

PoetryMidwest

an electronic journal of the literary arts

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WINTER 2004

FEATURING:

BALLARD • BUNCH • BYRNE • COLE • DI BLASI •
GEYER • HAINES • JANCO • KNOWLTON • KOPP •
LEE • LUFTIG • MATTHEWS • MCGLYNN • PATTISON
• PERCHIK • THOMPSON • VOGT • WOJNICKI



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EDITOR
MATTHEW W. SCHMEER

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Masthead

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Barry Ballard

An Unplowed Field

When the earth fails to exist (like in the way
we fail, and feel empty of self-worth), I
wonder how I'll build my life alongside
the barrenness of forest and terrain
that no longer plows a waiting image
of itself into the fields that used to feed
us. At night I hear it kneel into history,
weeping into the spewed-out ash of the unsaved.

It clutches at the cover hanging
from the side of my bed where it whispers
of past lovers: the amber sky against
its breast that's somehow lost its color, and streams
of forgiveness muddied into thicker
words, regrets, and days that never made sense.

Kathy Kopp

Swimming in milkthistle

quiet weeds caress her feet
the way her mother
gave her heated milk and honey
with vanilla
when she couldn't sleep.

These country nights
filled with summer winds
red barns
facets of a neighbor's honor
the night he tugged at the breach colt
waiting until creamy dawn
for the weary mare to slacken, surrender.

Debra Di Blasi

The Last Mare

The day after my mother died—heart still as winter—my father gathered the mares from the west paddock and one by one shot them with his .38. Once behind the left ear. Twice if their twitching persisted. It was not the sun I saw glinting in the last mare's eye but fear. The stench of death's sweat filled her nostrils and there was no escape, though she bucked and kicked at the wooden chute until it splintered. Splintered but held.

And I hoped after the last mare dropped and bled onto the mud black with bleeding—my eyes closed tight against the terrible light of death's glance—hoped that my father would turn the trigger on himself and put him out of my misery. He did not.

It is eighty-one years past and my father is long dead and I am old and tired, tired of it all. Yet look at me here: See how I still buck in my sleep, buck and kick, kicking fiercely now against the fierce approaching light.

Winnie Lee

Entropy

Skip a stone across a pond:
Ripples break the glass.

Stir some sugar into milk:
Viscosity makes a pass.

Bury a key beneath the soil:
Iron turns to rust.
Oxidized like human blood:
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Anne Haines

Door

I often stand in doorways
between one room and the next
looking in, looking out.
It isn't indecision
that keeps me here
but the moment of passage,
the opening, the frame.

Bernadette Geyer

Not Necessarily in Order

When you heard the news,
you stared down at your feet
as if they had floated away momentarily

You were nowhere near Berlin when it happened

The first thing you noticed

Your mother cried,
but that was all your father said

(Everyone loved the flowers)

Two days before your birthday,
the snow fell lazily, like ash

The last thing you remember

Click, click

One purple shoe, the laces undone

The sun's tears spilled through the clouds

You woke up

Liza Janco

Memory Fragment

We went looking for the keys in expected places,
the pocket of a lapis coat; beneath the seat of your old black Jeep,
our fingers blind to the spot of your flashlight,
tripping over crumbling leaves and forgotten pennies;
in the icebox, sleeping with waxed boxes of peas and spinach,
the keys dreamed of Florida.

Karyna McGlynn

Glass, Green

Ghost crabs click
Behind memory's scrim:
Yellow tooth, old man.

Fat blood tongue arcing,
Who else holds whole lives
In their mouth?

Why does glass, green break
And stick? yes buries happily
Into small feet.

Puff up, break open
Bubble wrap, small galaxy.

Say you're heady. Remember
Milk, salt, rope, man, also
You count on this.

About the skin's
Stranglehold: lungs, plastic,
Voice, hollow pepper knocks

And snake too. Rubber
Or intricate needlework. Hunt
Girl beats own face. Poisoned~

Tilt head back, fish
Grazed wrong, Corn erupts

Into meal. Shaker,
Tureen, set on the stomach
With lime, with creamer:

Snapshot. This is the release
That haunted you, this is wicker—

Mold cushions like where
Your toe broke in six places, nail
Dropping black

As beetle shell found discarded
Convex, like animal eye

Stretched across the big marble,
What, shooter? Grandfather
Pulls word awkward from larynx

Flicks hard off the thumb, smacks
Boys from the circle, overalls
Dashed in August, glass collision, ice

Cream sucked from the word
Free—tongue depressed, 1933

Fall from time, sky-dizzy
The ground, finger in dirt, there

In now, no, dry flesh
Caught in fish hook, index
Slipped through cold knife gill

Finger, so frozen eye, so mind
(Dog at throat, lock-jaw

Littered across remember: Daybreak).
Drop moment into list, no tack them
To your doorway, tattoo

Your shoulder, still they slip
Warm butter from the nails

You can't remember everything
Gasworks, green bottle

Broken again, men
For the love of god, laced

Girl's feet back together with ink,
Thick black thread, dye
For the love of god, fear

A mother's face, a sun-prune,
Bleached tile stamped down, but still

Asphalt: bottle cap mosaic,
Glinting eye, pharaoh,
Ejaculated tape ribbon

Oil ear drum, gasoline dress
Become gift. Outside, fume
From a zephyr's mouth

Around pipe. Your sandals
Cut, fully grown, do not

Fit, years swell bone.
You say: snapshot, empty mouth.

Ghost crabs hang from breasts.
That girl furls, feet in silver box
Tape measure, rests

Against a wall you wish
Were your thigh. Tomorrow
You'll stand stones

On your thin gray scalp,
The word iris, the word shutter.
Here: thumb-nuzzled

Against chin, unfinished clouds
Of an infant's skull, shake

Plastic rings, metal
Resting, parched roots blind, and you:
Ears quietly burn, torn paper,

Breath, cup
Invisible if not full.

Ginger Knowlton

Mining, 1920

From their soot-shadowed shoulders, they unfurled the crushed body, pushed it so that it rolled tightly up against the whitewashed boards. They pinned one arm under the body so that it wouldn't turn back down the slope of the porch to lie in the dry dust.

Through the frost crystallizing on the window in the bedroom upstairs, Anna Svarovski watched the heads rising and falling away down the path while she pushed her seventh child free from the trap of her womb. She could tell by the gait what had happened. The miners had been walking the same way, heads bent so low that a clean white line cut across the back of each coal-blackened neck, when they'd left her husband on the front porch, against the door, seven months ago. His arms and legs had been carefully arranged, straightened—all breaks absented, for a time, of angle.

Pietre Svarovski, age eight, begin to line canaries under the east eaves of the house several days after he found his brother's broken body, smeared with blood and excrement, splayed across the front porch. After the snowy funeral, when Pietre began his daily descent into the mines, he carried ash-grey birds up out of the shafts in his trouser pockets, brushed the stiff bodies clean as well as he could, and laid them out, waiting for rain to turn them yellow again. Then he could bury clean yellow canaries in rich black soil.

Edward Byrne

Autumn Storm

Early autumn and already the woods alongside this road
are disguised by ice. After five days away, I'm driving home,
a narrow stretch of meadow filled with snow extends
beside me, a long file of ragged tree tops—some stiff with brittle
branches split in the middle or now splintered on the ground
around their trunks, others tipping as if about to topple—rides
over my right shoulder. Last night, as the storm moved
through, telephone posts or power line poles snapped in half
lay all along this interstate. Left broken in morning light,
they appear like odd highway signs warning of dangers ahead.

Winter Pentimento

The black clot of an empty nest rests in one fork of this winter
tree, all its thin branches now white and bending under the weight
of a new snowfall. Spots of cloud cover still fill the ridge line,
their lengthening shadows drawn across little drifts or flat patches
of brown lawn that had been exposed by this morning's wind.
Before long, the vague sun finally fails to filter through even these
few remaining knots of cumulus and gives way to gradually
changing shades of gray, as if the faded landscape has been painted
over once more, the horizon's stripe taken away by feathered
edges brushed under soft strokes in pigments granting a darker tint.

Lake Gulls

Again the day begins in stages as a vague sun gives way
to flames rising behind that drapery of gray sky still shading
the glaze of lake water tinted jade beneath it. A tattered
patch of pasture borders the shoreline, an edge of dead grass
aligned beside the dunes, where gulls with ringed bills
lift and hover above in an onshore wind. I watch as my son
runs through a few shallow pools along the soft slope
of beach, each time reaching toward the white birds overhead
as if holding a bright kite with a tight string, feeling every
bob or weave aloft, hoping he might reel one in before we leave.

Lynn Pattison

Benjamin Islands-North Channel

Two of us hang off the bow, calling out the shoals. Looking hard into the lake.

*

Scrub pines elbow east, sure as stuck compass needles,
frozen by westerly flail, even on this windless day.

*

Our scent brings mosquitoes over the channel—from Manatoulin, Blind River, Gore Bay.
We zip into tents on the last edge of sunset; mosquitoes descend in clouds, sounding
like a hundred violins playing harmonics that drift over water from Spanish.

*

I dream that the water snake nudging the edge
of this granite island, where it shelves into the cold lake,
comes to you at night as a woman. Slips through the stitched
seam of the tent, wraps herself around you.

That tear in your shirt.

Has she made off with a piece of you?

*

Moon draws these islands
toward her, out of Huron's deep cold
into winds that scour them to pink granite loaves.

*

I was sure you were wrong, spread the remains of dinner on the smooth table of rock,
convinced that something would find it in the night. It went undisturbed for days.

*

Sunset stretches enormous.
Shafts of light cut the sky
in wedges. Silhouettes of pines.
Wayang shadow puppets on an orange scrim

*

We make love on granite stumblings of the Great Canadian Shield
in the shadows of the mainland, Kilarney Ridge.
Finally—a bed that never squeaks, will not collapse.

*

Another boat arrived this morning! A man and a woman walk the island.
They pick our blueberries, have the audacity to fish.

*

At Little Current, bully winds funnel through the boat channel. A boater with more yacht
than experience crashes against pilings; buoys buried beneath swells. Water rushes ahead
of wind as if an invisible snowplow is pushing, piling it up in banks.

*

We try for three days to find the metaphor for these cracked, swept islands. They are not
like loaves of bread, they are not like many-fissured brains in formaldehyde jars, not
sculptures, or sleeping giants, half-submerged, nor petrified whales, aground on an inland
sea. They are only themselves, gray in one light, rose in another. They rest on broad
haunches, curving toward the moon.

Clay Matthews

Weldon Kees on His Knees

It smells like honeysuckle and dead fish
when I open the Cadillac's door.
The sun sounds like a space heater.

I walk out onto a wooden bridge
that smells of creosote, and stare
at the creek bed below that is as dry
as a mouth stuffed with cotton.

I think about Weldon Kees
and disappearing. *Ala-kazaam* and *poof*.
Then nothing. But from this height
a jump wouldn't even break my leg.

Bob Dylan is playing on the car's radio,
and I sit down on bits of gravel,
light a cigarette and watch two birds bite each other.

I stretch across the wooden planks and fall asleep,
where I dream that Robinson—he has small hands
here—is pulling Weldon out
of the San Francisco Bay. And Weldon,
on his knees, spits out water and three black birds,
folds up Robinson and puts him in his coat pocket,
and then rides off on a bicycle.

When I wake up I hear a tractor running,
cars whizzing by in the distance.
Dylan's singing another song,
and the creek is as empty as it was before.

Benjamin Vogt

Dreaming III

My body against the grass brought ants across
my chest, let lady bugs approach my eyes
and slowly speckle me like glistening moss
amidst the fallen rain, the robin's cries.

I hadn't known the ground I walked so blind
day after day until I came to it low, empty
of human form. I lost my skin in kind
sprouting twists of iris which seemed to pity

my hunger for loss, forgiveness of my being.
I waited to be taken by the earth. My belly
hungered fully, its caves anticipating.
My bones became the moonlight's silent swell.

SuzAnne Cole

Angry

Cheryl stood in the liquor store, debating wine for the holiday dinner. Gewürztraminer for smoked salmon, but Steve would be angry if she didn't buy his expensive Chardonnay. Were two bottles of white too much for the two of them, especially with claret for the lamb? Oh well, it's a holiday, she thought, grabbing both.

As the bottles clinked convivially in the basket, suddenly the liquor store faded, and she was once again a young housewife. Dropping empty bottles into the wastebasket—*clink, clink*—she glowed with happiness in having hosted her extended family—parents, sister, grandparents—for the first time. A success too, their little boys well-dressed and well-behaved, clove-studded ham pretty and delicious, coconut cake applauded.

Her grandmother, rinsing dishes at the sink, heard the bottles, and turned to face Cheryl. “Your grandfather is so ashamed of you,” she said.

Cheryl flushed crimson, no longer a proud hostess. She was suddenly three and had just dirtied her lace-trimmed panties. *Why*, she wanted to ask, *what did I do this time?* But shame throttled her.

“He hated seeing you drink today,” Grandma Edna went on sternly.

Wine? she thought. *This is about wine? What about that “tonic” she and Granddad slug down? Forty percent alcohol, I looked.*

“I’m sorry, I thought wine made the holiday special,” she stammered.

“Well, I guess once a year is all right. Wouldn’t want to think our baby girl was a drinker.”

After everyone was asleep, Cheryl went back downstairs. Angry at herself for allowing Grandma Edna to shame her back to childhood, angry at her inability to talk back, she’d been unable to fall sleep. Still fuming, she opened the refrigerator and took out the wine they hadn’t finished at dinner. Pouring a glass, she sat drinking until wine and anger were gone.

Simon Perchik

Untitled

Our table cracked—every frozen lake
scents something green
tries to eat again: this plate
as helpless drums still break apart
and thunder turning back
circling to get a better hold

—this empty gauge points its knife
on course, contrails
rising with ice and water too
breaks apart, skies

strike each other—the sparks
—once I held a snowflake
and your cup too
sits around this wooden table
waiting for my fingertips still on fire
circling down—you know the sound.

It grows in ice, the slightest touch
ifting the Earth, your breasts
warmed, held safe and all winter
this table listening for smoke
and broken frost. And you.

Richard Alan Bunch

Conjunctions

1.

The rabbit's fur drips with rain
beneath the redwoods. In the wood
summer still sleeps.

2.

The sage muses
on the meaning of being
and its disclosive art:
a novel language for the dying.

3.

In a subway station down the eye of a pistol
aging is kinder than winter
contained by the savage heart.

4.

Pearls lying in darker waters
secrete ambition, the prize of
knives. They pry into secret lives.

5.

Canopy of the galaxy, the body's sacred time,
an explosion to lift the blessed,
for all spiritual destinies
in matter begin.

6.

Worms crawl out of apple-dreams
and go back to those unheard refrains,
lineals of the ancestral blood.

7.

Viruses appear at prime time,
once more fusing body with mind,
coiling around our comedy
with the bronze of winter.

8.

Serpents of death
squirm through membranes,
anonymous, double-minded,
shuffling with the odds. They too
enliven biographies of grenadine
amid the driftwood decor.

9.

Heart of sky, heart of earth,
parents of return,
all-too-soon recast
the violin's sound and its tenor,
idioms that implicitly disclose
the spectrum of silence.

Richard Luftig

Harry Heller Sends His Condolences via Airmail *(A Found Poem)*

Jan. 23, 1940

Your letter received and we were saddened
To hear about the loss of your Brother.
However, such things are inevitable
And eventually we must all take the same road
To the Great Beyond from which there seems
To be no returning. About all we can do
Is to have Faith that within the inexplicable
Scheme of the Cosmic there is a definite purpose
In all things, in sorrow as well as joy, in death
As in life. All we can do is go along and strive
To do our utmost in bringing happiness
To those we love and in alleviating the woes
Of human suffering. We are all awaiting

The coming of Summer when we plan
On visiting the North and having members
Of my family meet you. Meanwhile, do not think
It impossible for you to come and stay awhile
With us. Thirteen hundred miles is not so far
In this country and stranger things have occurred.
I appreciate your snapshot and hope that very soon
You will send us a real photograph, one that we
Can frame and place in a position of honor in our home.
Hoping this finds all well with you especially
Your grand old Father. I close, Harry.

Tad Wojnicki

California Lies

California lies lifeless and naked, shivering in heat. No rain has come in years. News crews grill elders who can't think of such a drought, dust, and thirst, when all the fields, hills, slopes strip to the buff, and bare it all, feeling the heat. Spotting the slopes, the live oaks shrink, shrivel and stone, saving their sap, clamming up, and holding onto a ghost of ooze for dear life. The wild oats dry into nuggets, their false gold shimmying and shivering, and shrubs fling forth their fangs, having lost their leaves to the heat.

Jennifer Thompson

Dear Cowboy

I don't know if I cry more
when you go
or when you hold me.
I'm just here to demonstrate
the domestic virtues:
cradle, milk, clean-swept hearth,
a woman you can talk to.
You always do saddle up.

The dust of your takeoff
chokes me.
I want you to embrace the few items
I offer.
I want to rip off this dress
pop the close rows of buttons
and ride,
ride,
ride.

Contributors

Barry Ballard's poetry has most recently appeared in *The Evansville Review*, *Blue Mesa*, *Louisiana Literature*, and *The Florida Review*. His most recent published collections are *First Probe to Antarctica* (Bright Hill Press Award for 2001) and *Plowing to The End of The Road* (Finishing Line Press Award for 2002 and nominated for the Pushcart Prize).

Richard Alan Bunch was born in Honolulu and grew up in the Napa Valley. His works include *Summer Hawk*, *Wading the Russian River*, *Night Blooms*, and a play, *The Russian River Returns*. Thrice nominated for a Pushcart Prize, his poetry has appeared in *Black Moon*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Oregon Review*, *Fugue*, *Red River Review*, and the *Hawai'i Review*. He resides with his family in Davis, California.

Edward Byrne has had five collections of poetry published, most recently *Tidal Air* (Pecan Grove Press, 2002). His poetry has also appeared widely in literary journals, including *American Literary Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *American Scholar*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *Missouri Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Quarterly West*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. He is a professor of American literature and creative writing at Valparaiso University

A community college English instructor for most of her career, **SuzAnne Cole** now concentrates on writing. She's had short stories published in anthologies—*The World's Best Shortest Stories* (QPBC, 2001); *Suddenly V, III, II*; *Short Shots II*; and *Shards*—and in magazines and journals.

Debra Di Blasi is the author of the novellas *Drought & Say What You Like*, winner of the 1998 Thorpe Menn Book Award, and the short story collection *Prayers of an Accidental Nature*. Her fiction, essays, art reviews and articles have appeared in many publications, most recently in *Notre Dame Review* and *The Iowa Review*, and forthcoming in *Chelsea* and *2GQ*.

Bernadette Geyer is the author of the chapbook *What Remains* (Argonne House Press, 2001) and co-directs the Washington Prize poetry contest, sponsored by The Word Works. Her poems have appeared recently in *California Quarterly*, *The Potomac Review*, and *Connecticut River Review*.

Anne Haines' work has previously appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Prairie Schooner* and *Northwest Review*, as well as in the anthologies *A Linen Weave of Bloomington Poets* (Wind, 2002) and *Poetry from Sojourner: A Feminist Anthology* (University of Illinois Press, forthcoming). She lives and works in Bloomington, Indiana.

Liza Janco is a freelance writer living in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is taking a break from professional life to serve as an Americorps volunteer.

Ginger Knowlton's poetry and fiction have appeared in literary journals such as *The Evansville Review*, *5_trope*, and *Segue*. More poems are forthcoming from *Double Room* (via Web Del Sol) and *Chimera Review*. She has won awards from the Academy of American Poets and Rocky Mountain Women's Institute. A few of her paintings are held in private collections across the United States. She teaches at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Kathy Kopp resides in Missoula, Montana since 1957. She was educated in Germany, majoring in music and later at the University of Montana in Creative Writing/ Poetry. After studying with Richard Hugo, Tess Gallagher and others Kathy's first book of illustrated poems was published in May, 2003. She has sixteen poems appearing in American and English journals. Kathy won Honorable Mention in Writers' Digest *Joy of Writing* national contest last summer.

Winnie Lee is just a regular joe with a regular job, seeking a path of creativity in a homogenous forest of average mundane mediocrity.

Richard Luftig is a professor of educational psychology and special education at Miami University in Ohio. His poems have appeared or are scheduled to appear in literary journals which include *Mind Matters Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Aura Literary Arts Review*, *Palo Alto Review*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Liberty Review*, *National Forum*, and numerous other journals.

Clay Matthews has been published or is forthcoming in magazines such as *Tryst*, *storySouth*, *The Rearview Quarterly*, *Rain Taxi*, *Taint*, *The Big Muddy*, *Rock Salt Plum Poetry Review*, and other fine print and internet publications. A 2003 Pushcart Prize nominee, he is currently working towards a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Karyna McGlynn is a writer and photographer living in Seattle. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Wisconsin Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Plainsongs*, *No Exit*, *The Paumanok Review*, and *LummoX Journal*. She is a four-time member of the National Poetry Slam Team and the editor of Screaming Emerson Press. She attends the creative writing program at Seattle University and teaches performance poetry at the University of Washington Experimental College.

Michigan writer **Lynn Pattison's** work has most recently appeared in *Peregrine*, *The MacGuffin*, *Rattle*, and *The Comstock Review*, *Wavelength*, and *Primavera*. She is the recipient of a 2003 Gilmore Emerging Artist Grant, and was recently awarded a writing residency at the Ragdale Foundation.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poetry has appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. Readers interested in learning more about him are invited to read *Magic, Illusion and Other Realities* at <http://www.geocities.com/simonthepoet>, which also includes a complete bibliography.

Jennifer Thompson received her PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of California, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Humanities at Embry-Riddle University. She has published poetry in several journals, including *Poetry Motel*, *The Laughing Dog*, and *The Absinthe Literary Review*.

Benjamin Vogt is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in poetry at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and received his MFA from The Ohio State University. His work has or will soon appear in the *Alsop Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Cream City Review*, and the *Adirondack Review*. A chapbook, *Indelible Marks*, is available from Pudding House.

Tad Wojnicki, a Shoah survivor, has worked as a college teacher, fruit-picker and newspaperman since arriving in the U.S. in 1977, speaking just two words, "I" and "you." He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy and an M.A. in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. His work has appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Leviathan*, *Coffeehouse*, *Clark Street Review*, *Wild Embrace*, *The Jewish Spectator*, *Sugar Mule*, *Harrisburg Review*, *Rearview Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He is the author of a novel, *Lie Under the Fig Trees* (1996), and a poetry chapbook, *Where Angels Catch Hell* (2000).

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