

# PoetryMidwest

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# PoetryMidwest

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EDITOR  
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## *Masthead*

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# CROW POEMS

One for sorrow  
Two for mirth  
Three for a wedding  
Four for a birth  
Five for silver  
Six for gold  
Seven for a secret  
Never to be told.

—traditional folk saying

## *Jianqing Zheng*

### **The Snapshots of Crow**

*1.*

change lane—  
crows pecking a dead mole  
on the road

**2.**  
spring dizzily  
black crows glistening  
in green grass

*Zheng*

3.  
shadowed in sunset  
crows perching and squawking  
on the leafless tree

4.  
skyscraper—  
a barn owl chased by a crow  
over Central Park

*Zheng*

5.

winter sun  
glints off the steeple  
where a crow lands

**6.**  
in misty dawn  
a crow flaps off the road  
as my car approaches

**My Attempt To Explain**

Late in the scene, a voice begins to speak  
as if from some solitary creature not mentioned  
till now. I assume its face is in the shadow;  
the outline of its jaw is circled in light.  
Look! says the mouth, Watch! Now!  
I will move the jaw!

As with a piece of string—  
one must hold; one must pull. Inside me  
pulling at everything. If I have to go  
somewhere, I have to kill a few  
hours and think of the landscape as a map  
with whole regions rendered with crows

soaring in and out of the sketchy edges.

I suppose those creatures are hungry.  
The confidence of their attack has left them lazy.  
It's only later, when awakened, that they squawk.

It is possible those creatures  
gape into existence without knowing hunger  
is only the meaning found  
at beginnings and again at ends.

All this turning has forced me to find  
more flaws: the birds, the trees, the gradual curve in the road.  
Particulars have had to vanish  
with the wood-pegged stairs on the front veranda.

And it didn't take me long to discover  
even small doubts insisted on talking.  
Grass, for example, said lower the blade.  
Look, said the barn door, the sky needs attending.  
Look, said the sky, the porch swing is listing.

**Crows Again**

Come down Sunday morning and the crows are back,  
hitchcocking in the front yard, stark on the  
powdered sugaring of snow.  
Feather robed Jesuits, cawing in conclave, they argue  
the finer points of bagel versus stale bread, eyeing me  
judgmentally through the glass.

The Irish say doors to the netherwold open  
where crows gather. I believe them.  
Else why all this weird? Not even the squirrel cold cuts,  
last night's leavings from a moonlit tabby songfest,  
can explain this invasion.  
*One for sorrow, two for mirth.*  
This gathering is more like hysterical laughter,  
but whose is the joke?

## *Ronda Broatch*

### **Breaking**

*Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap; they have  
neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.  
—Luke 12:24*

He sits, mornings  
with his loaf of stale French.  
    Blackbirds come,

    some prance the pavement  
at his feet, some land  
    on his tattered cap

    and coat full of holes.  
The wind worries his holey coat  
    for warmth. He hums

    quietly and breaks  
the rind, reaches the softer  
    flesh inside. Birds dive,

    peck at his offering, quarrel  
over crumbs in the gutter.  
    Ravenous,

    some stab his open hands  
and he holds them  
    open, knows someday

    he too will fly  
when there's no more bread.  
Mornings he sits

    and feeds these birds.  
In dreams  
    he goes to pieces.

## *Mark Wagenaar*

### **To Carthage—**

I had no sins to offer,  
as I knelt in the booth.

*Savonarola, there  
are more truths*

*on heaven and earth  
than in your visions.*

Before light there was desire  
and even before I was born

the word *want*, echoed  
in my head. I fingered the Book

in my pocket as shadows  
dimmed the shade that mocked

me from behind ornate wires.  
The firstborn of the dead.

Fifteen long centuries  
of silence since the horde

in the garden, the torch-lit despair.  
Once, when I was young

I numbered the fires  
in the Book, the tongues,

the lake and the burning bush.  
I began to pray, I want

to be a flame in the darkness,  
when I saw the tiny silhouette

of a sparrow, a tattered  
fist, curled tightly against

the church. The vision splintered  
in the soft crows of heavy breaths.

**The Crows of Kraków**

The crows of Kraków  
home in on the beacons

of 5 o'clock bells across the Vistula  
as though following landing instructions,

and perch like petals  
on university buildings, laddering up

the peaked façade near the statue  
of Kopernicus. If one flapped its wings,

if they all flapped, not one brick  
would budge. But such a wind

ruffling our winter coats: crows  
presiding over one more Krakovian night,

taking up their oaths of office:  
that they should be black

with no memory of the great war,  
no word in their language for *retreat*.

**Hunting Crow**

One bone cold October morning, the neighborhood  
crows, hiding in a woods forever wild, turned mute

and motionless as inky shadows behind the blind's  
brown and yellow leaves. There they surmised

the visual field of hunters hunting them with canned  
sound, the garlicky caws—crazy screams—

*Come here, come here, come here!*

Smart as insolent children, they kept their distance,  
not to be beaten by their family voices; they waited

it out, counting the camouflaged heads leaving  
the field empty handed.

Their game of silence broken when the last truck  
rumbled away—they ruptured their cell—the shimmer

of black wings flagging, *home free.*

## *Brad Clompus*

### **Tracks Near Ottumwa**

Five of them twirl  
like ragged blades,  
bank through columns  
of gray-bedded sky.  
They are rasping  
to a thrush-head  
stranded  
by the tracks, shattered  
near the cornfield.

The moist earth  
is quilted frozen  
with white stiletto,  
one thousand to the inch.  
They follow the glint  
of hammered steel,  
pass over  
one thousand husks  
crushed by the wayside.  
They land  
and peck a calf's hoof  
for crow food.

## *Susan Landon*

### **Crow Tracks**

Resplendent in shiny black,  
the crow stares at me,  
then turns around,  
balancing on the wire  
looking doubtfully down.

I pause in mid-step,  
then look down myself.  
The fierce blonde  
head of my landlady  
is bobbing below.  
Rage is returning  
to the domicile.

Thank you, Crow.

And thank you  
for flying alongside  
my car just before  
an aggressive driver  
menaced me.

Thank you too for  
sunset's raucous cries  
before the next day's rain  
of murderous rage  
from the floor below.

Thank you for telling  
what you know, for  
being shadow's first sign.

**Die Krähe**

Eine Krähe ist mit mir aus der Stadt gezogen;  
Ist bis heute für und für um mein Haupt geflogen.

Krähe, wunderliches Tier, willst mich nicht verlassen?  
Suchst Du, schon als Beute hier, meined Leib zu fassen?

Es wird wohl nict lang mehr geh'n an dem Wanderstabe;  
Krähe, lass' mich endlich seh'n Treue bis zum Grabe!

**The Crow**

Only a crow has accompanied me from town;  
Around and around, above my head it has flown.

Crow, strange animal, you do not abandon me?  
Do you seek to seize as prey flesh on my body?

It will indeed not last long, this walking on earth.  
Crow, let me finally see faithfulness till death!

**If Not For the Crows**

If not for the crows,  
the sky would be empty  
today. They command  
the air, small squadrons,  
familiar silhouettes  
against the awful blue.  
Black as bombers,  
they fly straight  
for the fields, become  
little politicians in dark suits  
walking the stubble,  
preening their feathers  
to an oily sheen.  
They flaunt their wings,  
trade guttural caws,  
discuss order and chaos  
in a land almost silent,  
if not for the crows.

*September 12, 2001*

## *Helen Ruggieri*

### **In a Wheatfield — A Crow Sequence**

crows sank  
to the ground  
he waved his arms

sentry crows screeching  
black wings  
a fist opening

stillness under  
the August afternoon  
cicadas cry

gold  
floats above the field  
pollen

wind tangles  
in the yellow sea  
wavering

the day moves  
it carries him away  
even the pain sways

crows rise  
wind ripples the surface  
pain dried too fast

he goes home  
in the clustering dark  
a fist in his heart

**What I Most Remember**

is not the mountain, not the cold  
breeze or the snow or the sharp  
slice into my palm when the pocket-  
knife opened accidentally, but  
lying for awhile. Rolling over,  
almost asleep, and gazing  
off the ledge at a crow  
balancing sunlight  
on its thin black wings.

*Dennis Etzel, Jr.*

**I carry three birds**

Their wings rub against my ribcage,  
trapped, as each heart pounds fast,  
as if I've stopped some kind of migration.

The cardinal saves with a song,  
knows when to fly and when to nurture.  
The second, a robin, sings afternoon  
when I mistake the danger of dangling branches  
for the opportunity of building.  
And the crow, for protection, is last,  
remains. But I confuse the bird I need  
with the one I listen to,  
switching them around.

Sometimes when the singing should continue,  
I crow curses instead.  
Or when the season changes and I should let go  
to soar, I scamper from tree to tree  
as each becomes barren.

Even then, all three continue  
to build a nest out of ruins, to nestle in  
through my winters.

## *Mark Wagenaar*

### **After the Plenty**

*Dime como mueres y te dire quien eres.*  
—Octavio Paz

The crow streaks  
into the sun. Down  
feather dark flecks

as night curtains  
the land. Bundle  
your rats' skins

close, and huddle  
your straw bones  
against the solstitial

cold, scarecrow.  
Hang at odd angles,  
limbs akimbo,

you faithful, sightless  
sentinel, over  
the forgotten fields

of your creator's  
clay kingdom.  
He left you mere

silence, his remains  
the carrion birds'  
*droit d'aubaine.*

Ignore the chatter  
from the crow  
on your shoulder:

a long howl echoes  
across the horizon,  
the drawn-out 'o'

in the hollow of 'alone.'

**Crow**

is the man at  
the bar when every  
one's drunk and  
the last call's been  
forgotten. Crow,  
a blue black sky  
shimmering over  
the bar stools,  
talons blurred by  
smoke. Crow  
waits, for once  
patient, as pale  
strangers nudge  
each other. He  
knows prey, knows  
none of them care  
if they die. A  
blue haze  
camouflages the  
blue in crow's  
wings. It's  
the hour of the  
crow, blue  
black, shining,  
coming for you

**Powder Hollow Hermit**

Ten-year-olds exploring a shack  
in the woods a mile from the road,  
we found the rope the hermit used  
to hang himself, the corpse-chill  
still in it. My witless friends laughed  
when I mimicked noosing myself,  
but I felt real strangulation  
draw a curtain over the noon  
brightness, felt my heartbeat lather  
like a tired horse. I dropped the rope  
and dashed through the field with my friends  
to romp where the hermit had planted  
potatoes. Since his death the weeds  
had risen in thick sheaves. Goldenrod  
and tansy had already claimed  
a share of the open August sky.  
My friends and I rolled in the dirt  
til mid-afternoon when crows  
settled on the roof of the shack  
and cackled in metallic tones,  
alterting us to change. We looked,  
then cried aloud and ran. Later,  
deep in the woods, we agreed  
nothing had happened. At home  
that night, I picked at peas and mashed  
potatoes, sulked early to bed,  
and pulled the covers over my face—  
then tried to pretend I hadn't hanged  
myself, the rope stretching till seams  
broke and veins burst in my face.  
We all saw the hermit dangling there  
under a choir of raucous crows,  
his face bold crimson with pleasure,  
his pants down to expose his groin,  
his broken neck elongate  
as a normal person's thigh. We all  
saw him, but forty years later  
I'm the only one who still believes  
that he saw us as well, one big  
Cyclops eye turned towards us, bulging  
as he gazed through a fatal mist  
and embossed himself on our future.

**Because, Because**

I have seen crows settle in the crowns  
of wild cherry trees

listened to their calls carousing  
with ticklish delight.

I have wondered what begs  
their scrutiny:

Is it the comely  
slime-covered snapper napping

among yellow irises?  
Is it transparent as

the empty creek bed?  
Was it the daily argument I left?

**Katie on Her Education**

I went down to the river to walk,  
to hear all those tons of water  
the earth lured down from Virginia hills  
the way you lured me,  
and in the middle of the clay path  
I met the man who'd taught me  
how to think after you had  
taught me how to feel.

He was with a woman  
not his kindly coffee-bringing wife.  
And his face was raw with guilt.  
And his eyes were jerky with lies.  
“Hello, Katie,” he said in a gathering bass.  
“We were trying to decide  
what kinds of birds those are,”  
he said, Dr. Warner, who taught me  
Ethics, who demanded such care  
with words, said.

In the huge, white-dead tree  
were huge, black-still birds.  
“Crows, I believe,” I said.  
Everybody knows crows.  
Her face was white as the tree  
and the water-rounded rocks.  
We smiled a stiff set of smiles.  
And then he led her away.

One day when we haven't fought  
I'll take you there  
to walk the river's run,  
to let you know I know just where  
the crows along the river roost  
and why.

**Black Bird, Bye, Bye**

The day you left me, crows invaded our garden.

They swooped down through the jacaranda and landed in the large avocado. They squabbled over sunflower seeds in the bird feeder, devouring what they could, leaving the remains for those who would follow.

I watched them room our bedroom window. I can't say how long I stood there, several minutes perhaps, before one of them cawed and signaled the others to move on. Rising in unison, the birds headed east toward the bluish-black outline of the Santa Lucias.

Crows invaded our garden the day you left me.

Without a  
backward glance—  
up, away,  
gone.

**At Night, They Caw to Each Other in the Trees**

From childhood, I thought the crows were his,  
the way they followed him, and when he lobbed a stone  
carefully through the air, the way he always struck one down  
to show me its feathers, the splay of the crippled foot,  
the red berry the quick one just now had caught in its beak  
still wedged between the sharp pieces of the stone mouth.  
I thought he knew something about the pomegranate seeds of their hearts  
and how to hold them, and how to drag them with him into the forest.

When he left, I imagined him calling them after him,  
emptying our gardens of the black forms, holding them  
over him in thick clouds of weather—a black dust to keep  
the rain out. But spring after spring, they came back,  
ate the same seeds and sat as close as I would let them.  
They loved especially the rarer and more monstrous fruit,  
lemons warty and half-decayed, stinking meat from dinner.  
I left them scraps on the plates of the flagstones and listened  
as they sang finding to each other, and keep away, and when  
the storm would strike. They were the black stones of my heart.

Gradually, I learned a quick throw always brought one down.  
I propped them up on the greenhouse table and began to draw;  
only after one dragged itself out of lethargy, roused to a frenzy  
against the glass, beat itself to death with its own idea of flying,  
did I learn to twist their necks before I started.  
Training myself in pen, I eliminated the idea of erasing  
or starting over. A line was either the bird or something else,  
and if not the bird, was useless, some other world I had no interest in.  
I drew them every day, until a picture propped against the hallway  
window drove the cat into hysterics, yelling to be out, until  
I scared my mother with the perfection of the feathers  
and she send me from the house to play like other children.

When I was a young woman, I saw the crows for what they were  
and for how my father knew them: death ships in the forms of birds  
with no ports, no destinations, loose in the sky between their eggs  
and their bones with no direction. They were the sorrow we flew  
through and knew as the condition of being living. Scavengers,  
they were the bodies of our flesh nailed shut beneath a covering  
of feathers. They bore my father into his own darkness  
and when I was old enough to see the path traveled,  
I followed him down it, past their wings, straight into the black ground.

**Van Gogh's Crows**

My son has been pacing, wringing his fingers,  
flicking from news to weather channels,  
as a hurricane moves up the coast.  
His panic is palpable, lurks in the murky air  
pushed up from the tropics ahead of the storm.  
Nothing we can say can calm him, as he wears a groove in the rug.  
I think of Van Gogh, those wheat fields under the pulsing  
sun, the scornful voices of the crows, the writhing blue sky.  
Think how hard the simplest action must be  
when those voices won't leave you alone,  
when even the stars at night throb and gyrate.  
My son says his skin crawls, his back is always itchy.  
What would it be like to lift from this earth,  
rise above a seas of molten gold, scratch  
you name on the blue air, "caw caw caw",  
be nothing more than a black pulse beating?

*Kris Underwood*

**All the birds say *Caw-caw***

All the birds say  
*Caw-caw* these days,  
So my daughter thinks:

All the sea gulls cranking  
Out their calls,  
All the ones that twitter  
And sing in the trees,  
And-all the crows that circle  
The church tower at dusk.

Blurred, black shadows—  
Slick, like oil—  
Gathered in numbers:  
What a murder they can be!

My daughter—  
She calls out to them  
In understanding

Just as her mother before has  
And her mother before  
And before.

**Crow's Year**

After all the hungry weeks of rain,  
the wind ripped nights of winter,  
after the delirious spring.  
when Crow, enamored with its light,  
dreamed of bringing Moon to Earth,  
after the broken shells and fledging of summer,  
whole delicious days of sun,  
when Crow flew to the edge of the world  
and nearly drowned playing chicken with the surf,  
after gorging on apples and worms in fall,  
the sky closing with early darkness and rain,  
after the feathers, lost in escapes  
from cats and owls, have grown back,  
after the crowing of gossip each evening  
had been forgotten in the rustle of sleep  
and then recalled at dawn,  
Crow has circled back, flying now,  
so tired, so tired,  
into steady snow, the light all but gone,  
able only to strain out one flap more,  
glide to a branch, fold wings, close lids,  
and find, at last, the rest.

Now cold crawls down each feather shaft,  
sneaks into the hollow bones.  
The snow seems stopped in the windless air,  
the ear hears nothing,  
the heart pauses, waits between beats.

Deep in a lung, where the in-breath's held,  
where air exchanges gifts with blood,  
a sound will be born on the next exhale.  
If voiced, what shape will it take in the throat,  
the mouth, before the beak parts  
and it passes through?  
Will it be a soft ululation that lulls back sleep?  
a glottal caw that cracks the night open?  
a rising murmur, arousing wings  
to lift and stir the air?  
Or will be unvoiced?  
Whispering, *Crow*  
*when the next flake falls,*  
*fly, fly, fly.*

# **REGULAR MISCELLANY**

## *Ron Singer*

### **Fly, Firefly!**

Insect inside:  
deer fly died  
fear fly fried.

Firefly, fire,  
flare, firefly,  
fair fly, fire.

Flee, firefly,  
fair fly, higher,  
drear fleet fear.

Flee, fly, dear,  
flee, fly, flow from  
dire fly fighter.

Fie, fly frighter!

*Nathan B. Smith*

*a practice test cage, exp. eight*

a great loss to have  
the evenly spaced rows of thin trees  
line the avenue.

smile wrinkles she prunes  
purple questions with a butter knife  
wild, wild strawberries,

bambi & hiroshima.  
no control except being victim,  
she held our hands through it all—

a carnivore  
mobile in the playroom sky unfolds  
and flexes back

for the better light;  
the garden gone to rain, bushes rose  
and fell, he cut down

one the bath,  
two the kitchen, & the fair-haired rest  
of sleeping heads.

a voice, through rooms  
heard as falling feathers departing  
gravity's charms,

spectral hollow advent,  
jasmine nightingale leaks vibrant strains.  
christmas swift angel one

of a series,  
cycling around the chimney, come  
home to roost.

*Frances Ruhlen McConnel*

**Semaphore**

March noon, swimming south  
in the college pool,  
the shadow of the flag-line  
passes over me;

three strokes more and then  
the flags themselves.

**how to move**

I want to do it quickly. All the boxes and furniture queued up by the door. I fantasize about the road like a lover that wants me on her fast and long and winding. How country will part eagerly for my coming. Green hills of corn and soybean quivering in anticipation of the engine's vibration. But that's still two weeks away. Cats play jack-in-the-box. The husband relinquishes all excitement to me. There's much to do here, he believes. I want to fling off the land, the house. I want it to be yesterday and by then I can mourn it properly, swirl it in my mind to see how it was to me now. But I've got to get gone first. Follow those tire tracks arrowing me away.

**Listening to Rain Fall and Thinking of Friends**

*after Thom Tammaro*

Rain soaks the Pacific Northwest. Petrichor rises, reminds me of friends. The wet streets leave no trace of others' steps as I tote letters to the post office on gray afternoons. In Fargo, snow has already fallen. I remember footprints burrowed in the spinster snow of morning, and how the prints I kicked through, I might have known.

Crows fly north come dusk, and I miss gaggles of Canadian geese honking south at dawn. In this new western town, the nights still rock with train cars screeching over tracks several blocks away. Only now sugar beets are replaced by thundering loads of lumber, whose sweet, damp scent nearly sickens me through open windows.

I discover poems stashed in books, on postcards, in old email folders—poems from friends sixteen hundred miles away. Reading their words, the staunch drizzle on the roof fades. And I know friends are using my name, keeping warm inside bars and houses where sediment of my old life stashed and stored for moments like these.

## *Heather Dubrow*

### **A Flurry**

Huge flakes  
Lurch together  
Like tipsy companions:  
Buddies out for a big night on  
The town.

Snowflakes  
Tease the puppy  
—”Come home! You'll get all wet”—  
Stretching its tongue out to catch them,  
Puzzled.

“Snow is  
Such a nuisance.”  
*Grownups smell bad—all that  
Perfume—ask silly things (“How’s school?”)  
Hate snow.*

Snowflakes  
Punctuate the  
Brightly lit up billboards:  
Illuminated manuscripts  
Of ads.

Snow is  
Sprinkled on trees,  
Just as lacquer craftsmen  
In Japan curl gold flakes on their  
Landscapes.

*Sandy Lindow*

**The Secret of Happiness**  
**Or Five Things That Can't Be Changed**  
*Utamaro's "Snow Scene," ca. 1786-89*

*I.* Everything changes, ends.

snowflakes sift gray  
flannel sky the bush warbler flees  
crystal cherry boughs

Old winter, new year, no luck perching here

2. Life isn't always fair.

after the arrangement,  
barefoot through snow, the body guard  
carries sandaled official

Broad backs turn a wheelless world

3. Love and loyalty are transitory.

watching from balcony,  
geisha wraps hands in sleeves  
wonders why she's weary

Great labor for glamour wants much, gains little

4. Little goes according to plan.

heavy with no luck  
merchant brings bamboo from Ebisu\*  
hope falters in snow

What good is rushing, snow falls just the same?

---

\*Toka Ebisu, the 10th Day Festival of Ebisu, one of the seven gods of good luck. People, especially merchants, go to the Ebisu shrine to take home bamboo branches hung with paper replicas of coins or other valuable objects as good luck charms.

5. Pain is part of life.

cold hand to bare head  
merchant eases warebox weight  
hunched shoulders aching

Wind has no body, knows no comfort or pain

6. The Secret of Happiness.

stray dogs on the street  
wild birds on rooftops nestle close  
need no lucky tokens

running with food and wine  
warmed by straw cloak and good hat  
small maidservant smiles

Good luck flowers, surprising the winter day.

*Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz*

**Leap**

Helen sat at the kitchen table, cigarette trembling between her lips, ignoring the faces around her but watching the mama cat, nipples distended, as she sprung onto the counter and wishing that she, too, could leap out of reach from crying, hungry children.

**Brewing Peach Tea**

First get a cat. Tabbies are best.  
Avoid the bony ones. You want  
something you can hold onto.  
It should be January. The sky  
deceptively bright, the wind  
promising you won't have to  
brave the outdoors again today.  
Put the pot to boil and wait  
for the whistle. The cat will be  
sucking the dust from her fur.  
She won't notice you unless  
you force the issue and then  
make an accusation deep  
from the gullet. Watch the  
lone bird feeder swaying,  
what's left of the garden.  
Steep the tea three minutes  
and add honey and milk.  
Resume your spot on the couch.  
Drink deeply, even if you burn  
your tongue. Think of humidity  
and flies, of peaches heavy and  
warm. Imagine yourself, the juices  
sliding down your face and neck,  
the way it dries on your fingers  
and know you've almost done  
something scandalous  
as you empty your mug.

**Young Girls**

There are low places a young girl  
stumbles upon, the first man  
to touch her knows this but keeps  
touching her despite himself  
and his wife next door who's life  
is but a hoax committed to air  
and a young girl will give more  
than she understands what she is  
giving to some pervert neighbor  
who bores into her as if he's  
hammering a nail into brick,  
she pulls away from the man  
as his dick hurts her now,  
she is coming to her senses  
and somehow he senses this  
and drives into her harder and says  
*you want this, you want this,*  
as the young girl succumbs for a moment  
if nothing else this is what she is told,  
*you have always wanted this*  
old men tell the truth and she is  
thinking about the flowered dress  
*this will be over soon*  
she may wear tomorrow, the one  
her mother made by hand  
*you are so beautiful*  
white daises around the hem, her mother  
telling her as she walks past  
*you are so beautiful.*

*Aline Soules*

**In a Woman's Life**

*In response to Yehuda Amichai*

In a woman's life  
the first temple is the source and the second temple  
gives it birth  
and she must revel in her life  
not like the people who spurn it  
in hate  
and not like God  
who gave her the source and left her with it.

In a woman's life  
she buries the dead in the light of day  
and in the dream of night she creates new life.

**Secret Origin**

Where did I come from, I ask my mother.  
I'm age six. She's in the kitchen, baking  
cookies. Why don't you ask your father,  
she says. You mean you don't know, I say. I  
know, she says, but I'm baking cookies, and  
that takes all my concentration. What's that,  
I ask. It means, she says, if you want cookies,  
then don't bother me—they might come out beets.

Anything but beets, so I find Father,  
under the live-oak tree in the front yard,  
behind his newspaper. Hi, there, I say.  
Hi yourself, Sport, he says, without moving  
the page. The page moves but I can tell it's  
the wind. Father, where did I come from? Now  
the page moves but his is the power. Why,  
from the hospital, of course, he says. Oh,

I say. They made me at the hospital?  
Yes, he says. You could say that. Yes, that's right  
—they made you at the hospital. From what,  
I say. From what, he echoes. Let me read  
my paper, Sport, he says. Okay, I say.  
But how did they make me? It's a secret,  
he says. Your mother and I promised not  
to tell. In fact, we've forgotten. Now he

lets the paper fall. He removes his glasses  
and pinches the top part of his nose, where  
the glasses rest. Why do you ask, he says,  
putting his glasses back on. I dunno,  
I say. Is there something wrong with asking?  
No, he says. But it was unexpected.  
Un-ex-pec-ted, I repeat. What's that mean?  
It means you surprised me, he says. Did I

scare you, I ask. I feel my eyes go round.  
No, he says. Well—yes. Yes, sort of. Yes, you  
could say you scared me. I start to cry. I  
run away, to the kitchen, to Mother.  
Why are you crying, she asks. I scared him,  
I whimper. I scared Father. Scared him how,

she asks. I asked him where I came from and he said from the hospital and I asked,

well, how did they make me there and he said that you two couldn't tell the secret and then he said he forgot how anyway. I want a cookie. I'm wiping my eyes. He said that he forgot, she says. Forgot? Uh huh, I say. Can I have a cookie. Well, he damned sure didn't forget last night, she says. No, sir. But it is a secret,

she says, and you'll find out yourself one day when you want children. Whether you want them or not. She sighs. Who wouldn't want children, I say. Nevermind, she says. Would you like a cookie. Okay, I say. Chocolate chip, so new that it bends without breaking, like cooked spaghetti. Are there more secrets, I ask. Ask your father, she says—he knows

everything. I go to him again. Mother says you know everything. I know enough not to talk with my mouth full, he says. Oh, I say. I forgot. So it's a secret, right? Right, he says. That's the way life is. Oh, I say—tell me about the hospital—please? Not much to tell, he says. We wanted a baby so we went to get you. Picked

you out from among all the others and took you home and there you are. Take me back, I say. I wanna go home. I wanna go home. I'm crying again. Go get you another cookie, he says. You can't go back just because you want to. Unless you kill yourself, of course. But not even then—not exactly. Oh, I say. I get it.

## Traci Brimhall

### Conception

I was planned. My mother and father began marking days on the calendar and checking my mom's basal temperature.

Dad came home early from work with the knot in his tie loosened and two buttons undone, reaching for his zipper

as he dropped his briefcase. Mom would be naked, waiting, angled on the bed at the recommended thirty degrees.

I wonder if she cried out *Hallelujah!* when my dad came, already aware that by tomorrow a pinprick of blastula

would hook around her fallopian curve and settle down for gestation. She probably ate Raisin Bran the next

morning and picked out baby names. Traci for a girl, Luke for a boy, put an *X* over the calendar square to mark

the occasion, and left with two weeks before she could check her underwear for proof of successful copulation.

But I wish I was conceived in uncontrollable passion, wall-shaking sex my mom would think about later and blush:

she and my dad stepping off a hiking path and throwing themselves up against a tree, their pants binding their ankles

and scraping the raised knobs of her spine as they scratched a layer of bark from the tree, itchin, like Baloo for the bare

necessities. I would have preferred my mom had screamed out *Oh fuck!* so loud she would have scared other hikers and trembled

from multiple orgasms as one half of me swam and sought out the other. She'd eat bananas at the campfire that night and pick

baby names like Bagheera and Mowgli for her wild, jungle child, then reach back and touch the bark burns dotting the peaks

of her vertebrae, giggle, and mark the calendar box with a big *O*.

**Security**

Homeland security can be grasped by assuming a defensive posture, dropping in unison and lying on our left sides, my legs bent under and against your legs, your right hand reaching around my right hip, my right arm wrapped around your ribs right and then left and comforting every soft smoothness, then the homeland will be secure for the present. The covers should be up to our necks, for warmth and privacy, and there should be enough light so that I can see the color of your hair just before my eyes. Once we are secure enough that way, we shift by an agreed upon signal, to avoid panic and maintain such well-being, encoded and decoded and transmitted through our central nervous systems, onto our right sides and repeat. As we feel the security alert change, we turn again so I am on my back and you are above me and we whisper the night's secrets, keeping lips to ears, or breathing in Morse code. If we fear surveillance, we slide undercover. Whenever we are out, thanks to these pamphlets, we can search each other sub rosa, quietly pat each other down, infiltrate, assess and deploy. We surge against insurgency, check every thread and layer, every button, every zipper, every earring, every fold, every hidden place, safer and calmer, better and better.

**Mabel's Bed**

Her fierce possession kept us long at bay,  
then brought us here to carry things away  
without her stories. Gently sorting letters,  
receipts and budgets, wishes, lists of debtors,  
the boxes deep with postcards sent to Mabel  
from sister Cinderella. At the table  
we spoke in truths. The generations now  
behind us left their faces, told us how  
they taught their children, went to war, and wed.  
The recipes and paintings, desk and bed,  
and when I put my hand in a high drawer  
I found my grandpa's teeth, stepped back in horror,  
he teased me often with those teeth. He'd have loved  
to make me laugh another time. A trove:  
McGuffey Readers full of math and rhyme,  
a chest with leather handles, Amy's clock,  
some gaudy vases, keys without a lock,  
a sailor suit. They all were piled outside.  
We bled our heirlooms, strangers touched them, tried  
to keep from looking at us. Mother cried  
and snuck things back into the house. Next year  
Grandmother died, her nursing fees were cleared.  
A sorrow settled on us soft as snow,  
as cold, although from there we did not know  
that everything we sold could have been kept,  
the wooden bed of dreams where Mabel slept.

## Jennifer Evelyn Wright

### What They Found

Two blankets, army-issue, and one set of sheets.  
Three pots, two forks, knife, one plate, bowl,  
and cup, no spoon. Cream of Wheat. They gave

all this to the Salvation Army. Four green towels,  
bars of soap, a toothbrush and a comb. The bathroom  
mirror cracked. Newspaper articles about race

relations, words like riot highlighted, some from  
1965. They split these things among themselves.  
A list in pencil on the small refrigerator of their

names—Daughter 1, Karen, back problems;  
Daughter 2, Karel, married twice; Daughter 3,  
Kris, lesbian. *One Hundred and One Famous*

*Poems, The Art and Craft of the Novel.* Yeats,  
Whitman, The Declaration of Independence all  
marked. Chapter 15, “The Maguffin,” ripped out.

These they gave to me. Bank statements from  
fifteen different banks. More than a million  
dollars.

One toaster oven in its box, an old radio in pieces,

a black and white TV. The entire 39 volume set  
of TimeLife Books’ World War Two Series, pages  
with Battle of the Bulge and Pearl Harbor cornered.

A soldier’s face circled in snow. Donated to my  
brother’s history library. A miniature stapler and four  
black felt-tip pens. Modern Grammar, notebook

paper sticking out: all the exercises worked  
and worked again. Three short-sleeve brown  
shirts and two pairs of pants, socks folded

together, darkening from light brown to black,  
a trench coat. A French dictionary. One pair  
of black shoes and still in its plastic, a 5x7 frame,

three blond haired girls and a slick father,  
a flower in each hand, trees, wide red smiles.

## *Joseph Leff*

### **The Flowers**

At the end of the heat  
The flowers lag behind  
In the marching. Cut, golden, sorry  
About the whole matter they  
Lay still enough to be redeemed.

## *Benjamin Buchholz*

### **Box Elder**

Pliable wood pinnately compound  
build it that way for me, the box,  
for I will pinnate, star, spreadeagle  
somewhat lobed and coarsely serrate  
in drooping racemes, yellow green  
appearing in spring, persisting  
paired with you, ripe in summer,  
sprouts on the bole paler below,  
paler, pushing through wet snow  
persisting in the tabernacle eve  
and into the first handful of earth

**a certain kind of breath**

A wheel without a center  
rolls into the water.

There's a certain kind of breath:  
a slow exhalation of everything.

Snow in the field, whiskery with grasses.  
A sky of grey stains. A passing plane.

So many times I speak,  
and your answer is absence.

I believe in a nonexistent God.  
I hold some pebbles in my hand.

**Phish Tangled in the Internet**

Come, catch them with a bright CD—  
use songs, or pics, or a MySpace blog.  
The world is digital as far as they can see,  
until they learn the soul is analog.

## Contributors

**Gale Acuff** has had poetry published in many journals, including *Ascent*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Ohio Journal*, *South Carolina Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Santa Barbara Review*, *Grasslands Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Slipstream*, *Pleiades*, *G. W. Review*, *Worcester Review*, and others; and has authored two books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), and *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006). He has taught in many English departments in American universities, and in the People's Republic of China and the Palestinian West Bank.

**Marie Ashley-France** has recently appeared in *Big Toe Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *Wild Violet Magazine* and *The Appalachian Review*. She received an MFA from The University of Michigan in 1991 and is currently raising two small children in southern Ohio.

**Traci Brimhall** was born in the Midwest but raised mostly in the Southeast. She currently resides in New York City where she works odd jobs to pay the rent and buy poetry books. This fall she began her MFA Poetry program at Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *a-postrophe*, *Kaleidowhirl*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Relief Journal*, *Umbrella*, and *Wicked Alice*.

**Ronda Broatch** is the author of *Some Other Eden*, (Finishing Line Press, 2005). Her work has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in *American Poetry Journal*, *Blackbird*, *Poetry Southeast*, previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*, and *Rhino*. Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Broatch is the recipient of the 2005 Kay Snow Poetry Award, and the 2006 WPA William Stafford Award.

**Benjamin Buchholz's** poetry and short fiction have appeared widely in the last several years at places like *Tarpaulin Sky*, *GoodFoot*, *Identity Theory*, *Planet Magazine*, *MiPoesias*, and others. He just recently returned from a deployment to Iraq. Please see <http://www.benjaminbuchholz.com> for details.

Poetry and prose by **Brad Clompus** have appeared in such places as *The Journal*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Passages North*, *Natural Bridge*, *West Branch*, *Tampa Review*, *Sonora Review*, and *Willow Springs*. He also has a poetry chapbook, *Trailing It Home* (Main Street Rag Publishing Company).

**Barbara Crooker's** *Radiance* won the 2005 Word Press First Book award, and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize. Recent work appears *The Atlanta Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Dogwood*, *America*, *Poetry International*, *Cream City Review*, and *Nimrod*. She lives in rural Pennsylvania, where she feeds the crows all winter. "Van Gogh's Crows" originally appeared in *The Drunken Boat*, and subsequently appeared in *Windhover*.

**William Doreski's** poems have recently appeared in *Notre Dame Review*, *Harvard Review*, and *Arts Interpre*. His most recent book is *Sacra Via* (2006). He teaches writing and literature at Keene State College in New Hampshire.

**Thomas Dorsett**, the author of a book of original poems and two volumes of poetry in translation, still practices pediatrics in Maryland. By the way, his favorite word for "crow" occurs in Tamil: "kaaka," with the accent on the *kaa*.

**James Dott** lives on a wooded hillside (home of several crow's nests) in Astoria, Oregon. For his day job he teaches elementary school. His work has appeared in *Stringtown*, *Hubbub*, *Manzanita Review*, *Fireweed*, and *Pacific Fishing*. He has been an avid crow-watcher since childhood. "Crow's Year" was originally published in *Verse Weavers* and won second prize in the Poet's Choice category of the Oregon State Poetry Association Fall 2001 contest.

**Heather Dubrow**, John Bascom Professor and Tighe-Evans Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is the author of a play produced by a community theater and of two chapbooks, *Transformation and Repetition* (Main-Travelled Roads/Sandhills Press) and *Border Crossings* (Parallel Press). Her recent poetry has recently appeared in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Southern Review* and in the collection *Mairi MacInnes: A Tribute* (Shoestring Press). She has also published five scholarly books and numerous articles on Renaissance literature and on pedagogy.

**Robert Klein Engler** lives in Chicago and sometimes in New Orleans. Born on the southwest side of the city, Engler taught many years at Richard J. Daley College, until he was banned by the chancellor. After resolving a Chicago Commission on Human Relations complaint against the City Colleges, which he wrote about in his book *A Winter of Words*, Engler went on to become an adjunct professor at Roosevelt University. He holds degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana and the University of Chicago Divinity School. He has received two Illinois Arts Council awards for his poetry. Just google his name or go to his website <<http://www.RobertKleinEngler.com>> to find his writing on the Internet.

**Dennis Etzel, Jr.** graduated from Kansas State University with an MA in English and Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies. His work has been in *Rattle*, *Black Bear Review*, *Inscape*, and *The Argo*.

**Paul Alan Fahey** is a learning disabilities specialist at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, California. He is the editor of *Mindprints, A Literary Journal* <<http://www.imindprints.com>>, a forum for writers and artists with disabilities or those with an interest in the population. His work has recently appeared in *Byline*, *Kaleidoscope*, *The Storyteller*, *Harvest*, and *Cezanne's Carrot*. This year Fahey won a commendation for his short, "Close in Spirit," in the annual Skive Short Story Prize, sponsored by *Skive Magazine* in Australia.

**Robert Haynes'** poems have appeared in *Lake Effect*, *New Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, *Diner*, *Cimarron Review*, *First Intensity*, *Southeast Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Louisville Review*, and other journals, as well as featured on the *Verse Daily* website. A book-length poem, *The Grand Unified Theory*, was published in 2001. Currently, he lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, and teaches at Arizona State University.

**M.J. Iuppa** lives on a small farm near the shore of Lake Ontario. She has recent poems in *Tar River Poetry*, *miller's pond*, previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*, *Blueline*, *Iconoclast*, *The Modern Review* (Canada), *Coffee House* (UK), *Flint Hills Review*, *Canter Collected*, *HazMat Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Tar Wolf Review*, and *Pearl*; and has creative nonfiction in *Short Takes: Brief Encounters With Contemporary Nonfiction*, edited by Judith Kitchen (Norton 2005), as well as fiction forthcoming in *Quarter After Eight*. She has three chapbooks and a full-length collection, *Night Traveler* (Foothills Publishing, 2003), and is the Writer-in-Residence and Director of the Arts Minor program at St. John Fisher College.

**Andrew Jones** lives in Dubuque, Iowa, and works as an editor. He is a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at Minnesota State University–Moorhead. His work has previously appeared in journals such as *Red River Review*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Dispatch Literary Journal*, *Occam's Razor*, and *Red Weather*.

**William Keener** lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he works as an environmental lawyer. He is co-author of a chapbook, *Three Crows Yelling*, that won the 1999 National Looking Glass Award sponsored by Pudding House Publications, and his poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Runes*, and *The Savannah Literary Journal*, among other reviews. "If Not for the Crows" originally appeared in *Legal Studies Forum* 28.1-2, 2004.

**Susan Landon** holds a B.A. in French literature. Her poetry has appeared in literary magazines including *The Aurorean*, *Cellar Roots*, *Fairfield Review*, *Perigee*, and *Quercus Review*, as well as in anthologies such as *Freedom's Just Another Word* and *Mothers and Daughters*. She received Cambridge Poetry Awards in 2003 and 2004.

**Joseph Leff** received an MFA in fiction writing from Columbia University. Recently, he was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in poetry. He has published poetry, fiction, and non-fiction in places such as *Watchword*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Confrontation*, *The New York Times*, and *Snow Monkey*.

**Lyn Lifshin** has published more than 120 books of poetry, most recently *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was just published by Black Sparrow at David Godine in October. Also out in 2006 is her prize-winning book about the famous, short lived beautiful race horse, Ruffian: *The Licorice Daughter: My Year With Ruffian* from Texas Review Press. She has won awards for her nonfiction and edited four anthologies of women's writing including *Tangled Vines*, *Ariadne's Thread*, and *Lips Unsealed*. Her poems have appeared in

most literary and poetry magazines and she is the subject of an award winning documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made Of Glass*. For interviews, photographs, more bio material, reviews, interviews, prose, samples of work and more, her web site is <<http://www.lynlifshin.com>>. She is working on a new collection of selected poems.

**Sandra Lindow**, officially past her 57th birthday, takes the responsibilities of apprentice cronehood seriously. Last June she semi-retired after 25 years working as a reading/ writing specialist in a treatment center for emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. Presently she teaches Remedial English at University of Wisconsin-Stout and works on her writing. She has published five books of poetry and has won numerous awards including the CWW Posner Award for best poetry collection published by a Wisconsin writer and the WRW Jade Ring for poetry.

**Frances Ruhlen McConnell** has a new chapbook out from the Alaskan Press, Bucket of Type Printery: *white birches, black water*. She will have a full-length collection out in 2007, published by Seattle's Bellowing Ark Press.

**Michael Meyerhofer's** first book, *Leaving Iowa*, won the Liam Rector First Book Award. He is also the author of two chapbooks, *Cardboard Urn* and *The Right Madness of Beggars*. His work has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Fugue*, *North American Review*, *Margie*, and others.

**John Minczeski** lives in St. Paul where he teaches poetry in the schools as well as occasional adjunct work at area colleges. His most recent collection, *Circle Routes*, was published by Akron University Press in 2001. Other poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Poetry East*, *Marlboro Review*, *Rattalpallax*, *Quarterly West*, and others

**Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz** is a fiction writer and poet. In other incarnations, she is a comedienne, an actress and somebody's mom.

**JBMulligan** has had poems and stories in dozens of magazines, including recently, *Autumn Sky*, *Contemporary Rhyme*, *Animus*, *opossum holler tarot*, *Starry Night Review*, *Modern English Tanka* and *Cafe Oleh*. He has had two chapbooks: *The Stations of the Cross* and *This Way to the Egress*, and appeared in the anthology *Inside Out: A Gathering of Poets* <<http://www.geocities.com/annejohn2003/index.htm>>.

**Wilhelm Müller** would hardly be known today, except for a few poems that became folksongs, if it hadn't been for Franz Schubert setting his songs to music. "Die Krähe" is the text to Schubert's Liederkreis *Die Winterreise*.

**Leonard Orr** teaches literature at Washington State University. His work has appeared in many journals including *Black Warrior Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Fugue*, *Poetry International*, *Poetry East*, *Writing on The Edge*, *Pontoon*, *Rosebud*, and *Orbis*. His first poetry collection, *Daytime Moon*, was published in 2005 by FootHills Press.

**Helen Ruggieri** lives in Olean, New York, and has had work recently in *Poemeleon*, *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Haiku Harvest*, *Calyx*, and in previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*. A second volume of short creative nonfiction pieces about Japan (*The Character for Spirit*) will be out soon from [foothillspublishing.com](http://foothillspublishing.com).

**Jana Russ** holds BAs in English and History and an MA in Literature; she teaches writing, world literatures, and Chinese history and culture at The University of Akron. She is currently enrolled in the MFA program of Northeast Ohio Universities, a consortium of Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Youngstown State University, and The University of Akron. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Warrior Poets*, *Circle*, *Cat Fancy*, *The Akros Review*, *Riverwind*, *The Vindicator*, and *Penguin Review*.

**Karen Schubert** lives with her daughter in the house her great-grandfather built in northeast Ohio. She's a graduate student in the English department at Youngstown State University and recipient of YSU's Hare Award for poetry. Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *DMQ*, *Angle*, *Primavera*, *Versal*, *Vision-International*, YSU's *Penguin Review*, and others.

**Ron Singer** is a five-tool writer: librettos, stories, satire, poetry, and essays. His work has turned up in places ranging from *Borderlands: The Texas Poetry Review* to *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. An opera for which he is librettist, *Deeds*, was recorded in June by Intermezzo, in Boston, and his chapbook, *A Voice for My Grandmother*, was issued November 15th by Bardpress/Ten Penny Players Inc. Singer, a teacher, is married to a visual artist/teacher, and their daughter is a food writer.

**Nathan B. Smith** is a native Ohioan currently wintering in New Orleans. His work has been published in a variety of formats in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, including recent and upcoming installments of *Willard and Maple*, *The Science Creative Quarterly*, and *Poetic Hours*. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, is intermittently employed arbitrarily, and likes avocados.

**Ron Smith's** book of poems *Moon Road* is forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press. He is Writer-in-Residence at St. Christopher's School in Richmond, Virginia, and also teaches creative writing at the University of Richmond. In 2005 he was an inaugural winner of the \$10,000 Carole Weinstein Prize in Poetry. "Katie on Her Education" was first published in *Southern Humanites Review* and subsequently appeared in the book *Running Again in Hollywood Cemetery* (University Presses of Florida, © 1988 by Ron Smith).

**Aline Soules'** work has appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *100 Words*, *Variations on the Ordinary*, *Literature of the Expanding Frontier*, and *The Size of the World/The Shape of the Heart*. Prose poems from her manuscript *Meditation on Woman* have appeared in *Tattoo Highway*, *edifice Wrecked*, previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*, *Kaleidowhirl*, *Long Story Short*, *Binnacle*, and the *Kenyon Review*.

**Kris Underwood's** work can be found on *The Whole Mom*, *MotherVerse*, and *Mom Writer's Literary Magazine*, among others.

**Mark Wagenaar** moved from Canada to Iowa for a soccer scholarship and somehow ended up with a college degree. After two years of professional soccer in Canada, he found himself in Cedar Falls, Iowa, as an editorial assistant at the *North American Review*.

**Sasha West's** poems have appeared in *American Letters & Commentary*, *Third Coast*, *Faultline*, and elsewhere. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Houston and serves as poetry curator for Brazos Bookstore.

**Laura Madeline Wiseman** is working on her dissertation in creative writing at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Her works have appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Tar Wolf Review*, and elsewhere. She is an *e4w.org* editor and a *Prairie Schooner* reader.

**Jennifer Evelyn Wright** holds both a BA and MA in English and was an Assistant Editor at *Poems & Plays* from 2002-2003. She also attended the Squaw Valley Community of Writers Annual Poetry Workshop, working with Galway Kinnell, Robert Hass, Marie Howe, and Lucille Clifton, and used to be a used bookstore bookseller.

**Jianqing Zheng's** haiku sequences have appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Hurricane Review*, *Poetry East*, previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*, and *The Kerf*.

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