs and pains of displacement
allegiance to the side of the bed we lie on, our embraces
and mind storytelling to give an encore to the day before light off?
You had made a parcel of all my sundry belongings
even my gardening shoes you meticulously brushed off the cut grass
something of a present to unburden your
constellations, chest, and closets.
I held you by your shoulders close and separate
as it were all you I could play the chiropractor's magic
in the single pop of your neck to the release of all your limbs—
chute of a tree and soul
and perhaps be full eye to eye circumstance in a rearview
mirror in a long traffic jam a commuter as if in the brief
eye aperture of a photographer freezes inside his model's pupils .
You made such an effort to put us into past yet off the cloth rack
the Velcro of your gloves stuck to my jacket like two empty
hand waving Au Revoir—see you across the quay
the junction of a disjunction between the what I am not—want to be
and I hold you out in the deep sight of your view.

Jean-Mark Sens

Brother Wolf

Where are they gone the wolves? Past the snowy curves of childhood tales, past the few spikes of spruces on a flat horizon, past the turn of pages in an illustrated book. Don't mistake them for wild dogs—they go unhampered over three feet of snow, their legs moving as if they spun the earth under their paws. Their furs have the blue silver of clear moons. The sharp constellations of their eyes and bright ivory pinpoints of their teeth they add to the stars. A geography of scents they follow through their nostrils and they never falter or let themselves thirst through pathless hills, vales and exiles of their steps. So follow the wolves into their yellow eyes, into your mind where a chimney curls its emblematic lock of smoke from a kitchen hearth. Brother Wolf, would not it be good to be invited behind the heavy barred door incrustated with ice, the wind battering at the narrow blind shut windows? Inside, the hosts staring through the dark slurp their soup, spoons scraping the bottoms of the bowls. You pass the snow heap, howling deep against the echo, the reverberating hollow of a white boreal dusk, and leave behind the peasants blowing over their scalding stew. You are no dog so pass your way, pass the hearsays, the fears unraveling tales of avenging cruelties, the murdering iron claws of their traps, their little red riding hoods of deception. Go your way wolf, past hungers and human angst. How come we never see you through the day?

Tim Suermondt

The Red Lantern of Ailments

So called because, in their infinite variety,
they spend the day begging and scheming
to get me to choose one of them to spend
the night in my bedroom firmly guarded
outside by the largest oak any empire, large
or small, has ever had the privilege of seeing.

Their persistence is worse when the evening
wind smoothes itself through the tree branches,
over the subway grates, and I hear them plotting,
growing desperate to the point of threatening
to kidnap the falcon I don't have, tapping their
wrists to prove how easily it could be done.

Kirby Wright

Notes above Water

Captain says Hawaii's early,
To subtract six hours
Before landing.

I'm lousy adjusting hands
On Mondays when
The one I love

Lives in tomorrow's time zone.
Broken since four,
I have avoided babies

Fearing transformation
Into Dadio,
The maestro of martinis

And swinger of belts.
My wing rips open a cloud—
Below, hunks of lava

Float the violent teal.
They step to a place
Where the walls scream.

I study fragments
Searching for meaning
Along fingers of reef,

Jagged black shores,
Into the green shallows
That drown.

William Wright

Nocturne for Apocalypse

*—to the childhood fear I've never shed, with thanks to my
grandfather, Robert R. McCammon, Cormac McCarthy,
and Barry Hines, director of the movie "Threads" (1984)*

After the food is gone, a few creep from cities,
away from the ravaged supermarkets, where every last

scrap has been snapped up, hoarded. Their hair,
an echo of smoke. Their burlap, duct-taped clothes the same

brown of every dawn and noon, the exact dun
this twilight became when concussions

thrummed earth's heart, when blinding light
and fallout fell. Nature and man collusions:

Now clouds run red as blood, hold a rain
of hair and malformed cell. A tortured dust.

Red lightning scathes the shanty towns, conflagrates
the womb. Deep in burnt countrysides

something new is born. Something black-toothed,
wraith-boned. Growling from its eyes. Dogs and engines

stab the days, where bleach-eyed children
forget the phrases slain parents strived to teach.

Why speak? Words have scalded throats away.
Nights are years. Nights grow colder as people kill

over rats, half-singed corn in ashen meadows,
the freshly fallen bodies of their own. Summer's

snow bleeds over the ridge: Something grins
behind the wind, something that will never speak

its name. Syllables shatter in the heatless fires
of nomadic camps, these huddled lost to fits and fevers,

to crazed armies that close in from every distance,
their own fires dappling dead farms. And if

people love here, as some must, that love is never
spoken: Here, in the kingdom of skulls, the skeleton

of this scorched barn holds a couple together in the straw.
They are too weak to smile. Tonight, they will dream the same

dreams as they clutch each other's gauntness in the dark.

David Wyatt

Independence Day

None of my friends is wearing a straw hat,
afraid the straw, once night forces stars awake, will catch fire.
On an ordinary day, not so much soul-searching,
with or without a flag in the room
or near the bandstand: supposedly,
an ancient tree, a founding elm, stood
where tuba players now wait for marching orders.
Amid leaf-dapple of a surviving gingko,
they tune and re-tune their horns, all notes
inching toward a parade.

I fell off a roof one makeshift Fourth,
my parents separated, my Uncle Clyde,
a beer in each hand,
emerging from the house in time to see the landing,
no remarkable injury but a torn shirt
of mountains and rivers, at the height of summer.

David Wyatt

". . .Into the old lost seasons"

—Yusef Komunyakaa

All the fallen leaves, the bruised clouds
retaining rain, the several marigold blossoms
like tarnished uniform buttons, plenty of smoke
in the air from the first fires before the deep
cold sets in.

Miles and miles of turbans on the street, out of feverish dreams.
A dislocation, when sirens are strange bird-calls
at sunrise.

The woman who is not there, a mother or a second wife,
speaks nonetheless. Into the world

go other conversations which haven't taken place; it
may seem, upon waking, and asking,
that this is foolish.

The crowds at the temple door are smaller now,
believers on new paths toward darkness,
as if toward the old paradise.

Notes on Contributors

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Laura Lamm is a retired theatre arts director/teacher who is writing seriously for the first time in her life, noticing the specific things that make up her losses, longings and loves. She teaches English skills to the provisionally accepted freshmen at Methodist University.

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William Miller lives and writes in the French Quarter of New Orleans. He has published five collections of poetry and twelve books for children.

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Jean-Mark Sens has taught culinary classes at the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute. He has published poems in magazines in the U.S. and Canada and a first collection, *Appetite*, with Red Hen Press.

Tim Suermondt, the author of two full-length collections: *Trying to Help the Elephant Man Dance* and *Just Beautiful*, has published poems in, *Able Muse*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Blackbird*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Stand Magazine* and *The Georgia Review*. He lives in Cambridge with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

Kirby Wright was a Visiting Fellow at the 2009 International Writers Conference in Hong Kong, where he represented the Pacific Rim region of Hawaii and lectured in China with Pulitzer winner Gary Snyder.

William Wright is author of five poetry collections, including *Night Field Anecdote* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2011) and *Bledsoe* (Texas Review Press, 2011). He is also series editor of *The Southern Poetry Anthology* and founding editor of *Town Creek Poetry*.

David Wyatt has published poems in *Prairie Schooner*, *Northwest Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East* and *Poetry*. In 2006, he received a fellowship from the Nebraska Arts Council. He lives with his wife, Susan, in Omaha, NE.