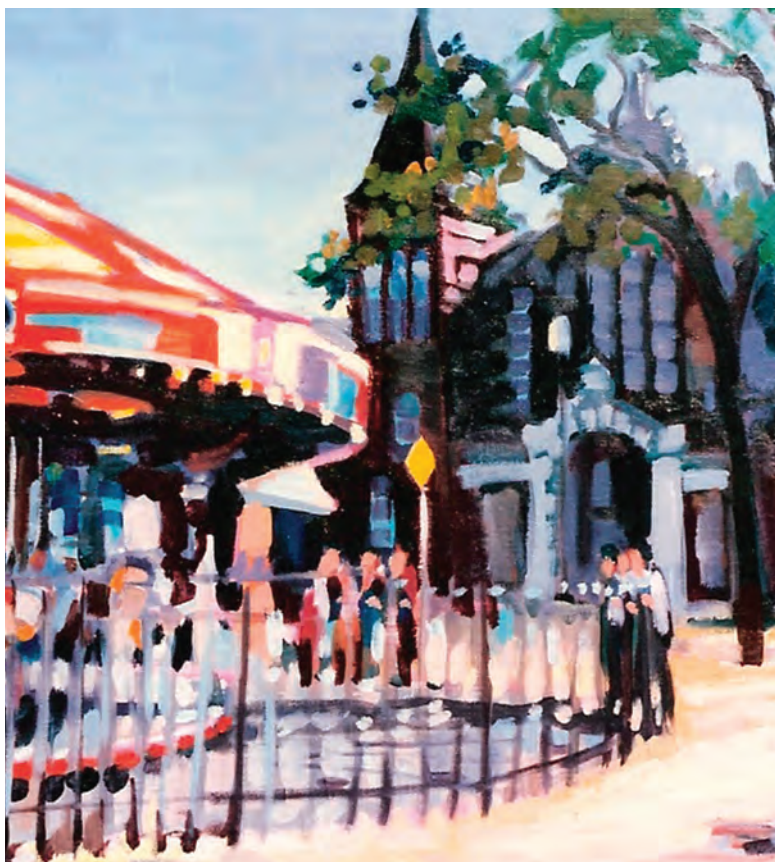


# The Federal Poet

Fall 2011



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THE FEDERAL POETS

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## Introduction

**THE FEDERAL POETS** is the oldest continuously active poetry group in the Washington D.C. area. First convened in 1944, it is a membership organization open to all poets without regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or political affiliation.

Members of **THE FEDERAL POETS** meet at the West End Public Library in Washington, DC, on the third Saturday of every month to read, analyze and discuss their poetry. Visitors are always welcome. Members and visitors who are planning to attend should bring 16 to 20 copies of a recently written poem for distribution to those present. The poem will then be discussed with a view to enhancing its chances for publication.

The chief aims of this organization are to improve the members' poems by the exchange of constructive criticism and to increase their exposure through publication and readings.

*The Federal Poet*, containing the best poems submitted by members, is published semiannually. Local and corresponding members receive it and may submit poems to the editor for consideration and publication.

For membership information, write us or visit our website.

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## Table of Contents

<b>The Turtle Rider</b> .....	1
<i>Elizabeth Black</i>	
<b>The Conjugation of the Species</b> .....	2
<i>Lee Giesecke</i>	
<b>The Bridge</b> .....	2
<i>Cary Kamarat</i>	
<b>Penelope</b> .....	3
<b>Andromache</b> .....	3
<i>Charles Gerald DuBose Jr.</i>	
<b>The Guardian</b> .....	4
<i>Ron Vardiman</i>	
<b>Pete Sussman Leaves on a Jet Plane</b> .....	5
<i>Herb Guggenheim</i>	
<b>Hands</b> .....	7
<i>Nancy Allinson</i>	
<b>Non-Essential Personnel</b> .....	8
<i>Blair Ewing</i>	
<b>My Answer to Your Poem</b> .....	10
<i>Marjorie Sadin</i>	
<b>Deep Forest Pine</b> .....	11
<i>Ninie G. Syarikin</i>	
<b>Ode to the Moment</b> .....	12
<i>Mary L. Westcott</i>	
<b>Last Night at the Macaroni Grill</b> .....	13
<i>Pam Blehert</i>	
<b>A Capitol Halloween</b> .....	14
<i>Ron Vardiman</i>	
<b>Frightened Into Submission</b> .....	15
<i>Clyde A. Wray</i>	
<b>The Earwig</b> .....	16
<i>Ingeborg Carsten-Miller</i>	
<b>Left Unsaid</b> .....	16
<i>Pam Blehert</i>	
<b>The Public</b> .....	17
<i>Nancy Allinson</i>	
<b>Huh?</b> .....	18
<i>Edna Small</i>	

<b>Ballad of M'Comie Mor, 7th Chief of Clan MacThomas</b> .....	19
<i>Judith McCombs</i>	
<b>Lost Land</b> .....	22
<i>Alec McRae</i>	
<b>Looking Out, Looking In</b> .....	23
<i>Dean Bleher</i>	
<b>Intimacy</b> .....	24
<i>Edna Small</i>	
<b>Poetry and Music</b> .....	25
<i>Miles David Moore</i>	
<b>The Lake</b> .....	26
<i>Mary L. Westcott</i>	
<b>Waving Goodbye</b> .....	27
<i>Pamela Passaretta</i>	
<b>Parting</b> .....	27
<i>Alec McRae</i>	
<b>UNDER LEO</b> .....	28
<i>Ann Rayburn</i>	
<b>Jaylen</b> .....	29
<i>Marjorie Sadin</i>	
<b>Strange Mix</b> .....	30
<i>Michelle Seaman</i>	
<b>And Again</b> .....	31
<i>Edna Small</i>	
<b>My Morning Freedom</b> .....	32
<i>Julie Kritzer</i>	

## The Turtle Rider

When you feel the wind on your face  
and your hair flies up and back,  
look to the ground —  
the turtle might be crossing your path.  
Beware,  
his subtle, plodding steps deceive.  
Don't be surprised when he snatches you  
as you reach to prod him  
from his path with your foot.  
In so doing, he will change your history.  
Be ready for a wild ride  
as he flies into the primal twilight.  
Cling tightly for your life's sake  
to his crusty carapace  
as his jaws open wide to hiss  
and snap at your fingers.  
Dare. Say, "yes" and go  
until you come home brittle boned  
to your end holding secrets of the sacred  
and ready for death.

*Elizabeth Black*

## The Conjugation of the Species

I lie down and lay the woman.  
I lay down and laid the woman.  
I have lain down and laid the woman.  
Of course, I lie about laying.  
I also lied about lying down  
and have even lied about lying.  
Yet 'tis a far, far better thing  
to lie about laying  
or to lay without lying  
than to lie about all day  
without the slightest chance  
of finding a frijole.

*Lee Giesecke*

## The Bridge

When the need for silence supplants all other needs,  
for a silence that builds mountains out of mists,  
there's a child's painting of a bridge,  
a simple-colored thing in whites and blues,  
that comes to life and laughs across a pond,  
halfway between a twinkle and a dazzle—  
I go there for the journey,  
and to ask and learn  
why children cry.

*Cary Kamarat*

## Penelope

Odysseus' halls are bare of revelers now,  
and, beside her chamber's roof-supporting pillar,  
a stranger stands where she stood veiled  
to chide the suitors. With calm brow  
he speaks: "I sailed for Troy twenty years ago,  
and for twenty years my wife and young son  
have mourned my absence and (possibly my loss)  
in strife with warring men. Now, in the fiftieth year  
of my life, I have finished with death  
and my life with you begins anew."

Her breath locked in her breast, Penelope  
looks up from the hearth-fire, eyes burning:  
"Not yet. I require the death of the servants  
who, to the tune of an insolent lyre, danced  
and feasted with the suitors: your phoenix wife  
rises from my women's pyre."

## Andromache

At last, she hears the Trojan women's cries;  
quickly upon Athena's altar she kneels  
and runs to the wall: the plain reveals Achilles;  
beside him, her fallen husband lies.  
And there, upon that high wall, her heart dies  
as Achilles pierces Hector's heels, waves  
to the pale women, and wheels his chariot  
beneath the brazen skies.

She flings the diadem from her reeling brain,  
seizes the hand of her doomed boy,  
and hastens to the palace to destroy the robes  
she wore during the years of Priam's reign.

Her regal crown lies on the level plain.  
In her high room, she weaves the doom of Troy.

*Charles Gerald DuBose Jr.*

## The Guardian

Approaching the five-winged citadel  
along the western road,  
I found it somewhat indistinct  
in the early twilight.  
For a few moments I seemed to see  
an enormous lion  
recumbent on the roof,  
guarding the ramparts,  
defying all enemies.  
As I came closer I could no longer  
see the great beast,  
but I like to believe  
it remains on watch;  
the Lion of the Potomac,  
defender of the defenders.

*Ron Vardiman*

## Pete Sussman Leaves on a Jet Plane

You always feel fear when  
your plane lifts you away  
from the restrictions of the  
earth. You leave with the  
cabin sealed, the flight attendants  
with their blank faces, their  
hollow hellos, the in-flight magazine  
which you're welcome to  
take with you, the orange  
oxygen mask that, in the  
unlikely event of an emergency—  
you're supposed to affix  
to your own head first,  
then to that of your  
child. The plane pauses at  
the runway, waiting for clearance.

In a dozen cities, you  
have sat in rounded chairs  
in front of observation windows.  
You have stared at dull  
gray carpets, stretching off into  
infinity. You have lugged your  
carry-on luggage down endless corridors  
seeking your gate, your number.  
You are nervous, afraid your  
plane will come and go  
without you, that your ticket  
will be invalid, your flight  
overbooked. You're afraid of —  
a wind shear, a storm, cancellation.

Today, the ceiling is low.  
The plane begins its heavy  
ascent. It lumbers. It vibrates.  
It is a very heavy  
plane. The ground rushes past.  
There is a bump—an  
unevenness in the runway. Time  
stretches. You are pressed back  
against your seat. You twist  
your head to look out

the window. The plane is  
easing up. First the front  
wheels, then the back  
as the ground falls  
away. Impossibly slowly. Pressure changes.  
Ears pop. Everything is compressed.  
The plane falls through an  
air pocket. *This is it.* Everything  
is over. The silver fuselage  
will drop. It will smash  
into houses, plow through buildings,  
cut down cars, telephone poles.  
Your body will be burnt  
beyond recognition—your skin like  
blackened chicken, your body parts  
torn and yanked apart, spread  
across a swaying field of  
corn. You clutch the armrest.  
Your palms sweat onto cool  
vinyl. You realize the idiocy  
of this action. Armrests won't  
save you. Nothing will as  
you fall through space and  
time. Plummeting not only through  
the cool gray air but  
through your life. This falling  
doesn't stop. It continues even  
when you are safely on  
the ground. Where do you  
think you're going? But miraculously  
the plane surges up. Up  
through the cloud cover. Up  
into this limitless blue dome.  
You will survive this flight.  
You will live a little  
longer. But going from here  
to there will never eliminate  
your secret feeling of restraint,  
your hidden fear of falling.

*Herb Guggenheim*

## Hands

*to David Grossman, author of To the End of the Land*

Watching her hand  
from the corner of my eye,  
watching the hand  
stroke her husband's hair,  
his shoulders,  
her fingers trickling down his back.  
Watching the hand invades me.  
I have to close my eyes  
as I listen to David Grossman  
who speaks to us in the sanctuary  
of the synagogue,  
who speaks of family and the situation  
in Israel and how it affects us.  
The hand now caresses her husband's neck.  
I want to grab it, slash the wrist  
as if I were committing suicide for her.

When you sign your book for me after the lecture,  
when we are down in the basement where  
there are tables filled with cookies everywhere  
where we are lined up in the dimly lit room, waiting.  
Finally, I am facing you,  
you are signing your name to my book.  
I am telling you that you are sweet  
that I loved your lecture  
you reach for my hand to shake it  
your hand in mine is a warm stone  
which we hold together for one brief moment.

*Nancy Allinson*

## Non-Essential Personnel

One fine clear Winter's day  
a decade or so before the war called Cold ended  
my father came home later than usual  
from his E-ring Pentagon office  
slyly strutting, a marked departure

from his standard clipped civilian march.  
Sensing something was up, I dropped my  
question-lure near his morass of papers  
in the dining room and waited,  
nor was my wait long:

"I've been made Essential Personnel,"  
he said quietly, following this with a  
wide-eyed smile I'd never seen before.

Still unclear on the concept,  
but now certain I was on to Something Big  
I pressed on, "Essential to whom?"

"To our nation," he proudly retorted.  
"In the event of a nuclear attack  
or other such emergency, I'll be taken  
to Raven Rock to help the government  
keep functioning."

Suddenly afraid, I reached out to him  
as I spoke, "That means we get to go, too,  
right, Dad?" My father went briefly rigid,

and after a long pause answered softly,  
his head down and face averted, "No.  
Just me."

Angry now, my voice rose and cracked,  
"So me and Mom and Chat and George,  
what happens to us? We're just ... what?  
*Non-essential* personnel?"

During my outburst, my father actually  
seemed to shrink as he fell grey and silent,  
his hands raised almost defensively as he  
retreated into his thousand-tome study  
and locked the door.

In my bones I know my father  
loved us because even when we  
made ourselves unlovable, he loved us still.

But one Winter day long ago his pride  
let it slip that come the Apocalypse,  
he would've abandoned us and absconded  
with his mistress, the State.

*Blair Ewing*

## **My Answer to Your Poem**

You are like a boy with a kite. The kite might get caught in a tree, but you always get it down, and it flies again. You are used to flying. Flying in your dreams is sex.

You covet sex. You imagine what it would be like without flying. You have this “man thing” that you are afraid will be like losing your kite, that part of you which isn’t even necessary.

But you have been flying kites all your life and you know just when that wind will sweep it high in the sky, higher than it ever has before.

And to be without that, just like a man with two feet on the ground, a man who cannot fly makes it feel like something you cannot live without.

So, I am left to comfort you, knowing what I do about kites, that without it you can feel the wind in your hair, soft kisses, the smell of cherry blossoms and the cricket’s call. That life is about more than kites, and flying, and I say this with all the love in my heart.

*Marjorie Sadin*

## Deep Forest Pine

Tomorrow, I'll have to leave before sunrise.  
The journey is long  
The task, daunting  
The burden, heavy  
I must penetrate the deep forest in the mountain  
to search for the pine nuts that my expecting wife is craving.  
Then carrying the pine cones, some greens, bark pieces,  
cuts of root,  
that she says she wants to make potpourri to scent our bedroom.  
"Husband," she summoned me last evening.  
"Our baby in the womb is desiring frosted pine nuts.  
So, go seek those delicacies.  
Stay in the wood, if you must;  
but don't you return without them."

So now, I am bracing for some unusual challenges, I can't imagine.  
Maybe thorns, perhaps snakes, could be itches, and might be  
bears.  
But for sure, I don't want my child to arrive in this world  
with saliva gliding out with unfulfilled wishes.  
So, "Eye eye, Madam," that's all I can say.

That night,  
my woman spread a jar of rose petals and a bowl of jasmine  
on the bed sheet, changing the pillow cases to the fresh ones,  
embroidered with big sunflowers.  
She combed her long hair, which framed her pretty face.  
Her bulky body made her even look sexy.  
Then she smiled at me and closed her eyes.  
My heart was bursting, beyond words.  
"Sleep tight, Petite," I whispered, kissing her forehead.  
"Dream your frosted pine nuts that I'll bring in baskets and baskets.  
They'll be here when you open your eyes."  
I, immediately, made my move,  
even earlier than intended.  
I set out at dawn to beat the daybreak.  
I am going to be a father!

*Ninie G. Syarikin*

## Ode to the Moment

Dawdling moments  
bring presents of surprise—  
each new moment a lesson:  
patience, how fear closes,  
how time is no one's servant.  
You, my unique moment, borrow  
bits of time, restoring them again like  
a wise god. My moment cries  
out for rainbows to eclipse  
the gray. While a Siamese cat  
rubs against my leg, another plane  
arrives in Paris. Now I'm slowed  
down to the sound of muted traffic  
in late summer's dusk, crickets  
buzzing in mountain forests.  
I see my life made up  
of moments, the past  
moments smaller and  
smaller like a  
Russian  
doll.

*Mary L. Westcott*

## Last Night at the Macaroni Grill

I had Lasagna  
(remember I'd been craving some for awhile.)  
You had vegetarian ravioli which you later said  
was very good and oh, "I should have given you a taste",  
and Sue, who can't eat much because of food allergies,  
(I should have such food allergies or maybe sew up  
my mouth)  
had grilled chicken and gave half of it to Jim.  
Jim had (oh, I forget – but 3 out of four ain't bad).

Sue said something about herself (something personal)  
and Jim looked at her and said "I didn't know that"  
(this, he said, after 20 years of marriage).  
And I thought about earlier in the day,  
seeing the scarred area on the side of your leg  
and wondering about it  
and you said "yeah, that's ten stitches,  
kid hit me with a sickle or something like that when  
I was young,  
surely you knew that",  
and after 15 years of marriage I hadn't.

*Pam Blehert*

## A Capitol Halloween

The zombies convene on Capitol Hill  
while vampires feast at the Taxpayer Grill.  
Ghosts terrorize tourists on the mall,  
and warlocks prance in the Pentagon halls;  
it's the year long Halloween in D.C.

Witches brew fresh conspiracies  
for the warlocks to baffle their enemies.  
The ghosts cry "fear!" but will not explain,  
and the zombies never do get any brains;  
those are always scarce in D.C.

Then the ghosts get nervous and witches grow witless,  
the zombies declare a long recess,  
and vampires flee to their coffers and hide;  
once again the White House has demons inside!  
It's political Halloween in D.C.

The voters drive a stake through some,  
but there's plenty more that are eager to come;  
It's tricks for most and treats for a few;  
the costumes make stealing so easy to do.  
Just so much fun in old D.C.

*Ron Vardiman*

## Frightened Into Submission

There is stuff you read  
that offends you  
stuff you eat that gets you  
to the size of a balloon  
there are people who contaminate  
your air with stuff  
which tries to corrupt you  
there is stuff in your medicine cabinet  
that will intoxicate you.  
there is stuff under your kitchen sink  
that will poison not only you  
but your family too.  
there is stuff pharmaceuticals companies  
what to experiment on you  
with or without your permission  
that's their job is to frighten you  
into submission.  
there are people that will use their stuff  
to eradicate your every decision  
because they need to feel superior.  
there is stuff you feel you need  
because you watched too much tv  
and the stuff you stored away  
is as good today as it was yesterday  
but the announcer said you've got to throw  
that stuff from yesterday away  
to get newer stuff today.  
and the stuff you should throw away  
you cling to from day to day  
the emotional luggage that's old and frayed  
because without it you're afraid  
you won't find your way  
and you think that old stuff is better  
no stuff.  
and you wonder why some stuff confuses  
you today!

*Clyde A. Wray*

## The Earwig

“How did the earwig  
get into the birthday  
bouquet of pink roses?”

"You must be mistaken!  
The earwig was last seen  
with the zinnias in the garden!"

“How did it get  
into your beautiful  
birthday bouquet then?”

"Think —  
it must be  
an illegal immigrant!"

*Ingeborg Carsten-Miller*

## Left Unsaid

How much is left unsaid, left shut up  
in the moist reaches of our psyche, out  
among the marshes, to surprise us,  
sink us in quagmires, trip us in ungainly  
airborne roots, snatch at our clothes,  
howl at us in the night.  
Even in this poem, how much  
is left unsaid.

*Pam Blehert*

## The Public

It's one of those long rainy Saturdays  
the kind we've had lately after all that snow.  
You're standing in line at CVS when this dude  
with a thin, crooked face walks in.  
He's got this cluster of long safety pins hanging  
from each ear lobe.  
It looks as if he couldn't afford earrings or maybe the  
safety pins

come in handy when he needs them. It's scary to think  
that he could use these pins if someone got in his way,  
but you're hoping he's just weird looking and not really  
weird.

He buys batteries, a water bottle, readers,  
sun glasses, too.  
The clerk who looks to be about sixteen asks him if he has  
a CVS card  
and the guy pulls one of those small cards off of a  
key chain that has a rabbit's ear  
hanging from it and he slides the card on the counter  
along with his Giant bonus card.  
The clerk rings up the items and says, "that'll be  
\$27.57."

He clutches a wad of bills in his coarse hands,  
hands that look like  
they've been in a fight. When he goes to pay the clerk,  
he pulls a twenty dollar bill out of a small red leather  
pouch hanging from his belt,  
crumples the bill in his hand as if it's a piece of paper  
he'll discard,  
just to make sure "they ain't two stuck togetha,"  
and hands him the twenty plus seven dollar bills  
and change.

Then he speaks: "Praise to Jesus. The Lord is my  
shepherd. Praise to Jesus,

Pray, pray. Good day.” The clerk says, “done,”  
as if he’d just pulled something out of the oven  
that was cooking.  
You compliment him, “you really know how to  
handle these people,”  
as if somehow people could be handled.  
He says back, “it’s all part of working with the public.”  
Then without saying another word, you slink out the  
door into the rainy afternoon  
looking for someone or something to save you,  
but he’s gone.

*Nancy Allinson*

## **Huh?**

My hearing sure has gone to hell,  
what was it you just said?  
Your words so fast I couldn’t tell  
you that my hearing’s gone. To hell  
with it! I wish that you would spell  
the words, but you announce, instead,  
that my hearing sure has gone to hell.  
Is that what you just said?

*Edna Small*

*Innisfree Poetry Journal 13*

## **Ballad of M'Comie Mor, 7th Chief of Clan MacThomas**

*Glenshee & Glen Isla, Central Highlands, Scotland,  
1600s*

O M'Comie was a swordsman good  
As ever drew a blade.  
Disguised, he fought his dearest son  
To prove the next Chief brave.

When Athol's men took the widow's flock,  
She ran to M'Comie Mor.  
He chased that mob, and with his sword  
Soon felled the bravest four.

Lord Athol begged M'Comie to fight  
The traveling champion.  
"Save my honor, and I'll let pass  
what else your sword has done."

"I will not fight where there's been no wrong  
to my people or to me."  
The Italian lifts M'Comie's kilt  
And whacks his bare body!

The champion's sword was swift as flight  
But M'Comie's swifter flew —  
It flashed too quick for mortal sight  
As he ran the Italian through.

\*\*\*

*Scotland, Charles I versus Cromwell & Covenanters,  
1644-58*

O M'Comie raised his sword and clan,  
With Montrose he would dare.

Seven times they smashed the Covenanters —  
Then made all Glasgow theirs.

M'Comie captured Sheriff Forbes,  
Outfought him sword and shield —  
Then left King's cause when Montrose lost,  
And the clans were forced to yield.

Chief Airlie raised his sword and clan,  
Fought where Montrose led —  
But Airlie stayed with the Royalists  
When Charles lost crown and head.

Three times Lord Airlie was a captured man.  
Doomed after Philiphaugh,  
He escaped to see fair Scotland thrive  
Under Cromwell's law.

Then M'Comie bested Airlie sore,  
Bought his title and sweet green lands.  
That can occur in civil war —  
The losers lose their lands.

\*\*\*

*Scotland, Charles II, 1660-74*

O Airlie bested M'Comie sore  
When fevered Cromwell died.  
Lord Airlie got the sweet green woods  
Where M'Comie's cattle thrived.

Airlie leased the woods to Farquharson,  
But M'Comie's cows still grazed.  
He was seized for ransom, his herd was thinned:  
"I'll have a warrant," he raged.

M'Comie's sons and the Sheriff's man  
Chased down the Farquharsons.

Two of M'Comie's brave sons fell,  
Two of the Farquharsons.

It wasn't swords that broke the clan  
But fines and guns and laws.  
The M'Comie's were found innocent  
But fees devoured all.

O Airlie bested M'Comie sore,  
He took his heirs and lands.  
That can occur in feuds and war —  
The losers lose their clans.

*Judith McCombs*

## Lost Land

Where the surge crests, it breaches the levee  
and the river takes the land, leaving nothing.  
A thousand acres disappear, all human plans  
dissolve. An awful clarification occurs  
where a place was. Its memory breaks  
from what is known now, and begins to drift.  
Where people lived and trees and buildings stood,  
now emptiness widens the air for birdflight, wind,  
and rain. As before the beginning, nothing is there.  
Human wrong is in the cause, human  
ruin in the effect — but let it go;  
all will be lost, no matter the reason.  
Nothing, having arrived, will stay.  
The earth, even, is like a flower, so soon  
it passes away. And yet this nothing  
is the seed of all — heaven's clear  
eye, where all the worlds appear.  
Where the imperfect has departed, the perfect  
begins its struggle to return. The good gift  
begins again its descent. The maker moves  
in the unmade, stirring the water until  
it clouds, dark beneath the surface,  
stirring and darkening the soul until pain  
perceives new possibility. There is nothing  
to do but learn and wait, return to work  
on what remains. Seed will sprout in the scar.  
Though death is in the healing, it will heal.

*Alec McRae*

## Looking Out, Looking In

*Out the window*, half a cloud,  
a piece of tree, bits of gray—call it sky—  
In the dusk little more dimension than  
an old brown academic painting in bad lighting.  
Any hint that somewhere half the sun sets  
while a ghostly crescent of moon rises—any hint  
is fugitive, impossible to distinguish from knowing  
these things must be so.

This pane-patterned square is framed by a room,  
walls, chairs, papers, TV... what we call  
a life, looming large in lamplight to stave off  
any ghost of other largeness in which we are absent,

all outdoors (barely visible through my reflection)  
reduced to an almost still-life in the window's frame,  
perhaps leaves wobbling in a wind I cannot feel,  
even the window a lie: *vind auga*—Old Icelandic  
for “wind eye,” eye of an old icy wind,  
an opening thru which a gust, a guest, entered,  
now a fake—a glass eye, through which the wind  
cannot see us.

*In the window*, that glowing square on a dark boxy shape,  
surrounded by the world of wind and cloud  
I stand in, head bared to the moon,  
my vision framed only by the eye's limits, if even that  
when, as now, drawn out by the night sky's depth  
where the clouds open, I slip out of my head,  
still seeing, by what means I cannot say. Looking in,  
I see a man at the window—

I think of my father, but he is dead,  
and of coming home late to a house in another city,  
but this neither is nor was my house,  
nor the wind's, and yet that glow promises  
an inward depth as deep as the dark between stars,  
something to do with home.

I see the man as he lowers a shade,  
then only a crack of light, then none,  
and I am both outside and inside at once,  
more penetrating than the wind  
that licks my eyes and tears them.  
I am the wind's eye. GOOD wind! GOOD boy!  
Come home with me, wind.

*Dean Blehert*

## **Intimacy**

Sudden darkness.  
House lights out,  
street lights out.  
With a lantern,  
I carry light with me.  
Across the street,  
houses outlined  
by moonlight.  
Light and darkness  
enter each other.

*Edna Small*

## Poetry and Music

He hoists ungrateful bricks up decorative ladders  
too dainty for the weight.  
Over millennia, his fathers and mothers  
molded bricks into arabesques,  
Grecian statues, free-form improvisations.  
He knows the rules, those tacky globs  
of mortar, but the secret of melting bricks  
is something no one can teach or learn.  
He looks at his hands. He looks at the bricks.  
Dull red, unpliable, they look  
defiantly like what they mean.

She tries to dam the stream using only her hands.  
Over millennia, her fathers and mothers  
solidified water between their fingers,  
built palaces, cathedrals, pyramids.  
Their secret can't be taught or learned.  
Their rules are crows on telephone wires,  
scattering at their own discord.  
She could wait for winter, but ice  
is slippery, dissolving at first sun.  
She looks at her hands. She looks at the water  
bathing her hands, the stream-bed pebbles  
in dull mosaic, the cloisonned fish  
eluding her grasp. The ceaseless  
water-sound and crows' caws mingle,  
signifying--what?

They toil side by side,  
too busy to notice each other  
till he drops a brick in the stream.  
She looks up. He looks down.  
His eyes trace arabesques.  
Her eyes build cathedrals.  
The brick bends. The water stops.  
From somewhere, a faint sound mimics birdsong.

*Miles David Moore*

## The Lake

I don't know what the smell  
of Omega is, that bittersweet  
aroma of summer's past, overwhelming  
with memories of Irish grandparents  
and tow-headed cousins and the lake  
exactly like Long Pond Lake, but no  
wasn't that lake smaller, a dock jutting  
out of its tiny beach, lily pads  
dotting the surface like round faces  
worshipping the infrequent sun?  
Were the languid days only a figment  
of my faulty memory, did my Aunts fight  
late at night while we were tucked  
into sagging cot mattresses  
on the linoleum floor, exhausted  
from diving and swimming? Something  
in the cicada abuzz, the twill of birdsong,  
the gleam of lake in the distance  
makes me think it was the only time  
I could claim pure happiness.

*Mary L. Westcott*

## Waving Goodbye

Velvet was black with short spongy hair and skinny,  
she ate bright red tomatoes.  
Frances was Italian with chocolaty curls in her hair,  
she wore jaggedy braces on her teeth.  
When I boarded the ocean liner from NYC forty  
    three years ago,  
in route to Spain with my mom, sister, brother and  
    cocker spaniel  
I knew I would never see the seeds and juice run down  
    her shiny skin anymore,  
or those little flesh colored rubber bands in her tiny  
    mouth again.  
Instead, I wake up from a dream and write their names  
    on a Post-it note  
together with a poem about these two childhood friends  
    I cried for so much over the water  
and this is all I can remember at fifty.

*Pamela Passaretta*

## Parting

The pickup stopped at the bus station  
and for a moment stood absolutely still.  
The doors slammed, two people emerged,  
embraced, said goodbye forever.

A package dropped, the moon dimmed,  
the doors slammed again, even louder  
and the pickup started up slowly  
and vanished in the darkness like the twentieth century.

*Alec McRae*

## UNDER LEO

In the thrall of the lion  
we gauge the weight  
of melons, of peaches,  
of hair damp  
with ocean salt.

It is time to go out,  
to sit in a field  
on a warm rock perhaps,  
or on a lip of earth  
near the edge of the woods.

Time to visit  
the vegetable stand  
under the pine trees,  
where needles spindle  
the heavy air.

Time to become  
a slim vertical line  
against the constant  
of the sea  
and its horizon.

Or to move  
like thin brush strokes  
on the twilight beach,  
kites and children  
reeled in, the day  
withdrawing itself  
across the sand.

*Ann Rayburn*

## Jaylen

Jaylen dozes in class.  
His little brother kicks him in bed  
so he can't sleep at night.

I am his tutor. He hugs me.  
I say, "not allowed." Reluctantly.

He is like a man  
Taller than I am  
and only 10.

Jaylen is at the 3rd Grade level,  
ADD and socially mixed up.  
Whatever he reads doesn't matter  
Now he reads sentences instead of  
sounding out letters.

And now he is teaching his younger brother  
how to read letters  
And he is a man to his brother.

*Marjorie Sadin*

## Strange Mix

Sylvia's memory is slippery these days.  
More like butter than molasses, it once was  
thick in the tree recalling

pink ribbons on the floppy ears of mules,  
children on front porches waving,  
her daddy, Alfred, delivering milk, or hooch  
if money was low and people were needing,

and her mama, Martha, scrubbing the linen of the rich,  
playing cards, stilling potato vodka, cupping illness  
out of folks blood like nothing.

Sylvia's white gloves, pillbox hat, and Sunday walk  
didn't want none of that. Catholic, for sure,  
a strange mix of devotion and back woods,  
daughter of a wild, drinking pair,  
she exercised lady-like dignity at mass,  
keeping her hands stamped against the hymnal.

She married the first gentleman she met,  
a man who'd sworn off liquor, went to church,  
knew how to fix and grow things  
broken faucets, potatoes, and seven, God-loving children.

Her days are spent now, listening mostly  
to talk radio. She calls, doesn't always remember  
everything she says. There's no one to argue with  
since her Gene's gone. She's a little invisible  
somehow, just a voice among voices  
in the strange mix of things.

*Michelle Seaman*

## **And Again**

*Paul*, I call him.  
Not his name,  
but I like it.

*Paul*, I'm lost.

He sits down  
and starts again,  
from the beginning.

*Edna Small*

## **My Morning Freedom**

I am glad I am free against the sky  
Free against the blue highlights  
Does she say I want a little zest  
How about a little pink at dawn and dew  
The breeze release my arms to write of what I see  
If you want to join remember  
The time requirement eternity  
Otherwise let me juggle join the clouds as they choose  
Loose throughout the day  
Who feeling you my breeze  
Seeing the moon  
Reflecting against its place  
The moon and I are in love  
It's a secret  
Don't tell  
Beauty is a grown up form of play

*Julie Kritzer*

Detail, Carousel at Smithsonian by Coulter