

# Poetry City, USA, Vol. 3



# Poetry City, USA, Vol. 3

An anthology of poems read at the  
third annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read  
plus essays, interviews, reviews,  
and other prose on poetry

**[Matt Mauch, orchestrator]**



Lowbrow  
Press

POETRY CITY, USA, VOL. 3  
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# CONTENTS, TABLE OF

<b>The Mgmt</b> GTCPR III	13
<b>I</b>	
<b>Kyle McCord</b> IT IS I, RANDALL KNOPER, AND THIS BE MY SONG	16
<b>Jenny Yang Cropp</b> BLACK ICE: REVISIONS	17
<b>Glenn Shaheen</b> CHRISTIAN CHARACTERS	18
<b>Matthew Guenette</b> HERE'S THE IDEA	20
<b>Jim Coppoc</b> de LEON CLAIMS FLORIDA	22
<b>Ian Beattie asks</b> Matt Ryan, MC Hyland, and Matt Mauch, part 1	23
<b>Rebecca Lehmann</b> NEW ZION	26
<b>Bruce Covey</b> NEUROBIOLOGICAL THEOLOGY	27
<b>John Colburn</b> THE NUMBER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH	28
<b>Morgan Grayce Willow</b> Buying Back Biko	34
<b>Matt Mauch</b> Notes taken after ingeniously rigging the gutters to drip water when it rains on the bushes I planted below them: on [SPOILER ALERT] by Laura Eve Engel and Adam Peterson (DZANC BOOKS)	35
<b>Betsy Brown</b> RICHARD'S CAFE	36
<b>Deborah Keenan</b> ONE OF THE OLD SONGS	38
<b>Gary Dop</b> A BRIEF ARGUMENT	39
<b>John Medeiros</b> ON DEATH & DYING	41
<b>Richard Robbins</b> A Map of Dick Hugo in Minnesota	44

<b>Richard Robbins</b> EVILESE	49
<b>Jeff Skemp</b> FOG	50
<b>II</b>	
<b>Traci Brimhall</b> SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BONDGAGE	54
<b>Paula Cisewski</b> PRESENT SYNDROME	55
<b>Carrie Lorig</b> scatterstate	56
<b>Paige Reihl</b> DEAR SCLERODERMA	58
<b>Ian Beattie asks</b> Matt Ryan, MC Hyland, and Matt Mauch, part 2	60
<b>Luke Pingel</b> THE SHADOWS THAT WORE US	63
<b>Haley Lasché</b> DRESS MAKER'S DANCE	64
<b>Kara Candito</b> POEM FOR MY THIRTY-SEVEN MISTRESSES	65
<b>Erik Tschekunow</b> VANITAS	66
<b>Cary Waterman</b> PERSEPHONE'S RETURN	68
<b>Lee Ann Roripaugh</b> WORD BETRAYALS—ANIMOANEY	70
<b>Kathryn Kysar</b> BREAK/FAST	72
<b>Su Smallen</b> MANUSCRIPT, ATLAS, THE FIELD	73
<b>Kris Bigalk</b> Edrich, Miller, and Waterman: Reflections on Poetry by Women in Minnesota	74
<b>Leslie Adrienne Miller</b> THE MONUMENT	84
<b>Adrienne Mathiowetz</b> ULTRASOUND	85

<b>Matt Mauch</b> Notes taken after sealing with duct tape the tiniest of holes that you'd never think a bat could get through: on the oeuvre-to-date of Bianca Stone	88
<b>Ryan Collins</b> TWO GOOD THINGS	89
<b>Lewis Mundt</b> BULLET	90
<b>Carol Connolly</b> SNOW	92
<b>Kris Bigalk</b> AUDOBON'S DREAM	93
<b>Juliet Patterson</b> CHERRY BLOSSOM STORM	94
<b>Seth Berg</b> BOTH ENDS OF SEDATION	95
 <b>III</b>	
<b>Feng Sun Chen</b> PASTORAL BITCH IN THE APARTMENT	100
<b>Ryan Vine</b> RULE 27	102
<b>Kelly Everding</b> TWO-HEADED LAMB	105
<b>Lightsey Darst</b> DEAR UNDONE,	106
<b>Richard Robbins</b> AT THE MOUTH OF MADNESS CAFE	107
<b>Cary Waterman</b> FIRE SONG	108
<b>Dylan Hicks</b> S'MORE TREES	110
<b>Brian Spears</b> RECORD: 44-53, 4 <sup>th</sup> IN DIVISION, 10 GAMES BACK	112
<b>Sharon Chmielarz</b> An Artist's Career: A Different Path from a Poet's? or: Can You See Yourself Here?	113
<b>Adam Fell</b> DEAR CORPORATION,	116

<b>Matt Mauch</b> Notes taken as I wait to see if the new seed in the feeder will attract prettier birds, on: <i>I Am Not a Pioneer</i> by Adam Fell (H_NGM_N BOOKS)	117
<b>John Bradley</b> MAN CAUGHT ON CAMERA IN TIMES SQUARE TAKING OFF SUSPICIOUS SHIRT	118
<b>Dobby Gibson</b> SILLY STRING THEORY	119
<b>Ian Beattie asks</b> Matt Ryan, MC Hyland, and Matt Mauch, part 3	121
<b>Amy McCann</b> KEEP	124
<b>John Jodzio</b> THE TWO MALLS	125
<b>Michael Walsh</b> SEA CREATURES	128
<b>Lynette Reini-Grandell</b> IN MEMORY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, WHO DIED IN 1983 AFTER CHOKING ON THE PLASTIC CAP OF A PILL BOTTLE	129
<b>Sun Yung Shin</b> THE NIGHT THE WORLD WAS GOING TO END	131
<b>The Mgmt</b> Coming soon online: reviews, reviews, and more reviews	133
<b>The Mgmt</b> What they call acknowledgments, I call these people/places/things rock	135





Poetry is the language of intensity. Because we are going to die, an expression of intensity is justified.

— *C.D. Wright*



## **GTCPR III**

*Despite an unannounced road closure on major Google-Maps®-route artery I-94, the third annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read was held in the Kay Fredericks Room in the Klas Center at Hamline University, in St. Paul, Minn., on what historical accounts note was a coolish-but-it's -cool-that-the-crab-apple-trees-are-in-bloom kind of Saturday, April 21, 2012. While it could have been warmer, at least the lawns weren't muddy.*

*Most of the poems found in pages that follow were read that night. Others were read at The Maeve's Sessions, a poetry reading series held, more or less, the first Thursday of every other month at Maeve's Cafe in trendy Northeast Minneapolis, along what at least one member of what is collectively termed "The Mgmt" affectionately calls Poetry Row.*

*Keeping the poems company and breaking things up a bit are reviews, interviews, essays, and other prose on poetry. The Mgmt is always seeking good prose on poetry, and tries to post updates on the GTCPR and The Maeve's Sessions at [GreatTwinCitiesPoetryReadandRoadShow.com](http://GreatTwinCitiesPoetryReadandRoadShow.com), on the Internet.*

*In poetry we trust.*



1

## **IT IS I, RANDALL KNOPER, AND THIS BE MY SONG**

It is I, Randall Knoper, inventor of the fire-retardant sleeping bag and sole agent of the apocalypse. I'm here today to talk to you about values:

all my life, I've owned vacuums named for presidents.  
My CIA file is the new American standard in banality.

Because at age fourteen, when I dreamt of hell,  
I realized each of us is the subject of our own great experiment,

is mere inches from honking at another in anger.  
I'm asking for your vote in this upcoming deception.

In the belly of the white leviathan we call our nation's capital  
I shall be your Starbuck. Because our land is nothing like hell

where the sky collides with the mountains  
and you would whimper to hunger for anything. But here in this jungle,

I must ask you to surrender your vote to me, Randall Knoper,  
who defeated Eric the Red in a race across America.

Who, from the age of eight, has relished only the fantasy of going toe-to-toe  
with you, Lady Liberty. You would not love me for ingenuity or ignominy

but I will not die unnamed.  
I'm like a baby king crawling beneath a bawling moon.

## Jenny Yang Cropp

### BLACK ICE: REVISIONS

I am watching my grandfather die. I am watching my father who is watching his father die. I am telling you this as if it were true, but it's not. If I say it again, then maybe, but more likely this is a poem where I try to convince myself that I am there, watching as the liver shuts down, as he drifts and kicks, flings sheets from skin, moans *glory to God* to hear it echo in what space he has left, to pass a message father to son, father to son. But I am not a son, and I am not there. I am a week before this, high on a concrete floor, dipping my toes in a pile of ash. Or am I a week before that, too wasted to come out of the dark? And if I say it again? I am watching my grandfather die. I am watching my father and can't help thinking about how he'll die, maybe the same way, slow creep of toxins through the body, his own child watching and waiting, resting in a bedside chair. But I am still not there. I do not see my face reflected in a bedroom window, because there was never a bedroom window, because this poem is a made thing and he is not dying at home. He is already dead, and I am still not there. I am not watching my father or my grandfather or my face in the blear of a public bathroom mirror. I am not reading the front page of the paper on the morning he finally died, its caption about an ice storm that barely missed us. I am not resting my solace on a metaphor about black ice, slick and deceiving. This is not memory or time travel. If he's already gone, then where am I? If I'm no good with my grief, then where am I? I am saying no to a boy who wants to love me. I am saying no because his love is a just a fear of dying, and I am busy not being there. I am counting my own pills. I am repeating to myself, *After this, after this, I quit.*

## **CHRISTIAN CHARACTERS**

What can we bear in this mesh  
around us our neighbors getting  
closer at the party we can feel  
their breaths as they press deep  
into us their questions their  
little curiosities we've been  
declared mud swimming in the  
river we've been cursed by touch  
and word without all the blame  
we could no longer hold the honor  
of being predators no let's eat  
let's talk let's be completely open  
and what could they bear to hear  
the milk that floods sour through  
our guts when we hear another  
sort of happiness different from  
our own they all must be better  
yes let's look at a list of Christian  
characters and they are all good  
in the most platonic sense pious  
or worship at their fingertips on  
their tongues should we stay  
inside the two of us should we  
get funky with some friends who  
can stay truly silent meaningfully  
silent black ice is a threat because  
it is not immediately visible when  
traveling at speeds usual to street  
traffic just broadcast our problems  
and see who forgives us ribbons  
from the second storey awnings  
and forgiveness implies error

can we also find acceptance our  
private lives projected against  
the side of a skyscraper an eyesore

## HERE'S THE IDEA

Insecure cheerleaders, capitalist jigglers,  
wait for it, it's the spring break  
nativity scene, there's a "no swimming sign"  
in the birdbrains fountain, go ahead and make me,  
St. Francis of Assisi, stained glass deer,  
a mailbox of copper nickels, it's a small box  
for your pathos, follow me to the garden decor  
whorehouse, Confederate lawn  
jockeys, garish gnomes making out, making love,  
fucking in front of other gnomes, a meteor shower  
at 90,000 miles per hour growing  
from the toilet planter waters zombies in the topiary,  
now is the time, seizure the day, Department  
of Defense health insurance, protesters  
dipped in oil, bathtub Madonna gin, underwater  
fundamentalists gazing balls and whirligigs  
rigged from voter ids, there's a Mercedes Benz  
in flames, are you ready to quit smoking?  
Oh Cinderella sniper yard globes, oh ardent  
and unyielding children of the conceptual,  
cover me in angel stickers, caucus my plains  
like a missionary, my sweet and sudden ignorance  
I never thought to ask, let's renovate history's  
patios and decks, let's drown some frogs turtles  
and ducks in cement, let's spit-shine our fear  
of death and win a trip to Disney, dear diplomats  
of pain, don't make my name into a verb, meet me  
at the hobby heist, saddle up your Leonardo  
de Plinko chips, your Virgin and Child  
with Snoop Doggy Dog, everywhere is pink flamingos,  
everywhere is camp yawn mower brought to you  
by Thomas Kinkade, please call for shipping rates,

it's a history of everything, even your mother,  
all this blood running glitter, all this glittering  
shine, I am having a blast, I've chained  
myself to it.

**de LEON CLAIMS FLORIDA**

Whereas discovery  
is greater than conquest  
and youth conquers death  
[at least in the imagination]  
whereas God has smiled  
on my endeavors, whereas  
guns fill the gaps that God  
leaves behind—  
whereas the war at home  
is won, and there is no  
place for a soldier in peace,  
whereas Christ is risen,  
and the season of Pascua  
Florida is upon us, I  
claim this land for God  
and for country  
and for the spirit  
of conquest,  
amen.

[and somewhere deep  
in the swamps ahead,  
the darkness thickens  
and begins to spread]

## Ian Beattie asks

*How has poetry contributed to the popular culture and how do you think the average individual views poetry in general? Should poetry's place in popular culture be different?*

**MATT RYAN:** I would say that contemporary poetry has in no way contributed to the popular culture, though I think pop culture influences poetry. Many poets, including myself, incorporate popular culture into their own work, either as a way of criticizing society or to create a sense of playfulness. As for the second part of your question, I think we can expect one of two reactions: 1) If a person has not been exposed to contemporary poetry, they either think it's something that rhymes or could be found in a thirteen year old's diary; 2) If by some odd chance they have been exposed to it, they dismiss it as too abstract.

It's hard for me to imagine poetry taking a popular a more visible seat in popular culture. Poets might be the most anti-establishment, unconventional artists out there. I think they take pride in their work being so far out of the mainstream that they would be insulted if a regular Joe understood their work. Now, is this the way it should be? I don't know. Maybe. I'm inclined to say that they are meant to live in separate neighborhoods. It's hard for me to imagine it any differently.

**MC HYLAND:** I think, at this point in history—it's sort of hard to even define "popular culture." Are we talking about tv? Movies? Advertising? Internet memes? I think popular culture now encompasses all of these-- and a number of poets work directly with popular cultural materials (more directly than I do, at least!) I'd take a look at their work for some examples of ho poetry can interface with popular culture.

The flarf poets are a major contemporary movement that construct meme-like poems using google searches. Their poems tend to be funny, raunchy, and insane--some of the best-known flarf poets are K. Silem Muhammed, Nada Gordon, Sharon Mesmer, Rod Smith, and (in the Twin Cities) Elizabeth Workman.

Other poets whose work directly responds to popular culture include Brad Lienen, Kate Durbin, Dan Magers, Ben Fama. The several generations of the New York School (starting with Frank O'Hara in the late-50s and 60s) tend to have in common an interest in pop culture: movies, advertisements, shopping, etc.

**MATT MAUCH:** I'm not sure anymore what "popular culture" or "average individual" mean. I know how they're used, but don't think *how they're used* really matches anything we would call, if we open our eyes and really see what's there, how things are. NFL football, I suppose, is popular among many in our culture in the U.S. Maybe it's the most popular thing that there is. Does that make fans of NFL football average individuals? I open my eyes and that's what I see. I see that billions and billions of people eat at McDonalds. Those people must be average. I watch NFL football but don't eat at McDonald's. I don't like the part of me that likes NFL football, because I see it for what it is: a big business making huge profits that go to a few people (although I do like that poor players with natural talent can get in on the take, but don't think I would enjoy sitting next to many of them at the bar, talking about things). I got hooked on football when I was a kid, and haven't been able to shake it. That's leads to a disconnect in me. That leads to me wanting to cut out a part of me. Football is benign compared to McDonald's, which not only systematically makes addicts of its customers—makes them physical addicts as well as psychological ones—but shortens their life spans in the process, and preys often on those who can't afford to eat good food, and so I understand why people eat there, why those people are addicted. They can't afford organic grass-fed beef or don't have the time to even think about the difference between that and a Big Mac® as they run between jobs and do what they need to do to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families. That makes me want to start a revolution. Black Friday and Cyber Monday are popular and enjoyed by people who must be average, and they make me want to move into the woods. Feelings of disconnection, rage, and solitude, then, are what I get from what seem to be prime examples of popular culture enjoyed by people most would deem average individuals.

Yet I am immersed in all of it, too—and way more of it than I've mentioned here. And it's the writing and reading of poems that let me live for a time on little islands of articulate transcendence. Poems are things that can scalpel out the good from NFL football, McDonalds, and shop-till-

you-drop capitalism. Popular culture and average individuals are among the things that poetry is nourished by. If you eat lentil salad, that lentil salad is a part of you. If you're poetry and you eat popular culture and average people, then those are part of you too, and that applies whether you're reading it or writing it.

But only poets and people who really read a lot of poetry know that, and I'm not sure, anymore, if that is really two different subsets of people, or one.

Poetry is outsider art. If it contributes to popular culture it does so because poets have regular jobs and bring their art into those jobs and the average people they work with and for, and by "for" I mean both their bosses and their customers, their deans and their students. If any of this were otherwise, poetry wouldn't be what it is, and wouldn't have the draw it does, I don't think, for those who read and write it.

I am going to continue to be U.S.-centric here, not only because I think that's what you intend, but also because it's the only way I can give answers that make any sense (if they do that), me being in and of this culture. There are other cultures and times during which poetry *was* a popular art/form of entertainment. On one hand that seems cool—a culture where poetry is something almost everybody reads and reveres—but on the other hand it seems like that would lead to a lot of the stuff that makes celebrity culture here so unattractive. If poets are popular, what keeps Jane the Lyric Surrealist from becoming a caricature à la Lindsay Lohan? Poets of stature already have to deal with that risk; I wouldn't want increased popularity to spread that burden around too much.

Should poetry have a different place in popular culture? Probably, from a moral standpoint. Shit, from a moral standpoint, poetry should be more popular than religion (which is a pretty big part of popular culture where one finds a lot of average individuals). That's not going to happen, though—not anytime soon. And that means poetry is still going to appeal primarily to those of us who currently read and write it.

*Ian Beattie is a student in the AFA program at Normandale Community College. Matt Ryan, MC Hyland, and Matt Mauch are, among other things, poets.*

**NEW ZION**

I am not the first person to confuse  
a poem for a room with silk wallpaper.

Even Newton, an early Christian Zionist,  
poured over the bible, lost in exegesis,  
his hair a wild tangle,  
a candle burning to nub  
beside his scribblings.

I learned that this morning,  
watching the history channel  
in a cheap hotel room.

When you got out of the shower you dropped  
your towel and shouted, Gravity!  
before realizing  
I'd opened the drapes.

I'll show you the Temple of the Mount;  
it's something I did  
once in college.

Now, it's finally your turn at the wheel,  
and, glad to see it, the sun  
makes a point of shining  
right in your eyes.

You swerve, half-blind,  
between semis and Subarus.

A whole gang of sixty-year-old motorcyclists throttles  
away from death at a reasonable speed,  
their thinning, dyed hair  
floating in the tailwind like  
a bunch of angel spit.

## **NEUROBIOLOGICAL THEOLOGY**

What would Jesus do when the checkout line at the grocery store is long and moving slowly and seven cashiers are behind the desk looking up at the black and white tv over the exit door at Jerry Springer?

What would Jesus do the weekend before taxes are due when he doesn't feel like getting up out of bed or calling an accountant and it's humid and buggy outside?

What would Jesus do when the button on his jeans makes the security alarm at the airport go off and he has to stand, legs apart with the button now undone while an angry person wands him?

Would Jesus buy an import? How many smokes are too many? What to eat to stay healthy? When to drive or walk?

How would Jesus introduce his partner to his estranged family?

Would he program a system upgrade or patch to repair the holes in the sky and calm global climate change?

Would Jesus create a viable third party? Would he wear vegan shoes and help to ban bottled water?

Would Jesus build a giant fan to blow away everyone's sadness? Or would he reach through the eyes and reprogram the brains, one by one?

**THE NUMBER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**

They stole chickens and  
slaughtered cows  
they castrated pigs  
they cut the tails off piglets  
they followed deer through the woods  
shot them in their necks  
they put out traps  
they raised lambs then slit their throats  
they hung animals upside down in their barns  
the blood drained out  
their guts were baskets  
they carried babies or carried bread  
downriver to grandmother's gut  
in the fall they slaughtered and they boiled meat  
they canned the meat and stored it  
in root cellars in shelved rows  
and other parts even brains  
they used for sausage  
and they tied horses to iron equipment  
and whipped them  
but the dogs just ran free  
they put meat in a clearing  
and waited for a bear  
all of this meat is how I am

my great grandfather stole three chickens  
he was put in jail  
he got out he had a stroke  
then he could only swear  
only from half his face  
his wife lost her mind was  
'committed' but when he died

she 'came out of it'  
lived for years  
never stole chickens

they caught fish and slid steel knives  
into their bellies  
they dreamt of animals  
the animal terror went into their bodies  
and they too lost their minds  
coyotes came to speak to them  
they killed other people  
as they were told to  
they kidnapped a Lakota woman  
it was winter there was so much snow  
and nothing to kill  
they survived on potatoes and  
canned meat and canned pears  
so that I was born

and one day a rabbit bit the tip off my finger  
and chewed it up  
so we killed the rabbit

some of them lived with mules in Kentucky  
or horses in Massachusetts  
some of them turned their front yards  
into pig wallows in Iowa  
and they kept slaughtering  
they bought guns and sows  
and killed who they were told to kill  
and made whiskey  
and killed rabbits and raccoon and foxes  
they poached and ran  
or later drove their cars into ditches  
and more of them went to jail  
they wanted sex and families  
they wanted to slaughter more animals  
even a horse in the worst of times

they were ready  
in their root cellars  
and they sang about food and animals  
they played guitars by the stove  
or on porches  
and more animals died and became songs  
meat dripping everywhere  
and I got here and began eating

    this morning I saw a rabbit in the driveway  
    I saw its beautiful eye  
    it was feminine  
    it carried a baby it carried bread  
    its eye was a womb  
    I was given a heart-shaped basket  
    made from dried plants  
    and I rode it down the river  
    I thought *who is riding in the basket*  
    *it feels like no one*  
    the incinerator came on at dusk  
    in the old yellow sky  
    and wolf-children came out  
    their hair gone poisonous  
    the people grew tired of raising them  
    and rubbing pollen on their bodies  
    grew tired of how years  
    run together after dark

they kept their bodies warm to stay alive  
they cut down trees  
and burned them to boil water  
they shaved the sheep  
they spun and wove the wool  
children watched the looms fill  
they had to keep warm  
and some of them burned animal shit  
some burned oil from the ground  
or oil from giant whales  
hauled onto boats and hacked to pieces

and the chimneys glowed hot  
the lanterns glowed  
children slept near whatever could burn  
the adults killed to stay warm  
they killed to eat  
they burned lost people passing through  
and the children watched their faces melt

someone check his teeth  
looks like the kind of person  
to squish in a machine  
press the juice out of  
rip apart with horses  
pour boiling water onto  
shoot metal into  
tell him to keep moving  
or we'll set him afire

they wanted to stay warm  
they wanted to make more children  
the rivers flooded  
they were alive but winter came on  
night came too and they wrote letters  
someone lit a candle  
the church bell froze  
a crow perched on the chimney meant  
someone would die  
a white dog on the road at night  
was a spirit  
a woodpecker at the window  
meant prosperity  
a coyote in the yard  
meant bad luck and a hard winter  
souls inhabited the fires  
ancestors spoke from the mouths of fish  
the cemetery glowed at night  
an elk wandered up to the house  
to deliver its message  
how fire keeps the busy spirits away

sunlight in the pines  
wild turkeys half-mad along the road  
long lines of eggs and mothers and  
sunlight in their feathers  
each evidence of glowing sound  
mind expansion practice dream  
the squirrel alive and  
the hawk in its piece of sky  
and they prayed for sanctuary  
they dreamt of the number twelve  
and of twelve gears  
turning this world  
through the levels of urge  
and in their dreams  
where celestial fruits fell  
into twelve tributaries  
they prayed to be absorbed  
by the divine  
but instead they woke up  
and drank whiskey  
and wanted to fight  
they distilled moonshine  
in Kentucky  
they took amphetamines and kept working  
kept killing  
the word was sacred  
so they didn't speak  
they built El Dorado  
they built industrial parks  
on the graves of each other  
they built flashbulbs and stark faces  
they built orchards and winding roads  
and shudders for the windows  
of homes they built or stole  
and they built a word for us  
they called us the future  
and they kept killing  
they got to twelve and they started over  
the future was both heaven and earth

the gods the months the stars  
a spiral of twelve  
a fulfillment  
an eating sound.

## Morgan Grayce Willow

### Buying Back Biko

The bookmark fell from a book I'd never finished, thought I should, think maybe I still might. A scant inch and a half by five, the slender bookmark is perfect for either hardback or paper editions. Once, it was dove gray, but now it's faded. The top half inch is yellowed from the light. One top corner is dog-eared, the other wrinkled. The yellowed top bears an illustration, an etching of a single, wall-mounted shelf. The shelf's books lean against each other haphazardly, or pile up in lopsided stacks. They're sure to topple. The eye follows the arc of their potential tumble, down to the distinctive royal blue Roman type – the bookstore's name, Second Story Books. Two heavy boxes I'd schlepped up those creaking stairs to that bookshop above a natural foods restaurant. I was moving and had to let them go.

From her wooden swivel chair behind the counter – amid the dust, mold and sweet-smelling pipe tobacco – the shopkeeper reigned over her ordered shelves. Unmarked editions of philosophy books, like Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* in English and German, she could sell, she'd said, to students from the colleges nearby. Likewise the poetry titles, especially those like the first edition collection by Steven Biko. She knew the work of the South African poet and activist who'd died in police custody in 1977. Someone's going to want that book, she'd said.

I was that someone. Weeks after the move, I longed for it back, realized how difficult it would be to replace. I climbed the creaky stairs again. The aroma of soy sauce and strong coffee faded as I arrived on the landing. On the door to the Second Story, a sign: Rent Hike. Shop Closed. No forwarding address.

**Notes taken after ingeniously rigging the gutters  
to drip water when it rains on the bushes  
I planted below them: on *[SPOILER ALERT]*  
by Laura Eve Engel and Adam Peterson  
(DZANC BOOKS)**

Reading *[SPOILER ALERT]*, the 2011 winner of the Collagist chapbook contest, written by dynamic duo Laura Eve Engel and Adam Peterson, is like having Stanislavski and Strasberg whispering their secrets like sweet nothings in your ear. Secret #1: When you say, “We promised the stockholders In five years, a family!,” make it effect how you “cling to these strangers and wonder how we came to be worth so much to them.” Secret #2: If you and another in a ferris wheel make up a “we” and you “pass legislation and call holding on each other until we’re tired and then we say I love you because there isn’t a thing we can think of that we’re missing,” bring that sentiment with you, back to earth, when “holding hands and winning big stuffed pandas for each other.” Secret after secret is revealed in poem after poem (each of them named “[SPOILER ALERT]”), until you, dear reader, become less and less you and more and more the characters that people these poems, thinking, “wrist-deep in wax, that there was no way to return to the blank white page.” It’s like reading 36 stories, the reading of which is a possession, only instead of your head turning 360 degrees like Linda Blair’s in *The Exorcist*, you become heavier and a little fatter “as your gratitude grows sharper and brighter and then painful, in that place in your stomach where the bear is now kindly proving your existence, even while pedaling, by holding you up.”

**RICHARD'S CAFE**

The last diner  
in downtown Selma  
has the Ten Commandments  
tacked up on the wall  
above the cash register.  
Splintered gold frame.  
Sprinkling of dull roses  
printed in smudged pixels,  
an aged border around the text  
and faded over years  
of watching sentry  
over the coveting  
and stealing and honoring  
committed by café patrons.  
These are days of vinyl.  
Of short checks.  
Darkened mugs for coffee.  
There are dreams served  
in the parking lots of banks  
and hands held while walking  
through the false witness  
of billboards and cobwebs.  
Streets with fake names.  
These are nights of hurtling rivers.  
Names taken in vain  
and cried out of the sunroofs  
of Camaros.  
The Alabama.  
The morning trains.  
The pigeons evicted  
from the Harmony Club.  
The chain link fence

surrounding the church  
catches the newsprint and gloves,  
the lost promises and lies.

The marquee out front  
is missing a couple bulbs  
but its letters spell out  
Bible Cover Sale.

We try to fix the stains,  
patch over the holes in our days,  
but the coins keep tarnishing,  
the wood rots and bends.  
The silence finishing the sentences  
of the sins.

## **ONE OF THE OLD SONGS**

The guy walked past singing *White Bird, in a golden cage on a winter's day in the rain*. One of the old songs, by the group, It's A Beautiful Day. Whatever songs the radio assigns me, whatever songs strangers sing as they pass me, those are my songs for the day. This is my creed, my gospel, my way of trying to stay In the world I was born into. I sang the song doing the dishes that night, and it felt right singing *White Bird, in a golden cage, on a winter's day in the rain*. It was winter, I was white, as I always would be. I understood myself to be in a golden cage, large enough to live a whole life in. I understood it's a beautiful day, and I lived the song in my body and mind for that whole beautiful day.

## **A BRIEF ARGUMENT**

The hunter, my father, a Marine, pops two shots  
at a young buck from too far. His hands motion  
for me to march the pasture and stand  
on the ridge. At the edge, overlooking

the brown brush, I spot the deer  
thirty feet, no more, down the embankment.  
He stares at me, as if to say, *I know why  
we're here*, but when I pull my first shot,

which smokes up the dirt, he doesn't run.  
I want to run. We're both too young  
for decisions that might save us.  
He takes two steps, his black hole eyes

on me, my breath held, my fingers shaking,  
my cheek tight against the slick wood  
of the rifle that stopped dozens of deer  
before I was born. I pull the trigger again.

The buck takes two more steps  
then drops, chest first, his back legs  
holding firm, a brief argument  
with fate. I approach. I want my father

to be here—to say *good shot*  
or *well done*—so I won't feel  
the heaving breaths of the dying deer.  
My legs stutter. My father doesn't

come. The deer doesn't die,  
and I don't know what to do  
except hold my gun to the space  
behind the buck's deep eye.

I tug the trigger, hoping  
the soft chest will stop rising, compressing  
the air as if to steal my breath  
with each of his last. A fifth desperate shot

finds something important  
in the throat. I'd tried the head  
and chest. He kicks once  
and settles in the dirt.

Above my buck's body,  
I sway, nauseous, hoping my father  
won't see the mess I've made,  
the mess I've become.

**ON DEATH & DYING**

*for dad*

i. denial

the days are beautiful. flax  
taking in wind taking in sun  
taking in the rapture of a summer  
sky. clouds never move  
when watched closely. there is  
a hole in the landscape  
& we fill it with an inventory  
of countless treasures: fresh  
rose petals, black & white photographs  
of uniformed men/bridal-gowned  
women/jewels seaweed-hidden  
along the atlantic coast.  
the days are always beautiful,  
& the nights live on forever.

ii. anger

days were beautiful. soot-covered  
grass as though it were  
an inseparable shadow. the umbra  
of whatever it is that is left  
when love no longer breathes.  
time is nothing

but sorry it was ever born  
because in the end there is no  
difference between ash & dust:  
the fist a terrible universe, a curse

in itself in air or in pocket, a  
hinge-rusted vessel by which  
we access our anger on  
those nights that live on forever.

iii. bargaining

if the days could be beautiful, if  
the years could roll themselves out  
like gold carpets, if God himself could  
put his finger on a pulse & flow  
life into hungry veins like tributaries  
following their own current, if  
red could turn to green come twilight, if  
we could carry our medals on our  
shoulders as the world cheers us on, if  
we could cast our lance at death's  
runaway steed & strike a blow  
so hard it separates rider from horse, if  
this were remotely possible, then  
this night would last forever.

iv. depression

is a day that lost its will to be beautiful.  
a disconnect from those things  
that green from the very process  
of greening. photosynthesis—  
a lesson in history, the eye  
no longer able to block the light.  
the light no longer able  
to stave off darkness. somewhere  
in a cave as vast & wide  
as a mountain beneath the ocean  
a cry echoes  
the same words over & over:

*this night will live on forever*  
*this night will live one forever.*

v. acceptance

the days are beautiful & they  
are not. they come to show themselves  
for what they really are: a petri dish  
where molecules of flesh & dust  
collide in atmospheric rhythm. yet  
we feel none of it—we become  
cubes of ice, nebular particles  
water-massed & hanging in the air  
over the landscape in silent submission.  
we come to see the world as a series  
of things that live & things  
that don't: a frozen gauze that now  
turns to the west. a once-ageless  
night that no longer lives forever.

## **A Map of Dick Hugo in Minnesota**

When some of us were graduate students in the late seventies, we used to joke about being on Richard Hugo panels at future conventions of the Pacific Northwest Literature Association, telling the audience what it was really like working with the master. We assumed he would be more famous than ever by then, and so would we. We'd leave a workshop some late Wednesday evening, heading toward the favorite bar, and one of us, remembering something from class, would say, "There was one for the panel." Some students kept serious notes on him in their file cabinets or in boxes under their beds. They gathered stories in a sometimes frighteningly serious way. Over thirty years after I last saw him—leaving a Bozeman restaurant dressed up, happy with Ripley, happy with a little beer on the night before he was to be given an honorary doctorate by the other Montana university—all I have are such flashes of him. These and a few things the newspapers wrote in the days after he died. These and the newspaper stories and the poems that sometimes bring the slighter memories to fuller view.

That look across the table during a poetry workshop: The glasses would be up on his forehead or off entirely and resting on the table top. More prominent than any lines on his brow was the V that worked up and into the bald center of his head. Before the cancer, he smoked a lot of cigarettes in those three hours. When he smoked and thought out loud, he looked a lot up into the air, especially if he was retrieving some lines of poetry from memory. When he spoke to the group, his eyes and the V aimed our way. A friend who entered the workshop a year before me tells of the first time Dick responded to one of his poems in class. After the piece was read to the group, Dick took his glasses off and looked at him hard. It was acting at first, because when Dick first started talking he might be only halfway through forming his thought, but it would turn more serious and convincing after a moment because he had found finally what he wanted to say, and he believed it absolutely now with all his passion and would let you know how strongly he believed it by looking at you, and only you, as hard as he could. I got that look a few times. I know now that Dick had

a way of enlisting the writer of a poem in the poem's critique. He would do that in part by taking the piece on its own terms and imagining its development from the point of view of the writer in the process of making the poem. By the time he questioned one of your moves, you were probably questioning it, too. What my friend got with the look that first night was, "You still think poetry is a form of communication, don't you?"

Dick left class one day to accept a phone call, and when he returned, apologizing for the delay, he explained that he'd just been offered the editorship of the Yale Series of Younger Poets. We all applauded. In following years, there was a little grumbling among poetry graduates because Dick had told us not even to bother sending our manuscripts to Yale. I always thought his prohibition perfect, though. After all, we knew his appointment and his winners would inevitably invite skepticism for any number of reasons. Why add charges of favoritism to the list? Many people now feel Dick's group of winners does not come up to the standard of Auden's editorship of the series, but then no one else's does either—Rich, Merwin, Ashbery, and Wright are tough choices to beat. I'm not sure any of my fellow graduate students would have dignified Dick's list more than those who occupy it. Despite our ambivalence about these things, we were proud of Dick's editing the Yale Series and pleased whenever he got any play from the East Coast literary establishment. We were proud when he was invited to the White House. Also when we heard he read at Harvard and Cornell and Yale, and smug to boot when we heard Harvard's check bounced. When *American Poetry Review* put his "Knight in Blue-Green Relief" in 14-point type on its back-page feature, we were happy he was getting the attention he deserved. When we heard the English Department had lost his office nameplate during his sabbatical, we took from that poem the ass-kicking speaker's name for himself and had a new plate printed: *Dick of the Storms*.

More than one critic I respect and more than one poet and lifelong friend of Dick have told me they thought he was probably not a good teacher. After all, they point out, look at how many students ended up imitating his style and spending the next several years, or their whole careers, trying to shake it. Marvin Bell is an example, they might say, of a teacher who's worked with some of the best poetic talents of the last 30 years without intentionally or unintentionally molding them to his image. "What Hugo students have gone anywhere since they left his workshop?" they ask. To answer, of course, is to accept the trap, the narrow definition of teaching and professional success. What I can say for sure, though—not

content to walk away from the question—is that no student left Hugo’s workshop not loving the language more than before. No one left less skeptical of pretentiousness in art or criticism. No one less confident in the imagination’s power to create order and beauty on the page and find it elsewhere—temporarily, maybe—in the self and the larger world. “All poets I know ... have an unusually strong moral sense,” he wrote in *The Triggering Town*. Despite the darkness in our lives, the defeat and self-betrayal, the victories of evil people, he believed writers are engaged in a process of discovering worth. He taught us this, whether we ended up as house-painters (the AFL could have started its own poets’ local in Missoula) or cops or professors. Whether or not we won the prizes.

That doesn’t finish it, though. Was Dick a good teacher? For those who came to Missoula to learn, I think he was. For the few careerists who showed up—interested in the degree, looking toward the job it would get them—I’m not sure he could do much. Those people did not put their writing first, and Dick’s name on a recommendation letter did not change that fact. (His references, by the way, were often hastily written, clumsy in a now-lovable way, laughed about only years beyond the sting of observation that could have been misconstrued as criticism: “Despite his ineffectual manner, he’s really quite bright.”) For the main body of poetry students—who entered the workshop to see what two years of concentrated work could do for their writing—he was among the best of teachers. He’d alert you to your process. He’d show you how a problem in a poem was often enough connected to a lapse of faith in your imagination. He’d get you to prefer jumping detail-to-detail rather than dwelling too long in one place. He’d get you to believe the impossible, that somehow the music of a poem could give you access to its developing content. He’d remind you that no group of people would ever care as much about your work after you left than the one group in front of you. *You’d* better care, or you’ll go dry three months out of school. If attention and praise is all that writing means to you, maybe you *should* go dry.

Have his students gone anywhere? Have they won prizes, published important books, or otherwise come into their own in a big way, the way Wright and Kizer and Hugo himself came into their own after Roethke? Understood in that last sense, the answer is no. No MacArthurs, Pulitzers, and so on. Dick was as happy as anyone to see his students do well in the world at large—and scores of his students have books and awards and jobs they like to show for themselves—but being on top of the heap wasn’t that important to him, and he didn’t suggest it should be for us. In his own

career, he realized his critical reception was often subject to the biases that divide east and west in this country. I'm not sure, though, that gauge of his place in the scheme of things occupied much of his waking time, as it did others, including his own famous teacher. Dick felt most successful, I think, in the middle of one of his legendary readings, where he could laugh and tell stories and recite some of the most powerful language around. After a particularly dark group of poems, he might joke, "Really, I'm a very happy guy," and get a laugh out of the crowd. He'd be in control in a way that, at least by his own testimony, he rarely felt anywhere else. This is vastly presumptuous, but given a choice between the two National Book Awards he was nominated for and the audiences he cultivated over the years, I'm sure he would have taken the latter every time. Even though no single student of his still writing and publishing poems has half the audience Dick has even now, over thirty years after his death, the poets he worked with don't deserve the narrow measure of success someone would assign them, especially in an American environment where so many of those on top of the heap are completely disconnected from a readership wider than one or two vested critical circles. The writing life is mostly a lonely life, Dick reminded us. But to be doing the same thing that Yeats and Bogan had done, that Stafford and Wright and Kizer were doing then—well, what else could be more satisfying?

I never became very close to Dick Hugo, like some students did, and a part of me would not have wanted to know him any better. Having said that, I remember my wife and I dropping in on Dick and Ripley often enough. We might have had a reason for being there—were we house-sitting the next week and coming to get instructions for mail and the pets?—or we might not have. Where I live now, I get and make fewer spontaneous visits to people's homes. But in Missoula, we did it all the time. It was like that in any Western town I've ever lived in.

Once, in fall, Candace and I dropped by and found Dick in his library watching the World Series. The Yankees were playing that year, and what I remember most is Tony Kubek's cliché about the long, difficult fly ball someone had just hit to left field. Dick repeated Kubek's remark immediately: "Roy White *battles* the sun! Jesus Christ, guys, isn't the English language beautiful?" It was not the most stunning thing he ever said, but it was memorable, mostly because it was private and also because it reflected Dick's spontaneous appreciation of poetry—accidental or otherwise—wherever he found it.

The last time I saw Dick, in that hotel restaurant lobby four months

before he died, he was preoccupied with the group of people he was with, with the happiness of the occasion. I remember his face, and Ripley's, and that my wife and I were laying-over for the night on a move from Minnesota to Oregon. That's all I can retrieve of that episode. Two years later we moved back to this state, to a new town, where students ask me now what Dick Hugo was like. We watch the video. We read *The Triggering Town* and poems that are tortured and beautiful at once. I tell them about the World Series, his living-room couch that—one morning after house-sitting—was the prop for my marriage proposal. I tell about his most visible failures as a man, the ones he himself would admit to. As much as possible, I want these new writers to understand he would have thought the best of them. There's an impossible lot to remember, but what the grave marker says, those lines from "Glen Uig," says a lot:

Believe you and I sing tiny  
and wise and could if we had to eat stone and go on.

We could do a lot worse than to believe and sing those things.

**EVILESE**

First in the clumsy sign, hexing that car  
around the next bend. Then in the clear  
expletive of feet, the way hers broke, broke  
a soft face. How the gestures cloaked her

from those far counties inside. How bright  
the road from bone to hand to daylight  
sorties where the word, black as oil, argues  
for itself in the sand. Where to find

the new songs. Across the sky, finches  
leave their shadow. Meanwhile, the mute screech  
of tires, child at a loom, the half second  
when the house blows, a kind of speaking.

**FOG**

Remember the day  
we dared to empty the fog  
into our throats.

That's how thick it was,  
how big we felt.

We dared to breathe  
like no one could see.

Slowly, don't run into  
the low strands of rusty fence.

Walk like you're blind.  
It's the only way  
you won't fall into a hole.

It's easy.

The fog finds  
the palm of your hand  
through your fingertips;

and the belly of its defeat  
inside the sun  
behind your eyes.

We breathe  
as it flows freely

to surround us  
as it dares us  
to pretend we're asleep.





**SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BONDAGE**

My secondhand religion calls this  
an unfleshed miracle. The atoms  
in my lips rearrange in numb euphoria,  
in a white nocturne, in nothing but black  
stockings. I've never wanted to adore  
anything but folly. Holy Mother, may I  
put this unchurched man's hands  
up my shirt? I am an allegory on all fours.  
Make of my story a wary girl born to feel  
God but never see him. Riddle my heart  
biblical. Riddle my wrists with ropeburn.  
When you reach through the veil for  
all the miracles money buy, you'll find me  
in your mother's clothes. Hallelujah me.  
Hosanna me. Throw back the curtains.

## **PRESENT SYNDROME**

Let's be grateful we have been trained to seek out the love story inside the extinction tale, that there is a certain ratio we've come to expect of embrace to mauling. I don't need an excuse to put my arm around my shuddering love while the darkness is our disguise kit. Together, we can hate a hero if one is introduced. A movie hero never reflects on the casualties: even hero wolf. Even dead wolf. When I can't reach to put my arm around my love for the giant Coke holder sprawling between us, I become all reaching. What if I am the wolf? Am I the salivary pack mother or the mangy lone pup? What if everybody's the same wolf? Our slobbery chops in the disguise theater. Thank you. The woodsman's body crumpled near a blood-drenched wolf suckling her cubs in the moon-numbed woods. We are tensed in the safe theater. We are in love and we are gnawing on the dry bones of our myths.

**scatterstate**

i write with a bad mouth you can dance to. your armholes shake around your arms. the claps are hard and they shake the mouths standing over them. the claps are going to catch your head moving around here. in the center of a rented space. i break cloth by asking your voice dangling under water it can't swallow. i tie it back together through my pained face. there is a naked around here that says you can only see my boobs through an armhole. it is not a hole, it is a ditch. it is largely brown. the fruit leans out. they feel over the edge. i feel it, two showers at once, two kinds of dressing at once. i feel it, two kinds of dead rind at once--one handwritten and the other written in shapes of the back and stomach, blue placed and pressed down like potato stamps. i feel it, two erosions at once. catching their arms around me like this. the cattle are wrapping themselves in big sheets and then standing up. tree pain means putting your arms around my hair and making it stand up. we are dangling under the bulb of a rented space. my chest drops from three stories to one. the river tries to stand up but is lost in its largely brown sheets. what did i ever think i would see through once i climbed inside? fishes that scare wet and stuck heart rah raw out of you? fishes that make lists out of your side of this sheet pouring place, this rented space we paid good land to rub our vine pelts in? there are pieces of my chest in the water. words breathe through holes in their sides and boats foam in their slits. you choose the ditch as a spot to focus on. you clap your hands. the sound of your hands comes out of the holes in my sides. you put your ear to my sides. i liked you because you were so long inside you and i liked you because you were so trashed on watermelon meat in the sink. i have not forgotten since what a harvested spill is, what a night foaming in its slit is. how bad i was at you with the cups of my hands. moon lips through his gauze. a fish looses his voice in the middle of your hands about to clap. it looks just like a horn wrapped in a sheet, grazing. the sheet is trashed on so much mouth pulling at the earth's covers. the sound comes out of my sides and i am tempted to weep in a catchy way. the way a checkout girl would. the way a girl who has fired off a pop before would. the way a girl who can hold hands over her teeth fence would. my

voice leaves a welt in the grass whenever i look at it while i'm talking. like  
it's been sitting there on its butt. i write a word in the grass while saying an  
unword like aahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. i die and come back to life  
a pain person. i die and come back to life a flower person. i die and come  
brackish to life a person who can slantwise sing dent music. i die and come  
brackish to life a river sugared with antler sheds who karaoke a word fishes  
territory to. i die, space, and come back to life, space, a stupid cow asleep.  
the letters drink a fifth of american grain, space, and groan with grass.

## DEAR SCLERODERMA

You, the ever-present but often misunderstood  
scar on my left arm, that shriveled sister.

No one understands your full name: *linear*  
meaning elongated, stretched, skin like thin

parchment scribbled brown,  
and *morphea*, pink and white patches

like the bite of winter into skin and blood.  
No, not “morphia,” the drug to deaden pain.

No “Morpheus.” (Why not a God of Dreams?  
Some ebony bed surrounded by red poppies?)

On it I could sleep, some drug  
or God to shape my dreams.)

In the spring the stares of strangers:  
*What happened to your arm?*

Winter sweater gone, skin now exposed,  
tight like plastic wrap, the fingers thin and curved

like a an old woman’s or a bird’s claw.  
What shall I say? *Scleroderma*: disease,

the body’s rare war against itself,  
the immune system a dictator,

the skin the proletariat landscape.  
But that is melodrama, a half truth.

Still, arm of mine, we are entwined,  
tangled branches of the same tree. I will nurse

your brittleness, your wilted browning limb  
and when summer comes, I will take you naked

into the sun and the rain and the air.  
Yes, we are all flawed and dying, each day

a scar here or there lifted toward the light.

## Ian Beattie asks

*What is it like to be a poet in today's age? Do people make assumptions about what you do? Do you see poetry being used in places people wouldn't think to look for it?*

**MATT RYAN:** I think non-poets have little interest in what we do, mainly because they are not interested in our work. If you take my family, for example, all of them are good and smart people. All of them love and are supportive of me. But what I write and why I write is just something they are not interested in. They are interested in the artist but not the art itself. They will act like they are, but in reality, they are not. I'm totally fine and not offended by this.

Do I see poetry being used in places people wouldn't think to look for it? Not really. The cast is the audience. The only people who read poetry are poets. We know exactly where to look. Could I come up with a few creative yet bullshit exceptions? Sure. The truth, though, is that this is a marginalized artform and those of us in the margins know exactly where to find it.

**MC HYLAND:** This is something I've actually talked about before! Now is an awesome time to be a poet—there's a great national network of poets that is made much, much easier to connect to by social media/online magazines/general online life. Being a poet is not a way to make money (pretty much all poets have day jobs), but it's an amazing way to meet people—by going to readings, doing readings, attending national conferences, etc. Within that community, there's a lot of space for different approaches and different ideas about poetry—more space, I think, than even 10 years ago, when poets tended to divide really rigidly into aesthetic camps.

**MATT MAUCH:** Most of the people who know I'm a poet are other people who read and write poetry (that cult I've been talking about), or are close friends, family, or students in writing classes. The people who know I'm a poet but who don't read or write it themselves don't ask much about it. It's probably not comfortable for them, or probably bores them. My family

will ask a few more questions than most, because they see something like publishing a book as a general kind of accomplishment they can be proud of for somebody they're related to, and so they'll ask questions in that vein.

I'm sure people make assumptions about what I do because I make assumptions about what they do. I think we mostly only share those assumptions with people about whom said assumptions are not being made, when we gossip. Most of the kinds of assumptions we make of this ilk are wrong, yet they are also crucial to the kind of work a poet does. In the same way I make assumptions about what it's like to work as a cop, I make assumptions about what it's like be a rock that thinks it's a bird, and that kind of thing. If you follow the logic, that makes poems snarky, ubiquitous, and wrong, but good-wrong.

Now is a great time to be a poet because it's easier to connect with other people who write and read poetry. Social media gives us that, and I value it. It makes doing what we do feel like belonging to a club, and everybody wants to belong to a club of the similarly stricken. That cyber-connection to other poets would, I think, be even more valuable if I lived in a place that weren't as conducive to poetry and the life of practicing poets as are the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Here, we get the best of both worlds.

Do I see poetry being used in places people wouldn't think to look for it? There's the DIY use of poetry like that (stickers in windshields, graffiti), and the organizational use of that (poems on busses, carved into wet sidewalk cement, on bridges that span major urban roads), and both uses are largely dependent upon place and the people that live in a place and how the majority votes. The DIY applications require believers with a guerrilla attitude and some time to literally spread the word. The organizational applications require money, nonprofit organizations and administrators—a culture that gives and supports. You see one or the other in places where one of those two things—or both—is going on. In my experience, the DIY stuff is bright and consuming when it happens, but temporal and rare. Places that have the organizational support tend to be where all those DIY folks move to. There's a kind of gravity involved that you could probably measure.

I think that's what you meant when you said "being used." What I really want to say is that I use poetry every day to live my life, to make decisions, to get from morning bed to evening bed, and I don't think anybody would look at me pumping gas or buying groceries and say, *Look at how he's using poetry*. I think the cult/tribe/gang of people who read and write poetry use it this way, and that nobody thinks to look for it being used there, in us as we interact with or observe or acted upon by all that isn't us.

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## **THE SHADOWS THAT WORE US**

went fishing. We sealed our vertebrae with clay, molded ourselves anew. When we stood still, birds bathed themselves in our hair before they too left us, whistling ballads across state lines. There was a moment when I thought you were a child, but stopped thinking for fear that this may be the thought to break my neck. It's going to be fine, we said—sometimes to each other, sometimes honestly. Someone will come back, someday. And we will feed them our hands to make them love us forever. And if they don't? What happens if they don't?

## **DRESS MAKER'S DANCE**

You who lead the ghosts home  
are ready to face the quiet, sit in the bulgur chair  
and take this quarrel to its currency.  
The brass bottom, the pedal at your feet  
your mother's grave

we were addicted to life in the buried attic  
flinging lace dresses to the reaches of their hems  
beckoning for maturity to dance a little closer  
what did we know

landing outside our own bodies  
clinging to the memory of age-worn tulle  
where the circumference of yard met horizon,  
where soft ancestral loam dismembered in the wind.  
The sun's vortex pulled at our feet, and gravity

glared, reflected back at me; my finger bones  
knotting like my grandmother's  
looping thread on the bobbin.  
She is so far away now

and your voice is not so near as it used to be,  
it lands like thorns against the night  
ripping the seams of my identity.  
I have been waiting for you.

I have taken in the satin  
where I have worn you out  
of me but what is left to say.

The dust in my throat has said it all.  
I have waited too long.

**POEM FOR MY THIRTY-SEVEN MISTRESSES**

*For Kyle McCord*

What do we think of number thirty-eight?  
Polyglot, closet smoker, patron saint  
of the Neighborhood Watch. What do we  
think of her? On her back in the grocery aisle,  
trying on gladiator sandals at the fire sale,  
tonguing the Teflon pans in the kitchen.  
How many times must we remind her  
not to use the countertop sponge on the dishes?

Let's be honest. It was charming at first,  
the way her voice turned up at the end  
of declarative sentences: *I'm going to the gym now?*  
But questions require answers. Answers  
are a form of respect, and we have none.  
Wasn't it us, after all, who held her head  
beneath the faucet, sliced her with immaculate  
care, and splayed her across a bed  
of lettuce, like an heirloom tomato  
that tastes faintly of fertilizer and money?

Words spew from her mouth. They invent  
a world for us to hate together. Last night  
we found her slouching in the recliner,  
drinking pretentiously named tea,  
weeping over the end of *Citizen Kane*,  
mouthing *Rosebud*, *Rosebud*, *Rosebud*,  
as if she understood exactly what it meant.

**VANITAS**

The hollowed loaves of raisin bread  
swaddling your feet like mama's

boy's slippers seem somehow wholesome  
atop the stone slab on which you stand.

There's room, of course, left in the foreground  
for the sweet-toothed to kowtow in morning;

and as they do your head helmeted  
in half a gourd will gloss

like a prophet both too proud and cautious  
who has also taken defense

against the cynics, capping each ear  
with the luscious splits of a grapefruit.

Already, tart blather dribbles to your mouth  
for you to spit out

having tasted but never swallowed  
irreverence. Yet you tempt

those of us unashamed enough  
to inspect the body's less presumable belts.

You've wrapped your penis  
in a banana peel and put bunches

of grapes around your balls—  
pickings of a fructuous aggrandizer.

Though I must admit, the strawberries  
on your nipples are a nice touch—

the green sepals of your areolae  
like a garnish for uselessness.

As your shoulders bear pineapples  
like vestigial heads or perhaps

epaulets of your jungled conquests,  
will you begin to bend and how long before

the lustrous donuts around your wrists  
harden to cuffs or the silk of cornhusk

draped like a blessing from Hestia  
around your neck begins to itch?

There are consequences to posing  
at the direction of the self;

but dressed in such an emblema  
of produce and baked goods

at least you'll forever see  
how sweet the ways of uncertainty.

**PERSEPHONE'S RETURN**

Where has she been, that girl?

Back from her winter travels

with him

Prince of Darkness

outlaw

How could she not love him

runic smile

muscled leather vest

and when she arched her leg

like a question mark

over the saddle-seat behind him,

encircled his sweat with her swan arms,

they exploded spacecraft,

booster rocket

falling away as they tore into deep space.

But today,

lilacs.

She's back with us.

Mother's Day. Demeter

out in the garden looking in spite of her

flowery dress,

bent and old.

What is it that propels the girl toward dark?

And the man who held her,

He wants            He wants.

A single bird swoops low over the river  
    where the Crime Scene van  
        is parked beside a cop car.

They are down in the reeds and muck  
    of the riverbank  
        looking for clues.

A body.

Demeter can tell them

    There has been a crime here.

## **WORD BETRAYALS – ANIMOANEY**

I am six.

Summer. Red Cross swim lessons. Navy blue swimsuit with a red stripe, brass buttons, an appliqué anchor. Red towel alternates with a blue towel. Yellow bag with metal grommets and pink handles made of braided yarn. Inside, my name written in black magic marker. A pink swim cap with bubbles. It has a chin strap that stretches under my chin, snaps with a metal snap beneath my ear. Sometimes I like to chew on the strap in the car on the way to Minnows. It tastes like rubber bands.

I have a terrible secret.

I wish for a swim cap like a sea anemone (ululatingly froned, chrysanthemummed, stingered, petaled, and poofed) in warning, neurotoxic colors: safety-cone orange, radioactive fuchsia, Travelodge blue. When my mother says the word anemone, as when she says the name of any flower, she says it like something perfect and beautiful in the mouth. Animoaney, she says. It begins like animosity, rhymes with alimony and acrimony. Exotic creature beckoning tentacles on the oceanic substrate. The moan in the name invoking a salt-bittered saturation of tears, sessility of the thing left behind. Acrimony like an acrid whiff of chlorine—the smell I come to think of as the sharp harpoon sting of shame.

A lump.

Pool a cool blue lozenge, like a Brach's Ice Blue Mint Cooler, a hostility of mintiness it hurts to suck on. Chlorine caustic, bleachy—stinging my eyes into red swollen slits. How the chlorine lingers in my pores for days, as if I'm steeped in it. A fountain for rinsing out swimsuits in the locker room. It squirts out cold water when I step on a pedal on the floor. A sinister wringer with a hand crank that roadkills my swimsuit damp and flat.

Too embarrassed, too horrified, to tell anyone I have cancer.

Our swim teacher's name is Darryl. He sports a blond afro. He wears a Speedo. He counts out loud, supervises our bobs on the side of the pool—line of rubber caps fronted by squinched faces burbling up and down like bright lottery balls. He floats us on our backs, tries to coax me into jumping into the pool though I don't want to. My mother is terrified of water. She says if she falls in, she'll sink like a stone to the bottom and drown. When I fail Minnows the first time, she corners me in the basement, tells me I've embarrassed my father, that I should be ashamed for being such a flunker.

I find the lump that night, convinced my cancer's punishment for being a flunker.

In Minnows redux, two Vickys: One Vicky, blue-lipped and goosebumped, has asthma. The other Vicky loud and round. One day loud and round Vicky inexplicably leaps off the diving board into the deep end, even though she can't swim. She sinks to the bottom. Darryl dives in after her, puts her on his back, swims her down the length of the pool to the shallow end. We are all envious.

I am six and waiting to die. I lie awake at night. My heart pounds. I wait and wait. I'm not sure how long it takes or what happens. Maybe it will be all coughing-up-blood-in-a-hanky. Or maybe it will be more like *Love Story*—where love means never having to say you're sorry.

There's a lifeguard named Michelle, with Sun-In blonde hair, glamorous tan, actual breasts. Her locker's full of mysterious paraphernalia: Schicks, Tickle, Love's Baby Soft, Coppertone, Tame, and Maybelline Kissing Potion. When she showers, the entire locker room becomes steamy with strawberry shampoo. She is completely anxiety-provoking, and all the boy lifeguards cluster around her like lovesick grapes.

Eventually I turn seven. The lump goes away—reabsorbed somewhere deep inside my body, where that secret darkness, that animoaney, takes root on an uncertain substrate and metastasizes. Spreads and spreads. It asexually reproduces (budding, binary fission, pedal laceration). Its nematocysts run riot. And still, I wait.

**BREAK/FAST**

Goat cheese, cherries, asparagus.  
The blue sun hesitates at the edge  
of the water, unsure of its path  
in the dim light. Swollen pods  
of flowers ponder the dawn,  
dew dripping, as the crimson haze  
rounds the corner. What Sunday  
sultans of orchids lay hidden  
in his dreams of the forest?  
The sun decides, rounding  
into a coin, to proceed--white  
blaring now out of the horizon  
like a French horn, a crystalline  
carrot. Mozart in the dirt, Freud  
in the sour cherries falling  
from the trees, his childlike tugs  
on flowers that won't be uprooted.  
Silence says the grass. He bites  
into the food, breathes liquid light.

## **MANUSCRIPT, ATLAS, THE FIELD**

Like a dreaming dog, his hands are running or typing, or lecturing, tapping the manuscript in his lap while he sleeps. My body tries to make itself a private space, folds my legs up onto the plane seat, close to fetal. This old bulldog, part lab, is somebody's sweet grandpa, somebody's difficult dad, a widower perhaps, alone with his wedding band. Certainly he is a World War II vet; even when he moves, something is always still. He must have been a pilot. He tracks our flight on a yellowed, dog-eared road atlas that he alternately hides under his manuscript, and reveals to turn the page. British Columbia, Alberta, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota. Like how dogs read earth, focused and loose, the folds of his skin pour through his trifocals. Squinting out of his doze as we start to descend, he hides the manuscript with the atlas, turns to page 74, "Minneapolis, MN" and rotates it north, northwest as he reads the landscape of Pig's Eye Lake, the river bend, I94, the Metrodome. When I ask if he's from Minneapolis, he says, "Yes, we're here, here's the field" and closes his eyes. Now his mouth moves as if speaking little bubbles of spit, now showing his teeth like a guarded dog. Sleeping over a manuscript can look like reading it. If he turned the page I would think he mastered osmosis, what we all dreamed of in college. We dreamed of taking it all in, safe, and unwatched.

## **Edrich, Miller, and Waterman: Reflections on Poetry by Women in Minnesota**

*In recent years, a national organization, VIDA, has drawn attention to the gender inequity in publishing, especially among the most prestigious national magazines and presses by publishing the annual “VIDA Count” – a tabulation of the percentage of male and female poets published and reviewed by these magazines. While the “count” of published and reviewed female poets nationwide has grown slightly each year, the field is still dominated by male poets at many of the top presses and magazines. Whether or not this trend is mirrored by Minnesota presses and magazines is still up for debate, but there is no doubt that Minnesota is home to a large, dynamic, diverse, and strong community of female poets at all stages in their careers, and has been since before Minnesota became a state. The first poem ever published in Minnesota was written by a woman, Mary Henderson Eastman, to commemorate Minnesota’s new state seal. However, the poem was not well-received, since it condemned the United States government for taking Native Americans’ land and resources, and mistreating them as a people. It seems that from the beginning, Minnesota women poets were not afraid of controversy or political topics – or of addressing social injustice in their lives and their art.*

*One hundred and sixty years later, three established Minnesota women poets, Heid Erdrich, Leslie Adrienne Miller, and Cary Waterman, share some of their inspirations, ideas, and insights on writing, publishing, and appreciating poetry in our great state.*

**Heid Erdrich** is the author of *Cell Traffic: New and Collected Poems*; she is an independent scholar, curator, playwright, and founding publisher of Wiigwaas Press, which specializes in Ojibwe-language publications. She grew up in Wahpeton, North Dakota and is Ojibwe enrolled at Turtle Mountain. Heid has taught college writing for two decades, both as a tenured professor and as a visiting author and scholar at dozens of colleges, universities, libraries, and arts organizations. She is the author of three previous books of poetry, including *National Monuments*, which won the 2009 Minnesota Book Award.

**Leslie Adrienne Miller** is author of six collections of poetry including *Y*, *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 PhD from the University of Houston, an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, an MA from the University of Missouri, and a BA from Stephens College.

**Cary Waterman** is the author of *Book of Fire* (Nodin Press), *When I Looked Back You Were Gone* (Holy Cow! Press), *The Salamander Migration* (University of Pittsburgh), *First Thaw* (Minnesota Writers Publishing House), and *Dark Lights the Tiger's Tail* (Scopecraft Press). She co-edited the anthology, *Minnesota Writes: Poetry* (Milkweed Editions). Her own poems have appeared in the anthologies *A Geography of Poets*, *Woman Poet: The Midwest*, *The Logan House Anthology of 21st Century American Poetry* and *Poets Against the War*. She has spent time at the MacDowell Colony and at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Ireland. Her writing awards include Bush Foundation Fellowships, Minnesota State Arts Board Fellowships, and the Loft-McKnight Award of Distinction in Poetry. She teaches at Augsburg College.

*KB: Your poetry addresses themes relating to gender, equality, and the place of women in the world. Can you share a story about one of your poems that addresses gender? How did the poem come to be, and/or how did others react to the poem?*

**Heid Erdrich:** My early training made me keenly aware that my poems were considered female—by my mostly male classmates and teachers. One early poem was “One Girl,” It stunned me, in the beginning, that my poems could be reduced to being described as poems “about rape” (when they weren’t) or about abortion or any number of other things my readers could label them in order to dismiss my poems as simply about being female. As if there’s enough said on the subject! Eventually my writing got better and the violations I hinted at were more clearly about the larger world, rather than the individual self. The distance between the self of my poems and my actual self grew vast.

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** That’s a tough question because I think all of

my poems are deeply gendered even when the subject matter itself is not. Ways of seeing are themselves gendered, so sometimes it can happen that people react to the way of seeing rather than to what is being seen. The title poem in my most recent collection, *Y*, for example, places “Y” rapid fire in as many different contexts as possible. As I worked on the book and sought to locate “Y” in its full variety of contexts, I had “Y chromosome” on Google alert for a long time, and I was surprised and amused by the range of material that trickled in. Though I expected much of it to reference scientific developments, I discovered the ways “Y” has taken on a life of its own as a joking reference to male gender traits in popular culture as well. Much of my own interest in it lay in the fact that “Y” crosses boundaries between math, science, language(s), and even the visual arts, so it seemed like a natural segue between and among discourses. It also sounds like the word “why.”

During the final year of my work on the book (and after I’d settled on the “Y” as its hinge), my significant other and I played a bit of a game. We took hundreds of pictures of Y’s we found casually in different contexts, and we did this both as we travelled together and in our daily lives. I have to admit that we both became rather obsessive about it for a while because we quickly realized that we were often seeing different versions of the same thing, as well as different things entirely, but most importantly, our ways of looking at everything were transformed by the focus. Especially as we travelled together, we’d often end the day by examining each other’s image findings, and each of us would be surprised by some Y the other had seen that we had not, or that we’d both noticed the same Y but contextualized it differently. The orientation of our attention toward finding Y’s made us notice the ways language and physical structures appeared to interact, the way Y is often an important constituent in architecture, roads, bridges, reinforcements, as well as in nature— trees, plants, paths, and, of course how gendered our ways of seeing were as well.

Certainly, our Y obsession lead us to see everything we looked at in terms of its visual constituency, but it also became like a conversation between us. Since he’s an engineer, and I’m a poet, he’s French and I’m American, he’s a Y and I’m an X, we had some pretty interesting discussions about the differences manifesting in our ways of seeing based on our little game, and as I revised the manuscript, certainly these experiences had bearing in the poems too.

**Cary Waterman:** Almost all the poems in my last book, *Book of Fire*, address gender. The first section of poems are a reinterpretation, or rather an extension, of the myth of Persephone. My goal was to see Persephone as the actor in the myth and not an unwilling victim. It seemed to me that traditionally, Hades or Demeter got all the attention and I wanted to focus more on Persephone. Persephone becomes Queen of the Underworld, certainly a promotion from being the innocent girl gathering flowers in the field. She actually becomes more powerful than Demeter or Hades and more like Hecate in her ability to move between the world of the dead and the world of the living. However, there is some ambiguity in my reinterpretation. I'm not really sure how readers respond to these poems. They are about darkness and the need to dive deep in order to return. It's not all light and flowers. But I believe in the power of the feminine to withstand, even to invite, the descent and return whether it is metaphorical or real.

*KB: Which female poets inspired you and influenced your development as a poet, and were your mentors, either in person or "mentors on the page" (poets you read extensively but did not know well)? What aspects of their personalities and/or poetry inspired you?*

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** I credit my undergraduate education at Stephens College, a women's college in Columbia, Missouri, with establishing most of my enduring influences as a poet. In the mid 1970's when I attended Stephens, the college was actively developing a model Women's Studies program as part of its core, and faculty from all disciplines not only taught Women's Studies courses, but designed courses in their own disciplines around Women's Studies issues and methods. The difference was so radical that we students even complained that we were not reading enough men! Women Writers were not only valued in this environment, they were central, and to me it felt as though the standard "survey" courses in early literature that contained mostly men were ancillary to the monumental figures of writers like Colette, Stein, Woolf, Austen, Dickinson, Atwood. When we did study literature by men, our focus was often on representations of the female in their work. Stephens also had a very rich collection of teaching writers in my years there, and a visiting writers program that brought in mostly women. By the time I graduated, I'd read, heard and often even had individual conferences with writers such

as Muriel Ruckeyser, Margaret Atwood, Marilyn Hacker, Tess Gallagher, Carolyn Kizer, Louise Gluck and Rosellen Brown. Needless to say, it was a real shock to me to go on to graduate school where the opposite was true, and I began to experience, for the first time, disdain and disinterest for overtly feminist or woman-centered subjects in my own work. But Stephens had already worked its magic, and the cognitive map of literature in English in my head still has female figures at its center.

**Cary Waterman:** I began to write seriously in the late 60's and had the benefit of being influenced by significant women poets who were just beginning to publish. I would count Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Louise Bogan and Adrienne Rich as influences. Locally, the group Women Poets of the Twin Cities was formed in the early 70's and included such wonderful poets as Phebe Hanson, Jill Breckenridge and Jenne Andrews. The group organized readings and published their own anthologies which was unheard of then. I also met Kathleen Fraser when she was here for a reading and she had an influence on my work. Most recently, I've been influenced by the work of Kathleen Graber, a wonderful poet I met last summer at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.

**Heid Erdrich:** My good fortune to have been taught by the poet Cleopatra Mathis was that she was most certainly a poet who depicted female experience in depth and in the context of mythology, history, even class. Grace Paley was a mentor, both politically and personally, and I was fortunate to work with mentor Roberta Hill as part of the Loft Inroads Native American program. My sister Louise was a mentor in a very "hands off" way—she taught me it was not crazy to try to write and that housework came second, although her house is always tidy. My mentors on the page are predictable: Sexton, then Plath, then Bishop and Adrienne Rich, Louise Gluck, Sharon Olds. In high school I discovered Roberta Hill and Joy Harjo. Leslie Adrienne Miller's work, and literary friendship, has been important and liberating for me. But right now my first readers are all men.

*KB: What, in your opinion, are the most important issues facing women today that are not often addressed in poetry, but should be?*

**Cary Waterman:** I'm still thinking about this...

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** Certainly women poets themselves are addressing a full range of important issues in their work and actively looking for (and finding) subjects and stories that have been mired in silence and invisibility for much of our literary history. I don't think there is a dearth of important issues being addressed so much as we're often unable to inhabit new perspectives on these issues because we're mired in ways of seeing that have become codified, comfortable or reinforced by audience expectations and the market. Poets, male and female alike, are always caught between audience expectations, the encouragement to produce work that is obedient to reader expectations (for strong narratives, accessibility, emotional expressiveness and entertaining performances as well as gender specific expectations) and poetry's need to see things in completely new ways. The latter often requires great struggle on the part of the poet, as well as departure from tried and true crowd-pleasing tactics, but these departures from readerly expectations can also alienate readers. It's a Catch-22 that all writers face, though obviously readerly expectations are gendered, and women writers must fight through expectations that differ markedly from the expectations men endure.

**Heid Erdrich:** We are all very much at risk, but for women with children I think the unspeakable is the difficult future we see for our children as a result of climate change. We work so hard to make sure our kids get good schools, but who will teach them to live in a world we cannot imagine? And of course writing about "nature" is made cliché in poetry. Political writing and overt content are not the mode of the day. We must really struggle to say what we so need to say and be allowed an audience.

*KB: How did you find publishers for each of your books? What advice would you give emerging female poets on how to find a home for their work?*

**Cary Waterman:** I have been very fortunate to find publishers when I had manuscripts ready. I really did not have to put in an incredible amount of time and effort to get a book to print. I think the best way for emerging writers to find publishers is to stay current with what is being published (ie. buy books!) And to read widely. I am not a big fan of contests but that's more of a personal choice not to want to pay the entry or reading fees.

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** Finding a publisher willing to take a chance on any poet's first book is tough, and my search was neither swift nor simple, but I marvel at the determination and ambition of my younger self. I started sending out a manuscript of my poems to contests as soon as I graduated from the University of Missouri with an M.A. in English in 1980. I had been actively publishing poems for several years then and sending out work with the encouragement of my undergraduate teachers. I knew that I needed to publish my work in a variety of well established literary magazines before a good book publisher would be interested in it, but in those days the number of literary magazines was much smaller than it is now. It was possible to read many of them regularly and feel a sense of kinship with the national community. The main book contests then were with university presses, and it was not hard to see which ones offered the important paths to becoming part of that community. I revised and submitted my manuscript to a handful of book contests twice yearly as I matriculated through two more graduate programs and a series of teaching jobs, and when the manuscript finally found favor, it was accepted simultaneously by two presses at once. I don't think this was due to any special talent on my part so much as it was due to the fact that I'd been honing that manuscript through years of study with a variety of poet teachers, Larry Levis, Marvin Bell, Jane Cooper, Donald Justice, Cynthia Macdonald, Richard Howard, Adam Zagajewski and Edward Hirsch among them. All of them wrought changes in me as a poet, but it was Cynthia Macdonald who pushed me hardest to find my own strength as a woman poet, and it was Cynthia who taught me how to put a manuscript together. Quite honestly, she just took the poems I had clumsily lumped together and rearranged them into a sequence that she claimed resembled an opera (she was herself a former opera singer), and the manuscript, as she had ordered it, immediately found favor. I still think of her advice every time I put together a book.

I very deliberately chose the University of Houston for the last leg of my academic journey because there was a major female poet at the helm of its writing program. I went there because of Cynthia Macdonald, and I was not disappointed in that choice. Cynthia would not let me be invisible and quiet as I'd grown accustomed to being among the considerable egos in graduate classes. She pretty much forced me to speak my mind often enough that I finally got used to it! So my advice to young women writers, without question, is to seek out women mentors both in the form of

teachers and in the form of what they read— to read at least as deeply and widely among women as they do among male writers, to look critically at what is on the shelf at home and to ask themselves if there are really enough women in their reading diets!

I can also add here that I think women can be their own worst enemies when it comes to publishing. We're often harder on ourselves, unwilling to submit work that we don't yet feel is up to the level that we want. We can doubt ourselves easily, back down at the first sign of rejection, retreat into private worlds where we feel more free and/or more comfortable. Our sense of the public/private is complicated by our gender, our relative newness to the public realm, as well as demands on our time associated with families, so we just don't send out our work as soon or as often as guys do. I know I am guilty of this myself. I sit on things for months and years before I feel ready to send them out.

**Heid Erdrich:** My first book was published through New Rivers Press' competition. Then I got simultaneous requests for books and I just said yes. Nothing that happened to me in terms of publishing was ever normal, if there is a normal, so it is hard for me to give advice. Keep submitting and pick a few contests a year is about all I can say.

*KB: What changes have you noticed in the Minnesota poetry scene since publishing your first book, especially in relation to poetry written by women?*

**Heid Erdrich:** There certainly are a million more poets out there and they are good and they are being published. It is amazing! And the voice of female experience is quite strong. The company is good.

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** When I came to Minnesota in 1991, I had already published a first book and contracted for a second, so my first book actually written in Minnesota was my third collection of poems, *Yesterday Had a Man in It*. Though I grew up in the Midwest (Ohio), it took me a while to absorb the culture and geography of Minnesota, and it took even longer for Minnesota to accept me! I'm not even sure now, after 21 years here, that I get to be a "Minnesota poet."

The poetry community here seemed difficult to locate when I first came. I had come from Houston where the visual arts and writing communities

were very visible, open, social, diverse, and interconnected, and I assumed Minnesota would have a similarly integrated arts community, but it was tough to find, tougher still to be accepted into. Partly this is a climate difference— in Houston, it's possible to be outside so much of the year, and arts activities were outdoor, interactive, and incredibly diverse as is the culture there. Minnesota was literally and figuratively chilly, homogenized. Older white men seemed to dominate its literary institutions, the presses, university writing departments and publications. Robert Bly and the younger men who were influenced by him seemed to have great presence.

The women writers were here, of course, just quieter, harder to find, but then the whole literary culture here seemed more subdued to me than it is now. The Loft was also certainly making differences already, but not to the extent that it has in the years since. In these twenty-odd years, many women have been hired into creative writing positions in the colleges and universities, women writers have frequently been guests, program directors and influential editors in our midst, and the balance has shifted significantly, is certainly still shifting, though there are always places where that long and strong male oriented literary history asserts itself, and sometimes it's even more insidious because it's hidden by a surface present that seems more equal.

**Cary Waterman:** When my first chapbook was published in 1975 it was possible to personally know every other poet, male or female, in Minnesota. Certainly that's changed! More women (and men as well) are writing now. Then, you could not get an MFA in Minnesota. Now, the state is home to quite a few residential MFA programs, and the new low-residency program at Augsburg College where I teach. There is more experimentation in poetics going on which I think is a very good thing. And, we have a vibrant spoken word/slam scene, all of which provides good energy.

*KB: What books by Minnesota poets would you recommend to our readers?*

**Leslie Adrienne Miller:** This is a question that I'm really reluctant to answer because 1) there are so many and 2) I'd be afraid of omitting someone really important and wonderful, so while the opportunity to

name names is tempting because I like to put them all forward, I know I'd instantly be sorry to have forgotten somebody. I can, however, offer a great place to start. There's a wonderful anthology of Minnesota women poets, *To Sing Along the Way: Minnesota Women Poets from Pre-Territorial Days to the Present*, that appeared in 2006 from New Rivers Press, edited by Connie Wanek, Joyce Sutphen and Thom Tamaro. Of course, there are many newer, younger Minnesota women poets now, and I'd love to see a new, expanded edition of this volume!

**Cary Waterman:** Right now I'm reading new books of poems by Roseann Lloyd, Leslie Adrienne Miller, and Heid Erdrich. I've just finished John Medieros book, *couplets for a shrinking world*, and loved it!

**Heid Erdrich:** I'd like to stress two profoundly good poets: Anna Meek and Sharon Chmielarz. We have such a richness of poets: Jude Nutter, Kristin Naca, Wang Ping, Joyce Sutphen, Leslie Adrienne Miller, Kathryn Kysar, Kris Bigalk, Kate-Lyn Hibbard, Sun Yung Shin, Katrina Vandenburg, Deborah Keenan, Denise Lajimodiere... There are so many, I'd hate to leave anyone out, I better stop there! And I am so pleased to see first books by two new Native women poets and my dear friends Denise Lajimodiere (Ojibwe) and Gwen Westerman (Dakota).

## Leslie Adrienne Miller

### THE MONUMENT

They're always coming with flowers  
wondering what on earth brought them,  
as if someone famous once stood here,  
someone to whom they ought to have paid  
homage if only they'd known the size

and shape of the tragedy that brought him  
down. Forbidden love of another or a god  
on earth would do, but not the self itself  
forced into obelisk. Once perhaps, the body  
resembled the one he sprang from,

keen and lithe, a limousine of plushy hormones  
he rode like a prince toward the first tryst.  
But this many miles from there, who could know  
how time and again, slick with amnesia,  
he crawled toward the beacon of novelty.

So what you see now warming  
the muddy eye the bedroom requires  
is no more than the child you could make  
from what's left.

## Adrienne Mathiowetz

### ULTRASOUND

I.

Growing inside of us, always  
are infinite potential faces

A miracle of life. A miracle of  
personification, in grey --

You shift on the couch and develop, briefly, an alien's profile  
below your right lung

It yawns and reveals a set of soft  
glowing teeth

then implodes on itself, gets sucked  
into the bermuda triangle that has appeared right off your sternum

And we all toast to that.

II.

"Is that a baby?"

I ask the technician, as I sprawl wide in her dimly lit room  
riveted to a television broadcasting

grey milk of my insides  
swishing and bulging against  
that wonderfully phallic x-ray wand

Is that a baby?

The goo they use on these things is warm  
and fills me with good feeling

and it's comforting too,  
to know you're not exactly  
empty inside, just

overcast.

That one's a donkey. This is the Batmobile. Is that the Virgin Mary? Is  
this my long lost twin who would have understood me completely? Is  
that a Seattle tea shop with a smiling boy, does that kind of look like  
the complete Oxford English Dictionary, is that the little rabbit I always  
envisioned saving in a warm shoebox of straw? Is that a

Is that a baby?

"No," she says  
"that is your intestine"

Which is good news, because  
I've been hoping for an intestine

While a baby,  
a real face, with its real nose, real brains  
inside of me

Is a little too parasitic for my liking. Connecting to me with its  
bellybutton tube

made wholly out of  
stolen parts

shitting into my veins, causing a fuckin  
ruckus

III.

I learned something today.

*What is that?*

The uterus is only 2 inches wide.

*2 inches wide!*

2 inches wide.

See.

There is too much me inside me  
To make room for baby

There are too many faces already,  
too many monsters lurking in-between ribcages, too many giant tongues,  
too many sagging mouths, too many  
soft teeth

baby they'd swallow you whole

**Notes taken after sealing with duct tape the tiniest of holes  
that you'd never think a bat could get through:  
on the oeuvre-to-date of Bianca Stone**

To try to get your (I say after trying to get my) but-all-I-have-are-these-two-sir arms around the oeuvre-to-date of Bianca Stone is as pleasurable difficult as “jumping/ out of an aerodynamic object, through a burning hoop/ into a glass of still water . . . making nothing happen very slowly.” The oeuvre-to-date contains poems, comic-book poems, video poems, and songs, the mass of which possesses equal parts gravitas and grace, “like an elephant standing softly on my chest.” The poems are as contemporary as they are classic, love oftentimes being the thread that Stone pulls from the fabric of poetry past so that she may continue to weave it in the here and now, where “YOU’RE SOMEWHERE/ RIGHT NOW /IN STEALTH MODE,” and “I AM HERE WITH/ A HANGOVER/,” here “LIKE A BROWN STRIPED PICKUP/ DOING SLOW DOUGHNUTS/ IN MY SKULL/,” like “THE SUN/ WAVING ITS CREAMY ARMS/ IN THE STREET.” I can believe in heaven, if only for a few minutes, to imagine Bianca’s grandmother, the poet Ruth Stone, drinking with an angel who notes, “She is her grandmother’s granddaughter, no?” Minneapolis isn’t heaven, but that doesn’t stop me from lifting my own glass, Stone way, to say, “Live long and prosper.”

## TWO GOOD THINGS

*for Evan Skow*

Today was an abortion.

Today filled with stupid  
(mostly mine)  
like a water torture cell.

Empty tanks, aggressive  
kittens & no one can  
keep their story straight

until it's too late to matter.

\*

But there are still kitten  
snuggles & synthesizers—

thanks for reminding me  
& reaching out to say *hey*.

Let's have a good cry, get  
shitfaced & out of the way.

**BULLET**

I woke  
two years later  
bandages  
off, someone  
had been trimming  
my hair in my  
sleep.

She was a quiet  
bullet, I  
remember she shouted  
and I turned  
my head (now  
it hurts to  
turn  
my head) and then  
nothing, no  
noise, I  
woke two years  
later in an  
empty room and  
did not remember  
the pull  
of my own  
lungs, the burden  
of my  
own filled chest.

They (always the  
they) shined  
their lights on  
me, they

took samples of things,  
someone had  
been trimming my  
hair in  
my sleep, I drank  
water with heavy arms,  
slept for stretches more  
I cannot recall.

And they showed me  
the scar, not  
even a wound now  
but a scar,  
sucking the flesh in-  
between my ribs,  
the ghost  
trailing out my back.

I touch it  
in the dark.

*You got  
lucky, they said.  
She passed  
clean through.*

**SNOW**

On a gray day  
an old man  
walks an old dog  
in new snow.  
Heads bent low,  
no ear  
for honking traffic,  
no eye  
on the outside world.  
They are alone,  
silent in a cocoon  
of their own quiet.  
Each must once  
have known strange  
fits of passion,  
leapt over fences  
climbed tall trees,  
and bolted wild  
through green fields.  
Today they move  
slow, so careful,  
to leave no mark  
on the winter's pale.

## **AUDOBON'S DREAM**

It begins at the easel,  
his brushstrokes soft feathers  
glittering silver black —

His model, a woman in widow black,  
with her hair caught  
up as if a nest graced her scalp,  
cool tulle neckline grazing chin,  
ruffles like a ladder  
to her mouth, which shapes  
itself into a cracked, uneven grace.

Her chartreuse boots  
peek from beneath her skirts,  
spike the floorboards, ready  
for flight or wing, the yellowed  
leather skin tender  
sheath over bone.

When he reaches out to position  
her puff-sleeved arms, she melts into bird,  
into hollow bones, disarranged feathers,  
wings breaking like sticks.

He studies the bruises,  
touches the innocuous claws,  
bends the wings back to her body,  
his face reflected back  
in her dull black eye.

**CHERRY BLOSSOM STORM**

Yesterday one friend told us what it's like to lose  
another baby. Then another of scattering ashes  
into the lake. We hadn't even thought of you yet.  
We said goodbye as people are apt to  
do when leaving the house  
and in the silence that followed  
five nearly round, slightly dented petals  
to each blossom snowing the yard's ground  
white fell like seeds in my brain.  
Only tonight did I have the courage  
to uncover the little garden  
like a casket. God is out.  
It's still raining.  
Eternally it seems it will rain.  
Each name shines a bit in the dark  
then goes out, vanishes.

## **BOTH ENDS OF SEDATION**

*– Our sight is here as a test to see if we can see beyond it.*

I.

This Propofol should  
put you right to sleep;  
it is a milky white mixture  
which may sting a little  
when it enters your river system.  
I've placed your milky on a drip  
so as to diminish the frigidity.  
Why are you reaching for your eyeglasses?  
Have they finally turned to vines  
exploring your cloudy face?  
Has your face yet detached  
itself from your head?

II.

You sting like a makeout session,  
like rivulets of psychedelia just beneath my skin.  
As such, I take you to the cornfield  
where the dirt anchors our feet  
into a season marked by gourds,  
in which I see something  
I call a spirit-creature:  
slightly gnarled, slightly chartreuse,  
and completely cycloptic;  
You capture it in my sight  
and name it diagonal

in honor of the direction in which I tell this story...  
in which you scatter your thoughts  
like bird seed...  
in which tiny birds beak  
entire universes into language.

### III.

At 500 frames per second, one can not tell  
whether the Firecrown Hummingbird's chirp  
originates from her vibratious tail--its feathers  
emitting a sweet, flute-like howl--  
or from her perfect, syringe-like beak.  
When the Firecrown dives,  
she will reach a gravitational force  
in excess of 10g, which is the point at which  
the world's keenest fighter pilots  
lose consciousness, their eyes rolling back,  
turning white like phantoms.  
Adult females will complete these dives  
once every three seconds  
not stopping to break  
until the sky takes pause to listen  
and is fractured by the immediate sound of bird.

### IV.

The skin on your brow is far too tense;  
like that which coats a firm fruit  
awaiting a sharp blade,  
or a page just shy of being torn...  
You know, it really is a shame  
that your eyes were open through all of this.







**PASTORAL BITCH IN THE APARTMENT**

Our Minnesota sky sweats blue cosmic palm sweat  
the nervousness of precarious beasts  
who watch us in our windows  
fluttering inside the yellow light  
I remember the way you slashed my throat  
like carbonated soft drink  
made me hungry with the drag of human fructose.

That was when the lights of the city  
burned my fishball eyes.  
I am writing this as my brothers die in prisons.  
They die like the souls of bright red poison frogs.  
Good people want to crush them,  
Good people juice them.  
I contemplate the nature of the acorn  
and the breasts of my ancestors  
while souls go pop pop pop  
and you are kissed by the rebels of delight.

I sent them  
to haunt you—  
that's what city girls do.  
When I'm not touching my hair which is black black black  
I am touching you  
your cosmic titty tantra and macrobiotic spores.

This is my narrative poem  
about the time we furrowed the field in Wisconsin  
which touches Minnesota  
the way my ambitious internet folds  
touches you.  
This city which touches my black black

black black black  
crustles and crystallizes pane by pane.

I will tell you about the time coming of age  
became a daily coming of age  
since there is no consistency anymore I got electrocuted  
everytime I took a shower and thought of you  
and your hoo-hoo  
and how you recited passages of Shakespeare  
which makes me hate you.

Hate makes me feel superior. As any bird knows  
being superior does not mean being happy  
and being happy means having a very small IQ.  
Somehow being an animal is superior  
and the wretched human hamsters cry in hotel suites  
bringing a little bit of the green green russian fields with them  
the tiny bile cubes in their tummies  
go shit shit.

Am I remembering another way of life  
when I see the sweaty blue sky  
when the sweaty blue sky takes the time to wash itself  
and put its thick blue finger into the window  
to strip me of my humanity  
so that I quiver like a mouse person  
who only wants to be clicked  
did your past selves  
of that other way of living  
quiver —————  
somehow I do not think.

**RULE 27**

it's overwhelming  
often isn't it

the pointlessness  
of it all

and at work right  
in the bathroom

somebody either puked  
or dumped their salad

in the sink  
you're thinking

*I know this*  
*I already know this hush*

*you'll not be saving me*  
*any pain by saying it*

I'm sorry I'm compelled  
and can't refrain

but I've been lucky  
lately gathering strength

the way a white pine  
gathers mist and turns it

to rain  
a student once asked me

tell me what there is  
to talk about

after you've determined  
nothing matters

I had no answer  
but we kept talking

filling the hall with laughter  
after some stupid joke

smiling shaking hands saying  
see you later

maybe you've heard it  
it's the one about

the last snowbank  
on the street

and the boy walking by  
with a mind of winter

that child thought *this one*  
*could survive the spring*

*this snow bank is stronger*  
*than summer*

you may even know  
the punch line

every day on his way to school  
he walks by and the sun

like a slow magician  
pulls the snow back

revealing incrementally  
a stained and discarded mattress

blue and white striped  
so the boy's wrong he hears

a painful buzzing and feels the sun  
and naked trees laugh loud as chickadees

but what you don't know  
is the joke continues

and the boy becomes you  
and you remove your good coat

throw it at some scrub brush  
and lay down on the mattress

the cold ground seeping up  
through your pants and brother's sweater

and for the first time  
you see snowbanks

in the sky

**TWO-HEADED LAMB**

Two-headed lamb, the smartest lamb,  
what did you mean by being born?  
I have done nothing my whole life  
compared to your twin thoughts.  
I am reduced to a past, narrow and unlit.  
When I tap the glass you respond with nods—  
your intentions are transparent.  
You mean to dazzle me with constellations,  
your mouths half open—you concur  
with yourself. I cannot face such bravery.

Two-headed lamb, the smartest lamb,  
tell me the future's not buried in the past.  
The parallel action of my action  
is a wave carried through the sea.  
It rides the backs of whales, torn by storms,  
breaks apart and coalesces in precarious unions.  
And when it reaches land, it's swooped into the sky,  
and disperses into plenum.  
O two-headed lamb, you  
float in an undeserving world,  
your short life forever preserved as proof of miracles,  
  
tiny hooves galloping the glass.

## Lightsey Darst

### DEAR UNDONE,

To understand. then to go so much slower.

I woke this morning thinking of yesterday's thought—a staining one.

This absolute cool, cool sheathing the once-green, dripping from undersides of red berries.

Please stop. listening. wanting to say, to hold. your architect hands.

And woke in a woke in a dream—still the dream, green in all its joints.

I can't hear every note in the aria anymore—I have dimmer perceptions being older. I am untruthful. I have learned I have learned to lie. and sent away, away, dismissed like a dead letter. A

longer way to fall.

Remember me like this: smelling the rose on the inside of my wrist. I want not to repeat myself.

To lie still. an ice figure. and sent here to live,

unheard-of sentences,

testing each limb as I crawl out further like the cat in the crabapple tree,

world dotted with carnal adorations,

no one sits on the porch opposite anymore.

I will do terrible things now.

**AT THE MOUTH OF MADNESS CAFE**

The bloodshot eggs stare up at her,  
and a dozen pigs are squealing  
on the grill. The waiter's pecs  
urge each other to a duel  
under a Mouth of Madness T,  
hers for a shout, a foaming

seizure on the tile floor. Newsboys  
whisper headlines on the snowy  
walk, but inside, steam-filled, hot,  
a spider pours down a threaded  
staircase to her hair, where it peeks  
in one ear for an answer,

where it looks for the story arc  
of dream, a stage door, a bouquet  
of consonants primped behind  
the eardrum. What'll you have,  
the cook keeps asking, the toast  
sulking, everyone a planet

swirling around her head, each knife,  
fork, and coffee cup in orbit  
above the black hole her own  
cup has made for us. See how it  
eats light and sound, steals breath from our  
lips for its vowel, its dark O.

**FIRE SONG**

The universe has no edge  
and no center.  
Your DNA unraveled would reach  
from here to the moon.  
We are vulnerable to such beauty.  
In the chaos of too much,  
the arranging and rearranging of tables, chairs,  
the all-night cremation fires smolder  
separating atoms formed in the stars  
that sparked into space and time.

What do grackles find in dead grass?  
They gather, then fly away together  
to a roof painted the color of flame.  
Rustle and breath of fire.  
Our Lady of Grackles.  
Pilgrimage of seed and wing.  
Oh, unnecessary skin!  
The red-gold tulips are somnolent  
in a cold March dusk.

Earlier, I had dug and dug,  
found those bright green eyes already here.  
What goes into the crucible is released,  
a bolt of lightning on skin,  
heat between my thighs,  
hot on my forehead, my arms.  
On the bed our sweat mingled when I was on fire.  
I'd spend the whole day humming the fire song,  
dragon tongue licking an ancient alphabet  
of love and desire.

Soon moon, or no moon.  
Bone dark, black arms of cottonwood tree.  
Only feather of candle  
and the woman with wings standing  
in the doorway.

## **S'MORE TREES**

### CANDY

For nearly an hour Candy couldn't account for the cut on her right pinkie. Then she remembered:

### PAPER

Late that night Jason decided to do his paintings on pages torn from the Albany phone directory.

### FRANZ KLINE

Fourteen years ago I sat in a chain bookstore reading an interview with the great German painter.

### FIELD GUIDE

As a girl Candy wrote pattern poetry in the shapes of trees. Best was "Elm," its shape more oaky.

### ACTION

Probably Jason should have blasted right in on tearing and painting, skipping all announcements.

### WILKES-BARRE

Kline's English was strikingly idiomatic. It took me several pages to realize he was an American.

### DECLARATION

Candy once with no command of tongue gave Jason a much-folded tree poem and speeded away.

### ECCLESIASTES

Someone at a kegger told Jason that phone-book painting had been exhausted half a century ago.

### UNGERECHTIGKEIT

During World War One, my great-grandfather and Palmerville's other Germans were ostracized.

### PILLOW-MUFFLED TEARS

Jason's excuse was neither callous nor convincing. His real reason was that Candy wasn't pretty.

### JASON'S NEXT IDEA

Henry Winkler in the corner of a huge white canvas crossed with bars of black paint: Fonz Kline.

### KRAUTS

They were refused service in cafes, kicked out of fraternal organizations, and in one case beaten.

### BLIGHT

As a municipal volunteer, Candy documented the locations of three thousand jeopardized ashes.

### KICKING THE LEAVES

On a lush campus in the Northwest, Jason, drunk, wished you could still write poems about trees.

### WRINKLE

Later I learned that the cuckold who beat my great-grandfather was a German-American himself.

### THE FUTURE

Before her death, Candy's ax-shaped tree poems had assumed an extreme simplicity and beauty.

### CANDY

More than once she told me we needed a Winn-Dixie bag full of something other than groceries.

**RECORD: 44-53**  
**4<sup>th</sup> IN DIVISION**  
**10 GAMES BACK**

Saturday July 24, St. Louis Cardinals at Chicago Cubs, Top of the 6th, 2:41 p.m.

instant collectors item has spawned the era of the conservative woman hit into a back stairway smells like a wet hamster cage gets a gift single so does the inside of the truck first bad hop I've seen this season wet-vac best tool I've bought my poem "Eurydice's Gambit" conservative sob story about a rich person more poetic cell phone sounds I am covered in my own blood been with Utah the last three takes a strike at hashtag #nn10 scored twice on a throwing error and a wild pitch like moving into the backwoods big on the 10th amendment can win a series against a Central Division opponent for the first time since noticed Pepsigate couldn't run thinking it might be a tough sun there spar over economic plan asshole thinks little intolerance is a beautiful thing avoid a Superbowl hangover what a high-tech lynching really looks like lot of pitches this inning either retire or play with my sister and NO children really hurting this year past a diving Theriot last day to play in the sand Bezos shouldn't be talking about character raining dogs cats and coyotes in SF (SF? oh, Santa Fe) four have come right-handed that's how he's batting right now should be grateful another throw to first what the hell happened to my audio? there it is now there's a Venn diagram I'd like to see in terms of concept and lineation get some liver and onions and two kinds of Chinese food the field would be dense come on Gorzelanny one time many who like Bruce Springsteen like this check swing ball no swing keep working got to go to first on

## Sharon Chmielarz

### An Artist's Career: A Different Path from a Poet's? or: Can You See Yourself Here?

My book club took a swerve at our latest meeting. The host chose not fiction or poetry or essays for discussion but *Pioneer Modernists: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists* by Julie L'Enfant who, in each artist's chapter, included a short bio and photo examples of the women's paintings or sculptures.

I immediately glommed onto a woman I'd never heard of, Frances Cranmer Greenman (1890-1981) because she came from Aberdeen, South Dakota, one hundred railroad miles east of the railroad town where I grew up. I wanted to know if she stayed in the state or if, to achieve success she'd had to leave. i.e., It's who you know that counts? Romantically I pictured her as a sod farmers' daughter or the local butcher's who, as an artistic autodidact, made good despite the dusty wheat growers' city on the James River she grew up in (population 555 in 1900).

In pretty short order, my illusions crashed. Greenman was a member of Aberdeen's upper class. (I know. Aberdeen in 1900 was hardly stomping grounds for the rich and famous. Nevertheless, compared to my town then with its thirty houses...) Her father was a lawyer, and her mother an activist who named her only daughter after the suffrage and temperance leader, Frances E. Willard.

At fourteen Greenman left the state. First she headed to the U. of Wisconsin-Madison. From there she moved to Washington D. C. to study at the Corcoran School of Art and live with up- and-coming relatives. In 1909 she moved with her parents to NYC where the action was/ is. In 1911 she studied in Paris at the Academie de la Grande Chaumière discovering "...the Fauves, 'the new art' movement--exciting things like bright blue shadows and purple cows and pink grass." Next came Holland, Germany, Belgium, England.

What, I wonder, would have happened to her talent had she stayed in Aberdeen? Were there any prospective artists or writers in the early 1900's who could have succeeded without Greenman's ambition and advantages?

Does that still happen today, that a person with talent has to move away from her origin in order to write or paint about it? What about Frederick Manfred? He changed his name but not his locale. He thrived in it. As did Oscar Howe, the only artist I knew as a teenager. His murals distinguished my hometown's auditorium. Anyone who attended a high school basketball game or graduation or band concert couldn't miss them. In her stories, Louise Erdrich has never moved far from her roots.

In L'Enfant's bio, Greenman never returned to South Dakota, but she came close to it: Minnesota. After her husband-broker lost his fortune in the Crash, she supported him and their daughter by doing portraits. They left New York for Minneapolis. From her training with Robert Henri, who moved her artistically away from Sargent, she decided to become "... the world's greatest painter of Indians" to wit, people on the White Earth Reservation. This produced one of her best portraits, *Woman Riding in the Wind* (1912).

By "best" I also mean "different." If you page through L'Enfant's book, the subjects begin to resemble each other no matter who painted them. Like Americans look alike in foreign countries, like women who use Mary Kay products look alike, like hippies are of one kind, etc. Standing out in the collection in a unique way is truly difficult. Would Greenman have had a greater genius had she returned to her birth place? Her first landscape? Where was her (artistic) soul?

I don't know enough about art to evaluate it other than what I subjectively am drawn to. Of Greenman's work, I like best her heart-shaped-face self portrait. "Not realism," l'Enfant writes, "but the geometry of a face fascinated her." I see her soul in her use of geometry. It's a bit rough. A left-over from South Dakota? My incurable Romanticism?

Here's how Greenman described herself in her autobiography *Higher than the Sky*: "I was itching to move mountains. I intended to have everything: career, love, home, children, independence, dependence, freedom." (I was) "...one of the much lesser losers" (comparing herself to) "...Franz Hals, el Greco, Augustus John ...who were the 'losers' compared to Canaletto, Holbein and Ingres." "I was very busy--very gay--very everything."

That last statement endears her to me. My envy forgives her adventurous path to success and her choice of the sophisticated over the sodbuster. She could have (and maybe did) cross paths with Edna St. Vincent Millay whose poem "Recuerdo" fits both women:

“We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—  
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,  
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;  
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon...”

**DEAR CORPORATION,**

My love, before you, this dehydrated piss of mine was such a lonely shade-grown coffee. My semen's judgment clouded with eerie, evangelical determination. My eyes were broken touch-screens; I tasted my own blood in every daiquiri.

But now, know matter where I am, I can hear the creaking of the pier beneath your spectacular breasts, I can feel the sway of your waves cupping my sack of indestructible puppies.

Collisions like ours are a shock to every system. Politicians never counted on us. Wall Street never counted on us. The cadaverous yuppies and their screaming, vegan babies never counted on us. Investment bankers swear they keep seeing our faces in their zeroes and ones like indestructible binary Marys. They feel our fingers in the throats of their housing bubbles, our teeth foreclosing on the napes of their tender, un-insured necks.

To put it more delicately: I want you to fuck the fiscal responsibility out of me. I want you to fuck me until universal healthcare. My love, come home tonight and skin the rabbit with me. We make such a flaring of magnificently epic nostrils, such a pure, pornographic latte. If you keep coming home, I'll keep pouring my miraculous rye that keeps the sun from surging, that keeps us underworn and hammocked in the back yard of February. Darling, come home, come home, you cave me like a raindrop in ash. Touch the tip of your electronic cigarette to me and I will ignite.

**Notes taken as I wait to see if the new  
seed in the feeder will attract prettier birds,  
on: *I Am Not a Pioneer* by Adam Fell  
(H\_NGM\_N BOOKS)**

Out of fear of being overly influenced by any one poet, I keep stacks of ten to twelve books in three or four rooms and read one poem from the book on top of the stack, then move it to the bottom of the stack, unless and until I come across something like, “When you arrive on a bridge/ suspended above a mighty jungle river,/ fleeing from religious zealots that are a part/ of a secret order of religious zealots,/ I will be that bridge and crumple myself/ and untwine the ancient twines of my ropes/ and shake the ancient dust caked on those ropes/ and halve myself as you just reach the safe side.” That’s when all my best-laid schemes gang aft a-gley, and one single book, like an unschedule eclipse, takes precedence over all of the others in my stack/s. I read, “The moon pulls each wave to us/ and taxes can never be taken out of that”, and I can’t wait to wander out into the night and walk to the water, no matter how cold it is, no matter that the moon seems like an ice cube in a dark, dark drink. And just like that, poem after poem beckons me to re-experience the world, to “stall and then flee and flee to the field/ where she stands on a stage at the fifty yard line.” And I say, Damn you, Adam Fell—damn your *I Am Not a Pioneer* and its “chandeliers catching/ our regrets in their skirts.”

## **MAN CAUGHT ON CAMERA IN TIMES SQUARE TAKING OFF SUSPICIOUS SHIRT**

Unable to shed his skin, he shed the shirt, which reminded him, Only litter what little a groundling will, so he stuffed his shirt into his backpack, looking around. Around he looked, afraid someone might hear his shirt leaving language in the air, and then assume the bearer of the shirt had something to do with this inedible voice. A voice much like the one several blocks back, when, pulling up his pants, he heard just beyond him someone saying, Don't you hate it when gravity embraces you down there below the waist? "Below whose waist?" he replied, looking above and then down, down and then above. Above is the last place a shirt would ever hover, said the voice, causing his flesh to jerk and twitch and even, under his neck, itch. An unspoken itch causing him to want to shed everything, beginning with his skin. "His skin," as if he could possibly own such a leafless leafy sack," my shirt tells me, spurring us, you and me, to listen for that voice which one day will spurn us, though we will try mightily to burn it first.

## **SILLY STRING THEORY**

My daughter's school roof softens,  
dripping rain into the terrarium,  
slowly drowning the snake.  
Her ponytail, like the very filament of the universe,  
won't stay bound long enough for lunch these days,  
teaching me to age a little more gracefully  
by teaching me to give in a little more gracefully,  
just as one finally learns to find more pleasure  
in tossing seeds on the happy couple  
than in chasing bridesmaids with vodka tonics  
hoping to liberate one from her catastrophe of satin.  
*Here's my number*, a woman said to me  
at a wedding many years ago,  
handing over digits randomized to never connect us again,  
which was like being given the combination  
hidden at the heart of every galaxy,  
the bingo balls of planets  
being vacuumed into a black hole  
like golf balls into the buggy  
crisscrossing the driving range,  
the one men and women older than mountains  
smash each motherfucking 3-iron at.  
The one piloted by a teenager  
who is more or less exactly like I was at 17,  
malformed and morosely mustached,  
except he's four days from being worth a billion  
for the website he built from ones and zeroes  
to swap party pics, the one Proctor & Gamble  
will use to sell us Crest White Strips.  
Sorry, the more invested I become in a subject,  
the harder it is for me to define the subject.  
Especially when Doc is up there on the roof

hacking another skin cancer from my scalp.  
He started by jabbing a syringe  
full of painkiller into the crown of my head,  
which was, of course, exceptionally painful,  
before it filled me with powers  
I never knew I could possess:  
the ability to head-butt a Buick,  
speculate on the supersymmetry of bosons,  
or successfully receive a left hook,  
which any prize fighter will tell you  
requires focus on the future, like winter coming,  
the mall opening thirty minutes early  
so the seniors can get their walk in without wiping out.  
Like us, they always circle back  
to talking about what ails them  
and what their kids are up to these days,  
the two subjects we all know the least about,  
the storefronts shackled behind steel curtains,  
the scent of yesterday's cinnamon buns in the air.

## Ian Beattie asks

*From a professional standpoint, what do you think about the work of the iconic and well known poets, like William Shakespeare? Is he still relevant and more importantly is he still good?*

**MATT RYAN:** Because you singled out Shakespeare, I'll start there. I, for one, do not love the bard. I think it's important for writers to know that they don't have to like Shakespeare as a prerequisite to becoming a contemporary poet. I would say many poets do like him, and that I'm the oddball in this scenario. Now, just because I don't like him, I acknowledge that he's good, great even. Just not my cup of tea. So yeah, everyone who put pen to paper before us, regardless of if we like them, they are important and relevant. Are they good? I'm sure they all were, at least at their time of publication, but that doesn't mean their work aged well.

**MC HYLAND:** Ok, first: Shakespeare will *always* be relevant, because he invented a crazily high percentage of the idiomatic expressions that we still use in the English language (there's an amazing segment on *Radiolab* about all the words and phrases that started with Shakespeare—for one thing, he invented about half of the words we use that start with “un-”, the word “eyeball,” “what's done is done,” “dead as a doornail”...).

But, more generally, I think that there are many, many reasons to read older writers—Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Gwendolyn Brooks, John Donne, Charles Olson, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Alexander Pope, Langston Hughes, etc. etc.—and the main one is that if their work stuck around, it's probably because there's something that they did really, really well—and if you like the things that poetry lets you do with language, there's going to be something in each of those peoples' work to excite you.

But don't take it from me: Harold Bloom has made a career of defending the Western canon—though I think he's kind of a pill, I'd take a look at his work and reactions to it.

**MATT MAUCH:** Have you ever walked into a group of people talking, and you hear a line—something somebody says—and you respond to that

something, and everybody either laughs at you or shakes their heads in sympathy for you because you joined in in the middle of the conversation and made a remark that doesn't account for all that's already been said, and so look silly? Well, that conversation is POETRY, and if you run in after Shakespeare has already been discussed, and you say, "to love that well, which thou must leave ere long," like it's original and has never been said, but everybody there knows it's Shakespeare and have it memorized, because they've been in on the conversation, you will play the part of the fool. It's practical for a poet to consider poetry of the past that way. You don't want to say what's already been said famously unless you're playing off of it or quoting it. If you don't know the poets of the past, it's like you're standing on flat ground are trying to discern the lay of the land. Each poet you know from the past is like new stratum you can stand on to improves your view of the landscape. A poet's goal, in this analogy, should be to view things from the top of a mountain he/she built layer by layer, Shakespeare being one of the thicker ones.

You've probably said or heard said something today that derives from Shakespearean texts. Antecedents don't have tentacles, and so they tend to get forgotten. As a people, we don't think much about causes or chains of cause and effect. We accept what is—the now—as what has always been and will ever be, despite the fact that at least once a year we'll say to ourselves or somebody else, *Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it*. If a poet wants to be good, I don't think he/she can afford to make that mistake.

So as a practical matter, yes, Shakespeare, et al, are not only relevant but are a necessary part of a poet's foundation. A poet without that kind of foundation is a poet taking a knife to a gun fight, a Gatling gun to a nuclear war.

And whatever Shakespeare is is what he—his writings—have always been, so I guess I'm not sure if I have the make-up to process what you mean by "still good." That gives a lot of weight to the reader and the reader's times, throwing Shakespeare's works into a sort of reader-response flux, is how I see the question, and if I try to see the world that way with the wiring I've got I'll worse than short out—I'll reverse my own polarity. If you've ever seen that happen with a car, you know it's not a pretty thing.

Poets use language, and language uses poets, to discover via image and abstraction, via syntax and song, white space and line, that which is Original, Profound, and Beautiful. Shakespeare played the game better than most. I don't care if he's from a so-called bygone era, nor that that the modern game has changed in ways he never could have imagined. If there were a Super Bowl of Poetry held this weekend, I'd want Shakespeare to be my team's QB. And I don't have a bookie, but I'd find one. And I'd put a very, very large wager down.

*Ian Beattie is a student in the AFA program at Normandale Community College. Matt Ryan, MC Hyland, and Matt Mauch are, among other things, poets.*

**KEEP**

*after Lytton Smith*

Fear of summer plowed under. Fear of the  
windbreak maples nothing but structure. Fear  
of secrecy in the choreography of crows

gleaning scrap kernels cast along the tracks.  
A hometown evaporates into the reek inside  
his homecoming helmet. The nailed-shut

door to the servants' back staircase. Defunct  
coop with its dusty scattering of hackles.  
Rustle of stalks out back, long nights

lit by a firefly jar—how light and possible  
a seed seems, compared to the heavy harvest.  
Fear of tendrils. Of microscopic seams

bound to be swollen open. Fear of the father.  
Fear of the face close enough to fail.  
His thumbnail clouded blue from bad aim

with the hammer. The blot of it against her neck.  
How the porch bulb, clotted with flies, inverts in her  
pendant as he leans near, second-thinks the kiss, but gives it still.

## **THE TWO MALLS**

There are two shopping malls in my town  
one is expensive and one is cheap.  
The expensive one is two stories  
and has a Sharper Image.  
The cheap one is low slung  
and smells like old chili.

Once at the cheap mall,  
I went into the dollar store  
and watched a man  
with a missing arm  
steal a carton of cigarettes  
by stuffing it  
into the floppy sleeve  
of his jacket.  
Well done,  
I wanted to tell him,  
well done.

The kind of bridge  
I like best is cantilever.  
The kind of sweater  
I like best is cable knit.  
A great time to be a whore  
would have been 1978.  
You and I might have nothing  
in common except collecting  
tiny metal spoons,  
but those tiny spoons  
might be enough for us  
to fall madly in love, okay?

Sometimes at the expensive mall,  
I buy a cup of soda  
from the hot dog stand  
and then balance it  
on the aluminum railing.  
Then I walk over  
to the other side of the mall  
and I wait until someone below  
is about to walk underneath the cup.  
Then I hit the railing  
as hard as I can  
and the railing vibrates  
and the cup dumps  
onto the person below.  
After I do this I go  
into the Sharper Image  
and use the massage tool  
on my lower back.  
People never get kicked out  
of places for being too happy.  
A few days ago  
I saw the man  
with the missing arm  
get on my bus.  
He snuffed his half-smoked cigarette  
out on a bus shelter  
and then he tucked it back  
into his pack very carefully.  
“That used to be your arm,” I said  
when he sat down near me.  
“What did you say?” he asked.  
“I said that your cigarette  
used to be your arm.”  
He shook his head.  
“EVERYTHING used to be my arm,” he told me.  
Sometimes at the expensive mall,  
I don’t do the cup thing.  
Sometimes I just sip my soda  
and lean over the railing

and look down  
at all the young girls  
throwing their coins  
into the fountain.  
Love is not at all expensive  
and my arms will be my arms forever.  
This is what all of them are thinking.

**SEA CREATURES**

Underwater, inside swimming trunks and speedos  
all the scrotums wrinkle  
back to ridged, rubbery pods  
floating in masses of hairy feelers.  
Underneath and to the side bob  
their cocks, eyeless as cave fish,  
darting and afraid of teeth.

## Lynette Reini-Grandell

### IN MEMORY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, WHO DIED IN 1983 AFTER CHOKING ON THE PLASTIC CAP OF A PILL BOTTLE

Lord, let me die a dignified death.  
And Lord, let me die with my clothes on.

I understand it might not be my favorite outfit,  
but Lord, I need to feel covered up a little.  
Skirts and shirts drift up;  
I must always wear underwear,  
as we used to say, "Semper ubi sub ubi."

Lord, this means I can't die in bed,  
even if it's winter, and I'm wearing a nightie,  
those never stay put,  
I toss and I turn and my hair frizzes up.  
I'll have to find another way  
to sleep  
if I'm dying in bed.

My college roommate was like Sleeping Beauty,  
she reclined supine,  
hair outspread behind her,  
arms straight at her sides.  
every time I sleep on my back  
my throat dries out,  
I gag.

I know I shouldn't eat in bed,  
I could convulse on a sandwich like Mama Cass Elliot,  
or heave and choke like Jimi Hendrix.  
Lateral sleeping has its advantages,  
I still have to do something about my hair.

And not in a bathroom, God, anything but that,  
please do not pluck me from this mortal coil in that little room  
where various states of undress proliferate,  
then there's the toilet,  
though I'm sure it beats dying in an outhouse,  
surely the fate of some of my ancestors.

Would it be so bad to die in a shower?  
But there's Janet Leigh in "Psycho,"  
and Elvis, maybe it's not just location,  
maybe I'd like to be dressed and not split my seams.  
Maybe I'd like to not choke,  
at least not on something everyone knows  
I should know not to put in my mouth!

God, not like Tennessee Williams,  
so far from the kindness of strangers,  
tired of tapping the electrified fence between him  
and his grandfather's church steeple.

Blanche DuBois could talk about God.  
Maybe Tennessee's sister, Rose,  
thought about God,  
so quickly,  
before her frontal lobotomy,  
maybe Tennessee prayed  
when he visited Rose, when he wrote that he loved her,  
each day she gaped open her mouth for more pills,  
six more decades until her heart gave out,  
with a brain the doctors invaded with knives,  
poking around,  
feeling with steel for some type of reset button,  
maybe.

## Sun Yung Shin

### THE NIGHT THE WORLD WAS GOING TO END

Time spread around us like a picnic behind glass  
Its splendor unboxed, glass bees electric with hunger  
Making bright glass honey in prismatic glass hives

*The night the world was going to end*  
A sun on the other side of night had a recurring dream  
Burning black lakes hurdling capes of radiance

Time was visible light, the fourth state the sky-ribbon  
Poets lined up with inexhaustible baskets of words  
*When we heard those explosions not far away*

California crumbling like a sand castle  
Child's play, beach glass curved as time, green as the endless field  
*The night the world was going to end*

We lay time on a paper boat and watched it float away  
Back to the city, back to the brick  
Every book a door, every page a room, every stanza a flag

Of a country that exists no-where, *utopos*  
A place that opens for us from time to time  
A friendship on moveable islands that materialize and then vanish

*When we heard those explosions not far away*  
We walked from one end of the room to the other  
To the window, to the sounds of some past war, some clever invention

*The night the world was going to end*  
All was invisible lines, towing everything, suddenly light as air  
Those of us still alive, transparent as music, began to drift

*Title and italicized lines from "In Time" by W.S. Merwin*



## Coming Soon

*While we love making and holding this printed and bound anthology, and doing what we need to to get it into your hands, and will continue to labor-of-love it into existense as long as the GTCPR itself exists, we also recognize that the Internet and social media allow us to reach a broader audience of poets and poetry fans, and plan to take advantage of that with once-a-month online reviews, which we'll hawk on Facebook and Twitter, and hope you re-hawk via the same means and also via means we haven't signed up for or even invented yet. Look, then, for reviews of these poetry books (and more!) in the coming months:*

*How to Survive a Hotel Fire* by Angela Veronica Wong

*This Is What They Say* by M. Bartley Seigel

*New Shoes on a Dead Horse* by Sierra DeMulder

*We Are Doomed* by Brad Liening

*Slur Oeuvre* by James D'Agostino

*On Subjects of Which We Know Nothing* by Karen Garcia

*Reviews will be posted at [GreatTwinCitiesPoetryReadandRoadShow.com](http://GreatTwinCitiesPoetryReadandRoadShow.com), so feel free to bookmark that. For hawking purposes, "Matt Mauch" will be synonymous with "Great Twin Cities Poetry Read" and "The Maeve's Sessions."*

*Signed, The Mgmt*



## What they call acknowledgments, we call these people/places/things rock

The institutions, organizations, and individuals that made the third annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read feel like a quail's egg on the roe of poetry are, in no particular order:

The Pocket Lab Reading Series

Lowbrow Press

*Water~Stone Review*

The BFA/MFA Programs at Hamline University

Coffee House Press

The Twin Cities Literary Calendar

*Paper Darts*

•

Meghan Maloney-Vinz

Anika Eide

Christine Rousu

Guthrie Hohlen

Mary Rockcastle

Jeff Peterson

Jamie Millard

Meghan Hanson

Courtney Algeo

Matt Ryan

Jason Mitchell

**Please raise your glasses to them and give them your business.**

*Signed, The Mgmt*