

Poetry City, USA, Vol. I

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An anthology of poems read at the
inaugural Great Twin Cities Poetry Read
+ essays, interviews, reviews

[Matt Mauch, editor]



Lowbrow
Press

POETRY CITY, USA, VOL. 1
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for Lucille Clifton

Greg Hewitt

**MY MIND LUSTROUS AS A PSALTER
OR AN I-BOOK**

Even working from your finely pixilated profile, I can picture
you

Only dimly, crouched over star-glow of cell-phone,
offering your location up like sacrifice.

I can account for all illumination leading from my door to
yours—car-lights, streetlights, moonlight, steeple sheathed
in incandescence,

CCTV screens in the lobby, caged light bulbs in the hallway,

The elevator's fluorescent tube droning like a fly's trapped
inside, the peephole's glint—

But not the light when you open up, not that brief light

Or non-light coming from you or from my desire for things
beyond

The angstrom range of the human eye, or maybe

Just from behind you, from a screen on mute in the room
beyond.

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part I of 7

“Experimenting with sauce on the grill,” is what I said I’d been up to. I can’t recall the exact wording of the prompt. There were two or three other prompts, though, in addition to the one that got me talking about sauce—easy ones like “name” and “current place of residence”—and we went around the circle, responding counterclockwise.

Whenever I’m one of the first responders in an exchange like that, I feel my response, as and after I say it, is inadequate—that I could’ve thought of something better to say had I been given a little more time. If I’m one of the last responders, I tend not to hear much of what my fellow responders say, too engaged, I am, trying to come up with a good response myself.

It was the summer of ’08, and what I know is that experimenting with sauces on the grill is something I was obsessed with, so the prompt, if you’ll allow me to hazard a reconstruction, must have been something along the lines of, *Tell us about what you do that characterizes you outside of the poetic realm, because in a few minutes we’re all gonna see your poems and will make up our own minds about that.*

When I said, “Experimenting with sauces on the grill,” Lucille said, *I luuuuv sauces, luuuuuuuuv food on the grill. Tell me more.*

So I told her how I’d read through a fair number of cookbooks to get a grip on sauce basics—what mixes well with what else, which things each concoction accompanies best, whether certain sauces work better on the side or poured over top, the process for taking a sauce from its watery origins in a mixing bowl to a thicker, reduced and plated *pièce de résistance*. And

then, I told her, I worked off-book. I mixed this with that in portions I hoped would compliment each. I went to the grocery store, picked up some things I didn't have. I dreamed up out-of-this-world versions of pork, chicken, prawns . . . duck, bison, lamb, veggies, fruit . . . made my watery, pre-sauces in a mixing bowl, transferred them to a bowl formed from aluminum foil two sheets thick to prevent leakage from any accidental punctures. The foil allowed me to open or close the top to any aperture desired. I experimented with direct and indirect heat, flavored some sauces with the smoke from wood chips, finished others with fresh squeezes, shakes, and grates of this or that, had successes and failures, none of which I could replicate, but each of which taught me something that would give me more control over my next attempt.

When I told Lucille I lived in Minneapolis, she said, *Honey, Minnesota is my second home. Next time I'm in, don't tell me I didn't tell you I'd show up in your backyard for sauce.*

Lucille is the poet Lucille Clifton, winner of the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the National Book Award, a two-time Pulitzer nominee. In person she mirrored her poetry: no-bullshit, spot-on, unadornedly getting to the funny-smart, expansive point. She told us that when she became a poet she did so having already been (and not being able to stop being) a mother and wife—cooking, ironing, cleaning, rearing, loving—and that the time constraints of that didn't allow her to do what most poets are taught, which is to sit down before the blank page every day and write, write, write. She had no choice but to compose her poems in her head, poems she could commit to memory, writing them down when she found the spare time. You do that—or anything—for enough years, and it becomes your way. Lucille the person and Lucille the poet didn't just seem like one and the same, they were that, and given that, you can hardly call me crazy for expecting her, till the day I had heard she'd died, to show up in my backyard for dinner. And no bullshit: I always made extra, just in case, and still do. If

anybody's got the wherewithal to die and show up again
in my So. Mpls backyard, demanding shrimp with sauce,
it's Lucille. It's a fool who wouldn't be prepared enough
to oblige that.

*

If a woman is an ocean, then what is Esmerelda?
An avalanche of distant metal. Someone else's
autobiography. The table is upended and the room,
vacuous, shifts. Esmerelda repeating, foot caught in the
grooved floor. Esmerelda drifting into hilly sleep, cool
radiating from her sides. Esmerelda is a sound rolling
down a mountain. There is music where her eyes should
be.

Split-faced man builds a city like an apocalypse; a city of
self-illuminating gas. Carousel horses listlessly circling,
rust-brown & windblown. This city in the desert hums to
itself. A solemn, scratchy cosmopolis. All the water turns
to rust.

5000 amperes of love course through Esmerelda. This
moan the city makes against memory. Esmerelda writes
a novel into her pillow. Rust & tears embroidering a
language.

{Esmerelda writes a letter:}

*Dear Split-faced Man,
I am writing to you from inside a volcano.
My skin adamantine. My body dinging.
Lost in a cavern of memory.*

*I don't believe in beauty.
I saw a couple on a beach.
My whole skin smarting.*

Against the sky, the perforate.

*First fire, then sound.
I am amazed by the rope you wove.*

*Into the ash-cloud.
My skin displaced.
The misnomerings night.*

I would like this story to be a love story, but I am afraid it is not. Split-faced Man and his lovers only gravitational, bodies around which we orbit. In this story, there is a you, and there is a me, but we are not lovers, of one another or otherwise. For both of us, there were lovers in the past, left behind when we came to the city. We do not speak of them. They live inside us like the desert trees: apparently dead until the rains come, then bursting into brief and sudden leaf.

Candace Black

WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN I SWIM

Breath. It's all about breath, about filling
my lungs to capacity,

each bronchi dilated, reaching deep
into honeycombed caves, each alveoli stretched

shiny. I think about oxygen
knowing passwords and moving, like the spirit

it is, into and through membranes, into blood
spurting through the swinging doors of my heart

and back out into the body again,
faster and faster as I continue to swim.

I think of azure sinking
to turquoise, of the black

line, sixteen tiles wide, that charts
my course, the "T" crowning

each lane that tells better swimmers
when to flip. I think of the ripple that precedes

my breaststroke, how silently it travels. I could be
a Navy SEAL, another shadow in a midnight

harbor. I think of large, semi-aquatic
reptiles, gators and crocs, of the lifeguards

talking, texting. I think
of their sweatpants dragging

us both down if they had to rescue me.
I think, fondly, of my goggles, fogging

just enough to blur the man in his Speedo
warming up on the pool deck. I think of my flutter

kick, my methodical feet churning
just below the surface. If this were the ocean

a glowing ribbon would trail
me at night, disclosing my whereabouts

to predators, it's true, but a beauty
worth the risk.

Richard Terrill

On Philip S. Bryant's *Stompin' at the Grand Terrace: A Jazz Memoir in Verse*

The assertion that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture” has been attributed variously to Martin Mull, Thelonious Monk, Elvis Costello, George Carlin, Frank Zappa, Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and even Frank Lloyd Wright. Add Winston Churchill, H.L. Mencken, Auden, and Groucho Marx and you’d have a list of everyone who ever said anything witty in the last one hundred years.

The line’s humor rests in the assumption that there is something intrinsically *wrong* with dancing about architecture—something purely pedantic, needlessly obscure. Something that runs counter to the common sense of the man on the street (for whom I’ve been looking for many years now; the street can be filled with people and I can’t find much in common about the ways they reason, though there may be much that I admire). The punch in the punch line “dancing about architecture” is the suggestion that this effort would yield something that no one would *get*.

Personally, I would welcome some brave post-modernist choreographer taking up the challenge, scripting a dance about great buildings. If I had the money and connections, I’d commission it. The dance would be about *space*—that much is certain. Something about patterns repeating, and then failing, purposely, to repeat. The performance would have to pay its respects to the laws of physics and gravity—no collapsing staircases or leaky ceilings please. There would be a marriage of the practical and the esthetic in this dance, the way a voodoo ritual might be intriguing and frightening to watch at the same time it functioned to drive away evil spirits. And the thing would have to be up to code.

Jazz is a genre of music that most people don’t *get*. Another such genre is poetry. So be it, and all the efforts

to reach the masses that don't want to be reached aren't going to effect much change. None of this has stopped anyone from blowing a horn or writing a sonnet, though. One could argue that Philip S. Bryant's new "jazz memoir in verse" takes up the gauntlet and dances about architecture, and one could argue that it does so with all the beauty and practicality that such an effort (if I'm right) requires. Rooted as it is in the African American experience in a particular time and place (South Side Chicago, after the war and up to the sixties), the book not only bridges an information gap with most of its intended readers (poetry as newspaper, as Williams envisioned—most practical), but as we learn about the time and the people and the place, we enjoy the dance of our enlightenment, its patterns enforced and purposefully betrayed. The humor in the book, alone, proves the poet as adept as whoever it is came up with the writing/dancing analogy to begin with:

Aunt Jenny on "*types of people*:"

There are only two types of people in the world—the screwers and the screwees."

The poet's father's friend Preston on the abstract alto sax player Lee Konitz:

"Hell, he sounds like a nuclear physicist scratchin' one of them theorems on a blackboard. Might be brilliant watchin' it unfold, but damn it it's ever gonna move anybody. Though it might blow up a whole lot of folks."

The fact that I found these two examples by merely letting the book fall open on my desk, and then flipping a few pages one way or the other, speaks to the consistent quality in the writing. If it's beauty instead of laughs that you want, the same random process yields results as well, so easy is it to find an opening line like this:

here in the
jazz of late October

I think of you
heavy as the
wetness of leaves
mixed with their
fall color

Or beautiful closing lines like these, on Bessie Smith:

The note she sings,
almost a hymn,
becomes as small and black as
one last leaf in autumn
suddenly blown from a bare
exposed limb.

A perusal of titles just as easily tells what kind of book this is going to be, one in which the reader's emotions modulate, one which mixes darkness and levity, the sacred and the profane:

"Chubby Checker Comes to North Dakota"

"The 14th and Final Way of Looking at a Blackbird"
(perhaps the first poem ever to reference both John Coltrane and Wallace Stevens within six lines)

"Liver and Onions: the Pianists"

"No Greater Love"

"Birth of the Cool: Minnesota"

We've known all along, haven't we, that the work that moves us is that which blends the tragic and the comic? Perhaps there's a reason that in the theater the masks of comedy and tragedy are displayed side by side, not on opposite sides of the proscenium. So it is in *Stompin* and most good writing. We laugh and we cry, but at the same time.

Still, let's give Zappa or Groucho or Martin Mull his due. Writing about music is an odd amalgamation, especially if the purpose of that writing is not primarily critical, as in a recording or concert review. My own personal list of writing about jazz that works unconditionally would read as follows:

- 1) "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin
- 2)

If I gave myself time to think about it I might even take issue with some passages of Baldwin's great short story. For writing about music is necessarily second hand, as if to say, "*I guess you just had to be there.*" What's wrong with most writing about jazz, in particular, is that it tries to be "jazzy." By that I'm referring to the element of what the Beats did—and they did much that we should be thankful for—that makes us snicker today, that which suggests bongo drums and torn sweatshirts. To be merely "jazzy" is to borrow what the undiscerning listener imagines to be the rhythms of jazz—staccato, or long and spindly and winding—when in fact the rhythms of the music are as varied as anything Shakespeare ever wrote. To write something "jazzy" is to write about what people assume jazz is, rather than what it is. It borrows the spontaneity and the emotion of the music without touching upon the formidable intellect required to play it and to listen to it closely. Bad poetry about jazz borrows the improvisational nature of that art form without recognizing that in those improvisations, the jazz musician is attempting to build something as architecturally sound as Mozart, but to do it on the first draft, as it were. Most jazz musicians hate playing music that only pretends to be jazz. They would much rather play, and listen to, classical music.

There is nothing jazzy about even the least successful poem or line in *Stompin' at the Grand Terrace*. But beyond that, the achievement of the book is that it has the wisdom not to try to write much about the music

itself. If you've ever had the fun of listening to Phil Bryant read from the text, you'll note how often in introducing the jazz artists referred to in the poems, he uses the word "great": the great Sonny Stitt, the great Lester Young, and so on. That's partly because the audience is, regretfully, not familiar with these great artists (there I go, too...), and there isn't time to provide hours of listening experience between poems in a reading. The word shows up in the poems themselves: "S.P. Leary, the great drummer," "the great Bud Powell." But let's face it, the poet and I, and the characters in *Stompin'* are being relatively inarticulate in dropping this word seemingly to describe the entire pantheon of jazz. It doesn't say much.

That's because it's very hard, or perhaps impossible, to tell the reader anything at all. About the music that is.

The art of this book begins in that it makes jazz most often the occasion of the utterance, not the subject of the poetic description. From time to time, true, a poem will use a metaphor to try to capture the feeling of *listening* to the music (slightly different from a metaphor *for* the music itself, and more honest, it seems to me, though I'm splitting hairs). For instance, the short poem of one-word lines that describes Lester Young's tenor saxophone sound as

A
Door
Somewhere
That
We'd
Find
Already
Unlocked
If
We
Ever
Tried
To
Open
It.

Lovely, to be sure. But the book is smart enough not to make that move too often. It has different notes to play, different approaches to its subjects. It's not afraid to be a *collection* of poems (temporarily out of fashion in the poetry world), at the same time that it's closely unified thematically (very much in fashion).

The book's subtitle reads "a jazz memoir in verse" and like every word in its pages, I have to believe a lot of thought went into that composition. "Verse" of course suggests song lyrics—yet a lot of the book is prose (see the above paragraph on varying strategies)... which leads us to the notion of memoir. The freshness of the memoir component is that here at last is a memoir in which the person doing the remembering is not the main character. Maybe no one is that important, which is why conventional contemporary memoir plays so much more to our nosiness about other people's lives than it does to our literary intellect. In contrast, the narrative strategy in *Stompin'* is more layered: the poet thinks back to his boyhood and the music he heard, but also thinks back to his father (apart from his relationship to the father) and the father's friend who listened to that music constantly, those characters in turn revealing much about working class urban Blacks in a time and place, that in turn revealing so much about the struggles of us all. And then there are the variations in which the writer/poet writes of his recent, adult experiences, or plays cultural historian to tell us, for instance, just what the real Grand Terrace Ballroom was and what it represents and why we should care.

I haven't told you a great deal here about *Stompin' at the Grand Terrace*, nor was that my intention, any more than it is Bryant's intention to tell you about jazz if you don't already know and love the music the way he does. To say that Philip Bryant has found in jazz "his" subject, in this his second or third collection of poems would be condescending and inaccurate. I suspect jazz and these experiences found Phil Bryant a lifetime ago, and it took this many years of care and, yes, revision (so much for

being spontaneous and “jazzy”) for the poems to collect themselves into this particular opportunity.

Eric Lorberer

I DO NOT WANT TO LEAVE A MESSAGE

What I am doing is right but it feels wrong.

It is wrong to leave a shovel in a ditch.

Wrong to carry a pail in November.

I called a wrong number
and the fire machine roared by, spouting flowers.

I threw water on the knives but that was wrong.

Wrong is such a long way from right

that I'm spellbound, struck dumb across the windpipe,
dismembered into a ball of leaves and trash
fumbling down the street.

The absence of a sign is wrong
and the conductors know it, they wave goodbye.

A brocade cap, a garment brush, a mousetrap:

these things are all mistakes, like
unspoken bits of light
or a birdsong

dark with awkward gestures.

Margaret Hasse

APRIL HUMMING

This warm morning
drawing bees to
the apple trees' bower
for blossoms like
love notes left in the night
opening
white wings of perfume
hears the whole orchard's
humming
with the electricity of
someone in love

Someone in love
with the electricity of
humming
hears the whole orchard's
white wings of perfume
opening
love notes left in the night
for blossoms like
the apple tree's bower
drawing bees to
this warm morning

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 2 of 7

The older Catholics that I got my news of the world from, in my formative years, used to talk longingly of the pre-Vatican Council Latin mass (PVCLM), during which the priest faced the altar when he did his presto-chango mumbo jumbo¹, etc., delivering the entire mass in Latin. SOP in the Catholic church I was raised in, post-Vatican Council, had the priest saying mass in the language spoken by the parish (English, in my case), facing said parish.

Despite its solemnity, its chanting priest, its organ music, its border-busting handshake of peace, despite all that, the older Catholics I got my news from told me that the mass I really kinda dug was a liberal interpretation of the centuries-old real thing. I lived in the new world order, I was told, but was glad to be close enough to the old one that eyewitness stories from the front were waiting to be told if I asked the right questions, which was easy enough to do, given the human propensity to think of the world in terms of the good old days versus now.

Then, one leaf-drippingly, this-is-why-we-live-here fall day, the hippies took over. An acoustic guitar ensemble replaced the organ and organist, the choir was put out to pasture, a new hymnal with folk interpretations of the classic hymns replaced the old, leather-bound standard, and we all had to hold hands, kumbaya-style, during the Our Father/Lord's Prayer, which, by its excess, the hand holding, completely ruined the handshake of peace, turning it into a redundant thing.

The pre-hippie handshake of peace was fantastic. The whole parish lingered during it, some stepping out of their pews to shake hands across the aisle, many leaning

this way and that, supported by pews and bodies, reaching to meet a well-aimed hand. Sometimes you shook the hands of the family who always sat in the pew in front of yours when you went to the late mass. Sometimes you shook hands with the family in from out of town, visiting relatives for Easter. You could shake hands with prominent business people, with your teachers, and when you got lucky you sat in front of or right behind the boy or girl you had a crush on—the boy or girl who didn't know about your crush—and on those days the handshake of peace became the SERENDIPITOUS HANDSHAKE OF UNREQUITED VA-VA-VOOM PUPPY LOVE. It was the bomb, man.

So it was a separate-the-continent-into-continents caliber of shift when the predominant mode of mass-touch shifted from the handshake to the hand-hold. The handshake was directed. It was controlled. It lasted only as long as it should. The hand-hold is random and oftentimes incestuous, you most likely being at mass with your family, sitting next to them. The handshake is about the moment. The hand-hold is about duration and discovery over time. The chances of you sitting right next to the boy or girl you had a crush on were far lower than the chances of you sitting near enough to them to aim, click, and shoot a handshake.

Having to hold hands at mass because you're told you have to do so is lot like having to participate in an ice-breaker at a work function. Everybody does it, because its mandatory, but nobody really wants to do it. The way you learn to loathe the work-function ice-breaker is the way I learned to loathe the hippie hand-holding of the new new mass, resenting it, the mass, altogether and forever.

What a surprise it was, then, to find myself excited rather than resentful at the prospect of going to Lucille's workshop a second time. What happens, see, at the end of a Lucille's Clifton poetry writing workshop, is that she asks everybody to hold hands, and while you're holding hands each person there has to tell the others about one

thing that's going to get them through the day. It's kind of like going around the Thanksgiving table, each person noting one thing they're thankful for before digging into the turkey and yams. It's kind of like that, but different from that, too, because the thing that "gets you through the day today, today being a day all its own," isn't the same as the thing you're thankful for once a year.

Each and every time after a person has his or her say, Lucille shares her thoughts, or tells a story, which feels like a blessing. Her workshop reminded me of all the things I loved about the post-PVCLM, pre-hippie mass I grew up with. It was solemn. There was music. Borders were broken. Lucille presided. The notion of nations, each unto themselves, had no practical or contextual meaning whatsoever.

¹Aka the magic spell that leads to transubstantiation, i.e., the Mogen David® turned into Christ's blood, from which the gathered drink, the unleavened wafer turning into His body, from which . . .

THE FATHER'S ROOM

1

The nursing home aide, the good one, ex-nun
with the patience of a distant planet,
sets down the phone, goes
to check the father's room.

The silence too long, the connection so perfect
that the son hears her footsteps come back
to say he's just that minute gone,
"Just as you were dialing..."

Why does the son assume
he is the only one crying
as if in an empty theater,
darkness rising toward the chandeliers?

Friends can't take him past the irony last moments make,
the He just had said, the Only last week,
the He finished all his supper that night
and asked for coffee and dessert.

The idea comes then, and passes, that death gives meaning.
The dying, at first, seems to reveal something.

2

We hauled him up to the cabin one time last year.
More at ease, he didn't insist on packing a rifle
—what did he think we were going to shoot?—didn't insist
on taking his car, not driven since winter.

He even showed mild interest in the two plum trees

I'd planted in the yard, warned me again
to keep the beaver from rebuilding in the lagoon
where only last May he waded with hip boots to tear up their lodge,

got stuck in mud so deep my mother called the rescue squad.
He warned me not to leave valuables inside when I closed up,
so far back in the woods they'd just as soon steal as look at you.
He told me this season we'd hunt from the deer stand the bears
clawed to hell.

He told me this property was no good for deer,
and why that was so.

Matt Mauch

An interview with MC Hyland about her book, *Neveragainland*

*MM: **Neveragainland** tells a story—or stories, if you prefer—focusing less (if at all) on plot and character, relying instead on image, motion, sound. Is this “collage” approach typical of the way you write poems and books of poems?*

MCH: Oh, yeah! Definitely! I’ve always loved collage as an aesthetic, for writing and for other kinds of art. As a kid, I was smitten with Victorian collage valentines; in high school, I spent many, many hours swooning over “The Waste Land.” Now I’m sort of obsessed with folk art environments (like Wisconsin’s Forevertron, or Alabama’s Ave Maria Grotto), for exactly the same reasons. There’s something thrilling about seeing a thing that’s made up of other things. It’s the sense of submerged history, I think: and the sense of possibility that comes from seeing the detritus of the industrial world repurposed into aesthetic items. It makes me feel like the machines haven’t taken over yet, like we still have some agency in the face of all this manmade stuff!

But, to actually answer your question: it took me a long time to internalize that collage aesthetic (or, as I like to think of it, the postmodern lyric) in my own writing—through at least the first half of my twenties, I was very much under the sway of the first person. I went through this very gradual process that started with switching around gender pronouns in traditionally lyric poems, and then inventing increasingly improbable causal relationships, and over time just peeling the world of the poem away from the world of the day-to-day. Because what do we go to poetry for if not the possibility of another world?

I'm now working on a book that is 100% collage. It's collage that takes my own writing as its source text: I write pages and pages of notes, then cut them up into tiny slips of paper, maybe a line or two each. And then I literally cut-and-paste those slips into new poems. It's the most fun process I've yet used. I could get hooked.

MM: Your neologism, "Neveragainland," makes for a great title. Every time I really think about it and say it out loud a few times I'm am half-filled with nostalgia, half-filled with a "that happens again over my dead body" kind of defiant rage. What are you hoping to impart with the title?

MCH: Both of those things! Though I wish I'd invented the word "Neveragainland," it's actually one I found in a New Yorker cartoon about Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. This was before his death, back in the wake of one of the sex scandals. I have no memory of the cartoon itself, though it would be easy enough to track down—the issue date is in the poem called "Neveragainland." I cut out the word and ended up using it as the title for a collage poem, which, under its influence (and that of a spooky black-and-white photograph from the same issue), became sort of apocalyptic: it ends with the line "we'll evacuate to the moon."

I chose *Neveragainland* as the title because it felt like it responded to a lot of the issues the book grapples with: ecological destruction, extinct (or now-vestigial) political systems, geographical displacement. And nostalgia. Always, definitely, nostalgia.

MM: Chairman Mao, for most people—and I imagine this is the same in both the East and the West—is more caricature than character, yet your poems that take their cue from Maoist propaganda are personal and sympathetic. It's like biting into what you thought was solid dough and finding a custard-filled center. How did the Maoist sayings lead to

you writing—and might I say to the great pleasure of the reader—such delectable treats, and what can we maybe take away from that as United States-ians in a politically bi-polar, propagandistic age?

MCH: Part of what I initially found exciting about Maoist propaganda was its illegibility to me as a western reader: though it shares some elements with Russian propaganda, it comes primarily from a visual tradition which I lack the skills to properly interpret. So many of the posters are colorful, full of happy children and workers, almost always with the smiling, fatherly (and, oddly, disembodied) head of Chairman Mao looking down on them. Of course, like any propaganda, they're intended to mask (or to transform!) all sorts of repressions—but what I take away from them (as, again, an uninitiated reader) is not so much a sense of militancy as one of utopianism. I wondered what it might mean to take them at (pun intended) face value: to imagine the sort of magical-realist world they present—all full of colors and people and things—within the context of the contemporary. I think the tenderness of the posters' optimism (even if that optimism may have been cynically deployed) led to a kind of human tenderness, especially about this “bodiless and beatific” Chairman, looking on from the sky.

MM: Domiciles in your book, the structures themselves and elements of their architecture, orthodox and not, many and varied, both give and don't give, like they are indifferent to giving despite what the humans living inside them wish was their agency, like “nature” in something by Stephen Crane. Do you see domiciles—the ambivalence of domiciles—as a sort of muse?

MCH: I moved a lot during the writing of this book, from Maryland, where the first poems were composed, to Philadelphia, Alabama, and then Minneapolis. I think all that moving led me to think a lot about the provisional

quality of most domestic spaces in the modern (or at least the American) world. I actually picked up a copy of Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* at one point, when I realized how much I write about houses/apartments, and I found that, lovely though the book was, it didn't speak to my sense of a dwelling at all—Bachelard's houses have a sense of inevitability and the organic, while the places I've lived have all seemed like places I'm passing through. Even my current apartment, which I adore, has had many tenants before me, and will have many more after.

I wrote the long poem "Residential, as in" during the first few months of a year of house-sitting and subletting, when I think the provisionality of dwelling places was a particularly pressing concern. The year before that, I'd done some work in Greensboro, Alabama, which is one of the homes of Auburn University's Rural Studio architecture program. The program builds beautiful municipal buildings and houses in Hale County, AL, using structures appropriated from southern vernacular architecture, and, often, materials salvaged from the detritus of industry. I'm inspired by the program—both by its successes and its failures. When it does fail, it's because of a failure to communicate: the students and professors are so focused on architectural design and sustainability that they can, on occasion, fail to ask the people they're building for what they want or need. These failures are especially heartbreaking when a house has been built, and then lies empty, because the person the house was built for doesn't want a dwelling that loudly signals his or her poverty, that's built of salvaged windshields or tin. I don't think that's a situation that arises often, but it's one I think about when I think about houses: they're so pregnant with meaning, with values, with expectations. How could they not be muses?

*MM: Okay, you've named a section and a trio of poems after **Ballet Mécanique**, so now I hear the score as the soundtrack to your book and see the film, the way its*

*repetitions and separations build to something that feels like the feeling that led to us inventing the word “meaning”—I see that a forebearer of your own narrative structure. How do you see (or feel) the movie or the music or the eventual mix that is **Ballet Mécanique** as a kind of dance partner to **Neveragainland**?*

MCH: Absolutely—what I love about that film is exactly that—the way it makes meaning (I would actually go so far as to say it makes an argument) without using any of the tools we usually think are necessary to an argument. There’s no narrative, no characters, per se, and yet you come out of it with a clear sense of message. I read *Ballet Mécanique* as being about the way that people and machines brush up against and start to become like each other, especially when encouraged to do so by capitalist modes of production. I love the film for its storytelling, but it also feels like an apt partner to *Neveragainland* because so much of the stuff I’m using in the poems (obsolete propaganda, films both popular and arty, the mountain of magazines I accumulated in various homes) are the detritus of those mechanized 20th century forms of production.

MM: I read this and sense the influence of C.D. Wright and Jorie Graham. I know, though, that who a reader (me) sees as an influence upon another (you) is as based as much upon said reader’s (my) reading history and influences as it is on said poet’s (yours). So, who do you see as your influences here?

MCH: I think it was because I loved music so much that I was able to start thinking about what actually made a piece of writing compelling. A lot of my models in my early twenties were songwriters—John Darnielle (of the Mountain Goats), Springsteen, Joni Mitchell, Simon Joyner—and I noticed that songs could actually be more effecting when you knew less of the story they were telling. There’s this Mountain Goats song called

“Neon Orange Glimmer Song” that I think taught me everything about what I want poems to do—it’s cheerful and strummy and the verses are a sort of blues structure, repeating simple lines about stuff like plants in the backyard, and then there’s this chorus: “I am a monster...I can’t believe the thing I’ve done.” If I could write poems that packed the same sort of incongruous emotional gut-punch, I would!

In terms of who I think of as poetic influences, I’d definitely say Lyn Hejinian (whose writing I find quite lyric, though not everyone does) and Brenda Hillman are big ones for this book—there’s a reason why they’re both quoted in the epigraphs. Also Medbh McGuckian and Inger Christensen. T. S. Eliot, John Donne, and Margaret Atwood were all early and powerful influences on me, as well, teaching me about rhythm and the elasticity of language. Harryette Mullen’s *Sleeping With the Dictionary* and some of Joshua Beckman’s work shook me up and helped me think about humor—there are poems in *Neveragainland* that I can directly attribute to reading each of them.

LouAnn Shepard Muhm

ANGLER

In fishing it's always the mystery that stops me.
Not knowing what's under the black-mirror glass,
I rarely can muster the faith that's required
To keep at it, cast after cast after cast.

I'd rather sit down to enjoy sun and birdsong,
Watching the light as it plays on the trees.
This is a weakness, I know, to look shallow,
Never confronting the puzzle of deep.

But you know the secrets of watery hideouts,
You enter those depths as you stand on the shore
You know what's there waiting in cool, weedy hollows,
Each cast a step closer, more certain than prayer.

You envy the silence, I think, of the weedbeds;
Bulrushes rub against silvery scales.
You think of fish weightless, caressed by the water,
You've been there in dreams and recall how it feels.

Land-life is frenzied and webbed and it makes you
Admire perfection of purpose in fish.
No movement is wasted in their boneless fin-glide;
Even in fear, there's no trembling of flesh.

Kate Shuknecht

Looking For Love In All The Right Places

The green worm wiggles...

is the first line of poetry I remember writing. The rest of my amateur haiku attempt from third grade is as lost to the years as it was later lost to the washing machine. But what I retain is immeasurably more important: the joyous triumph of original creation. That poem was MINE and I carried its pocket-sized radiance closely (at least for a week) as I still carry closely that singular achievement of bringing something new into the world.

This fantastic task of wrangling words grew to magical heights. If sounds and syllables were puzzle pieces and it were my charge to place them perfectly, then of course discovering their necessary patterns made me feel like the queen of everything. While my poetic course became clearer, what confused me was that this sacred undertaking did not seem to be a priority for anyone else I knew. I spent wearying years in a workaday world defending my transcendent experiences, justifying time spent apparently daydreaming, trying to explain how words are a product of labor well spent and furthermore whatdoyoucare?! My choices were secretive poems, angry declarations, or leaving to a place where words didn't have to be constantly legitimized by practical means. I tried all these tactics, ultimately pursuing my MFA degree in a city, in a state, in a time zone entirely new.

*When I moved
1,000 miles west
Mom bought me an atlas.
Before I left I shared it
with one who wasn't
leaving. He said
"Aren't you afraid?"*¹

Yes. I was terrified. I was intensely scared that if I stayed I would die. Oh not literally, not right way. But die in a thousand daily ways that can be the only result of seeing the thing I valued most decrease in my esteem as I would be invariably sucked in to the bland expectations of others. Nervous that I would become unworthy of the words I fought so hard to deserve. Absolutely certain I would go mad. I should add that I didn't suffer a complete lack of support. My immediate family was and is amazingly encouraging of my literary life. But wanting me to be happy is not the same as understanding what drives my vision of happiness.

*Spring is achieved
purpose perfected
in eager green
of leaves like punctuation
three - ellipses breathe...
two - aside (push)
one - exclamation so new! ²*

So I came to Saint Paul, to Hamline University, and (luck of all luck!) I found more than I was looking for. Before my first class even officially began one of my fellow students asked if she could make an announcement. She had already taken a couple classes and knew several people long entrenched in the program and was involved in an excellent student organization called West Egg Literati. This fledgling operation began as a way to get students together outside of the classroom, to facilitate connections and conversations that only happen in galleries, bars and living rooms, to engage in the larger literary community, hell, the larger community. Yes. Community. This is the word that fit my longing. Classes were all well and good but I wanted, nay, needed! to be involved with like-minded folks who were shaking things up by making other ways to interact and learn. The announcement went thusly: West Egg planning meeting next Sunday at Coffee News. Here's the time and address. If you have

ideas or are just curious about what we do, come. And I went.

Four years (and a few months) later, I am still in Saint Paul, having just defended my thesis and making jokes over the phone with my brother in Pittsburgh, insisting that he forevermore refer to me as Master (or at least until I get a Phd and then he may call me Doctor). I've often thought back to that first West Egg meeting I attended and marvel at all that has come from it. The only other people who attended were five women who founded West Egg and worked tirelessly to keep it going and growing. They've all since graduated but are all still integral parts of my life. In fact, one became my roommate. One became a crafty collaborator in broadcast press (a book arts-based collective with two other lively ladies who also attend Hamline). One became our first client in said press and has established her own collaborative film/poetry project called Co-Kisser which she has turned into an annual contest, with broadcast press creating original books for each winning manuscript. The other two are great friends who I don't work with as much without the blanket of West Egg functions but still see in the waves of interactions that overlap in artistic circles.

*Don't spill a drop, drain every sip, tip it
drain every sip, tip it all the way back
all the way back until empty. Use
until empty. Use what you have, take
what you have, take what you need...³*

My plan: Say "yes" to everything then make time to do it. It wasn't just attending and then helping to create the various readings, parties, panels and field trips promoted through West Egg that gave me the range of experiences I so craved (and which have subsequently helped me get better jobs and make me far more capable at coordinating schedules, contacting venues and the other million minutia of setting up anything from a cooking class to a neighborhood fundraiser). The thing

that influenced me the most (and what I think is still the coolest product coming from this ever-evolving organization) was *rock, paper, scissors*. Once a year the MFA and MALS students at Hamline create a unique literary magazine with a book arts bent, composed solely of student work, designed and constructed entirely by students. In my first year at Hamline I was able to work on *r, p, s* as a poetry editor and as a member of the design team. I also had a poem published. I contributed to the creation of this magazine every year that I was able and was even editor-in-chief for the 2008 edition.

All these experiences were invaluable. I read my first slush pile and got a taste for the degree of subjectivity that is editing. I sat in a basement with a beer in one hand, a pencil in the other and an X-Acto knife in my teeth, seeing paper-folding spitballing launch into totally feasible ideas for original ways to unbind yet contain pages. I created spreadsheets, sent countless emails, cajoled and cracked-heads when I tried to find the lines between friend, colleague and chief. And while I get to add these skills to my resume, other fortunate results have occurred. People in positions of generosity have noticed my hard work. Professors have shared interview and publication credits with me; colleagues in writing and book arts have asked me to be on panels and visit classrooms; I've been recently asked to run a literary magazine workshop for high school students this summer. My initial splash in the literary community pool continues to ripple outward and I'm a stronger swimmer for it.

...Listen

*to what is learned in corners of coffee houses, back
attic rooms, templar basements, through windows'
casements before there were doors, on my first city street
like a secret (bold) harmonic
slap (to the face) banjo, toe, toe and ⁴*

YAWP.

As in Barbaric. As in the monthly literary open mic

series hosted by my fellow Hamline MFA alum, Chris Title. As in one more imperative part of my now flourishing communal experience here in the Twin Cities. Title first founded this Whitman-inspired night almost three years ago. In the beginning we gathered at MacKenzie in Minneapolis but more recently we meet at Coffee Grounds in Saint Paul. I'm pleased to say I've attended almost every YAWP, reading poems and prose old, new and not always mine. After such a span I am enthralled to note we have managed to keep a core of regular attendees as well as continually grow a mix of artists from outside the Hamline loop and even a fan-base of neighborhood folks who just like to listen. This is the best of all worlds. The true blue YAWPers are able to read sequential pieces over spans of time and/or showcase range and evolution and get better feedback because there is a history for comparison. The new voices keep things fresh and unexpected. We've had well-published poets stop in to test new material as well as just budding high schoolers shakily mangle the mic.

For myself, the practice of mic management has been most helpful. I, too, have been known to bungle the technical side of public reading. Lips too close, spitting gibberish. Lips too far, whispered missed words. Stand too low, sore neck, sore back, squinted eyes trying to see the words. And then there's poise. I used to be hair-tucker, flicking a lock around my left ear with maniacal frequency. Month-by-month my nervous quirks have leveled out to more confident mannerisms. It's impossible for me to act natural. I just had to do it until I was natural. An additional boon to monthly open mic-ing is wanting to have new material. The best writing prompt is knowing that many of these people have heard pretty much every decent thing I've written in the last three years. And while there's no shame in breaking out the occasional old favorite, it's always more exciting to share something hot off the laptop.

*I never know if I am
doing this right except when I know
I am doing.⁵*

A similar spin-off is my writing group. This is like a smaller, work-in-progress open mic (usually with less mic and more food). Aside from getting together on a monthly basis and hearing new work from poets I adore and admire, this is another kick-in-the-pants to keep writing. Generally, I'm a self-motivated artist. But I've also been known to fall prey to distraction. Having a writing group keeps me accountable to someone other than myself, which has been especially important in the last year that I've been working on my thesis and not taking classes. Not only do these ladies motivate me to share new work, but we always start the evening off with great discussion before we get to workshopping. One or more of us brings in an article or a book or a question. It's fairly unplanned. I'm very fortunate to have found poets who are serious enough about their work that discussion of the literary world falls into place alongside the commonalities of well-wishing and how's-your-family. We're also very nurturing to each other's practices without being too soft. We share advice on how to maneuver jobs and other daily cares while still living as poets, which is different from writing poetry.

*Put it on.
Say: this is not
the first time
you have walked
through this door
for the last time.⁶*

On break one winter my aunt asked if I would move back home after I graduated. I said probably not (though my heart was screaming NO!). In the years that I have been here it hasn't gotten any easier to explain that I can't feel fulfilled in a one-bar, no-stop-light town that really doesn't care about

poetry without it sounding like “I’m too good to live your life.” I’ve never wanted to hurt anyone’s feelings. I attempted yet again to say how it wasn’t about achieving MFA status then just coming back. The degree may be the pragmatic goal but the real purpose and achievement is the earned experience of participating in this world of artists and events. This world that I have fought hard to be a part of. This world that was growing every day. I tried to tell how I had more and better opportunities to take advantage of. And more and better opportunities to give back. And that this beautiful interaction did not end upon degree completion but would most certainly end (or at least significantly diminish) if I came back to western NY to... what?

Work where? Write and read with who? Fall immediately to the frustrated ways that pushed me to leave in the first place? And isn’t it possible that “home” could be redefined to include everywhere I am? My speech grew quite impassioned but had little effect except to cause speculation that drama classes had been part of my curriculum. But I meant it. And I still mean it.

I’m not saying that if one wants to be a serious poet (whatever that is) than one must live in a city, or this city, or that one has to do specifically any of the things I have done. This is simply the path that has worked for me. And I’m still on it. There may come a day when my path changes, when success depends on different surroundings. Recently poet Jim Moore and I were discussing how I planned to stay engaged with poetry now that I’ve earned my MFA. As we were considering the various groups I’m involved in and possible turns in the future, he gave me some unexpected advice: “Know when to take a break from this fruitful community you’ve helped build around yourself.” He then suggested setting aside specific time alone, whether it’s regular writing time throughout the day/week, or big blocks of time like writing retreats. I recognize the wisdom of his words.

Because the truth is, it’s possible to get caught up in the poetry community and lose sight of the poetry. With

his words in mind I think a little longer before I say “yes” to projects and invitations. My work must come first. It is the center I build around. I believe for poets, poetry is not just a thing we do, it’s who we are. It’s not only tied to the work of doing, but to the work of being. This may be true in other arts and professions. I hope so.

But I can only speak for myself and my craft. Seeing every experience through a poet’s lens means I am paying attention as carefully as I can. I think this makes me more appreciative and, ultimately, an increasingly better participant in this crazy cosmos we all call home.

*Space is a page, what’s outer about it is the margins.
By this new quantum logic our universe is the coolest poem
being written every minute...⁷*

¹ excerpt from my poem: “This Is How We Might Be Found”

² excerpt from my poem “Self Portrait As Flower”

³ excerpt from my poem “Self Portrait In Mirror”

⁴ excerpt from my poem “Tempo Rubato Con Bravura”

⁵ excerpt from my poem “Advice From AWP, 2009”

⁶ excerpt from my poem “The Hat”

⁷ excerpt from my poem “White”

William Reichard

TWO MEN ROWING MADLY TOWARD INFINITY

The current flows in the opposite direction
so they are moving, always,

against.

Time is like water, but is not water.

Time flows, but isn't a river.

They're determined to reach their destination,
that point when they may turn the boat about
and head toward home. But oars drag slowly
through these viscous hours.

You cannot set your watch by it.

Better to use the sun, approximate
your position in the sky.

As they row, the shore becomes a series
of scrolling scenes, a diorama of one era
crashing into the next, an index
of possibilities. There is always the pull

toward,

which implies

its opposite. The push into one day
moves them

away

from another.

If there were such a thing,
one might say they've been in this boat

forever.

But there's not, so they've always only just arrived.

It's a warm day on the river.

See how the light falls on their shoulders,
sweat glistening in the long sun.

Without the will to go forward,
they can only

continue.

As the daylight ebbs, the dusk engulfs them.

In their vessel, the atoms of all that's
 been,
 all that
 is,
 all that
 will be
merge in the darkness, erase any difference between
the men, their craft, the water, and the endless world.

Matt Mauch

A review of Paula Cisewski's Ghost Fargo

A small-town boy who's moved circuitously to the city I live in now, I've always been curious about what it feels like to live in the same place forever, to still run into the kids you went to kindergarten with. It's a nonviolent Us vs. Them thing, the push and pull of which Paula Cisewski is privy to, a conclusion I come to with her Nightboat Poetry Prize-winning *Ghost Fargo* (selected by Franz Wright) as witness.

In poems where the line between poet and speaker feels negligible, the poet/speaker of the opening poem admits that what is being said is as much about the sayer as it is the said. She recalls her brother's death, saying, "I will at least be honest:/ it is not his person but my/ longing becoming epic." The relationship the speaker/poet has with the brother she carries within is anything but simple. Dead and not-dead, he "holds up/ a cardboard sign at the freeway exit ramp and I/ distracted, drive right past." In this sense, the brother is one example among many.

It is never clear whether what we carry of where and whom we're from is burden or blessing. Cisewski says this clearly in the long, multi-sectioned poem "the poor choruses":

Recall The Loverboy girls.

The Loverboy girls! A triumvirate
Strut through the mezzanine
in their groupie band T-shirts,
festooned with bandannas!
Now, I am happy again. Or

*and what if your absence remains
the most interesting thing about me?*

One response to carrying around not only the ghosts of

place, of cities like Fargo, but the ghosts of people, too—those still living and not—would be to let them, their accumulating presences, weigh you down like the emotional and psychological equivalent of cement shoes. Cisewski chooses the opposite path. She takes the accumulated ghosts and, both literally in section two and figuratively in the three other sections of the book, renders them in odes, a god-like state in which the poet/speaker is maker, a creator of firsts. In “Ode to Tether,” a poem recalling the poet/speaker’s parents, she says, “In this game/it’s as though I created them./ But how did I recognize them?,” her parents, who:

After such an absence, they appeared
as two familiar darkneses
in an entryway of light.

These aren’t your father’s or your mother’s odes. They do not exalt, but render (i.e., melt down, process, extract), honest revelation building upon honest revelation, until the poet/speaker realizes that the carrying around of ghost cities, carrying, in fact, a city of ghosts within her, may be not only a response to external things but part of her nature. This enlightenment comes through in “Ode to Continual Loss,” when the poet/speaker admits, “Eventually a boy was born unto me . . . He was my city and he is/ my city and that/ is not always fair.”

The push and pull of the ghosts leaves the poet/speaker happy at times, sad at others—functionally manic, as in “Ode to a Dull Ache (Fargo Redux),” where the poet/speaker wants “some more some/ cuss some blasphemy. Some suet for our pet *if only*./ Into whose birdcage we gaze/ and poke our childish fingers, in/ endless, selfish dares.”

Singing loudest amidst the choir of ghosts, as Cisewski does for us, the seemingly matter-of-fact becomes anything but. An observation like, “There were only mourning doves. No other bird” explodes like a snowball

some punk kid throws at your car window. In the end,
the 'usable thing' all this rendering has rendered is a kind
of "more to come," but all comers and coming beware,
this badass poet has your number:

I permit Ghost Fargo
to follow me around.

(*Here, boy!*) which is not like relenting:
which is no kindness whatsoever.

It would be kinder
to throw it out to the night!

Then it would be a tumbleweed.
Then I would be a cowgirl.

And a tumbleweed.

Leslie Adrienne Miller

FROM A BALCONY OVER RUE DE LA HUCHETTE

It's possible to step into and out of
the shadows of walkers with the eye

alone, each block an accomplishment,
the mind's claim to more space

with less effort, unless you are
the boy inclined to experiment

with the vagaries of narrative
sequence, entirely engaged

in the problem of whether to drop
the cork in front of the woman

or on her. Looking down as a power
as long as no one below can find,

let alone open, the door he remembers
as hidden behind racks of postcards,

behind a giant spindle of lamb
shimmering in spotlit grease,

the door he remembers leads to a tiny,
slow lift and another locked door.

Therefore he decides the last drop
of wine in mother's glass might descend

differently, might be perceived
as rain, which, oddly enough, makes

anyone look up, as if there is something
other than cloud responsible.

There was a father there too, that day,
though now that we are in his future,

in the simple alteration of tense, he's not
present. You can't exactly say he's been erased.

He's simply no longer in the mind considering
the view over Rue de la Huchette,

fixing on the end of the block where
the sky arrives differently every time

she looks. What to do with the missing
agency this change in tense has caused?

Who will stop the child from flinging
the ruby lozenge of Bordeaux?

Who will stop the mother from turning
the last sip of wine into rain?

“FROM A BALCONY OVER RUE DE LA HUCHETTE”
first appeared in *The Literary Review*, 2010

GTCPR Fun Fact # 1

At the end of the evening, the names of each of the poets who read prior to the 10-minute open-mic portion of the event* were placed in the ceremonial beaver skin hat. The third name drawn from the hat was **Kathryn Kysar**, and she was awarded the \$150 Jazz June Prize. The second name drawn from the hat was **Todd Boss**, and he was awarded the \$250 *Water~Stone Review* Prize. Although the editor cannot recall the names, he knows that five more were drawn from the hat, as he drew them, and each of those poets were awarded one of five anonymously donated microphones.

** The open-mic portion of the event is part of the GTCPR's mission to foster and celebrate community. Audience members may read a poem that takes no longer than 90 seconds to read, and each of the poems read during the open-mic portion of the event will be considered for publication in the **Poetry City, USA** series.*

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 3 of 7

I'd fished the fresh waters of the Midwest, had my own tackle box, my own gear. Dreaming of one day being able to afford not only local but also exotic multinational, multicontinental sporting excursions of my own, I was a subscriber to and voracious reader of *Sports Afield*, *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, *In-Fisherman*, etc. For birthdays and Christmases, I asked for more gear and subscription renewals. I was sure I was going to be a guide, was going to own a resort. When I played with my dad's old Lincoln Logs®, I built the resort I envisioned operating. I took a class in taxidermy so that I'd be able to mount my trophy catches. I studied recipes, vowing never to let anything I caught and didn't release go to waste. In the seventh grade, I was taught science by a man who would resign to become editor of the *In-Fisherman*. I listened to his fishing stories intently, not paying attention to plot or characterization or climax, but focusing on details of weather, of barometric pressure change, cross-referencing lure color with conditions and seasons. I tried to catch bluegill on a bare swivel, yanking from the water at the precise time they hit, thinking that if I landed one—if I could time my yank to its suck—that I'd be a ninja fisherman, maybe the first one ever.

I was, that is, steeped in the outdoor arts, in the blood sports of land and water. It wasn't until late in my 30s, never having opened a resort or caught a trophy fish, my interests shifted to the literary arts, no longer sure I could tie the proper knot to keep the hook attached to the line, unclear whether the best way to hook a minnow's through the head or the tail, dreaming not of the fishing tours I would guide but of the books I'd publish, seeing my old science teacher from time to time

on In-Fisherman TV, not sure anymore whether it's a rising or dropping pressure that means a storm's coming, that the fishing'll be good, or not, or who knows what.

No, it wasn't until hair began growing out of my ears—till my knees started to ache just from doing what they do—that I came across tilapia, filets of it sitting in large and mostly clear bags, next to the catfish filets in similar bags, all frozen, inexpensive, and just the ticket for a fella hoping to feed 15-20 friends at a backyard cookout.

I had enough experience grilling fish not to worry about whether or not I could transform the tilapia into something cooked and edible. If nothing else, I could make fish tacos, and the accoutrements—guac, fresh tomatoes, salsa verde, hot sauce, scallions, chopped romaine, etc.—would render my fish choice moot. And so went the summer of the tilapia taco. On the surface it all seemed kosher (figuratively speaking), but the surface never provides the whole story, now, does it?

That fall, I did some research. I learned that the name “tilapia” is much like the name “mahi mahi”—a brand used to market a fish that locals know by a different name. The switch-up happens once the fish becomes a mass-produced commodity. Mahi mahi, I knew, was a euphemism for dolphin (the fish, not the mammal), and tilapia, I found out, was a replacement for cichlid, et al. That I was suddenly seeing bags upon bags of frozen tilapia filets in the supermarket was a result of some 40 various species of the tilapia, due to their nice size and rapid growth rate, making perfect candidates for aquaculture, i.e. fish farming, an abnormal cultivation process in which the health benefits of eating something you might catch in the wild are eliminated by (a) hormone injections, (b) an unnatural diet of corn and soy, and (c) the less-than-robustness that comes from an overcrowded life in a pen (what you want from your veal is not what you want from your salmon).

How Lucille got on the subject of tilapia I don't recall, but what she said once she took the topic up is something I'll never forget: “Tilapia? What's tilapia?”

Tilapia was never a fish when I was growing up. I never fed my kids tilapia because there was no such thing as tilapia. Tilapia! Don't feed me no tilapia."

Upon encountering the unknown, Lucille Clifton's gut reacted, and she went with that reaction. Encountering the same unknown, I had a gut reaction identical to Lucille's, but didn't go with it. I cleared a space for it to sit beside me, interviewed it, checked its references, and then sent a form letter saying it didn't get the job.

What you would've learned if you had ever had the opportunity to spend some time around Lucille is this: she's got/had a lot of gut feelings, and seems/seemed to always go with them, and is/was always right. Even when, in the telling of it, it seemed like she was on the oh so wrong path, there'd be a twist at the end showing how she'd been right all along.

I still wonder: Do/did Lucille and I interact with the world not just differently, but irrevocably differently, or, in our reactions to tilapia, can one discern qualities of the master and qualities of the apprentice, the differences between us having more to do with "I have arrived" versus "I am on my way"? I'm not sure that one way or the other—difference as irrevocable versus difference as journey—is better or worse. But I know that I'll spend the rest of my life measuring myself by Lucille's standard. That I have tilapia to either thank or blame for that—perfectly acceptable things to do with tilapia, thank them or blame them. As long as you don't take a bite afterward.

Matt Rasmussen

LOVE POEM FOR OPTIMUS PRIME

There is no love like the love of a man for a robot.
We could travel wherever we want and I could live

inside you. My wife would be ok with it because you
are asexual and have a way of convincing people

with your iron voice like a futuristic Public Service Announcement
and the force to back it up. But I won't be able to fathom

your gentleness, your giant hand never crushing me
even a little and somehow you never accidentally

kick me across the afternoon. You will leave your cause
and I mine, I'll have one by then, and we'll never talk about

who we were. You'll try but I'll just put my finger to your cold,
chrome communi-grate and say, "shhhh..." and we can watch

the sunset in silence, if the sun is setting at that time. If it isn't,
then it isn't. We won't be able to keep travelling forever, my wife

after all will be waiting for me, I hope, and when I begin
to treat your truck-self differently than your robot-self,

I hope you'll understand. It's just, I would rather be
a passenger in your rolling cab than the alien

and nonmetal heart in your see-through-shielded chest.

Matt Mauch

A Review of Steve Healey's *10 Mississippi*

I've always been able to see more shapes (huge hands, bunnies, giraffes) in the swirls, rolls, sucks, torrents, bellies, eddies, and pocks of a river than I have in any of the clouds above (including but not limited to the rare and alluring mammatocumulus), and I suspect Steve Healy and I, at least in this regard, are a lot alike.

In Healy's *10 Mississippi* are poems like rivers. Paradoxically and engagingly, they stay the same and yet are entirely brand new. As with a river, this is done partly by marrying repetition (the tumbling boils that break the surface about fifty feet from shore remain the tumbling boils that break the surface about fifty feet from shore, as long as you stand on the bridge watching) with renewal (the water you first saw when you noticed the tumbling boils is in Red Wing by now). In the poem "New Fighting Technologies," "A rock can be used as a weapon" re-emerges as "A person/ can be used as a weapon," and then as "humans have been used as weapons/ with increasing effectiveness" from which comes "It's always/ the same last light that touches the faces/ of new casualties lying in their own blood," a dance that ends with:

We sit there
searching for the right words
to make the final weapon
that will force the sun to set.
Finally we say the words
the sun is setting.
And then we wait.

The paradox of our lives, Healy's poems make it known, is parallel with the paradox of the river. Two old friends

who haven't seen each in awhile cross paths, and the speaker of one of the ten sections that comprise the long, eponymous poem "10 Mississippi" says, "I think we were glad to see each other,/ but it was weird to see those years in each other's faces,/ as if not-seeing could be seen."

Childhood rhymes, tropes, and tongue-twisters like "She sells seashells by the seashore," find their way in and, in the processing plants of Healey's poems, cast-off their Disneyfication and reveal their inner Grimm selves: "Protected/ by 30 SPF sunscreen, she sells . . . inside each seashell/ the sea is having sex with its shore . . . she sells maritime erotica produced/ across the sea in factories . . . The messiah tells her that in exchange/ for her sins she will suffer by working/ eight-hour shifts until she dies."

Even the idea of original poetry itself is a thing that, while new, participates in formations (like that tumbling boil) that stay the same, a testament Healey makes with epigraphs throughout the book, each one asserting, "been there, done that, but you just go right ahead with your new way of saying it." The Declaration of Independence's "to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them," morphs into "Clouds gather to beat/ cats and dogs out of heaven. If you catch/ a tiger by the toe, your mother says to pick/ the very best one, and you are not it,/ you are the best rain ever," and we are glad that Healey has decided old dogs can indeed be taught his new tricks.

Water appears in all of its masks, in nearly every poem, as its paradoxical, mesmerizing, life-giving, life-taking, 55-to-60-percent-of-who-we-all-are self. We encounter glacier, pond, snow, bog, tide, fog, et al, in brilliantly harmonious discord. In the poem "Slow Emergency," the story of a dysfunctional family includes an ocean crossing, tears, and sideways rain, concluding with:

There is a family of ice cubes melting

in a tumbler, and you can hear
what those little frozen oceans
say while losing their shape.
You can hear the sun killing them.

Of all the gifts given us in *10 Mississippi*, the one you'll thank Healey for most is a pervasive originality of language, imagery, and all comparisons of the metaphoric ilk. It's a book that makes you feel like one of the gang, sitting there with Healey and his pals, when someone says:

if you look far enough into the stars
you can see a limousine pulling up, ready to drive us
into morning. The pond said, listen to these kick-ass frogs,
they remember what the glacier felt like when
it retreated, like it was letting go of a book
it would never finish. We listened to the frogs,
and for a while, we didn't say anything stupid.

Katrina Vandenberg

She thinks of herself as an old green Dodge van

from the 70's, lumbering down I-75 after 2 am,
driven by a mother. On the bench in back
the sister whispers to the brother, "She's drunk
again." And if the van is this woman, the O

of the steering wheel is her mouth in lipsticked
surprise, with plenty of play in it. A silver goat
swings from the rearview mirror, aims its horns
at the boy and the girl in back. They were alive

when the van was built, but it's from before
they can remember, they can't imagine
it parked in front of a flower shop, a van to pass
their eyes over without noticing. The woman

is a van the children inside are ashamed of, indelicate
with rusted quarter-panels, no longer capable
of blending in. The girl's friend sits at her side.
That makes three kids with stretched-out

seat belts that don't work, if you're keeping track,
in the back of the van driven by a drunk mother
a van that is really a woman (remember?)
a woman entering the shiny headlight stream

of the universe. Earlier, the van waited
in the frosted dark of the bowling alley's parking lot.
The van that is really a woman had to imagine:
league night, the mother's vodka tonics, the kids

leaning on a jukebox pulsing watery light. Scores
were being projected overhead, and shadows
of hands bigger than life were writing in spares,

X's for strikes. If the bowling alley's a memory,
the van that is really a woman could not get inside it.
And you must not confuse her with the sister, now
crying. You must not confuse her with the friend
gazing out the window, pretending not to know.

The van that is really a woman only carries them.
You must not confuse her with the mother,
though she often confuses herself with the mother,
drunk, hurtling down the highway after 2 am.

Richard Robbins

First Lesson

It's rhythm. It begins near your navel and goes down when you breathe in. It rises as you exhale, sometimes clear out your mouth.

It's the sound of your feet on the sidewalk, the softer sound passing over wood chips in Rasmussen Woods, the sound of your rubber soles on terrazzo as you walk from your desk to the restroom. It's the echo in the restroom, your voice against the canyon wall, the cave. It plays the sound of your past against the sound of the next moment.

It followed you in your car that day to the double falls outside of town. It's waited for you all these years to hear about why nothing happened, why you turned around and came back. It's the rhythm of three moments: the drive there, the turning back, and now.

It lies down inside you like breath, like the bass line of grief, two thimblefuls so powerful, if you let them leave you you might die. It's the life in you you have to give away. It wants to be prodigal, to upset you running away toward the world. It's the music of letting flesh and blood go join the circumference of the world, the round song of ancient birds, the round violence of Asian war, of leaving someone behind.

It's never idea. It's rhythm of cornstalk following Buick following the color of her cheek. It's the rhythm of summer air so heavy the insects labor through their song, and baseballs die in midair just over second base, and the woman high in the stands blacks out, comes to, then talks nonsense, all the while her sixteen-year-old daughter fumbles with her summer skirt watching Jeremy, the boy at bat, who just last night in these bleachers put his lips to her neck, her ear.

It's never idea. It's rhythm. It's rhythm in your chest and in the sound it makes in air and something like

the sound of words on a page but never that perfectly, never that or else you will have become a sorcerer and you're writing the spell that without help of potions or swinging watches would make us lose, or find once and for all, ourselves. Writing's not magic but the rhythm of it.

Tim Nolan

UNTITLED

I've never written a poem
titled—*Untitled*—but now

I'm thinking there should be no title—
not even—*Untitled*—it should

Just be a blank _____
where the title would normally be—

And you could title it yourself—
if you chose to call it—*Untitled*—

So be it—it's just
that I've wanted to

Give you a hint as to what
was on my mind—as if

That's even possible—a way
to draw you in—*This*

Is something I would like to know—
but tonight—when Micah

Walks down the street with his
two girlfriends—I want

To call this poem—*Micah*—
because he has a way

With the girls that should be
celebrated—even in a poem

That no one will read—
Micah—who when he was six—

Went out on Halloween as James Bond—
a dark ruffled suit—he pointed

His plastic gun at me—said his line—
The name's James...Bond...James—

Kathryn Kysar

THE DAY TEN PEOPLE DIED AT RED LAKE

“Are you a relative?” Don Shelby, WCCO T.V.
Outside the Beltrami County Hospital
Monday, March 21, 2005

We drove the narrow road
north to the border, flashes
of blue sky, brown mud flats
packed hard with rocks, plowed
by waves with perfect precision.

With perfect precision,
he aimed at faces, heads,
sounds popping like a paint gun,
the numbers of dead counting
Against the door leaned
a teacher and student, others
huddled in closets, bullets spraying.

Before the bodies on stretchers,
before terrified parents lined
the school fence, before
his name hummed in wires
on the gun and joined
the white-capped waves,
the muddied weeds in the ditches,
the dark green shade of the pines.

The day ten people died at Red Lake,
we drove a winding road north.
With perfect precision, light flashed
between the silhouettes of trees.
Ghosts singing on those stark high
wires, we will not say your names.

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 4 of 7

It was later in her life. By this time, she moved from point A to point B to point C—and point D, if she wished—in a wheelchair pushed by a personal assistant. The last thing, though, Lucille ever wanted you to think was that she was wheelchair-bound. The fact that she could stand and walk if she wanted to was one of the first things she'd tell you. The wheelchair she was in, she wanted you to think, should be thought of in the same way you'd think about crutches or a cane.

Lucille Clifton, distinguished professor and author of 13 collections of poetry and more than twenty children's books, was a person around whom others congregated. You weren't likely to find her engaged in an intense one-on-one conversation that keeps those who might like to meet her or say "hello" from interrupting. She was a storyteller. She held court.

And just as she said she could, she stood and walked when felt it was necessary. The night it was her turn to mesmerize the assembled, she got up from the chair, walked to the podium, did it strongly, confidently. Who knows. Maybe the wheelchair more of a prop than even she'd let on to.

In every single way, Lucille was not bound but free. Her words, her ideas, her humor, sass, and inspiration: She was double-dog daring us, showing us the path she'd hacked out though the undergrowth. *Honey, do I need to take you by the hand?*

Want irony: The person around whom others gravitated like asteroids under the influence of a massive sun is the person who felt the need to be more mobile. And the irony continues: those who were strong, who could run, carry, lift, and climb, were the ones who felt like their

folding chairs were wheelchairs they'd been in so long sitting had turned them half human, half mechanical, transformers.

Later that evening, Lucille played the role she was born for. The host house was full: before-dinner drinks, dinner, after-dinner drinks, a kind of poetic hootenanny happening, having happened, slated to happen before the night was through. A handful of Lucille's fellow distinguished poets—great, great people, all—were talking one-on-one to whichever of the workshop poets whose turn it was. Lucille sat on a sort of sectional sofa, no wheelchair in sight. She had this great, floppy, wide-brimmed hat on—the hat a gift from one of the workshop poets—and it distinguished her among and from the already distinguished. Next to her on the sofa, sitting on the floor, standing behind the sitters, were workshop poets, gathered like an extended family, like what you'd expect the Waltons to burgeon into two or three generations after John and Olivia's progeny took wing from Walton's Mountain. And let me say, as one of and on behalf of the other workshop poets, that it felt like we were a family, all gathered around the matriarch. Although most of us had met each other only six days prior, we were already familiar and comfortable, as if upon the occasion of meeting we remembered having known. And what I swear I heard exclaimed, ere we walked out of each others' sight that glorious night, were variations on a theme: Maybe Shirley MacLaine, the Buddha, name your favorite old soul, aren't so nutso after all.

James P. Lenfestey

TWO LIVES

for B. H. Fairchild

My ebullient father, famous in his youth all over Wisconsin for his party skills, and not just because he pulled the fire hose prank at the State Capitol (and later I rode a borrowed bicycle through the dining hall sparking a famous food fight), but for his epic recitations from his huge storehouse heart of long narrative poems by Robert Service, “Sam McGhee” and “Dan McGrew” and “The Dangerous Jane McChew” parody from *The Princetonian*, streaming tears of joy and laughter

but also grief, reciting William Ellery Leonard, he told me the whole city of Madison wept in 1922 when Leonard, reclusive professor, published TWO LIVES, an elegy in sonnets to his deranged wife, the love of his life, a suicide,

as I wept many years later holding my father’s worn copy found on his book shelf among the dumpster loads of business failure and success, concrete and coal dust, sporting trophies tarnished, games lost and won forgot, still treasured this chart of our two lives, my father who took every bite of his with horseradish, who taught me to love the silken mystery of oysters,

for which I rejected him, hard, his passion for his nation, he who tried to enlist the morning after Pearl Harbor, rejected, too old, married with a child, a business, me a three year dream away, and in the Sixties, his and ours, there I was, dressed longhair-to-toe in denim, festooned with anti-war buttons proclaiming Johnson’s war a madness, my wife in strange billowing India print, our son’s—his grandson’s—baby carriage festooned too,

marching down the same State Street of his beloved Madison,
and so the rift.

I left behind his business shaped and measured by the ton,
blocks and beams and pipe welded, poured, steamed
and tipped to lay deep underground where coal was mined,
his filthy trucks rattling loads down chutes
of household cellars and into factories heating milk for cheese
before the natural gas pipe from Kansas wiped him out,
his business hopes for me already gone.

But I lived on, long enough to recite with friends around
our Solstice fire on long Midwestern winter nights
“The Cremation of Sam McGhee,” plus Mary Oliver
and Robert Bly, and you and me,
to teach each summer our love for poetry,
my father’s casket settled easy now along the river
where he and I were born, while I trace now
on granite stone Two Lives, and sing, and weep:
broken, lost and whole.

Cass Dalglish

“GROW-A-TREE” GERMINATION KIT (SEQUIADENDRON GIGANTEUM)

It's April, dusk, and I just pulled the tiny sparkling lights I planted last November out of my window boxes. I've been fighting the battle against darkness, but isn't it time I switch to flowers, start a garden, grow a hedge, break open

the sequoia germination kit – seeds, a mini-green-house, just add sunshine and water and success is guaranteed – one hundred percent – plant a row of hardy conifers between my house and the one next door, make us even better neighbors?

I've walked among sequoias, between cinnamon red trunks that lean toward one another like lovers. Look up. Find the crown. Can you see birds crouching in the branches so they don't bump into the sky?

There's a man who knows the trees by name. He visits every year, each time moving his aging limbs more slowly along the cinder paths. In human terms, the man is growing old.

Sometimes he stands very still, sheltered in the moist bark, in the hollow spot, where giant roots meet forest loam. “This one's three thousand years old,” he says, looking up at the tree that towers above him and feeling very young.

Morgan Grayce Willow

Parallel Lines

On a recent December evening, I braved the cold and the mysteries of snow emergency parking to hear a staged reading of a play in progress. The performance was one of Nautilus Music-Theater's Rough Cut productions, a series designed to give playwrights a chance to see and hear their work in formative stages. On this night, the piece being done was Ann Schulman's "Bob Dylan: Mind Out of Time."

The setup for the play comes from a May 29, 1997, *Los Angeles Times* article announcing Dylan's cancellation of a ten-city European tour. He's in the hospital suffering from histoplasmosis, a respiratory infection resulting from exposure to spores of soil fungus sometimes carried by birds or bats. The spore infection can cause inflammation and swelling of the membrane surrounding the heart, which a sufferer experiences as, among other symptoms, severe chest pain. Coughing, feverish, Dylan (read by Steven Epp) is confined to strict bed rest and is visited in his hospital room by James Dean and the Jack-of-Hearts (Nathan Christopher and Mo Perry, respectively). These two engage Dylan in a witty exchange that combines flirtation with death, seduction by life, and a rough bartering among them all for Dylan's soul, symbolized by James Dean's red leather jacket. Their spirited badinage is framed by, and interspersed with, several Dylan songs. These are performed by singers/angels (Jody Briskey and Jarius Abts) who hover above the hospital room as on clouds.

When I was younger and an avid Dylan fan, I didn't fret, as some tended to, over the meaning – or meaninglessness – of his lyrics. From time to time, I'd read through the album liner notes, but mostly I let go of the need for narrative sense. I like to think it was an emerging poetic sensibility that permitted me to simply lie back and enjoy the barrage of images, though it's

likely the marijuana haze that sometimes lingered about my head and heart had something to do with it. In any event, I surrendered to Dylan's melodies, the eccentricities of his voice, and suspended judgment about sense as various images rose to the surface then receded back into the music. So it was with great pleasure that I heard his songs performed in simple, clear tones by the singers during the Rough Cut production. I was taken by Dylan's lines as I never had been before.

Take these from "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall":

I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it
I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it
I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin'
I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin'
I saw a white ladder all covered with water
I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken

It struck me that night, as it wouldn't have long ago, how like Ginsberg these lines are. How like Whitman. What they share is a prophetic voice that arises out of tumbling images embraced by the reassuring rhythms of parallel syntax.

Let's take a Ginsberg sample from "Howl":

who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the
snow-bank docks waiting for a door in the East River to
open to a room full of steamheat and opium,
who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment cliff-
banks of the Hudson under the wartime blue floodlight
of the moon & their heads shall be crowned with laurel
in oblivion,
who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the
crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of Bowery,
who wept at the romance of the streets with their
pushcarts full of onions and bad music,
who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the
bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts,
who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with
flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange

crates of theology

Unrestricted by the phrasing of the musical score, Ginsberg's lines extend three, or even four times the number of feet in a Dylan line. Nevertheless, you can almost hear segments of "Howl" sung to the rhythm of "A Hard Rain." While Dylan heaps up a stack of simple declarative sentences, Ginsberg layers relative clauses like courses of brick in a retaining wall.

Whitman, also keen on anaphora, employs both kinds of parallelism. Here, from section 31 of "Song of Myself," he coordinates declaratives:

And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of
heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all
machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress'd head surpasses
any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of
infidels.

In another sample from "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," Whitman uses a front-loaded layering of prepositional phrases:

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,

Each of these three poets leans into the rocking of English syntax, with or without the accompaniment of music. Once the line is tuned to anaphora and parallelism, each poet lies back and lets his imagination tumble. The result is a cascade of images. Even if we don't like them, even if they don't "make sense," our ear, and our bodies, accept and applaud them.

GTCPR Fun Fact #2

To reiterate from the first GTCPR Fun Fact: At the end of the evening, the names of each of the poets who read prior to the 10-minute open-mic portion of the event were placed in the ceremonial beaver skin hat. The first name drawn from the hat was **Jim Cihlar**, who was awarded the \$500 Grand Prize.

James Cihlar

WHAT MY MOTHER HAD NO USE FOR

Rain bonnet
Collapsible cup

Terms
Of Decree

Lampshades
Without cellophane

Eternal
Brown

Burlap
Sofa

Ample
Evidence

Custody
Alimony

Turning
Her back

Brad Liening

An interview with Matt Mauch about his book, *Prayer Book*

BL: Here's an obvious question based on an equally obvious observation: given that your titles are often unorthodox in their length, how do you view the formal/aesthetic relationship between poems and titles? Is it a purely stylistic choice? Is it a way of leading readers into the world of each poem?

MM: Kafka, in *Parables and Paradoxes* (which is the source for the epigraph that begins the third and last section of *Prayer Book*), writes perfect titles in the sense that each one is so incredibly necessary to the parable/paradox itself that to separate the two would be like separating a human head from the body it captains. It's as if the body of the pieces (not sure what to call them—prose poems or flash fiction) are extended definitions of the titles—as if the titles were coined words defined by the pieces themselves, such that the only way to understand what the titles mean is through the text that follows. This is the case even with titles as seemingly mundane as “The Savages,” “The Test,” “The Refusal,” “Poseidon,” and “The Hunger Strike.” My titles are a lot longer than Kafka's, but they don't usually start out that way. They start out pretty short, actually, probably in mimicry of Kafka's, or at least that sense. I go through several titles, usually, before I arrive at the right one, and “the right one” tends to be one that feels to me like it's attached to the poem in the same way that Kafka's are attached to his pieces in *Parables and Paradoxes*. It just so happens that they tend, too, my titles, to be on the longish side of the poetry-title spectrum. What oftentimes happens is that the titles surprise me after a long period of distillation. I mean, it's happened often enough, me working on a poem for years and then one

day getting the title right and finally being able to finish the poem, that I can't call that a fluke anymore. Being surprised by titles that finish a poem like that is one of those light-bulb-in-the-cartoon-balloon moments that I expect will come if I wait/work for it for long enough. What it feels like when they do arrive, these titles of mine, is like waiting for the *Wizard of Oz* in the days when it was on once a year, and not seeing any ads or commercials for it, and then realizing it's on tonight, and whatever the day was—humdrum, trying, crappy—it turns perfect.

BL: In keeping with such broad questions: the title of this book is PRAYER BOOK, and your poems posit themselves throughout as “prayers” – what do you think of Wallace Stevens’s contention that “[i]n a time when religion can no longer satisfy, poetry must replace it”?

MM: Ah, brother Wallace. I think—as I imagine one would guess from reading the poems in *Prayer Book*—that Stevens is spot on. I was raised Catholic by two very Catholic families in a religious/Christian small town. I went to a Catholic college straight out of high school in a time when Catholic colleges—and I think this has changed in the past decade or so—but Catholic colleges at the time of my matriculation were bastions of intellectual freedom and liberal thought. I think the Holy See has put the kibosh on a lot of that, making professors toe the Vatican line in a way that was never the case before. So, I'm at this Catholic college, majoring first in engineering and then in pre-law and finally in English (conversions can be slow things), and I woke up one Sunday morning, having never missed weekly mass lest I scourge my soul with a mortal sin, just laying there in my loft in my dorm room with about eighteen inches between my face and the ceiling, and I decided—just decided right there, like it was a decision between eggs sunny side up and eggs over easy—that bacon and said eggs (I think they were scrambled) in the caf is what I

was headed toward, rather than the transubstantiated body and blood in the campus chapel. I don't know: maybe a lifelong acceptance of hypocrisy, when it's jettisoned all at once like that, can be replaced only by something with equal folly, i.e., a lifelong dedication to and pursuit of the metaphor as mode of comprehension, as lens I see the world through. This conversation reminds me of George Steiner and his work in what I'm going to call "poetics" in *After Babel* and *Real Presences*. I better be careful, though. Making the leap like I have from Stevens to Steiner may prophesize a death-bed conversion for moi! Note that I said "prophesize," not "foreshadow." "Foreshadow" would be far too ironclad. And now I'm getting snarky, so . . . next question.

BL: As a follow-up to that: Are you concerned with poetry's role in the world or in people's everyday lives and how we attempt to construct meaning?

MM: The "best of the best" of any art form, I think, is a language within a language, or a language on top of a language, or language at the borders of the ever-expanding language universe. This applies to all the arts—visual arts, music, dance, poetry, you name it. By that I don't mean that it's inaccessible or is accessible only by an elite few, the art form in question. What I mean, rather, is that it's something you have to both learn *and* teach yourself; it's a language that you arrive at after spending some time with it, and with those who have more experience at it than you, playing around and figuring things out, usually pretty slowly. Going back a step, that means that at some point you have to encounter it, the work of art, and have to catch a glimpse of something that makes you *want* to learn a new language. And you know—and this is a cool thing—I still catch glimpses of this language-at-the-edge both in the art I practice (poetry) and in the art I consume, admire, or puzzle to translate (all the rest). So, I would never want a world in which poetry dominates all the

other arts such as to render them quasi-irrelevant, like the Pittsburgh Steelers of the late 1970s did the rest of the NFL. What I hope instead is that poetry has its place at the table—just as it does now—but that the table becomes the equivalent of the cool-kid’s table, and artists being artists we expand that fucker with leaf after leaf like it’s bread loaves and fishes and we god-complexers were assigned by Zeus or Odin to feed the starving masses. What I try to do as an individual poet, if you’ll allow me to run with that scissors of an analogy, is surprise those who’ve been at the table every Thanksgiving of their life with fare that would make Lynn Rosetta Casper salivate. *I never thought fish soup could be so good!* For those who are at my crazy table for the very first time, who’ve maybe stopped because they saw the lights on, who expect turkey and not fish soup on Thanksgiving, well, all I ask is that they try some—that they take what my niece would call a “No, thank you” bite, meaning they at least try it before they say they don’t like it. Whether or not I’m successful as that kind of a Thanksgiving host is one of those things in our “let’s model everything after the business model” world that, like the feeling you get when you have a flat in fast and heavy traffic on I-35 and open your trunk to find not a donut but a full-sized spare, has yet to be reduced to measurability.

BL: I’m totally curious about why you decided to post small essays on your website as companion pieces to certain poems...

MM: As an English major, I really, really dug the footnotes in the Norton Anthologies of Literature. Without them my experience with the texts would have been otherwise (I want to say “worse,” but it’s hard to know if “worse” or “different” applies better without being able to go back in time and observe who I was then from the perspective of who I am now in scenarios with the variables varied, and how likely is that to happen?). I also really dug Robert Hass’s syndicated

pieces when he was poet laureate, him presenting a poem in prose, compiled in one of my all-time favorite books, *Poet's Choice: Poems for Everyday Life*. Back in the days when I was writing for “alternative” journalism pubs (think *Village Voice*, but on a smaller scale), I published some poems with intros and outros. These were the ancestors of the flash CNF pieces that accompany each of my poems, found, as you note, on my website (www.mauchmauch.com). I plan to write a piece to accompany each poem, and post them as they're completed. What rekindled my attraction to this sort of nonfiction accompaniment to the poem was Ander Monson, who took one of my poems for his journal *DIAGRAM*. What *DIAGRAM* does is requires you, the poet, when they accept your poem, to write a short annotation of, more or less, the poem's origin/impetus. Doing that brought back all of the above, and so I started writing the flash CNF pieces. Actually, I think of them as a book, the working title of which is *The Book of Matt, or Annotations to **Prayer Book**, Mostly in the Tangential Vein, or A Dead-Sea-Scrolls Versions of God's Poetry is Waiting to Be Discovered in a Cave in a Place as Go-Figure Surprising as Utah, or My Publisher Asked Me for a Craft Book and All He Got Was This Lousy, Dean-Young Inspired* CNF*

* “THE WRITING OF POETRY IS NOT A CRAFT. WE ARE MAKING BIRDS, NOT BIRDCAGES.”

BL: On a more abstract level, what does something like this do to change the relationship between reader and writer? And how does this affect the assumptions readers bring with them about the speaker in your poems and you, the actual guy Matt Mauch, who walks down the street and does laundry and stuff like that?

MM: You know, that's one of the reasons why I want to write the accompanying pieces. I want to have a stake in establishing the very relationship you're talking about. The actual guy Matt Mauch is never the person behind the “I” in my poems—at least not in the final drafts of

my poems. The “I” in the first drafts is probably pretty close to the actual me, but I revise my poems a lot, and over a number of years. Draft to draft to draft, the poems take on lives of their own. The “I” develops its own identity, separate from me. That can be confusing to people who see the poet and the speaker in the poet’s poems as one and the same. Yeah, I, the actual Matt Mauch, may have smoked a Marlboro behind the VFW, but the “I” who does that in my poem is light years away from the actual Matt Mauch of draft one. Seriously, I look at my poems and wonder, “Where the fuck did that come from?” Think of Victor Frankenstein and his monster. I look at my poems, and look at them, and look at them, and see that, yes, they’re capable of accidentally drowning a blind girl (unlike my poems, I have no innate fear of fire). The guy doing laundry, aka the real Matt Mauch, isn’t very interesting. The poems he creates, which are products of a process that takes place over time—often a very, very long time—I hope are. Interesting, I mean. Plus, on a what-are-you-going-to-do-with-the-24-hours-allotted-you-in-a-day? level, I’ve always had a special affinity for CNF, from way before it was even called that (which is kind of like being a fan of KISS because of *Rock and Roll Over*), and marrying it with flash fiction, e.g. “flash CNF,” is the kind of thing that keeps me up at night. Literally. Writing these accompanying pieces. Which might not be flash CNF at all, but prose poems. Who’s to say?

BL: What’s the easiest way to make a poem just really suck, do you think?

MM: The easiest way for me to make a poem suck is to write a first draft of it and never touch it again. My first drafts suck. The old notion that you have to give yourself permission to write shitty first drafts is a notion that sits well with me. Like, way well with me. I think my definition, though, of how to write a sucky poem, is peculiar to me. Here’s why I say that: I had the chance

awhile back to participate in a workshop where, for an entire week, 60 poets wrote new poems on a daily basis, and shared them in workshops of 13 or so people. I can't share of any of the particulars, as one of the cardinal rules of the workshop was/is, "What's written here stays here, unless you have the permission of the poet to share it." What I can say about what happened is that I saw some fantastic poems written in 24-hour periods. That changes you, you know—having to produce poems in such a short time frame—poems that you actually read aloud and share and offer up for comments. I didn't think I could do it, that first Sunday night when the workshop leader said, "You all need a poem ready for workshop by tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. sharp," (although my paraphrase is not nearly as eloquent as what he said off the cuff). But I did it. And now I can't imagine not doing it that way. Over time, a sucky draft can become a great draft if you let it live its own life, and not the one you initially intended for it. On a side note, in the poets versus poets softball game at said workshop, I hit an inside-the-park homerun, and it wasn't pretty: the thin air about killed me, and I figured that out before I'd even rounded second base. So not only can I write sucky poems, but I can hit sucky homeruns, too.

BL: Let's talk about your influences a little. James Wright makes a couple of cameos in this collection, and I do feel Bly haunting some of these poems, too, which makes this book sort of Minnesotan. Do you feel inspired by location and region and those people who are a part of that?

MM: What, you don't see the Homer in my poems, the Sappho? As poets, I think we're engaged in a poet-to-poet conversation that I find both valuable and necessary. When I went to school, we didn't have options like the A.F.A or the B.F.A. If you liked words and writing, you majored in English, i.e., English literature. I am glad to have the foundation I have—glad to be an English major. I truly think it has enriched the poet-to-

poet conversations I'm able to have today. At the same time, had I had the opportunity to get a B.F.A in creative writing instead of a B.A. in English lit, I would've jumped at the chance. I think the focus on the contemporary that those programs provide is important—it's something I didn't get until grad school, which has always made me feel behind the curve. Conversations with the dead tend to be one-sided. Where am I going with this? I read 7-10 poetry books at a time, reading one poem from each in succession, until I finish one of them, at which point I replace it with another. I do that intentionally, because I don't want to be over-influenced by any one writer. I love James Wright and Robert Bly. I also love Jorie Graham, Olena Kaltyiak Davis, Dick Hugo, Dean Young, Bob Hass, Tomas Transtömer, Gerald Stern, Sharon Olds, Anne Carson, James Dickey, Tony Hoagland, Bob Hicok, Matthew Dickman, and I could go on and on. I try, in my reading, to be influenced by as many poets as possible—to have the kind of conversation that drives you batty when you try to decipher it in a Robert Altman film. A poet I respect, who shall remain nameless, who I was in a workshop with, said he could and would always be able to tell a Matt Mauch poem was a Matt Mauch poem, that it was different from anybody else's, and if he saw one nameless on the page he'd know it was mine. I'm pretty sure he was being sincere. If that's the case, I'm doing what I've set out to do. My heart may be on my sleeve, but I work hard to make sure my influences aren't.

BL: There's a lot of formal variation in here. Can you speak to how these poems took such different shape?

MM: Oh, but do I ever appreciate you for using the word "formal" when speaking of free verse. We could play a swell game of netless tennis, we two. Seriously, though, if I could update that old Frost saw about free verse being (derogatorily) like playing tennis without a net, I'd stick with a sports analogy, mine being this one: The difference between free versus poetry and formal/metrical poetry is like the difference between a quarterback running the

two-minute drill in American football and a quarterback running the scripted set of ten or fifteen plays that a lot of teams use at the start of a game. And in the same way I took Frost's negativity and turned it into a positive by manipulating grammar and idiom (did you see that, kids?), there are a lot of ways to read my QB analogy, and each time I read it in a new way, I'm happy with the outcome, no matter what the new perspective. It gives each approach its fair due, I think, my analogy does, in a way the Frost doesn't and never intended to. Now, what was the question, again? Oh, right. Sorry I veered so far off course. One of the things I have to discover about my poems as I write and revise them is what form or shape it is that best fits what's going on in the poem. That's never pre-ordained, and in fact it changes as the poem changes—as it distills. Now, this process, this distillation, isn't measured in hours or day or weeks. It's not even measured in months unless you count them the way people do when they say a baby is 24 months old instead of two years old. It's a process that takes years, and in those years a poem tries out every shape possible, so that you know when you're finally done tinkering with it that it's in the shape it's grown up to have, and looks nothing like its baby pictures. This takes you through gestation, adolescence—all that—into the poem's salad years, which is when you give it over to the world and its own wits. One of the things that this process led to in this book is my first ever prose poems. Until I realized that they should be prose poems, I was kind of (more than kind of) against prose poems (I was being as obstinate as Frost!). But then the moment came when I discovered that prose poems is what they were meant to be, and a core mystery of the poem was clarified. Gary Snyder said that you have to spend as many years uneducating yourself as you have spent in formal education. I've spent that time—and I'm not there yet, I haven't evened the Snyder scales—experimenting with free-verse form. That's made me comfortable with the shape any one poem settles into, no matter what the poems

around it do. As with the best Japanese gardens, you can see the differences in the plants when you look close and look for differences, but that's a perspective you only get when you talk about the garden as a garden, i.e., as an artifact. You get that perspective when you're trying to create one. But more often what you do is appreciate the garden as living thing with order you feel more so than you understand. That's when all the differences come together to make a one-of-a-kind whole, which is what I hope happens when people read *Prayer Book*.

Paula Cizewski

EXCERPTS FROM THE LAUGHING CLUB

::

At first your fake laugh
sounded like a typo.

Then it sounded like its own
bad joke. Your fake laugh

became one sparse
landscape of sick infants.

No one could help. You said
You needed no help.

No benefit came from leaving you to
it, yet another night fell and still

the laughter never ended. Now our sleep
needs to come with a bad laughter almanac.

Sow the seed.
Reap the seed.

As if we had once-and-for-all
prepared ourselves for spring when

the leaves dropped
right off our humor.

::

At Grandma Stella's Catholic funeral, everyone took communion whether
we believed it or not. Then my sister and I filed back with the family into
our pew.

Too sad to try prayer, I watched the congregation line dwindle.

I had never noticed until now the officiates must ingest all the uneaten body of Christ. The man behind my grandmother's casket shoveled the leftover wafers in his mouth by fistfuls. I directed

all my bitterness toward him. I watched him lick his fingers and wipe up every last consecrated crumb from the bowl as if they were ranch flavor. My sister saw it, too.

We cracked into laughter. Had our grandmother been there, her fake fury would unleash. "*Kuszydwas!* (you little shits!)," she'd have scolded and flicked our rotten heads.

Unrestrainable, in that hollow cough silence. It was awful. Leaning in toward each other, shoulders heaving, very like sobbing, we hoped.

::

My smile remained
Well-structured, yet

it became ineffective.
Whether directed optimistically

across a conference table
or coyly over

candlelight at my love.
My smile worked

like tickling someone
who isn't ticklish or who hates

to be tickled. My smile
had lost its agency.

My humor was out of context:
a resource with no identifiable source.

I tried to be optimistic.
I laughed a little, but that was worse.

::

I want our
allied laughing
to be more
than corrosive
to do more
than peel
the wallpaper off
the sad trap of
our enemy's gaze.
Our poor enemy!
He should laugh more!
The mortar crumbles.
The ashlar crack.

The instant between
the wishbone snap
before the two wishers
recognize either side
of clavicle as smaller.
The poor bird. Who did
not offer to help thusly.

Todd Boss

MY LOVE FOR YOU IS SO EMBARRASSINGLY

grand... would you mind, much, my darling, if I
compared it to the Hindenburg (I mean,
before it burned)—that vulnerable, elephantine

dream of transport, a fabric titanic on an ocean
of air? There: with binoculars, dear, you can
just make me out, in a gondola window, wildly

flapping both arms as the ship's shadow
moves like a vagrant country across the
country where you live in relative safety. I pull

that oblong shadow along behind me wherever
I go. It is so big, and goes so slowly, it alters
ground temperatures noticeably, makes

housewives part kitchen curtains, wrings
whimpers from German shepherds. Aren't I
ridiculous? Isn't it anachronistic, this

dirigible devotion, this zeppelin affection, a moon
that touches, with a kiss of wheels, the ground
you take for granted beneath your heels?—

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 5 of 7

Guessing the number of not-distinguished poets that a typical distinguished poet meets at workshops, readings, conferences, and supermarkets in southern California is like guessing the number of M&Ms that somebody has poured, pound bag after pound bag, into a really huge jar. You wobble your head around a bit, which makes it look like your counting or figuring, and pick a very specific number like 13,581, because you won't win the new car if you write down "a lot." If you're one of the M&Ms, you might find satisfaction in having played a part in the contest, but you really can't expect that the person who guessed your number correctly is likely to establish a personal bond with you, brown M&M pushed up against the glass four inches from the lid. That shouldn't stop YOU, though, when you shake hands again somewhere, someplace, in somefuture, from reminding the guesser that you've met before.

Or so I was thinking when I saw that Lucille Clifton was scheduled to visit the Good Thunder Reading Series in March 2010 at Minnesota State University, Mankato. A graduate of the writing program at Mankato, I'm well-versed in the goings-on for a typical Good Thunder event. In the morning, Distinguished Poet interacts with grad students, either one-on-one in manuscript conferences, or in an intimate Q & A session. Distinguished Poet always gives a craft talk on the afternoon of a visit, with several hours between the craft talk and the reading later that night. The GTRS director allows Distinguished Poet some alone time at the AmericInn, and then takes her or him out to dinner. Dinner, I figured, was my first "in." Full disclosure: I know the director of the GTRS pretty well, so finagling an invite to dinner isn't as difficult as it

might seem. Maybe at dinner I could reintroduce myself to Lucille. I could bring up the sauces, food being one of the greatest associative re-animators of memory. Lucille, gracious distinguished poet that she is, would say, *Matt, I remember you.*

If the guest list at dinner was too large to preclude a one-on-one betwixt me and Lucille, I would have my chance at the after party. GTRS after parties are hosted at the homes of faculty members on a rotating basis. As a grad student, the GTRS after parties represent the chance to get some food and booze of a quality you usually can't afford. The profs at Mankato treat their grad students right.

And what would I say to her, Lucille, whether I got my shot at dinner or at the after party or at both? I didn't know. I wasn't going to go in with a script.

Between the announcement of Lucille's visit to Mankato and the visit itself, two things happened. The first of the two is I wrote a poem, and not just any poem, but a poem in response to a prompt—an exercise poem. The essence of the prompt was to pick a poet we admired but whose work was nothing like ours, in order to attempt a new poem of our own in the style of the poet we admired. I chose Lucille. Her short lines, ample white space, and general disregard for caps—for punctuation entirely—is, stylistically, nothing like the poems I tend to write. As well, her spare way of achieving grandiosity is about the opposite of my meandering way of reaching small, so-called, by some, epiphanies. I worked hard at it, reading and re-reading her poems to get a feel for them, trying to inhabit both them and her, and finally I came up with a poem in response to the prompt, and while it may have been conceived as Matt Mauch writes a Lucille Clifton poem, it was *my* poem, wasn't hers at all, though by writing I felt her—Lucille the poet—inside me more than I could have ever believed was possible, and that out-of-body, body-to-body, my-mind-is-your-mind-your-mind-is-my-mind, Vulcan-ish union between Lucille the Distinguished Poet and Matt the M&M has influenced

the way I've written every poem since.

The second thing that happened is Lucille died. Her scheduled visit to Mankato was cancelled. The wheelchair was no longer needed as a prop. She would never taste my sauce, would never hold another M&M poet's hand, never again refuse fish that isn't fish, never have to guess at whether or not reincarnation is the way of the gods. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

Gretchen Rueth

VENATIO

It is believed that the extinction of lions from North Africa was due largely to bloodsport in Ancient Rome. As many as 50 lions could be killed in the coliseum in a single day.

What is a crowd to a lion? Its sound
named for his own voice,
however strangled in dust.
Whatever ungulate flesh built the cells
of his tufted tail is present in these
final moments as we ask:

what was the texture
of his dreaming,
back in dark savannah,
when the tips of his first mane
climbed from his scalp?

No matter, now claws
scrape at packed earth, that
awful sun his only familiar.
Never had there been
enclosure. What
is a wall to a lion?

Even a beast has a heart that hammers in fear,
forced out the gate with a blazing straw.

Flashing his conical teeth, yellow
and pitted like limestone,
he might have reminded us
that once, we men and women
and lion shared the earth in equal numbers,

but he cannot even grasp what this is,
advancing on him, this tender animal

with its one long tooth. Or is it one
inelegant claw that cannot be retracted?

Three days hunger
can be understood but what
what is that roaring?

The sound pounds its rhythm
until it is only wind in his ear.
Golden eyes rolling. Hot
tongue marbled white with thirst.

His mane as heavy
as a wreath of lead roses.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Gretchen's poem was one of the poems read at
the open-mic portion of the event.*

Richard Robbins

DE-CLUTTERING

He had become the woman with eleventeen cats and
Washington Posts crowding out the daylight. He
had become the hopeless teenager not knowing
where to start in a bedroom he could not
leave until it was finished. He had become the
 juggler's eighth knife, the last ounce of water
needed to rip the earthen dam, the fifth glass of
wine, the final mile per hour over the limit.

Everywhere and without delay, a trembling under
the surface created new clutter. Across the
Caribbean island, where the palace flattened
and lay down next to shanties. In the melody
of songs. In the parade of itches traveling the
length of both arms.

Everywhere and without delay, the world simplified: She
will kill him if he says that again. The ocean
gives up ten species to save the one. I have
burned all the holy books so that the only God
left is made of ash.

So many directions and degrees to sacrifice or gain. The
woman at the North Pole stands on 90, and all
360, all in a parka protecting her from 0. A first
place, a last place, melting by the minute.

If he could celebrate anything, it would be the hydrangea,
larger than a pig's head, then nothing. A
dandelion puff of white, then nothing. His
brother Jason, in those months of dementia,
conducting full operas in his living room,
the chair and coffee table and books and
knickknacks in their places, all making their
notes, shaking the walls with their voices, then
nothing.

He would celebrate the full and the fading.

He would celebrate the full and the fading. At the Wall,

the wide and narrowed granite, the lives. At the river, the flood stage of grief. The full eyes of the well fed and starved. In everyone's memory, the sky that brief moment littered by the spaceship's explosion, and the silence of the sky clearing, of the pieces coming down across four states, the mania of searching for them behind barns and on rooftop terraces, in the borrow pit along a U.S. Highway, before the quiet heart, the empty hand retreated.

Lynette Reini-Grandell

I Once Asked

I once asked Minnesota Poet Laureate Robert Bly why he thought there were so many organizations in Minnesota supporting a flourishing arts culture, particularly in the literary arts. He was on my radio show, “Write on Radio,” to promote yet another upcoming literary event. His answer surprised me. I had been expecting him to say something about the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s, but he argued that Minnesota owed a lot to the wave of Scandinavian and northern European immigrants who moved here a generation or two earlier, around the turn of the century and after, radical leftists who had dreams of forming collectives and certain habits of working together that they instilled in their children.

I am not enough of a student of history to check how this lines up with the factual record. But I do know that a surprising number of major arts organizations in Minnesota—including literary organizations—were founded in the 1960s and 1970s: the Guthrie, Minnesota Public Radio, Intermedia Arts, the Loft, KFAI, Milkweed, etc. I also know that many prominent small presses currently in the area often relocated to Minnesota from other places: New Rivers from Massachusetts, Graywolf from Washington, and Coffee House (originally Toothpaste Press) from Iowa. Certainly Minnesota-based foundations such as McKnight, Jerome, Bush, the Minnesota State Arts Board and others have given significant support to the arts. Area colleges and universities provide a certain degree of institutional support, not to mention audience development. It’s no wonder Robert Bly never really left the state. Even Garrison Keillor came back from New York. And the St. Paul Poetry Slam Team has taken first place at nationals two years in a row. Something very unusual is happening

here.

I am a believer in synergy and critical mass. Whether one wants to credit Scandinavian political progressives, social revolutions of the 1960s, or the foundations begun by a few wealthy and generous individuals (and none of these is mutually exclusive), there are often five or six readings or public book discussions in a given night in the Twin Cities. Check out Rain Taxi's calendar of literary events at www.raintaxi.com/twincitiesliterarycalendar.shtml if you don't believe me. There are so many events and scenes that you don't have to be part of one particular literary school to find a venue or an audience. If you've just broken up with your girlfriend who is also a writer, there are still plenty of alternative communities you can join before risking running into her.

Whether by accident or design, the writing environment is good here, and I would like to make the case for continuing to nurture it. Agricultural ecologists like to talk about sustainable agronomy, or permaculture. I think that sustainability is also what happens when there is a diversity of like minds. Bear with me on this oxymoron. What I mean is that in the Twin Cities, and perhaps in Minnesota at large, what fosters our literary community and makes it grow is the incredible variety of writing being done. If you were to draw a map of it, you wouldn't see concentric circles, you would see neighborhoods connected by rapid transit, bicycle paths, bridges, and much undeveloped and inviting wilderness.

The Great Twin Cities Poetry Read is one element of that literary landscape, like a corner coffee shop near the edge of town. There's a mic stand on a little raised stage area in the corner. Sometimes there are people playing guitars here, but tonight a poet steps up to the mike. The volume is just enough to rise above the clinking of coffee cups, cutlery, whispers, and the whoosh of the espresso machine. The audience listens attentively but not too solemnly. There is give and take, there is laughter. Someone by the window types away at a manuscript. Nearby, someone turns the pages of a newspaper.

Someone at the center table examines a piece of paper, crossing out a line and changing a verb. The poet at the mic finishes and sits down with welcoming friends. The writer at the center table gets up to take her turn at the mic.

We nurture our literary environment by participating in it—by writing, reading, responding, and traveling to its different neighborhoods. Welcome to this neighborhood. I hope you find something in it to inspire you.

Joyce Sutphen

DINNER IN

I'm about to order the house wine—
three-buck Chuck from Trader Joe's,
when the waiter (where did *he* come from?)

suggests a Bordeaux, something from
that little shop on Rue de Suffren in Paris—
“You know,” he says, “the bottle you’ve

been saving.” I agree, persuaded by
a bird in the back yard, a very persistent
warbler, who also convinces me

to have the soup with garlic croutons—
the only tomato basil in the house,
and soon I am convinced that the salmon

was flown in from Seattle, freshly caught
that morning in a coastal stream, and all is
going well until I realize that everyone

who is me—waiter, cook and general
management—is slightly drunk, so I
order what I wish was an espresso and

move into the next room for a screening of
Tokyo Story, the feature in a Japanese film
festival I’ve organized for myself.

An interview with Brad Liening about his book, *Ghosts and Doppelgangers*

*MCH: Ok: Let's start by talking about something I hope you already have a plan for. **Ghosts and Doppelgangers** gets optioned for a multi-player video game. What characters will people be able to play and what will they have to do to win?*

BL: That's a good question. I think there'd be a bunch of different options about who you'd be and what you'd do, like: You're Lil Wayne and you have to bring democracy to Pyongyang. Or you're Congress and you lost your health care and you have to win it back from the evil clutches of your electorate. You're the Detroit Lions and you must win the Super Bowl to bring some good cheer to the Motor City. It would be a hard game.

*MCH: Serious Interview Question: one of the recurring themes in **Ghosts and Doppelgangers** is celebrity: both specific celebrities (Morrissey, Tom Selleck, Brett Favre, Nicholas Cage, Wolf Blitzer) and celebrity-culture tropes (the "tell-all" memoir, reality TV, sex tapes, celebrity fragrances). Do you think there are some conversations poets should be (or are already) having with the culture of stardom?*

BL: Oh yes, absolutely. It seems to me that the culture of stardom, as you put it, is a significant part of our national culture and even identity right now. Why is that, and what does it say about us? I think it's actually kind of a large and scary question; it's also one that poetry is especially well-suited to try to answer since it's such a nimble and elastic art form. It can accommodate so much.

If poets are already addressing this, I haven't seen it. Perhaps because it could be dismissed as nothing more

than a lightweight lark. I obviously don't see it this way. Tackling celebrity and our weird relationship to it seemed like a challenging project, and much more interesting than, say, another book about melancholy or lyric pastorals or whatever. I wanted to tackle something very contemporary and very American.

MCH: Piggybacking on that, I notice that the majority of famous people in these poems are dudes--which is interesting, because I tend to think of celebrity culture as being driven by starlets and those glossy photos on the covers of women's magazines (and, of course, Oprah, who you do give a shout-out to). I'm curious about how you approach gender when you write about popular culture. Are you consciously thinking about these male celebrities as models of masculinity?

BL: The disparity in gender was something I became aware of only after I finished a draft of the book, so I don't think I was consciously thinking too much about it one way or the other. Probably what happened was I simply gravitated toward people I found compelling for one idiosyncratic reason or another.

But now that you bring it up, it is kind of interesting; I agree with you about starlets being engines of and for celebrity. I know that I did write a few poems about certain starlets but they just seemed pretty uninteresting to me (the poems, not the starlets). I couldn't add anything of merit to the conversation about them, so I just let it go.

No wag could possibly resist mentioning Oprah, however.

MCH: Although the poems in this book almost always start out at least breezy, if not openly satirical, it seems like a lot of them (I'm thinking especially of the book's first poem, which is one of the ones called "Poem") take, somewhere, this so-gradual-as-to-be-almost-imperceptible turn into something else. Wistfulness? Regret? Loneliness? How were you thinking about humor as you were writing these poems?

BL: I wanted them to be funny, yeah. I was hoping for high camp and sharp-toothed satire, which has somewhere at its center something acidic and real. So the poems almost always take a darker turn at some point. But I think humor is a perfectly appropriate way of responding to the world.

By way of illustration: There's a poem in this book called "Wolf Blitzer," which you mention. This poem has its banal origins in my running at the gym one day. I was on a treadmill in front of a huge flat-screen TV that was impossible not to look at. It took up your whole field of vision.

So I was watching Wolf Blitzer's afternoon program on CNN. It's called the "Situation Room" or something equally silly. And over the course of a few miles I went from amusement to bemusement to feeling depressed. But my feelings had little to do with the actual news being reported. I wondered why I felt so affected by this show, and what I realized is that it felt like watching news for sixth graders. It's the news for dummies.

I felt like I was being condescended to, almost, with the flashing colors and weirdly futuristic sets and images zooming around and the quick-cuts and contrived drama and conflict and lack of any true substance. Which, once you think about it, is very troublesome on a number of levels. The joke is serious. We deserve better. We owe ourselves more.

*MCH: You write about yourself in the third person in several of the poems in **Ghosts and Doppelgangers**. And not just that—you have three different monikers: sometimes you're Brad Liening, sometimes Lil Brad, sometimes Bradley Pee Pants. Is there any difference between the three, or are they interchangeable epithets? Which one of them has the upper hand?*

BL: Ha! Right. This is where I worry about my mother

reading this book and wondering where she went wrong.

Charles Simic and Dean Young have both written about themselves in the third person, which is a mode of writing I always found funny and engaging, and it seemed like an apt and interesting way to write given the subject matter. It also created a nice tension between the tired old saw of confessional poetry in the age of the tell-all memoir and the horrendous over-sharing that goes on with blogs and Twitter and Facebook and so on.

But they're all very distinct people in my mind. I think that the Brad Liening character is perhaps the closest to being me, though of course he's still just a grammatical construct around which I can organize materials and explore and goof around. He's also better looking than I am.

Lil Brad is like a stage name, modeled after Lil Wayne. (And that whole idea of self-creation and re-creation strikes me as very American; it's the idea of the self-made man.) This was the name through which I wanted to really dig into the unsavory and licentious and depraved aspects of celebrity and excess. Lil Brad probably has the upper hand even though he doesn't know what to do with it and isn't particularly interested in having it; he's happy as a clam, wealthy and naked on a bearskin rug on the top floor of a skyscraper in Berlin.

The less said about Bradley Pee Pants, the better.

MCH: What celebrity do you think would most benefit from reading this book?

BL: All of them! All of them.

Patricia Kirkpatrick

from BRAIN TUMOR

"The plastic brain is like a snowy hill in winter."

-Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself*,
describing the figure used by Dr. Alvaro Pascual-
Leone to explain how the brain changes yet we
remain ourselves.

1 *A Woman Perpetually Falling*

First you stumble and then you fall
and then you limp and hide and drop foot.
And then you lie and hide and hold
a chair before you stumble and fall again.

You know the words but still
you tremble,
fall at the board, stumble at curbs.
Then you walk into the wall.
Finally a student says after class,
"There's really something wrong with you."

Then they go inside you
and then they come out.
Then they hook wires to your head,
take pictures,
add bells,
and although you're a white woman,
you feel like a black child in corn rows.

Machines can do this, link the brain
language of electrical current
to patterns on paper, colored scrawls
like toddler drawings
or a Jackson Pollack painting.

Beer for stimulus,

later a hair wash.
Eyes open, eyes closed--

your brain translates you
into a line on paper: blue,
red, green
for mobility, expression,
balance.

First sensed, then signaled,
every reflex, feeling, action,
even thought has a personal signature
fired in the brain,
transmitted by neurons,
measured from the scalp.

What is inside comes out

then spikes the monitor.
You tremble
when they tell you
the diagnosis. You stumble

because the brain has been pressed
for so long it's volcanic.
Rootless, ungrounded,
as if being pushed,
with nothing to hold onto,
you fall.
You are perpetually falling now.

The apples are talking to the maple trees
and the ovens are cleaning themselves.

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 6 of 7

During the ten or so years in which alternative music went from being an actual alternative to the mainstream to oxymoronically becoming the mainstream itself, rendering the “alternative” tag supermarket-surreal (much as “modern” has been rendered silly as a descriptor for a style of literature), I published essays and poems under the pen name M. Elvis Mauch, “Elvis” being the part that makes it a pen name rather than a real one. At the time, I was reading a lot of poems by a lot of contemporary poets, in this “best of” anthology and that, and I had an easy time remembering poems I liked—images and lines and metaphors and such, oh my—but had a much more difficult time remembering names. In conversation, I could tell somebody, “Oh, I read this great father-son-playing-baseball poem the other day, with this killer last line in it, ‘The wildest pitch is the one that stays in your hand’ . . . but the poet’s name escapes me.” I was a novice writer with jack-shit published, but I had aspirations, and didn’t want what had happened to the poet with the great line about the wild pitch to happen to me. If somebody someday read a poem of mine he or she liked, I wanted my name to be easy to recall. “Elvis” was a no-brainer of a choice. There’d be Presley, Costello, me.

But a pseudonym is a weird thing. After awhile people say things like, “But what would X think about that,” X being the pseudonym, in my case M. Elvis, the underlying assumption being that the writer with a pen name is literally of two minds, one of which can be conjured to offer a point of view in line with *its* personality, I guess is what you could call it, a point of view assumed to be distinct from that of the conjurer,

i.e. the writer presenting him or herself by given name. I don't know what the exact number of times was, but after awhile the incidents of folks saying "What would M. Elvis think?" added up to a critical mass, and then it wasn't only other people who wanted to know what both Matt and M. Elvis thought about the mayor's plan to privatize trash collection, but I wanted to know, too.

I found myself getting into character to write pieces as M. Elvis. I'm not saying "getting into character" is a bad thing. Poems—or mine, anyway—have speakers distinct from the poet. There is, that is, a character that is not me behind every poem I write. I started to feel, though, like I was losing the thread of authenticity, putting down the character within a character's name as creator, i.e., sending out not the poems of Matt, but those of M. Elvis. There was anxiety a-bubbling up from somewhere deep inside me/us/we.

While I was trying to figure out if I was really Matthew or Matthew D. or Matthew Douglas or Matt, enter, stage left, Serendipity, Catalyst, aka SOMETHING ONE POET SAID TO ME AND ELEVEN OR SO OTHERS IN A WORKSHOP, PARAPHRASING WHAT ANOTHER (DEAD) POET ALLEGEDLY HAD SAID, that something being, *It really matters that great poems get written, but it doesn't matter a damn who writes them.* And that something resonated. It brought my bone marrow to a simmer, and in a song of either innocence or experience I decided I would henceforth write and send out all of my poems anonymously—all of them—and if ever I had a book out it would be published under the moniker "anon."

The worse angels of my nature weren't so keen on that plan, which led to a relatively bloodless battle between they and my betters. Two or three beers in, I offered a framework for armistice, something I thought of as a kind of middle way. Instead of presenting my poems to the poetry-reading public either anonymously or pseudonymously, me/we/us would attribute them to Matt Mauch, which is what most people call us, so

it's practical, utilitarian, no matter that most people mispronounce the last name and I knew my mother'd be sad that me/we/us hadn't selected Matthew.

Matt, Matthew, M. Elvis, anon.: chances are that whatever I had introduced myself as, Lucille, when I met her again in Mankato—the meeting that wasn't to be—wasn't going to remember me anyway. What I hoped to remind her of, though, was part of one of the poems I had written for her workshop, that part being the end of a poem, a part that Lucille dwelled on, saying it made her see in a brand new way, me describing the remnants of an imagined whisper as “wind/ echoing and swirling through the mountains/ and valleys/ of each other's ears.” Lucille put her hand to her ear. She felt it and said she'd never thought of the ear that way, that she'd never connected the two topographies.

And in the meeting that wasn't to be, that image, not my name, is what I planned to remind Lucille of in the hope that she would remember it, and we would talk, and as we talked other people waiting to have their turn with her would wonder, and would utter to an acquaintance or friend, *Why are they feeling their ears like that?*

Brad Liening

THE ROVING MUTANT DEATH SQUADS CAME LATER

We were drinking pitchers of blood
when some people came along and asked
us what we were doing. We were
checking our hair at the time,
shaking it out and teasing it
and such to make sure it was
glorious, which it was, of course,
so we told them we were checking our hair.
The people looked at each other
then walked away. They were probably poor.

Morgan Grayce Willow

BIRTH OF THE POEM

The syllables long to be spoken,
to assemble themselves as words.
We are merely their agent,
nothing more.

To assemble themselves as words,
sounds cluster, tongue and mouth their tools,
nothing more.
Later, mind gets in on the act.

Sounds cluster. The tongue, the mouth, tools
for braying off rough edges.
Then, mind joins in, its job
uncovering patterns.

After braying off rough edges,
the clusters become words,
uncovered patterns
of naming, doing, of defining space

and so on, till word clusters
become rhythms
for naming, doing, for defining space.
They shape a sentence.

A becoming rhythm,
this new thing,
this shapely sentence.
It wants to repeat.

This new thing,
this rising and falling of sound,
longs to repeat,
to hear again

its rising, its falling of sound.
Nothing more.
It wants to hear the syllables,
who long, again, to be spoken.

Matt Mauch

In case you were wondering why this book is dedicated to Lucille Clifton, Part 7 of 7

One of the ways she said it was, *it is nice to find your, or actually, what happens is, your tribe finds you. and you are so happy.* She said the thing about poets and their tribe in a lot of ways. She said it during workshop. She said it the night it was her turn to read a few poems. She said it between poems, in her part poet, part stand-up comic, part been-there-done-that-so-pay-attention-*child* way of hers. She said it in small groups, in large groups, during meals, in transit from venue to venue, here, there, everywhere. She said like she knew it was a mantra to be, like she was gestating a mantra in utero, like we were called upon as the village that would raise it. There's no doubt she had said it before, to assembled others, yet we felt like we were hearing it for the very first time. It's hard not to build a cult around something like that. We drank and drank and drank it in.

How do you tell someone who's never dropped acid what it's like to be on acid? She wouldn't have minded, I don't think, if the new slang we coined for hallucinogens natural and engineered was "Listening to Lucille." We listened every time she said it, every way she said it, hearing it even when she was wasn't saying it. Sometimes "Mustard, where did you get that?" is simply a request for a condiment's whereabouts, not a call to saddle up and spend your life spreading the word to new and distant lands. Not always, though.

I asked the designer to put the *it is nice to find your tribe* phrase on the poster advertising the inaugural Great Twin Cities Poetry Read¹, dedicating the event, posthumously, to Lucille. Lucille is gone. Long live Lucille.

Maybe I had been mired in my own dark age, but I'd

never before heard the morass that binds poet to poet,
each of us like bog bodies in waiting—never before had I
heard that bloodless bloodline described as a tribe. Once
I did, though, I knew it had been named. Named rightly.
Named well.

your tribe finds you. you are so happy. let the
sunshine, let the sunshine in.

¹Long for the acronym GTCPR, first held on Friday, April 30, 2010, on the campus of Normandale Community College, it being the reason you are holding this book in your hands. Thirty or so poets were invited to read a single poem each, and most of them showed up. Co-sponsoring the event were the Normandale Community College English Department (thanks, colleagues), the Hamline-University-affiliated *Water-Stone Review* (thanks to all you Hamline-ites, including but limited to Mary Rockcastle, Patricia Kirkpatrick, and Megan Maloney-Vinz), and the online journal *Jazz June* (thanks, Eric Matas). Each of the participating poets' names was put into the ceremonial beaver-skin hat. Three names were drawn out of it. The first went home \$500 richer, the second \$250 richer, and the third \$150 richer. A number of high-end microphones were donated (thanks, anonymous donor), so more names were drawn from the ceremonial beaver-skin hat. At the end of the event, 15 or so minutes were allotted for an open-mic reading, so several audience members got to read a poem, too.

The inaugural GTCPR lasted about an hour and a half, and featured a 10-minute intermission. The poems read by the invited poets are those that appear in this book. Interspersed are essays by poets who participated and poets who will in years hence. The cover of this book is a rendition of the actual event poster. Jeff Peterson (grazie) designed it. Jeff Peterson rocks. Other co-sponsors were the Pocket Lab Reading Series, curated by MC Hyland, who loaned us her Jeff (thanks, MC). Lowbrow Press, Matt Ryan's baby, is the publisher of the book you hold in your hands (thanks, Matt).

The GTCPR is an annual event held on the last Friday of April, National Poetry Month. My guess is Lucille would be proud to be the inaugural dedicee (dedicant? to whom said anthology is dedicated? O dedicate-able one?).

IN POETRY WE TRUST.

Bios

Editor's note: The poets whose short biographies you find here are far from being done. They will write and do more. Blank ruled spaces, therefore, have been provided after each bio. There, you can add, in longhand, the publications and accomplishments to come.

Richard Robbins was raised in California and Montana. His most recent poetry collections include *Radioactive City* and *Other Americas*. He currently directs the creative writing program and Good Thunder Reading Series at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Margaret Hasse is author of three books of poetry, including *MILK AND TIDES*, *IN A SHEEP'S EYE*, *DARLING*, and *STARS ABOVE, STARS BELOW*, and recipient of many literary awards, including a poetry fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Originally from South Dakota, she now lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she has been lucky in love, work, and a literary life.

Morgan Grayce Willow's poetry publications include chapbooks *Spinnerets*, *Arpeggio of Appetite*, *The Maps are Words*, and collections *Silk* and *Between*. Also an essayist, Morgan contributed the title piece in *Riding Shotgun: Women Write about Their Mothers* and published *Crossing that Bridge* about making literary events accessible to deaf audiences. Morgan teaches at Minneapolis Community & Technical College, as well as The Loft Literary Center.

Greg Hewett is the author of *The Eros Conspiracy*, *Red Suburb*, *To Collect the Flesh*, and most recently, *darkacre*. He teaches at Carleton College in Northfield and lives in St. Paul.

LouAnn Shepard Muhm is a poet and teacher from northern Minnesota. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and

anthologies. Muhm was a recipient of a 2006 Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant in Poetry, and has been featured twice in the “What Light” poetry series on mnartists.org. She currently serves as Poetry Editor at WomenWriters.net. Her chapbook, *Dear Immovable*, was published in 2006 by Pudding House Press, and her full-length poetry collection *Breaking the Glass* (Loonfeather Press, 2008) was a finalist for the Midwest Book Award in Poetry.

William Reichard is a writer, editor, and educator. He is the author of four collections of poetry: *Sin Eater*, *This Brightness*, and *How To* from Mid-List Press, and *An Alchemy in the Bones* from New Rivers Press. Reichard has published a chapbook, *To Be Quietly Spoken*, from Frith Press, and he revised and edited the award-winning memoir, *The Evening Crowd at Kirmser's: A Gay Life in the 1940's*, by the late Ricardo Brown, published by the University of Minnesota Press. Reichard is a Program Director/Faculty member for the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs. He lives in St. Paul.

Leslie Adrienne Miller is author of five books of poetry, *The Resurrection Trade* and *Eat Quite Everything You See* from Graywolf Press, and *Yesterday Had a Man in It*, *Ungodliness*, and *Staying Up For Love* from Carnegie Mellon University Press. Professor of English at the University of Saint Thomas, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, she holds a Ph.D. from the University of Houston, an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, an M.A. from the University of Missouri, and a B.A. from Stephens College.

Todd Boss's debut poetry collection, *Yellowrocket* (Norton, 2008), was selected as the 2009 Midwest Booksellers Honor Book for Poetry. Todd's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*, which awarded him the Emily Clark Balch Prize in 2009. His work has been syndicated on NPR and in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry* column. His MFA is from the University of Alaska-Anchorage.

Cass Dalglish's book of poetry, *Humming the Blues*, (Calyx, 2008), is a jazz interpretation of Sumerian cuneiform signs in *Enheduanna's Song to Inanna*, (ancient Iraq, 2350 BCE). She was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award (1993) for *Sweetgrass* (Lone Oak Press) and was awarded a Loft Career Enhancement Grant for *Nin* (Spinsters Ink, 2000). Her poetry has been selected for What Light: This Week's Poem (McKnight Foundation and Walker Art Center) and The Tupelo Press Poetry Project (www.tupelopress.org). Her animated interpretation of Enheduanna's ancient text, "Mesopotamian Blues," was selected for www.mnartists.org Five Minutes of Fame. She has been invited to present her interpretation of Enheduanna's ancient poem in a number of venues, including the Red River Conference on World Literature, Fargo, N.D.; the Antioch University MFA Program, Los Angeles, CA., and the day after conference of the British Museum's "Inanna –The Me in May," London. A former print and television journalist, Cass Dalglish is a professor of English at Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

Tim Nolan is a lawyer and poet in Minneapolis where he lives with his wife and three kids. His poems have appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Nation*, *Ploughshares*, and many other magazines. His book *The Sound of It* was published in 2008 and was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award.

Joyce Sutphen teaches literature and creative writing at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Her books include *Straight Out of View* (Beacon Press, 1995, republished by Holy Cow Press in 2001), *Coming Back to the Body* (Holy Cow! Press, 2000), *Naming the Stars* (Holy Cow! Press 2004), and *First Words* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2010).

Matt Rasmussen's poetry has been published in *Gulf Coast*, *Cimarron Review*, *Mid American Review*, *MARGIE*, *New York Quarterly*, *Natural Bridge*, *Water-Stone Review*, and *Dislocate*. He is currently a Bush Artist Fellow and has received grants and residencies from the Jerome Foundation, Intermedia Arts, The Corporation of Yaddo, and The Anderson Center in Red Wing, MN. His chapbook, *Fingergun*, was published in 2006 by Kitchen Press. He is a founding co-editor of *Birds*,

LLC and he teaches at Gustavus Adolphus College.

Candace Black's first book of poetry, *The Volunteer*, won the 2000 Minnesota Voices Poetry Project and was published in 2003 by New Rivers Press. A chapbook of poems, *Casa Marina*, won the 2009 Thomas Wilhelmus Award and was published in early 2010 by RopeWalk Press. Her work has been recognized by a Loft-McKnight Award in Poetry, a McKnight Individual Fellowship, and a S.A.S.E.: The Write Place/Jerome Foundation Fellowship. She teaches creative writing at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

James Cihlar's book of poems, *Undoing*, was published by Little Pear Press of Seekonk, MA, in 2008. His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Bloom*, *Minnesota Monthly*, *Northeast*, *The James White Review*, *Wisconsin River Valley Journal*, *Water~Stone Review*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Plain Songs*, *Verse Daily*, and in the anthologies *Aunties* (Ballantine 2004), edited by Ingrid Sturgis, *Regrets Only* (Little Pear Press), edited by Martha Manno, and *Nebraska Presence* (Backwaters Press), edited by M.K. Stillwell and Greg Kosmicki. The recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowship for Poetry and a Glenna Luschei Award from Prairie Schooner, Cihlar lives in St. Paul.

Kathryn Kysar is the author of a two books of poetry, *Pretend the World* and *Dark Lake*, and the editor of a collection of essays, *Riding Shotgun: Women Writing about Their Mothers*. Her poems have been heard on *A Writer's Almanac* and published in many literary magazines including *Great River Review*, *Midland Review*, *Mizna*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *The Talking Stick*. A winner of the Lake Superior Writer's and SASE poetry contests, Kysar has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Norcroft, The Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, and Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts. She teachers at Anoka-Ramsey Community College.

Eric Lorberer holds a B.A. in English Literature and Humanities from Washington College and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He has published poems, essays, and criticism in numerous magazines and has been awarded a SASE/Jerome Fellowship for his writing. As the editor of *Rain Taxi Review of Books*, he is responsible for the voice and style that has brought the magazine widespread acclaim. Lorberer also is the director of the Twin Cities Book Festival, has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts, and speaks at conferences and literary festivals around the country as an advocate for independent publishing and literary culture.

Katrina Vandenberg is the author of *The Alphabet Not Unlike the World* (forthcoming) and *Atlas* (2004), both published by Milkweed Editions; and, with poet Todd Boss, coauthor of the chapbook *On Marriage* (Red Dragonfly Press). Her poems and essays have appeared in *The American Scholar*, *Post Road*, *Orion*, *The Iowa Review*, and other magazines. She is the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, a Minnesota State Arts Board grant, a Bush Artist Fellowship, a Loft-McKnight Award in Poetry, and a Tennessee Williams Scholarship to the Sewanee Writers' Conference. In 2008–09, she was the resident fellow at the Amy Clampitt House in Lenox, Massachusetts. She lives in Saint Paul, where she teaches in the MFA program at Hamline University.

Brad Liening is the author of *Ghost and Doppelgangers* (Lowbrow). His poems have appeared in *H_NGM_N*, *Fou*, *Forklift*, *Sonora Review*, *Microfilme*, *Swink*, and elsewhere, and his chapbooks include *We Are Doomed: Dispatches from the City of the Future* (InDigest Editions, forthcoming) and *Oblivion, More* (H_NGM_N B_KS, forthcoming). He lives in Minneapolis where he helps run Hell Yes Press, a tiny independent poetry press.

MC Hyland's first collection of poems is *Neveragainland* (Lowbrow). Her most recent chapbooks are *Every Night in Magic City* (H_NGM_N, 2010) and *Residential As In* (Blue Hour Press, 2009). She lives in Minneapolis, where she works at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts and runs DoubleCross Press and the Pocket Lab reading series.

Paula Cisewski is the author of the collections *Ghost Fargo* (selected by Franz Wright for the Nightboat Poetry Prize and released 2010) and *Upon Arrival* (Black Ocean, 2006) and of the chapbooks *Two Museums* (MaCaHu 2009), *Or Else What Asked the Flame* (w/Mathias Svalina, Scantly Clad 2008) and *How Birds Work* (Fuori 2002). She was a 2009 SASE/Jerome Fellow.

Richard Terrill is the author of two collections of poems, *Almost Dark* and *Coming Late to Rachmaninoff*, winner of the Minnesota Book Award, as well as two books of creative nonfiction, *Fakebook: Improvisations on a Journey Back to Jazz* and *Saturday Night in Baoding: A China Memoir*, winner of the Associated Writing Programs Award for nonfiction. He teaches writing in the MFA program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he is a Distinguished Faculty Scholar.

Patricia Kirkpatrick has published *Century's Road*, two poetry chapbooks, and books for young readers; her awards include fellowships from the NEA, the Bush Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board (1988 and 2010), and the McKnight Loft Award. Poetry Editor for *Water-Stone Review*, she also teaches in the Hamline MFA program. She has conducted workshops and residencies at the Princeton Theological Seminary and many schools and libraries. She was a 2002 Fellow of the Shannon Institute for Community Leadership. Recent work appears in *Prairie Schooner* and *The Poets Guide to the Birds*.

James P. Lenfestey, after a career in academia, advertising, and journalism as an editorial writer at the Minneapolis StarTribune, and with his four children out of the house, has published poetry, reviews and articles, plus a book of essays. His six poetry collections include *A CARTLOAD OF SCROLLS: 100 POEMS IN THE MANNER OF T'ANG DYNASTY POET HAN SHAN*, and he edited the forthcoming *LOW DOWN AND COMING ON: AN ANTHOLOGY OF DELICIOUS AND DANGEROUS POEMS ABOUT PIGS*. Lenfestey chairs the Literary

Witnesses poetry program in Minneapolis.

Matt Mauch is the author of *Prayer Book* (Lowbrow) and the chapbook *The Book of Modern Prayer* (Palimpsest). He teaches at Normandale Community College and coordinates the Normandale Reading Series (the Great Twin Cities Poetry Read is the NRS's signature event). The editor of this book and a resident of Minneapolis, poems he's written of late can be found in *H_NGM_N*, *DIAGRAM*, *Connotation Press*, *Salt Hill*, and *Noö Journal*.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The bios, not, obviously, being arranged in alphabetical order, are arranged in the order in which the poets read at the inaugural GTCPR. That order and the order of the pieces in the book were selected by the editor. It gave him something to Hüsker.

Thanks a ton for the editorial assistance provided by the Matts Rasmussen and Ryan. I owe each of you whiskys.

