

The background of the cover is black, featuring several white, hand-drawn style curved lines. One large arc starts from the top left and curves towards the right. Another arc is positioned below the title, and a smaller one is at the bottom. The text is centered in the upper half of the page.

Poetry South

2010

Poetry South

Issue 2 2010

Yazoo River Press

The logo for Yazoo River Press, featuring the letters 'YRP' in a stylized, bold, white font on a dark grey rectangular background.

Yazoo River Press
14000 Hwy 82 West, #5032
Itta Bena, MS 38941-1400

Poetry South

Editor John Zheng

Associate Editor Claude Wilkinson

Art Editor Ben H

Poetry South is a national journal of poetry published annually by the Yazoo River Press. The views expressed herein, except for editorials, are those of the writers, not the editors or the Yazoo River Press. *Poetry South* considers submissions year round. Submissions and queries must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope in order to guarantee a return or reply. No previously published material will be accepted. *Poetry South* is not responsible for unsolicited submissions and their loss. Subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years; the foreign rate is \$15 for one year, \$30 for two years. All rights returned to authors after publication. We request *Poetry South* be credited with initial publication. Submissions, queries, and subscriptions should be addressed to The Editor, *Poetry South*, 14000 Highway 82 West, #7242, Itta Bena, MS 38941-1400 or by email to poetrysouth01@gmail.com. Visit *Poetry South* at www.yazooriverpress.com

ISSN 1947-4075

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Angela Ball

Showing the Flag

Stop the bone leaning against me, please. If we're to
Understand change

We must have some. Instead of windows and doors,
Children should draw the stairs

That jump from under. As in Mexico,
Our cantinas should provide electrical shocks

For two dollars. As in France, our pharmacists should certify
Which fungi can be consumed. All the lovely clouds

We have seen should be repatriated
Along with the archaic charm
Spilled in the harvest.

Angela Ball

What I Remember

Johnny Mercer said,
“I remember you, and when the angels ask me
To recall. . .”

I hope no angels ask me to recall
Anything. At least not by name.

Yesterday, the ice cream boss
Asked me to remember to pick up
Some cones. I said I thought he made his own.
It’s not that hard. He asked me to remember
My place.

I remember Jayne Mansfield. Her breasts
Something she wore all the time with little
Difficulty. She rubbed my friend’s head once, for luck
During a number.

I remember Joe Brainard’s *I Remember*.

I remember sitting in my parents’ office
And listening to records. A heater like a little grotto.
Perry Como singing, “I believe for every drop of rain that falls...”

The lower leg remembers to jump
When hit with a rubber mallet. This is called
Health. My memory is a lazy mongrel
Who licks my feet, a beggar.

Angela Ball

Dear Concerned

Dear Concerned,

I have written several sentences towards the lake, though the sentences keep breaking down, breaking laws, braking for fire engines, which should be called “water engines.”

The lake has a rowboat containing a woman in an overcoat, a scarf tied under her chin, as was the unflattering style after WWII. She has been written about often—her neurasthenia, her early brushes with brushes, her desire for fish and lack of tackle. In fact, I have been waiting in line for quite a while. When at last she reopens for business I will move quickly towards her.

Meanwhile, a turtle begins talking, “She was a Duchess. Married a Duke. We turtles aren’t allowed to marry. A strain on the infrastructure, they told us.”

Angela Ball

Beauty Is Not Big

“The beautiful never hurry,” Fitzgerald said.
But the sky left in a hurry.
Popeye fought an alligator
In a whirl of hurry. The alligator fell to earth
As luggage. Popeye
Never left town. He was too proud.

I had an alligator like that inside me.
A pain that was taken care of far too quickly,
With a pair of hands
Dusting each other smugly.

I almost drank
A mosquito hawk. It dried out nicely
And flew, trailing the delicate bones
Of its gown.

Kevin Brown

Wiping Her Feet on the Doormat of Grace

She has come back again, crying
out for your forgiveness, despite the heresies
of her heart, despite her installing idols, raising
them to your rivals, and her using your name
in vain, using it both to beg
for blessings and to call
down curses on herself and others. We stand by
and watch and try to warn, try to play prophet,
pointing out that she is the Jezebel to the
Jehovah of your affections.

She has come back again, crying
out for your forgiveness, and you wait
to welcome her once more, leaving us,
the supposed prophets,
disappointed and puzzled as to where
the limits of your
love might lie.

Susana H. Case

Three Thousand Days of Evil Tongues

On the steps of the white limestone
Mosteiro Dos Jerónimos in Belem, away

from the talk of presumed friends, I pose
for you, a tight smile. Bundled in a fringed shawl

wrapped around a thin black leather jacket—
I bought them to look hip. Now, I try not to squint.

If I were not your wife, would you choose me now?
Hazy, hard to see the digital photo we debate saving,

as we resist the glare in a shadowed entrance,
the south one with coral and sea shells.

Inside, built from pepper, the Manueline cloisters,
profits of the spice trade, where Luís de Camões

is buried. He was targeted with gossip
for a love affair, described his stay in Lisbon

as three thousand days of evil tongues.
There are fresh calla lilies on his tomb.

*If there had been more of the world, they would
have reached it. Would we?*

What else is there to say? If I were not your wife,
after all the hurt, would you choose me now?

Susana H. Case

Killing Me Softly

So you want to learn to play the acoustic guitar,
he said to me, all teeth and spark,

the second string band guy
whose fingers could do anything

in the dark of my bedroom, so thrilled, enthralled,
impaled, slain I became. He was the guy

I'd dreamed of—turnkey love. The tune
of screaming more-more-more lit a metallic silver

path to heaven. Well...love
fell on the way up,

a clunky sofa pulley-hoisted on a frail rope
maintained only by me. I was so tone deaf,

off key, in the about-to-change world
in that moment before HIV, PCP, 2C-B,

CDSC, growing-bigger drift of
the I want my I want my I want my

money money money money money honey
club drug decade—and did I mention a gulf war?

Not him—when he strummed my turned-on life
with *his* changed song, more-more-more turned

material as stone—he went with the flow, left
for Boston and his MBA degree.

Listen, it was 1980
and Reagan got elected

and very quickly
everything went down the crapper.

Susana H. Case

Ramón Llull and the Cancerous Breast

He says he wants *to die on the high seas of love*,
burning hot and happy.
He can't transgress the three-mile limit.
At first, he's all juiced up with sex,
poetry. But, it's a hard pillow of silence
—she's already taken.
Impossible suffering.
Savage, twisted sheets. Dry skin
at the hinge of his mouth.
She might kiss him,
if God were not speaking.
A universal algebra of everything
accelerates the dawn, its noise and static.
God, the great comedian, emerges
from the gauze of fading stars to expound
on the logic of love, hisses in her ear,
says to invite him to her attic, bare
her blemished breast.

Exploding into supernovae,
he turns from the wreck of her cancer,
Ramón, Doctor Illuminatus—
the fear, tyranny of sexual longing;
better to throw himself
on the fustian pile of licentious poets,
not on the heap of the repelled.
He'll wander wilderness for the next nine years:
the beauty of women...
has been a plague and tribulation
to my eyes.

Susana H. Case

Not Fade Away

I'm losing sleep over the vanishings.
One morning, my shin is gone.
Yesterday, an ear.
Like missing persons—
I must wait twenty-four hours
to file a report.
There's you, diminishing too, in parts.
Does a lover's love not fade away?
An elbow over there
by the radiator.
I'm watching carefully.
The dog's chewing on a piece of you
as if there's no tomorrow.

Ted Haddin

Handwich

I walked the park to make amends.
All dogs are my friends.
The couple came with other ends,
one ahead, that sent their dog aleash.
The other, friendly neighborhood peace—
so they told me later,
when someone had to call the police.
The blood flowing from my hand
made them understand.
A little *Buchon Frise* had leaped
across the walk to gash my hand.
The owner held the other end.
He yanked it like a band, that made
the cut all the more a rut.
I wouldn't have written about this sadly,
if I hadn't been bitten badly.
I was only helping myself to walk lately,
when this critter crunched my bones straitly.
When I had just eaten my own sandwich,
a dog decided to have a handwich.

Ted Haddin

Shoveling

The long handle goes into gravel,
the man next door on his pickup
pitching shovelful after shovelful
into a wheelbarrow makes me hear
the old scrapings and heavings
of shovels in the street, the mixed
clanging of shovelhead and pavement
till only dust rises and then remains.
They're still going off ten shovels
at once one after another in a bank
of sand and gravel to make a road
from the prison door. But this grating
I hear comes over and over, a sound
accompanied by a little fear. It was
when I sank the shovel in the earth
for the last time for her or him,
waiting for the dust to clear,
a scraping, a thud, a last thrust
to somebody's final rhythm.

Ted Haddin

Lines for Maurice McNamee, S.J. (The Dream That Catches On)

There I was, at the Jesuit Residence,
out on the Diamond, playing center field.
I could see the pitches as they rose or curved
toward the plate. It was the freshest of green
as all around 'twas just beginning of spring.
Father Joe Knapp had gone out already.
Then Father Mac came up, his usual smiling self,
and I just heard him to the catcher,
"It's going up there," and he planted his cleats
firm in the batter's box. When that final pitch came,
he made a mighty swing, his shoulders rising,
his game leg straightened with the bat,
and I saw a ball coming up over the Diamond
rising in my direction and I prepared to receive it,
but I had no glove and the ball was turning
marvelously fast and went up over my head
out of sight. We weren't playing the usual way.
For some brief seconds the sky had McNamee
written all over it. The game was over,
and somebody had won.

Mack Hassler

The Building Inspector and I

Sue and I were at breakfast when Bobby came by to get me.
The site was raised since towers seek the high ground.
We could see the Plains beyond Hutula's farm in the mist.
Three Minnesotans, who resembled each other more than Finns
But claimed no relation, had cut up the old field to plant
The modern marvel of a cell tower. One had his thirteen-year-old
Son along to teach him, he said, to stay in school. I learned a lot
Watching Bobby inspect the site. The ancient ritual
Of generation, of construction where what we build
We build to last. But driving out, he said that years ago
He had roofed the old Visuri farmhouse we passed,
An empty shell in need of a lot of paint. We came down
The hill and I mused again how lucky we are that we can
Build, that decay and disrepair and entropy, though clearly
Nature's law, are not our only rulers. We small men pick
Each other up to make inspections, to issue permits on our own,
To build the towers to give us bars that generate faster even
Than the thistles in my own field. Maybe just utopian
Optimism. But I did photograph it so that I am sure
Where to ground my own tower of hope and anchor
It in new mud, as Bobby calls the cement they will pour.

Kathryn Jacobs

Closing Ranks

A wing-formation, clustered like a dance—
and then you lose one, and you feel a gap,
like moth-holes in a carpet. Spiderwebs
with stones flung through; a rupture, dangling threads.

We close up ranks, of course. But as in war,
the lost leave surface waves like rippled glass,
so that the light cries through us. Don't tell me

you can repair the carpet, patch the web,
replace the broken zippers, pop the seals
on callused-over insides: maybe so.
But every hit you take, you circle in
a little tighter, with a dragging sense
of scraped-out pumpkin strings. Design remains—
elongated, like squash-smiles. So much strain.

Charles S. Kraszewski

The Pacific

She always remains the same as when you saw her first:
Brown as the murky swells beneath the fishing pier
near Crissy Field, so that when the harbor seal
glides up to gaze at you with his doglike mug,
his quiet snout, before it breaks the water's skin,
is pasty and indistinct,
like the face of the departed on the double-exposed
sepia daguerrotypes pedaled by old psychic frauds.

Or such a brilliant cyan, bleeding into cobalt,
with creamy froth ringing the black rocks,
that when the old Navajo smith
at his table near the dry latrines in Arizona
shows you a turquoise pendant set in silver,
her eye flashes at you from across the dusty miles.

Star of the Sea, pray for them
whose Pacific is a one way street with buskers,
taffy shops and freak shows,
where baggy pants stroll insolently on the crosswalks
flipping the bird at impatient motorists;
whose Arctic is part of the directions
to the nearest Harris Teeter.

Charles S. Kraszewski

Terminat Auctor Opus

One warm evening in May,
we walked along the white-paved embankment of the river,
passing children throwing breadcrumbs at the ducks.
Then we heard the frantic splashing.
A little mongrel, with half an ear bit off,
sucked past by the river's wash,
paddling in terror next to the scummy stone kerb
a foot too high and slippery.
I held your hand and stood there dumb,
watching him struggle past
until an old man in beret and with walking stick
bent down on arthritic knees
and fished him out by the scruff of the neck,
unmanning me with a wink and a smile.

Rodger Martin

Lullaby for My Mother

After half a century, it's time
to sleep, to turn, hand-in-hand from that corn-
filled summer, to turn from that stroll along the lane,
fields flush with stalk and silk. Time to turn
toward tonight, the stars, and an ancient guitar
strummed by a tall and bearded, balding man
from Italy, stooped like his Appenines
or my Appalachians, his fingering precise
as both our mountains first spring shoots—
tones like the gurgle high above of melted ice
finding its liquid way to the valley
greening below. Time to let go,
lift the tiny finger grasping yours,
those delicate hands you lay on the ivory
ridge of your piano, each key a thrush's call,
dawn and dusk, your singular note
arcing upon the evening velvet,
lingering, lingering, gone.

Larry Marshall Sams

The Art of the Prose Poem

Having written a grand total of twelve prose poems and read *Great American Prose Poems* (ed. David Lehman), I now on this subject can blow notes toward the right margin, one of the main demarcations of the medium. On a challenge, presumption (I hope not arrogance) will often override good sense, much the way a steamroller compresses smoking asphalt to pave a highway.

Prose: forget the line. Thought, energy, and time whoosh off in a trombone fart if the prose poet tries counting the number of characters in a printed line of the magazine she sends the poem to or tries to set in the left and right margins absolutely to control the line. A composer may control notes the trombonist plays, but the skill, character, and intent of the player will lift notes from page and into individuality, and when improvisation begins, the notes remain only the base. My handwritten line here on a legal pad differs from a line on my computer, which differs from a line on the printed, published page. Flexibility is one message of the medium. Let the notes unfold to the right margin and toward the bottom of the page.

Marshal diction, syntax, detail, paragraph, rhetoric, and structure. The trombonist's notes may equal multiple truths; if the player cannot assemble the truths into expressive, significant structure, he does not create art. Beauty lies stillborn. No beauty, no ultimate truth.

The border should enclose a logical or metaphorical assertion—the start; submit the assertion to the development of right notes; and end with a thoughtful coda that directs the listener to feature the network of links through the poem: then the prose poet has applied the principles of rhetoric and art. The block of song lives in beauty.

I have never witnessed bird flight without birds, so I do not expect to mark a prose poem without words. Press down on the words to mold them into the functional sentence. Macadamize the sentences into the thoroughfare that the poem must develop down the page. Meaning precedes being; the poem, thus, cannot be if it does not mean: con-

trolled rhetoric produces meaning. As the versifier Dickinson teaches the prose poet, no difference separates syllable and sound. The song communicates only as clearly as its notes strike the eardrum of the listener, who listens himself and participates in forming the poem.

Larry Marshall Sams

Cashman's Café

To venture in with friends provides delectable sustenance for the journey. Whether sablefish, lamb, duck, or bison—the fine cuisine wires everyone around the table into the glow.

To grind the savory food kindles the compartments of mouth and stomach; everyone chews time into the mixture, so that the Café's gleaming corners return a currency.

To wield the cutlery exposes the plate, fills the stomach with glow, and clenches the body's capacity for the necessary steps. An elegant strength encases everyone who consumes the food.

To depart Cashman's opens the dissonance of horns, the squall of a siren. People outside rasp the well-being of everyone transporting the restaurant's glow, but the selfsame glow pays everyone to bowl along through time to the place where streetlights end.

Larry Marshall Sams

Mirrors

I never reflected—pro or con—much about mirrors until I landed before fifteen feet of them in my fraternity house. When I observed some guys locked in on their visages—marveling, eyelash-batting, moueing, simpering, cocking heads to find the choice angles of benefit—I knew I had to mugwump vanity. Jimbo Buford without strain could waste a half-hour, scoring his hair with parts back and forth across his noodle, gazing into the deep orbs of his eyes.

Years of coast-guard restrooms, sporting-events restrooms, airport restrooms, et al.—wherever men assemble in numbers—confirmed my epiphany in the old frat house. Mirror-loving men stand among us, and a fear seems entwined with their love: a fear that tearing themselves away from the images in the bright frames will rip their flesh, their self-love, and their psyches.

Early on, I took out a policy with myself to spend as little time as possible in front of a mirror; shortly, I added a rider to avoid eye contact as much as possible. I own that I noosed myself with a tie almost every day of my working life and that adequately molding the knot required observing the tie in a mirror. My strategy ever called for fastening my eyes onto any task, completing the task in short order, and tooling on down the boulevard of being-in-the-world.

I concur with the dictum of celebrating every tatter in one's mortal dress, but why would anyone want to dwell upon the mutations in a mirror, while time edges back, greys, and thins hair; increases the bagginess of Bogart-Camus eyes; and develops freckles, moles, rashes, keratoses, and cancer along skin? A person noting the changes and dancing on, rather than poring over them in the mirror, lengthens the time for celebration.

A mirror, with “sufficient undiffused light,” can form a “true picture”—albeit reversed and therefore once removed from truth. That his image—when Narcissus attempts to embrace it—again and again shivers, vanishes, and returns corroborates how devious the mirror

image can be; that an inability to hold and to know the image wears away his life verifies the lethal threat.

So a person might in a utilitarian way employ a mirror as a device to accomplish tasks and to locate himself in the world, but transmuting the mirror into a silver fountain of egoism risks sinking the person into an idleness that thwarts meaningful effort. Besides, the given of human fallibility does not mesh with admiring oneself for an age in the mirror, regardless of the image returned. Mugwumping long, vain self-adulation bends a person back onto the right avenue.

Jean-Mark Sens

Cracked Clay Pot

with two ear-handles,
round and lipped.
She explained how it cracked
refusing to conform to the strength of her hands
one overlapping the other, then parting, splaying from her palms,
fingers fanning over the wet clay for height and roundness.
Rebellious in the kiln, the pot bubbled, blistered
pigments flared inexplicable colors—
night cyan with a burst of red star shone in the glaze
and then from the blaze to the coolness of the room
it serrated itself into two perfect twin pieces—
something of a grin curving around the belly, from ear to ear
magic of opening a pot half in half
and closing it complete again
a rent the light comes through
for an instant out of the dark whole and sole.

R. Allen Shoaf

Coop

It was old, dingy, smelly, and felt so
rickety, but the roof was sound.

Sometimes I'd hide from the rain in there,
and listen to the hens cluck their displeasure.

An even ten Grandpa kept, into his 80s,
and every morning he ate fresh eggs, toast

dipped in milk, black coffee, and too much salt.
When I was six, he took me with him one day

to collect the eggs and showed me how to shoo
the chickens off their nests.

How warm the eggs were as I laid them each one
gently in the basket just as he said.

Walking with him back to the house, I carried
the basket as he held my hand.

As usual, he moseyed along
and didn't say much.

R. Allen Shoaf

The Crack

Quinci si può veder come si fonda
l'esser beato ne l'atto che vede
non in quel ch'ama, che poscia seconda
Paradiso 28.109-111

*Thence can be seen how is founded
being beatified in the act that sees,
not in the act that loves, which comes after ...**

Her China plate he gave her long ago
Remains with me still—distant memory
(I was only nine)—because of the crack
She asked me to find with my younger eyes.

It was visible, although very fine
(Like paper cuts, only seen when they bleed).
The purple filament gave it away,
Serpentine within Victorian white.

“Yes, ma’am, here it is.” She told me to mark
Just alongside it with a lipstick stub.
She held it up to a furious squint,
Shrank (I can hear her sob), then slivered them.

* (My translation, very literal, almost word for word)

Margo Taft Stever

Step-Mother

Pricked by the yellow pinpoints of stars,
her wolf children howl in the night.
Homeless, following crumbs, they burrow
into caves of dying bats, barely warm.
Needles of pine trees draw their blood.

Always brash, rash, the step-
mother seizes rice,
corn, the family's fodder.
Don't step on a crack—step on
a step-mother, break her back.

The step-mother's fangs lengthen
in moonlight. Eating toads, she lives
in a mushroom forest. A poison comb
under her black cape taints apples for orphan
girls, seven feral children, all language forgotten.

The step-mother is evil, marked
by the blood of her husband's children.
She climbs into the other's shoes.
Wrench, crack, break her back—step
on a step-mother, step on a step-mother.

Margo Taft Stever

Ruined

There's not much to do on a garbage truck
except back up, go forward, hang on
or see how far you can go
without holding. Some garbage
is heavier, but most weighs the same.
After a while, you don't even smell it.

Maybe he wasn't holding on.
We were backing up.
The truck lurched. The back wheels
missed his body (from the cab me and Jesse
couldn't hear a thing), but the front
wheel ran right over his head.

Sometimes I think that wheel
like the earth goes
round, crushing
the life out of everything.
The ambulance came.
They checked for a heartbeat.

Right after the accident,
Jesse was acting like he'd been hit.
He was hollering like I never heard.
No one could talk to him.
They took him to the hospital.
Bet he'll never drive again.

Katsue Suzuki

Mother

All day long,
the girl listened,
elbows at the windowsill.
The rain came
and brought Mother's
high heels ticking.
Waterdrops,
like crystal marbles
clicking the pane.

The gate opened,
the girl ran to the door.
Mother was in pink,
a doll in one hand,
hard chocolate
in the other—
Mother's hands
unwrinkled
like the doll's
plastic skin.

Then one morning
the girl opened the door.
She saw nothing
but a balloon,
clinging to an antenna
like a lost child.

Now the girl is thirteen.
The window's clear.
She sees a woman
in a pink dress, her head
leaning on the broad shoulder
of someone's dark coat.

Katsue Suzuki

Attachment

Overhead, I hear noises, then
nothing. Around the ceiling's weak light,
dead moths.

Now, I feel your breath
so close to my cheeks—

Under the familiar weight,
I see the dark blue in your eyes
flowing over my body
with your hands. You want

proof of the first move
below my naval,
open my legs as if turning pages
of my diary.

You move like a doctor
lifting a paper sheet
and touch the dryness
between my thighs, the shadow
creeping into our years.

Katsue Suzuki

Self-Portrait

I choose a male stylist and ask him
to cut my hair
above my shoulders. Really?

he asks. That's fine, I won't regret it,
this is just hair, I say,
it's going to grow again.

When he washes my hair, I remember
your hands. You did this a lot. You
loved to see me all wet,

my tight curls loosening with water.
But now I want to cut you off.
Cool wind around my neck.

At home, I rinse my hair and body
with hot water, dry my whole self
with a white towel. Then,

watch how I am. I am comfortable,
I say, drinking cappuccino
without sugar.

Meredith Trede

The Willowware Sings

A muted tune
through the attic's
cedar walls:
set us free,
set us free.

The painted birds, lovers
parted, reborn
to fly wing to wing
on the pattern: bridge,
brook, weeping willow.

In one dimension,
they can't see beyond
the glaze, blue
and white, wing
to wing, white and blue.

The chorus carried
by a hope chest, hats,
pastel prom gowns—all
kept from the prodigal
years of time gone.

The mold of dust
will quiet the hum,
dimmed sight damp
the rest. Who will
sing? Who will see?

Meredith Trede

In His Line of Sight

Behind the sunken, shattered orbits
of his eyes, only the memory
of sight lives, so many

years without vision have curled
the neural pathways, light
arcs inside: her first

pirouettes revolving through time,
an older orbit on its curved
path in space around

her sun, his sculpted reflection
diving off a Hudson River
pier, the early promise

to fly her to the moon, cascades
of jitterbug, the last nights
of waking up alone.

Philip C. Kolin

Her Handwriting

She wrote neatly like a linotype machine
Symmetrical, cadenced, perfectly proper
On the line, balanced, but just below

Her characters cried crooked tears
Words with divided letters, broken
Sentences that scribbled her "Help me" messages

On her face. A blindfolded smile
Lies covering any syllables of discomfort.
Her eyes, though, were cataracted with memory's madness.

On the way to the post office her feet mumbled
Through a double crossed life, jilted betrayal
After betrayal why write at all

Until she blotted her birth certificate
With blood drawn, so neatly drawn,
From her veins.

Dan Morris

Lake Byron

A killdeer, in hysterics, paces
the shoreline. Turtles submerge,
abandoning a stump. I walk closer

to the bank. The sun, like the turtles,
veiled by water. I point at the dragonfly
in a holding pattern above a ripple

on the surface. If my finger
were a line it would pass
through the dragonfly and intersect

the egret standing in the shallows
on the opposite bank and I say
ecocritical. The cars on Hardy Street,

beside this pond, start to move. Clouds
dissipate. And here on the bank
bubbles rise from those uncertain turtles.

The killdeer still screams. A car honks
as traffic pauses. The egret stares.
Sweat beads on my face.

Dan Morris

Thimble

On the edge of the porch,
a woman sits, darning. And in
the yard, chickens peck the dirt
for seed and grit, going about
their daily tasks. In the midst
of rethreading the needle,
after finishing the elbow
of her husband's shirt, the tin thimble
releases from her left thumb, falls down
each subsequent step until it comes to rest
in the yard. A white bantam picks it
and eats it. Down from the porch,
the woman grabs the bantam's neck,
its plumed tail passing in front,
the final vision of its life.

Jeffrey Tucker

Rubbing Wisteria on My Forehead

After Kimberly Johnson

I run among spring-loaded wisteria
and think *bamboo is a pox*,
the way it hides a blue jay
and never stops growing.
Really: what always grows?

On second thought: what doesn't?
See that tree branch, now a woven ghost of web
pocketing flies. See also: appetite,
or the wisteria, verbing perpetual.

Even my soles, wasting with every stride,
still make this road.
Give or take one hundred years
me and red Yazoo clay could line the Trace
to Natchez, to the river.

Jeffrey Tucker

Gustav

*Hattiesburg, Mississippi
September 2008*

Our hurricane is dapper in approach,
a cummerbunding stretch of white-on-black
in ribboned windage raking east, then back
along a westward highway. Our reproach
appears in billboards slashed: a gap-faced coach,
a redivided lawyer. The cars, packed
to bursting on their contraflowing track.
When we are fled and gone, a ruling roach
will take these plastered walls and decorate
in hues of pinestraw, Mississippi vine,
the mildewed carpet rotting quick to brown.
I dispossess myself; I contemplate
the evenings blown in placid, blind recline.
Who really owns this place? Look up. Look down.

Greg Weiss

Does Every Song Get Rote?

I just saw Bobby “Blue” Bland play for the first time up at a blues festival in Greenville. He didn’t play “Turn on Your Lovelight” or “Ain’t No Love in the Heart of the City,” but did croon “Members Only” to great approbation. He wore a black silk vest over a starched white shirt, looked good. I was eighteen when my friend Tom, a blues fan, told me that Bland had recorded the original version of the Grateful Dead’s “Turn on Your Lovelight.” He, and soon I, preferred Bland’s. But when Bland came to Madison a few months later, Tom said that he’d seen him in Milwaukee a few years ago and that Bland really couldn’t sing anymore, that he kept going “——,” as though violently, but almost silently, clearing his throat.

William Wright

Trumpet Creeper

1.

June light comes again
and again without remorse:
Pollen rummages the blonde scalps
of spent deciduous hour after hour
until two sycamores puffed open by the wind bend
over the creek in twin green flames. Lacertilian armies
raze the garden and the yard's fringes,
flares for ruby-throats, bees.

Around the bowed trunks the loam shoots forth
lush feelers, sprung broad then clustered,
pink star-trails drooped at the stalk
and bursting
now to hum a song I almost hear.

*

Coiled red mouths, they bloom beyond the shed
into unhinged greenness,
brighten, pump, swell through everything,
fall flaccid,
foiling their own morphology.

All spines suffer their histories, blossom-lattices
formed from water
in microfossil plumes,
when great black smokers
billowed up, kelp-like shifts,
fields of ducts, white worms, smokestacks—
a trillion trillion cellular divinities.

Preglacial, they shift into the woods and out again,
coil and articulate
deciduous nooks, flaunt the seasonal genesis:

vast gasps of light and air,
power of galaxies held forever in the lungs.

*

After June rain, I turn my back to the animals, the hush-
hush metaphors—abandon a green too brilliant
and face the black interstices of the tree-wall.

I feel the imminent collapse, the mass,
vibrissa crowding the ribcage,
my skeleton transformed under
the leaf-kiss, deep earth
watered down,
gourd unwrapped like a gift.

*

Heaven is neither lamb nor lion: Heaven
is symmetry's absence,
a trumpet creeper's seedpod
drained down the dead man's throat.

Strands and stalks expand
beyond order, uncontainable,
pierce thistle and stone:

Whittled to hair and bone,
the beast rolls its leaf-lobed head,
howls new identities.

2.

Summer sky an old onion.
Over the fence flares of pink trumpets.
Bees wheel about their coral bells, fly off.

*

I am meat, salt, water.
In my skull hums

a three-pound sentient chunk.
When I kiss my mother's hair,
a sleeping giant's heart blooms, collapses.

He shifts in his sleep and smiles,
mica flashing.

One day he'll look me in the eye.

*

A fleet of cumuli leans away.
Freighted with rain, bees drop
to the freshened grass,
red clover.

3.

My great uncle Basil died when he was five years old
on a farmhouse floor in Iredell County, North Carolina,
half of his face boiled from his skull.

Quilts and winter storms
broke my great-grandmother
to bone and a scorched gown,

pre-dawn dimness on a copper cauldron
that held the lye he tipped and spilled,
his little fingers charred,
hard as rust.

*

Sleeves of corn stalks flapped and clattered,
ash in the chimney flue, plum jelly's bright jar.

My grandfather turned in
his mother's darkness, eyes fusing.

*

As the calyx
unsheathes a petal,

as the hand holds
the scalded hand,

furled leaf,
heat to breathe and bear.

As water scars deep grain,
cottonmouths uncurl

over roots that twine kin
to smilax and larkspur:

the stream's clear coil.

William Wright

Nightmares for the Seasons

1.

Pond's bottom: the dead, frayed
meadowlark wavers,
slow in the grammar of gar—

The hollow eye, unfeasibly black,
stares backward through its own bones.

2.

Starving, you eat the pale berries,
juice stinging your tongue:

Summer woods lean
in: the sun,

torn gauze uncoiling.

3.

Big as horses, wolves snarl behind you.
Your scent blows back to their snouts,
wild and bloody is the darkening sun.

Wind smells of wood smoke, a fire
on the ridge: Your house.

A wolf has been here where man
or animal lies at road's edge,
eaten in red sumac.

Ribs, out of which the purple vitals
spill where they do not belong.

Far distance:
Cold salt of the night's first stars.

4.

Your sentience in another's mouth,
in the voiceless mouth
of a name expunged.

Your utterance frozen
and lodged in the throat,
syllables of cracking boughs
and the ice-scarred leaf.

Steve Yates

A Love We Have at the Start

(Oaklawn Park: Hot Springs)

Bucking against the gate, full-muscled neck;
The eyes roll behind black leather;
White rails rattle to keep her in check.

Blood and waiting track untether
Wet breath, and the stanchion sets free
The rip of the bell and her eyes on me.

Jerimee Bloemeke

After Noon Storm

The clouds sent torches
their gray smoke
of downpour

Threatening the monolith
the stone of water
shadows the junipers

The ritual season
fades into one of pilgrimage
and grinds into the earth

Daniel Crocker

Never Got That Dog Fixed

The dog tenses when the prim lady,
not ugly, from church again opens
our rusty fence and walks to our door.

The dog wants to bark—muscles a tight
kinetic energy, a land mine
with foot poised and ready to explode.

The lady from the church always smiles.
My wife, a white face behind the screen,
the “Bad dog” she keeps

behind her lips ready to snap.
I have come to understand this dance—
A constant struggle between these three

every weekend—dog, wife, church.
I’m on the couch, a hand on my crotch,
an empty beer can on the table

and again this Sunday I’m falling
asleep watching *Leave it to Beaver*.
I dream of barking.

Susan Davis

A Sick Child in a Winter House

I propped up on pillows in their room off the kitchen,
crayons at the lip of a hospital table, snow lighting the organza.
Mother hummed at the stove. I heard my father's boots stamp,
then he slipped up in sock feet, kissing her neck.
He lifted lids, red-faced in the steam, and stirred with a ladle,
making round music in the pan.

Violetta Ekpe

This Is Famagusta

A stone cottage newly whitewashed,
a lemon tree inside a fence you once lived,
something of what you thought you earned—
a brewed coffee on your neighbor's stove.
These are gone. These will always be gone.
You will not sit on the wooden porch again.
The lands you played in are muted now.
Your garden has sprung weeds.
You want to plant seeds. (It is not your tree,
not your backyard.) With one thought
you become like the wind weathering every stone,
and childhood is but a dream away.
You are inside the kitchen's draw;
the dough roller is there, pastries on the table,
your father and mother.
This is the house whose walls
you painted the color of seas. It is not your home.

The night fills with tourists buying ceramics.
This is what they know of your land.
You tell them stop and hear the crying.
They tell you conflicts make great stories.
The girl you were a far sight,
the hills stretch behind you—
ancient land and docile grave.

June Huang

No Place Like Home

My friends asked me
if I wanted to relocate to the Delta.
Absolutely, I told them.
But when I moved up to the Delta
I was surprised by the endless flatland.

I was urban. Living in the Delta
has made me feel my life is like the cotton fields,
flat and boring.

I wait for each weekend escape:
to the art museum in Jackson,
to the fine Chinese restaurant in Memphis,
to the Granada Lake or
to some place for a difference,

but I want to come back each evening
for a good sleep in the Delta.

June Huang

Black Friday

Black Friday I went
shopping in Memphis.
Instead of going to JC Penney,

Sears or Macy's, I
went to Hunan
for real Chinese food:

baozi, youtiao, doujiang,
jiaozi, guotie
and stir-fried noodles.

After lunch I went
to an Asian grocery store
to get a buggy of tofu,

soy sauce, preserved zcai,
hot black bean sauce,
canned spicy fried fish,

Chinese cabbage
and bok choy.
I also grabbed

some juicy golden yalis,
red persimmons
and coconut cookies.

On my way home
to Greenwood, the sky
looked really black

Maybelline D. Gonzalez

Antidepressants Make Me Dream

Pills taken to lift me up make me dream
of animals that haunt my mind with dread.
I awaken every morning and scream.

A gold dog told my ears he was supreme
as his paws wrapped me up in metal thread.
Pills taken to lift me up make me dream.

I dreamt I was a fish swimming upstream
with sea snakes that bit me until I bled.
I awaken every morning and scream.

Today in therapy, sex is the theme.
Metal yarn and bloody skin comes to head.
Pills taken to lift me up make me dream.

Lack of speech isn't just low self esteem.
My sensitive throat leaves nightmares unsaid.
I awaken every morning and scream.

As the doctor writes notes that make a ream
I think of drugs that don't cure me, instead
pills taken to lift me up make me dream.
I awaken every morning and scream.

Ma Zhiyuan

(1260-1325)

Autumn Thoughts

—to the tune of *Sky-Pure Sands*

On an old tree
thick with withered rattan:
evening crows.

A small bridge
spans the stream and
a house leans

by a worn path.
Against west wind
a thin horse and

a crushed traveler—
the sinking sun
at the sky's end.

Translated from the Chinese by John Zheng

马致远

《天净沙：秋思》

枯藤老树昏鸦，
小桥流水人家，
古道西风瘦马。
夕阳西下，
断肠人在天涯。

Bai Pu

(1226-1306)

Autumn

—to the tune of *Sky-Pure Sands*

Along the long road—
wild grasses and
cold sands.

The dusk sun
above distant waters
has changed into afterglow

over drooping willows,
fading flowers and
a thin horse.

No regret about the departure,
but where's a house
to lodge tonight?

Translated from the Chinese by John Zheng

白朴

《梨园按试乐府新声》

长途野草寒沙，
夕阳远水残霞，
衰柳黄花瘦马。
休题别话，
今宵宿在谁家？

Li Shangyin
(813-858)

Night Rain: Letter to North

You asked about
the date of my return, but
there is no date yet.

Tonight the rain
in the Ba Mountains has swelled
my autumn pond.

When can I return
to trim the candle with you
by the west window

and talk about
this night rain
in the Ba Mountains?

Translated from the Chinese by John Zheng

李商隐

《夜雨寄北》

君问归期未有期，
巴山夜雨涨秋池。
何当共剪西窗烛，
却话巴山夜雨时？

Books Received and Briefly Noted

Hayes, Terrance. *Lighthead*. New York: Penquin Books, 2010. 95 pp. \$18.00, paperback. ISBN 9780143116967.

A National Book Award finalist, *Lighthead* offers forty poems in four sections that one cannot read lightheadedly.

Lunde, David, trans. *Breaking the Willow: Poems of Parting, Separation and Reunion*. Buffalo, NY: White Pine P, 2008. 91 pp. \$14.00, paperback. ISBN 9781893996953.

In this collection of the classical Chinese poems, the translator says that he tried to stick “as close to [his] sense of the original as possible and [use] what skills [he] had as a poet to make them read as satisfactory poems in English.

Quill, Liana. *Fifty Poems*. Hattiesburg, MS: Mississippi Review, 2010. 58 pp. \$9.00, paperback. ISBN 9780984265213.

Fifty minis, three to five lines each, are like leafless twigs that challenge readers’ imagination for new leaves.

Winke, Jeffrey. *I’ll Tell You So: A Flash Story / Haibun Collection*. Ellison Bay, WI: Cross Roads P, 2010. 102 pp. \$12.00, paperback. ISBN 9781889460239.

A collection of eighty-five haibun, a Japanese-style prose which ends usually with a haiku. Haibun is short and can be called a kind of flash story in a westerner’s eye. Here’s an example:

With gray temples, the bespectacled monsignor nervously smoothes his starched white collar while waiting for the young boy to hang up his alter-boy cassock before taking him to the rectory for cookies and one-on-one spiritual guidance that will always be their own special secret time together.

sunday brunch
a sparrow flies in
through the open door.

Winke, Jeffrey. *Coquette: Sensual Haiku*. Milwaukee, WI: Distant Thunder P, 2008. 10 pp. \$5.00, paperback.

Twenty-one haiku on sensuality, for example: “slowly undressing / the sound of dry leaves / rustling in the wind.”

Contributors' Notes

Angela Ball is Professor of English in the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi and poetry editor for *Mississippi Review*. She is the author of five poetry collections, including *Night Clerk at the Hotel of Both Worlds*, which won the Donald Hall Prize in Poetry. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, the *New Republic*, *Poetry*, and *Best American Poetry 2001*, among other publications.

Jerimee Bloemeke is the author of *JERIMEE BLOEMEKE* (2010, unpublished). He lives in Iowa City.

Kevin Brown is an Associate Professor at Lee University. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New York Quarterly*, *REAL: Regarding Arts and Letters*, *Connecticut Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *h2so4*, *Folio*, and *Quercus Review*, among other journals. He has one book of poetry, *Exit Lines* (Plain View Press, 2009).

Susana H. Case, professor at the New York Institute of Technology, has recent work in many journals, including *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Portland Review* and *Potomac Review*. She is the author of *The Scottish Café*, *Hiking The Desert In High Heels*, *Anthropologist In Ohio* and *The Cost Of Heat*. An English-Polish reprint of *The Scottish Café*, *Kawiarnia Szkocka*, was published by Opole University Press (2010) in Poland.

Daniel Crocker is a graduate of USM's Center for Writers and the author of two poetry collections, *People Everyday and Other Poems* and *Long Live the 2 of Spades*. He has work published in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Juked*, *Night Train*, *Big Muddy* and others.

Susan Davis was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and spent her older childhood on a farm place in upstate New York. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Cincinatti Review*, *Zocala* and *Entasis*. She coordinates undergraduate creative writing at the University of California, Irvine.

Violetta Ekpe holds a BA in Creative Writing from Hunter College. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *The Olivetree Review* and *i magazine*. She currently works as a freelance writer and editor. She lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband.

Maybelline D. Gonzalez is working towards her Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing at Hunter College of The City University of New York.

Theodore Haddin, a professor emeritus from The University of Alabama in Birmingham, is the author of two poetry books, *The River and the Road* and *By a Doorway, In the Garden*. He has published articles and reviews on American literature.

Mack Hassler says, “In addition to poems now and then, I write a lot of criticism on science fiction and edited the journal *Extrapolation* for nearly two decades. Most of my work appears under ‘Donald M Hassler’—lately I go back to my less formal name.”

June Huang’s work has appeared in *The Literati* and *Valley Voices*. She is an instructor of Chinese at MVSU.

Kathryn Jacobs is a poet and a medievalist from Harvard. Her latest book of poetry, *In Transit*, will be published by David Robert Books in 2011. She also has a chapbook *Signs and Portents* due the same year, from Finishing Line Press. She also has over a hundred poems at a wide variety of journals. Kathryn teaches at Texas A & M – C.

Philip C. Kolin has published four books of poems, including *A Parable of Women* (Yazoo River Press, 2009). His poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Christian Century*, *Spiritus*, *St. Austin Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Blue Collar Review*, etc. He is the founding editor of *Vineyards: A Journal of Christian Poetry*.

Charles S. Kraszewski is Editor of *The Polish Review* (New York). His poems and translations from Polish and Czech have appeared, among others, in *Chaparral*, *The New Yorker*, *The Antaeus*, and on the boards of Chicago Actors Ensemble.

Rodger Martin’s third volume of poetry, *The Battlefield Guide*, was released by Hobblebush Books in 2010. He has been awarded an *Appalachia* award for poetry and a New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Fiction Fellowship. He is managing editor of *The Worcester Review*, teaches journalism at Keene State College and directs New Hampshire’s Poetry Out Loud Project.

Dan Morris currently teaches writing and literature at Auburn University. A chapbook of his poetry, *Following the Day*, was published by Pudding House in 2007. His poems have appeared in such journals as *Xavier Review*, *California Quarterly*, *String Town*, and *Red Rock Review*. He is the senior editor for *Town Creek Poetry*.

Larry Marshall Sams is professor emeritus from Mississippi Valley State University. His published works include creative nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and literary essays.

Jean-Mark Sens lives in Thibodaux, Louisiana. He has published poems in various magazines in the U.S. and Canada, including *International Poetry Review*, *Xavier Review*, *North American Review*, *Whiskey Island*, *Descant*, *Queen’s Quarterly*, *Mississippi Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. Red Hen Press in California published his first collection *Appetite* in 2004.

R. Allen Shoaf is Alumni Professor of English in the University of Florida where he teaches and writes about pre-modern European literature (mainly Dante,

Chaucer, and Shakespeare). His current poetry project is provisionally entitled “From the Black Forest to the Yadkin River Valley (How the Shoafs Came to America).”

Margo Stever’s *Frozen Spring* won the 2002 Mid-List Press First Series Award for Poetry. Her chapbook, *Reading the Night Sky*, won the 1996 Riverstone Press Chapbook Competition. Her poems have appeared in the *Seattle Review*, *West Branch*, *Connecticut Review*, *Rattapallax*, and elsewhere. She is the founding editor of the Slapering Hol Press and founder of The Hudson Valley Writers’ Center.

Katsue Suzuki, a native of Tokyo, was the winner of Joan Johnson Award in Poetry in 1997. Her poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Orleans Review*, *The Laurel Review*, among others.

Meredith Trede is a founding publisher of Toadlily Press. Her chapbook, *Out of the Book*, was in *Desire Path*, the inaugural volume of The Quartet Series. Other journals that have published her work include *Barrow Street*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *The Paris Review*. She has held residency fellowships at Blue Mountain Center, Ragdale, Saltonstall, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Virginia and France.

Jeffrey Tucker’s work has appeared in *Inscape*, *Saw Palm*, *Product*, *Swarthmore Literary Review*, the *Sandy River Review* (wherein he was awarded the Editors’ Choice Award for the Spring 2008 issue), and elsewhere. He is also the coeditor of *Squid Quarterly*, a journal devoted to prose poetry and flash fiction.

Greg Weiss’s work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *African American Review*, *Crickets Online Review*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Now Culture*, *The Columbia Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Mississippi*, and others.

William Wright is the author of the full-length poetry collection, *Dark Orchard*, winner of the 2005 Breakthrough Poetry Prize and published by Texas Review Press. His chapbook, *The Ghost Narratives*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2008. His second chapbook, *Sleep Paralysis*, recently won the South Carolina Poetry Initiative Prize and will be published in fall 2011. Wright’s recent work appears in *Shenandoah*, *North American Review*, *AGNI*, *Colorado Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Texas Review*, among other literary journals. Wright is editor of the ongoing twelve-volume Southern Poetry Anthology (Texas Review Press).

Steve Yates’s novel, *Morkan’s Quarry*, was published in May 2010 by Moon City Press at Missouri State University, and a recent short story was a notable story in *Best American Short Stories 2010*. His poems have appeared in *Tampa Review*, *Folio*, and many other places.

Poetry South

2011



Deadline for the 2011 issue: July 15, 2011

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