



River City Poetry
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Spring 2019

Edited by April Pameticky
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It's a beautiful spring in Kansas this year, storms and noise, so much wind and moisture. I put my coat away for the season, only to pull it back out in late April. I put the tomatoes in the ground last weekend and am hoping I didn't plant them just a little too early.

Poetry is a little like that. You plant a seed, watch it sprout, think the work is ready... only to realize that maybe the poem isn't ripe yet. Perhaps some pruning should occur.

River City Poetry made the decision this issue to expand. With so many quality submissions coming in from the region, and frankly the world, we want to expand our offerings. Which is why we're also now offering the digital download in different file formats so that our readers can access our poetry in the ways they prefer.

We continue to offer unique opportunities within our Wichita community to share poetry. We'd like to especially thank our readers, YOU, for continuing to support us and *Poetry Worth Sharing*.

April Pameticky

Gale Acuff
3 Poems

Cold One

Father shows me how to shake salt on slugs
so that they'll die. More than die--I kill them.
But they're bad for the garden and sure don't
belong on the back-porch steps. They're icky.
Not too much salt, Father says. A bit
is all it takes. He's right--Father's always
right--but when he turns his back as he goes
into the house for another cold one
I pour it on until the slugs wear coats
of salt and drown in their own pain, if they
feel pain. I'll bet they do. I heard one scream
in agony one time, or thought I did
--it was Father's shoe on the linoleum
on the porch. He caught me. What I learned is that

it's alright to kill, just don't get cruel.
That means that killing isn't bad if you
don't rub it in or get carried away
or really enjoy it. Now, son, he said,
crushing his beer can in his strong right hand,
They don't really need to suffer. Don't hurt
them beyond justice, or retribution.
Then he belched. Ret-ri-bu-shun--oh, yes sir,
I said. I sure won't do what you said there.
Good boy, he said, patting my head. I hate

when he does that but he's always friendly
after a couple of brews. I can't wait
until I can drink one: I've tasted it
and it's pretty awful and Father laughed
and said, It's an acquired taste, whatever
that means, and he should know, he saves the cans

and we recycle them and he gets cash
and buys some more and I get some candy
or a comic book. I'm only ten but
I don't want to turn legal age and not
be able to drink a beer without making
faces. That wouldn't be right. That would be

like sprinkling too much salt on a poor slug,
maybe--but they're not so poor and deserve

to die. But not with too much suffering,
just the right amount. When I can explain
exactly what that is, I'll be a man

and I'll pass it on to my own son, or
daughter, if it comes to that, and they'll know
what life's about, and Church would be good, too.

Lesson

I can't write my name but I'm not stupid
--I can say it, to myself, and others,
and answer to it, and to only one
half of it, when someone calls it out. Who
really needs to learn to write to know what's
what? I've just started first grade and I'm sick
of it already. I'm going to ask
Mother and Father if I have to go
back tomorrow. Today it was something
called *letters*. You put them together and
you have a *word*. You put words together
and they make a *sentence*. *The ball is blue*.
But it's not--at least not mine. My ball is
brown. I have two balls--my basketball and
a baseball. It's white. Show me a blue ball
that isn't for jacks or isn't some girl's.

Let's all write Gale Acuff's name, Teacher says.
I guess that's me she's chalking on the board.
It's my name--let the others write their own.
Mine. Why is everyone copying it?
I use four letters to spell my first name
and five for the second, though one comes twice,
at the end. Teacher finally came around
to me, showed me how to hold my pencil,
then pointed at the blackboard at my name.

It's not polite to point, like Mother says.
Teacher didn't like that and sent me out
into the hall. I was scared but happy
to be out of here. A minute later
she came out and closed the door and said, *Gale*,
you're going to the Principal's office
if you use that tone with me again.
Yes, ma'am, I said. What the hell does *tone* mean?

Now I'm sitting in the office, waiting
for Mr. Hill to come through that door and
kill me, maybe. Who knows? It's my first time.
I hope it will be my last, so I won't
be dead. And while I'm here my name's still on
the board, missing me and I sure miss it.
The other kids are learning who they are
in letters and I'm falling behind them.
But I figure if I lag far enough

and hold my ground on learning anything
then somehow I'll be smarter, or special,
or different, or happier, or both
--I mean, all. So who's the ignoramus?

Not *me*. Mr. Hill comes out. He's smiling.
That's not good--I wonder what he's selling.
All I've got is milk money. Lunch money,
too. In my right jeans pocket. I'll keep my
hand in there so he can't slip his in and
pick me. *Hello, Son*, he says. Hi, I say.
Are you having some trouble this morning?
No, sir, I say-- I just made Teacher mad.
She pointed at my name up on the board
and we don't do that where we come from. *Oh*,
he says. Where is that? Deepest darkest Hell,
I say. Boy, does he frown. *Do you use such
language at home*, he asks. Christ, no, I say
--do *you*? He gets up and makes a phone call.
This would be funny but I'm six years old.
Your father's coming to get you, he says.
Good, I say. I've learned enough for one day
--we'll see what you've got for me tomorrow.

Father spans me in the car. *What's your name*,
he asks. Gale Acuff, Junior, I say. *Yes*,
he says--*you answer to more than yourself*.
I don't know what that means but I get it.
They were taking my name in vain, I say.
I'll show you in vain, he says. The truth hurts.

A Comic Vision

On Friday evenings we go out to eat,
Father, Mother, and I, to the Red House
Cafeteria. I choose what I want
as we move through the line. What Father likes
I usually like--prime rib, if they
have it that evening, and boiled potatoes,
and a salad, but no dessert; slices
of pear on cottage cheese on lettuce tastes
better than it sounds. And I like iced tea
because it will keep me awake all night.
I have some serious reading to do:

comic books. After dinner, they give me
my allowance. It's 1966,
so a quarter goes far, and Vietnam
and LBJ and Tricky Dick haven't
destroyed the country yet. Two bits gets me
two comic books at twelve cents each, plus a
penny for Georgia state tax, just four cents
on the dollar. I ask to be excused
and they say yes. I'll meet them in one hour
at the fountain in front of the Rich's
department store. Father will be sitting
on the concrete bench there, smoking Camels
and surveying the parking lot as if
the cars are stars in the asphalt's dark and
the people coming in are meteors
and the ones leaving are rocket ships. At

the Rex-All Drug Store next to the Red House
they arrange the comics like magazines,
and I mean on the wooden racks and not
in the kind you spin around. They respect
what they sell, or I like to think so. I
look forward to coming here--I love my
four-color heroes even more than I
love a visit from my cousins over
in Alabama twice a year, and now
that I'm ten and know there is no Santa
but what your parents make him to be and
what I will make him for my own children

I come to the comics like I'm in love
and I haven't seen her for a whole week.
Tonight, Justice League of America

--I get several heroes for the money
--and The Flash. Boy, that guy can flat-out run

circles around any of his arch-foes
and they're all good bad-guys--Mirror Master,
Captain Cold, Heat Wave, Captain Boomerang,
Pied Piper, Trickster, Reverse-Flash (also
known as Professor Zoom), and my favorite,
Super-Gorilla Grodd. Barry Allen

stows his uniform inside a ring on
his index finger. When he touches it
his uniform pops out and expands on
contact with the air. I never learned how
he stuffs it back in. I don't really care.
But he's the fastest man alive so there
must be a logical explanation.

I meet Father at the fountain. Mother
joins us and we sit in front of water
that leaps and leaps but never escapes. Where
does it all come from? Where does it all go?
The fountain never fills with water. It's
like the cup that's full but never empties.
Where did I read about that? The Bible?
The Brothers Grimm? An Aquaman comic?
We track down the car--it's an almost new
'65 Chevy Nova, not the best
of the line but Father's a principal
so he has to show the community
that he's reasonably conservative.
He likes to drink beer. But only at home.
Whenever we go out he wears a tie.
People he knows never see him smoking.
He obeys all the rules of traffic and
never runs a Stop light and always yields
and never gets a speeding ticket. He's

probably more super than Superman
but a lot less exciting, and Mother's
no Lois Lane but she's just as pretty
or used to be. I've seen the photographs.
By the time we get home it's dark enough
to yawn. I go to my attic bedroom
--twelve steps to my Fortress of Solitude
--and start reading about the Justice League

and their battle against the Shaggy-Man.

He's got long hair, like most teenagers now,
and he's big and tough, like football players
or pro wrestlers or guys who build houses

or work on road-crews. And mean, like monsters
or Nazi prison guards in the movies.
Tomorrow's Saturday, so I can sleep
late. I stop halfway through the story so
I'll be sure to have something I can dream

about. I'll finish it tomorrow--then
I'll start The Flash and finish him Sunday,
maybe before church to keep me awake
while Reverend Brown tells us some more
about who God is, and what He wants, and
what He's going to do if He
doesn't get it. First He gave us Eden,
which we got thrown out of, at least Adam

and Eve did. Then He gave us Jesus but
we killed Him, or the Romans did and so
did we, somehow. But that's okay because
if Jesus hadn't died we'd all be darned.
I don't know how what's bad can be good, too
--that's not how it works in the Justice League

--but when I'm older maybe I'll get it.
I make good grades in school, and always do
my homework, and keep my shirttail tucked in.
I'm the principal's son--I have to be
a role model, and make a good impression
and be a hero, come to think of it.
After all, the world is full of evil

and I hope to meet with my share one day
so I've got to get ready for it now.
I don't want to die but I'll give my life
if I have to. I have to anyway
but I mean not faster than I have to
but anything can happen so I hope
that if I die young I'll live forever
and if I should live to be a hundred
I'll never die at all. And that's justice.

Robert L. Dean, Jr.
3 Poems

Pulp

You could
draw and quarter it,
chuck it in the blender,
but what you really want,
with this autumn night
peering wide-eyed in your boudoir window,
is your fingernails clawing
the rind, the pebbly skin peeling back
into the cup of your palm, and only then
do you section it, careful like a surgeon entering
a body, suck the tit of each segment, the blood
of the mandarin trickling down your chin like
orgasm, the pulp sweet on your tongue, heaven dripping

onto the open book in your lap, Li Po's Jade Stairs Lament
tearing up right where Night, late, has its way with her
silken hose, but you resist dropping your many-faceted curtain,
reach instead for another fruit, another life, another moon,
tome of the fruit of life, the most ancient Shijing, and when you bite into
the first ode—the one where the prince seeks but doesn't find
the modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady—a November breeze
whispers down from Cold Mountain
of temple bells rung, drums beat, stone chimes struck, and you reach back
yet another life, you are Cai Lun discovering the distillation
of paper out of mulberry bark, the stuff upon which
the fall of your very first crystal curtain will be written, how, after you
cause the deaths of Consort Song and her sister by their own hands,
you bathe, don your finest silk robe, and swallow
the poison of your own making rather than surrender
to the Emperor's blind-eyed, dark moon prison, the stuff, surely,

of a Spicy Detective, Startling Stories, Weird Tales, Black Mask.
You suckle another slice and turn the page.

True Tales of the Supernatural

You don't pass through the cold spot, it passes through you. You look at the gauges: nothing. Check the video monitor: more nothing. Something

abnormally paranormal about this investigation. You reconnoiter your surroundings. You don't recognize this house, you've never

been here before, yet there's that old baby crib you've seen pictures of with you wrapped in diapers, the ladder of pencil marks on the door

jamb where your dad recorded your passage to manhood, much to you mother's chagrin, and that—no, it can't be. Margie Cranston's

bra! Only that was at the drive-in, one of those Son of Flubber or Nutty Professor movies, or at least that's what you told them when the folks

granted you the keys on that first full moon after the last ladder mark, though what you really saw was a quick flash of Mrs. Robinson's tits, and you timed your maneuver accordingly

since you'd seen the flick three times already at the Orpheum—there's a parking lot there now—and what's that God-awful moaning coming from down the hall or whatever it is

you're standing in, some doorway to hell maybe, you float down to see, look in the open door and it's You and the first Mrs. You, wrestling away in that crummy

bed in your first cheap apartment and yes, that was some kind of hell alright, but Orpheus-like you escaped and of course you wouldn't have Becky if it wasn't for

that night of fingernails dug in, ash tray shards
on the hardwood, that night of backs to each
other afterwards, those years of nights and days
of hot words, cold shoulders, a shudder runs down

your spine, cobwebs kiss your face, you reach out
towards that light way down there, white, warm,
pulsing, like the strobe at the disco where you met
the second Mrs. You, reach out, grasping: nothing.

You remember now. Last week, the booze, the fight.
Yesterday— You check the gauges: nothing. The monitor:
nothing. At the end of the hall, a bathroom, a mirror—
you remember because it was the last thing you

saw in that dingy motel after the breakup, the razor
slicing across your throat. Now you have your bearings.
You know where you are. You are home. That nothing,
it's all that's left of the ladder of you. And you hope, as you

enter the light, that
Becky understands.

Last Supper

You need not have stolen
this heart was yours
always
for the asking
wind sun moon rain
would you thief these also
even the fox dare not
the stars are safe
from the unkindness of ravens

one tear shed
in spring
lady-in-a-bath
valentine wine
dripping
unbidden
from the hem of her
crimson petaled kimono
cupped hands
all you need
to taste
the salt of it
she does not look to see
who
accepts the offering
ask
what need you have of it
what care
you will take of it

would you think
me not so generous as
the lilies of the field

O ye of little faith

take, eat
do this in remembrance of me

Luke Taylor Gilstrap
1 Poem

At the Farmer's Market

I bought a bouquet of Irish poets.
Their bent sienna blossoms shaded
the news that wrapped them. Deadly

Bombing in Kabul. Her sweaty palm.
Her other almost touched my own
when I gave her some change. I had

reached farther down the stems,
where legs were, and an arm—when
life has become a game of chance,

a routine: sweeping broken glass
and calling others—split all the way
down, like a tectonic fault,

still bleeding. Like so many things,
I didn't deliver these flowers.
I didn't come through. I couldn't

keep their heads from sinking in
time for you to meet them. The news,
now, is all that's left to hold. But can

I tell you how bright they were,
how fragile, how perfectly timed?
Would you believe me?

That faded, thin, incapable shell,
could never, not long, not always, hold
a flower so windswept and free.

Grace Marie Grafton
3 Poems

Something borrowed

I want to sell the moon some player joy,
I want to help her complete the body of
night and her lacy underpanties, not for
the hoi polloi to view her sweep away
petals of a thousand dahlias whose sudden
name change tips space into a tizzy.

The entire demand in the pupil of the snap
pea's eye is calculated to create later trust
in space's slope, the new moon's
knuckle music, the built instant – as in
the weightless vector which guarantees
sleep-solitude to earth's thousand mountains.

I love the small blooming of the moon,
I love white dahlias' sacrifice.
Glances spill into the path of moon's
erasure of color, how it helps
the chatter and rattle go mute,
helps me build instant's eye.

Other pleasures

Plump up the bolster on the back of
the chaise, the wrens are returning
to leave messages among the twigs.
If we lie here long enough, they'll
volunteer all the news about their trip,
even though their talk is indecipherable.
So much is repeated and yet it's worth
changing the pillow case and brushing our
teeth. Please hand over the melon bowl
while I offer you a sip of mint tea.
Enamel toenail polish, the reclusive
ginger-plant blossom proffering
its bull's eye intensity once we lift
the heart-shaped leaves off its
hysterically elongated petals.
Mysteries that salve our days.
Our trip to the coast where the chaos
of being alive is strewn grinningly
along the high water mark.

Intimacy

He hands me a glacier.
I say, 'Do gloves come with this?'
I want to give it back, except for
the turquoise lakes - or are they pieces
of frozen color? The glacier
seems too big for me to manage.
I wonder how he got it this far
on his own. Was it on his own?
One never knows another's secrets.
Not, at any rate, all of them.
Marvelously intact, it doesn't drip.
Not yet. I think, 'Is this a subtle
invitation to travel with him to Iceland
or the Arctic?' Someplace cold enough
we'd feel the need to stick close together
for warmth if nothing more.
Would there be inns with cozy rooms,
comforters, hot tea and a large
picture window from which to view
in leisure the growth of the blue/
white glacier we'd been allowed
to park on the nearest mountain, wave to
through the thick glass, think of
as the perfect, unobtrusive pet?
'Thank you, I say. 'Thanks.'

Kelly Johnston
3 Poems

Holding on to Hope of Spring

Thear the north winds
blowing icy messages from
high country. Oaks cling to last
year's leaves. Redbuds
have not purpled. Bluets
have not yet peeked.

Static electricity erupts from my blankets as I reach
for a split of firewood. The winter wood
pile is almost gone. My trailer door
rattles in unison with skeletons of
burnt cedars resisting the wind. Turkey
vultures have returned to resume the
wait. Pulling my boots over worn woolen
socks is a chore. This floor is a glacier.

I weary of reusing old coffee grounds. If my truck
will start, I must journey south for
provisions. Maybe I will find fescue
greening in short grass beside the
road, or henbit taking over winter
wheat. Even a golden dandelion
emerging from the dust, like the sun
from the horizon, would be a sign.

Blackbirds

S

The prairie fire makes
skeletons

of a grove of red cedar trees,
reduces

to ash tallgrass and wildflowers,
reveals

forgotten strands of barbed
wire

on the ground like surgical
sutures.

My chainsaw makes short work of
bones.

Splinters and shards scrape
and gouge

my flesh. Dripping blood
nourishes

scorched earth and blackened
stubble.

Like red-winged blackbirds,
we wait

for replenishing
rains.

Twilight Rescue

Amid the silt of a retreating river, an egret is motionless in the mud. River bottom grime has stained wing tips and belly down. Spindle legs disappear in the muck. Long neck and head rotate like radar.

The skinny boy is shirtless, white washboard ribs vivid. He steps off the bank, sinks in to his ankles, wobbles to gain balance, drags one boot free and steps forward. The egret watches, trembles, tries again to escape.

The boy whispers like an angel, bends from the waist as his legs are clutched by the mud, One finger traces a line along the bird's back, neck and crest then grasps the beak. The other arm cradles the egret, raises. it out of the mud and into flight - moonrise from horizon's misery,

Kyle Laws
3 Poems

We Drive From Santa Fe to Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs

in a waning crescent moon, highway wider than last time,
sky lit more by casinos than a moon and stars.

At Espanola we turn onto Hwy 84, catch a glimpse
of the Delta Bar, but the neon's off on a Monday night

in winter as we look for a drink, never find one,
turn around, go back to Hwy 285 and when I ask
if we're lost, you say, "No, all roads lead to Ojo,"
as we drive into the desert looking for your past,

a Dutchman's Mine of memories after we cross a bridge
over the river your family waded, after we drive around
new construction of casitas with private soaking pools,
after we stop where springs run back to the river, sky a casino

of chance and new beginnings if we gaze at it long enough.
But it is cold and standing in one place is hard, so we take off
to the old hotel, first time you've been back since you lost
this place in a takeover no one saw coming until it was down

to your shares and an uncle too old to care about what money
brought, and you fought and fought until you could not come
back even though one of the perks was a lifetime of access,
a lifetime of soaks, a lifetime of room and board, which I think

about as we sit in the lobby near the fireplace still in coats
and hats trying to get warm, find a key in the lock of one
of the rooms down the hall, and you turn it as if it's been left
there waiting for your return.

One Day After the Solstice That Was to End the World

—for M.J.

Breaking in a new pair of hiking boots when I phone,
I can hardly make out your answer, keep saying your name.
Finally you reply it is Zoe. She has to be put to sleep. I ask
if you need me. You falter, "Yes," above the swell of river.

I ask about the trail to your house. I start up, a bushwhack,
climbing almost vertically, grabbing limbs of small trees.
Foolish, but going back down would be worse.
Up has always been easier.

I scale the first top, your house two cliffs above the river.
New boots give bravado, worth what I paid for the ascent.
I show up bloody, apologize for how long it took.
You're carrying a wicker basket, blanket on top.

I ask to wash my hands, regret the timing of the request,
the Mayan end of days, a change Zoe not meant to make.
The souls of animals debated by theologians, but not today,
not in the aftermath of the solstice moon.

Yellow and Pink: Elegy for Jackson C.

Yellow breasted finches at the sunflowers,
ones that come to Staab St. in Santa Fe—
yellow of yarrow,
yellow of the beginning of the turn of aspen,
a green lost to too much desert light.

But there is also pink this year—
pink of hollyhocks, cotton candy pink,
Ride The Pink Horse pink,
Zozobra's gloom not yet here,
all those scenes in La Fonda,
old Harvey House hotel,
and in the warren of streets
of this 400 year old town,
the gloom of 50s B&W B-grade films
that is not a gloom as Zozobra,
not an old man consumed by flames,
but the idea of a man who will not die,
who wants to deliver one more line
from the films he spent a life inside.
He's there on the edge of screen
like the cameos of Hitchcock.
I can hear his take, his compare and contrast,
his "You know he played in another film"—
an offering that at the center is pale cream;
then proceeds out until the flickering red
is of a movie run through the projector
over and over until it bursts into flames,
and the theatre goes dark,
and we sit in silence,
filing out when we're absolutely sure
it will not begin again.

David R. Mellor
3 Poems

Just a bit part in life's big movie screen

Do you remember getting lost?
On the path you never took
Spent a life time being a stranger and always forgetting to return that look

Always a second behind that big break
Moving scene
Just a bit part in life's big movie screen

When all were gathered to be cast in their part
Dentist, doctor, perfect father
You forgot your part

Fluffed the lines,
Stumbled and broke down
Ran down countless alley ways screaming in the dark
Hitting the pillow
Chatting to the demons within

Cursing the day
you.....
let those
Bastards in

She Scrolls up
She Scrolls down

She scrolls up
She scrolls down
She likes
She loves
She's shocked and surprised
Sends a photo
Sends an update
She likes a photo of her child...
Who's just fallen on floor
She scrolls up
She looks down
She is shocked and surprised ...
Takes a photo
Of the bloody mess
Shares it online
Her Friends
Scroll up
Scroll down
Pass comments 200 (at least)
Sits back on the bus
"Now wasn't that an event"

First Love

I used to love those cells so much
Those that became so fond of you
Trapped as I was between youth and despair
Holding onto to branches and life's first parting of hair
I used to ly in bed
Turning over life's first body blow
You growing cold
Whilst my hair was wet with fever
And I as a boy said
"don't go"
not knowing why or what for
a few years before I kicked a ball around
was delighted with ice cream
never asking for nothing
then my cells felt so much, became fond of you
Trapped as I was in life's first parting of hurt

Mike Pantano
3 Poems

Baby Boomer Footage

When JFK was shot part of my father died too.
His blood tears splattered across my childhood.
Holding my hand, his evening scotch drained,
the beginning of the end he would say over and over
watching the fuzzy black and white. Mysterious
new words, ominous phrases, soon probed the psyche.
VC, Charlie, Sirhan Sirhan, James Earl Ray, TV body counts,
Billy clubs and riot gear, teargas canisters, Black
Panther rallies, Haight-Ashbury where handcuffed hippies
flashed the victory sign, peace and love, from backseats of police cars,
while camouflaged boys half a world away suddenly appeared
crouched in pockets of swirling jungle grass, trading
body bags for ammo cases, M60 tracer rounds
strafing murky treelines on our bigbox color Magnavox.

In a Foreign Country

Beautiful are the strange trees
white with dust on either side of the road
as the artillery transports thunder over the hill
into the valley of fires. It is a desert evening
and we are eating rations in the shadow
of a shelled wall, swatting at flies,
reading letters from home, the names
of the day's dead still warm in our mouths,
O'Leary, Holden, Crane, hunched in the dust,
hoping to sleep an hour before the bitter morning,
though, by now, we know the deep sleep of love
can never happen here, our slumbers broken
by the terrible screams that followed us out,
and won't stop, or return with us to the flames.

Finding Spring Where You Are

Spring in my Saint Paul is a really sheet of paper
waiting for winter fields to seed, catalogs
for tractor parts arriving by UPS, grocery lists
added to and subtracted from checking late
April pantries, the brick hum of snowbanks
dissolving, the local measurements made,
sun angle and shadow length, mud scraped
from boots, descriptions of breaking ice,
timber piled in thawing estuaries, evening pipes
and whiskey snifters, prairie winds cutting a trail east,
Ivanhoe to Red Wing, an old woman knitting
by firelight, blue stars rising over a million lakes,
the remote icy roads we drove across in snow chains
a month ago, coloring now with starry phlox and wild violets.

Marilyn A. Pellini
3 Poems

HADES AND BACK

Terror grips me.
Dark cloaked figures abound.
In dungeons so scary,
Wild demons all round.

Trees with fingers and arms,
They grab and paw at me.
Set off blaring alarms,
But still won't let me be.

Is someone here to free me?
The firemen as I am trapped?
The lifeguard from churning sea?
The police from violent attack?

See where I am shot.
Skin burned off from the blaze.
Sharks tearing my body parts.
But then turning from my laze:

I flutter open my eyes,
And to my great relief,
Find not my being's demise.
Nor torture in deaths grief.

Destination Unknown

It kept creeping closer, the hand.
I saw the puckered shin,
the long tapered fingers,
nails that were curled under,
it made a motion, almost a demand.

It beckoned me,
and insisted I follow,
into the darkness and fog,
where a skiff awaited,
just at the edge of the sea.

A figure was ready at the oars.
so I knew I must hasten and go,
but did not want to leave my motherland,
and the sea awaited with roars.

A cloak was thrown over my head.
Where was I to be taken
to escape my supposed wrongdoing?
A grander place of safety,
or a boat's floor forever my bed.

Will I safely arrive at the distant shore?
The cruel night just might swallow me,
or a stalwart foe be my captors again.
I most dread, left wondering evermore.

I am the rightful king,
Yet I must trust my fate
To this still unproven oarsman.
Can I be saved for another try
By those who my praises do sing?

Bonnie Prince Charlie is my name.
I will never sleep,
Never give up the quest,
To reclaim my rightful throne.
In reality my life may be taken,
but I must at least not die in vain.

The High Life

I'm living on the edge,
The edge of fame,
Or remaining a nonentity.

The edge of being rich,
Or really, really poor.

I've seen some of Europe,
Even lived in Paris a year.

I'm out to try new things,
And have exciting adventures too.

I like the interesting, the exotic,
Even the erotic.
Go everywhere, try everything,
Is the goal I've set myself.

Being young and vibrant,
This should be possible.

All I need is some money,
Which could be provided
By the job I do not have.

You see, I got out of college last year.
With big ideas and plans.
But none of this can come to fruition
Without a bankroll attached.

I'll have to put off the Galapagos.
Even a stay on Cape Cod,
Till I find a job that pays real money.
And lets me take off when I can.

John Timothy Robinson
3 Poems

My Father's Lymphoma

For I had felt all hope abandoned,
no knowledge of medicine, no degree.
His disease seemed invisible to a geolog of landscape,
an eroded arc of his monument, my cave.
Powerless and stupid, angelic dispositions, severed wings,
no crueller force on earth like this, so brutal.

I knew not my mother's anguish, so brutal
to live and love, then watch as if abandoned,
he, receding beyond any reachable point between those fabled wings.
As if his life retreated past some stark degree,
unformed, invisible in a clueless wisdom of that cave,
my ghost and his ghost one, muted in silent landscape.

I hope that I can be a father like his athletic landscape,
of ball fields, solidarity and love, to escape brutality
in fires of old, neolithic caves.
Though as I see these years of gradual abandoning,
give me his hope to salvage in degrees
all things of honor. A ladder stands to mend a fractured wing.

His humor in old photographs gave him different wings.
Posed in the yard with a hunter's kill, at play on landscape,
with family, military dress, a high school degree.
Of all the protests at Vietnam, he was silent, with brutal,
cellular changes coursing in his blood, though never abandoned
friends. He remembered them and smiled. This strength, his cave.

Once, when I was critical of government, he would not cave
in to speak against a greater good. His smoker's wings
he'd earned since he was twelve and never abandoned
this habit, almost unconscious, like his pastoral love of landscape.
The facts of our neglect are often brutal
when failing to adjust for such impossible degrees.

Man of wire, man of steel, no knowledge or degree
has found the cure or cause of our lament. This cave
is lit with runes which liken us to ancient men, brutal
in their cause and wake. May your wings
explode with life, hover, unfurl here above this landscape
where we continue in the sorrows of your abandonment.

I will not drag you abandoned through life, from warm, October degrees.
Daffodils and Naked Ladies in landscape above this hollow pit, this cave.
With sober wings and conscious thought, we carry on, less brutal.

Happy Girl

A small, black, short-haired dog;
brown splotches above the eyes,
some white on her chest and belly.
Her mother was a Mountain Feist,
the father, a registered Beagle.
Good disposition.
Always ate like a bird.
I think I only took one photograph
the whole time she was here.
In the picture,
she still seemed to look at me
as if posing oddly,
complaining at the same time.
She came to me from grandma,
when Alzheimer's became too severe.
I used to drive a half mile in one direction
to mow grass
and she would follow me every time
no matter what I said.
I chained her in the barn once
and the next time she followed me anyway.
I would often go miles into the woods
and she would follow.
The loyalty of dogs is pure and true.
In a good mood,
she would crouch with her hinds in the air,
front legs extended
as if ready to pounce.
I would say, "I'm gonna get you."
Then she would run that happy
kind of crazy running that dogs do
when they're in a good mood.
She would then stop,
frozen in the same stance,
pose again,
wait for me to chase.

I found her once in the lower yard
curled into a little ball.
The neighbor had hit her.
She was missing her right eye.
So I took her back, a half mile up the road.
Eventually, her socket healed
and she seemed to live a normal life.
One day, I noticed when I tried to pick her up

she would wince and slightly yelp
when I touched her sides.
A couple years later,
there were days where she wouldn't move as much.
I found small pools of watery vomit
on the porch.
I knew something was wrong.
She didn't move; the heavy breathing.
I tried to soothe her
but she didn't respond
even to my voice.

The dogs of our lives are scattered here.
We live in the country
So you don't take your dog to a cemetery.
Sonny, my border collie,
is over where the corn crib stood.
In the hay-field; Benji, Trixie, Tug,
Peaches, Manley and a cat whose name I've forgotten.
Miles is buried in the yard.
Hazard, somewhere next to the Barnwood Nursery,
where the building was
before I tore it down.
In the corner of another field,
Next to the creek, under a huge sycamore,
I imagine they sit
like guardians of an afterlife of animals;
Red Bone, King, Patches, Colby and Hap.
As Breece Pancake said,
they run and play in the Happy Hunting-ground,
they run and play,
for the deer are shot there,
they jump up and run after they fall,
as no one ever truly kills there,
and nothing ever dies.

The Dance Practice

The way she moved across this wooden floor
was like a dancer leaping high in bounds
with grace, a soaring gesture up and more
than once was caught in fleeting eyes, her gown.
Of all the days I watched her dance, not once
was someone ever there to smile or stare,
as I had often stopped or stooped so much
in keep with my lone task of clean and care.
Though I would not intrude upon her time,
and only often watched in just a musing way.
I never saw her in these halls, the shine
and gold in glare of footlights gleamed, held her sway.
So many faces fill the walks, unknown.
That twirling figure, I will not forget, has grown.

Steven Sassman
3 Poems

All Became the Same

*i dreamt i was you
halfway through a yawn
i was frozen in mid-stretch
a crystallized prism of tensions
where life and death sharp and flat*
all became the same
*sun poured through me like rain
so i dreamt i was a bird
my wings were fins of joy
swimming the terrifying surf
of some familiar metallic ocean
as i lifted my head through a
pinhole of sanity in the surface
my strange new lungs breathed into
a space where light becomes solid
and time is a stairway of pain
then i dreamt i was me
and you knew*

Efflorescence

EFFLORESCENCE

*as copper pass a magnet jets electrons
as cloud crushed over mountain gushes rain
as press of night wrings sunshine into color
released of winter prarie issues spring
of unlocked rock up blooms a secret water
just like we do we do we do we do sing
as radiance so beautiful in summer
as cherry grape exploding in a bite
ellipsing into orbits that you circle
go naturally as gravities guide flight
in your atmosphere become I luminous
burning burning burning in the night*

They Miss

playing pool
is just like poetry
it's all about
getting the English right
most people have great aims
but **they miss**
because they don't know
how much side spin
they are putting
onto the cue
but
when we're in the zone
we don't even have to aim
it's almost like being drunk
when we're in the zone
all that extra spin
makes it dazzle
we can't miss

Christine Swanberg
3 Poems

Wind and Wet Leaves

A high wind slaps through maple leaves,
scattering and swirling into wet carpeting
that I will have to rake soon.

I don't mind raking leaves.
I appreciate the wet ones
because they are easier to set in piles
and don't fly away during bagging.

But today my mind, after seven decades
on our blue planet, is stuck like wet leaves.

A damp and cold epiphany
slides onto the cement of my brain,
thoughts I would like to sweep
under this carpet of cold leaves:

I have made enemies on this earth,
I have pissed off some folks,
not everyone likes me.

The wind cuffs me on the side of the head.
It has taken me nearly seventy years
to admit this. Maybe I talk too much
or not enough.

The wind shears my face,
cold tears from my eyes,
like the leaves under my feet,

the only sound the sweeping of leaves,
then the surprising fervor of a cardinal,
and the rat- tat-tat
of the red-bellied woodpecker.

The Eve of Daylight Savings Time

Maybe someday in the dark
just before Daylight Savings Time
when an unnamed foreboding lurks
in the crevices of vague, unhappy
dreams, I will give up, not

say to myself: Things are OK,
get going, grab that coffee.
Yes, you struggle with a few issues.
Who doesn't?

Perhaps I will not write this poem,
feed the cat, make breakfast,
rake the brilliant maple leaves.
I admit it's getting easier
to stay inside all day. No.

I plan a trip to the ocean,
a visit to a friend
all the way across the vast country,
on the one and only perfect blue planet.

Mid-Air

I have lost another thought mid-air.
I would tell you what the thought was,
but as you can see, I don't remember it.
Tomorrow is my sixty-ninth birthday.

I remember that. I remember 1969,
a year etched into my psyche like no other,
the dark paisley magic and Woodstock rain,
stepping out of the American Dream
into the Purple Haze, leaving behind
domestic and tame expectations.

I still haven't recovered the thought
lost in mid-air, but I remember 1969,
flying over the North Pole,
Knights in White Satin on headphones,
above the clouds above our blue planet,
heading into the gray smoky haze of Russia,
letting my head go wherever it wanted to go,
not concerned about losing thoughts mid-air.

So far the misplaced thoughts have returned,
falling from the clouds,
dropping back into my brain like rain
when I am in a Zen zone of routine,
perhaps feeding the cat or folding laundry,
not exactly flying over the North Pole.

So far not one thought has evaporated for keeps.
I still have not retrieved today's escaped thought,
dangling mid-air like a star
on this morning's horizon.
I count on catching it soon,
I surely will,
and wish myself another happy birthday,
head still mid-air in the clouds.

Madison White
3 Poems

Bones

are always
the end. Too polite
to charge in first,
arriving modestly
after the miracle,
thrown
to the loyal hound.
They reveal nothing
of our character. Do
our wings end in elbow
or fingertip? When we leave
is it bone that feels
the last pinch of air?

The Teacher

My mother plants tulip bulbs each fall
she has grown maybe five hundred now
by reading to them
and teaching them to tell time

Each spring when their sticky fingers wave
goodbye she smiles and watches
their petals fall to the provincial summer
and buys bulbs for the next year

Two decades ago, my mother
planted two unknown seeds
my brother and I didn't notice
her checking behind our ears for buds

She sweat profusely for a while
not knowing my brother was an aster
and would bloom behind the tulips
though just as tall

She looks at me with the same eyes now
brushes my hair back and says
my, how you've grown

Horse Girl

Horse girl tells her blonde friend she is a palomino.
Horse girl pulls her belt one notch too tight so it's snug as a girth.
Horse girl translates her steps into walk, trot, and canter.
Horse girl only eats off plates round as horses' cheekbones.
Horse girl reads her Saddle Club books alone during lunch.
Horse girl scrapes rocks from her rubber shoes with an invisible pick.
Horse girl hovers over her dog and practices: jockey, jumper, cowgirl.
Horse girl rides a horse named Dusty around in lazy circles.
Horse girl learns what assertive means and how to kick and kick harder.
Horse girl overhears the thud of a horse snapping her instructor's leg.
Horse girl shrugs off questions about her missing boots.
Horse girl replaces her old backpack with a plain blue purse.
Horse girl doesn't tap on the glass when passing by horses.

Gale Acuff has had hundreds of poems published in literary journals and has authored three books of poetry. He has taught university English in the US, China, and Palestine (where he currently teaches).

Robert L. Dean, Jr.'s debut poetry collection is *At the Lake with Heisenberg* (Spartan Press, 2018). His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Flint Hills Review*, *I-70 Review*, *Chiron Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Shot Glass*, *Illya's Honey*, *Red River Review*, *KYSO Flash*, *River City Poetry*, *Heartland! Poetry of Love*, *Resistance & Solidarity*, and the *Wichita Broadside Project*. He was a quarter-finalist in the 2018 Nimrod Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry. He read at the Scissortail Creative Writing Festival and the Chikaskia Literary Festival in 2018 and will return for Scissortail 2019. He is event coordinator for Epistrophe: An Afternoon of Poetry and Improvised Music held annually in Wichita, Kansas. He has been a professional musician and worked at The Dallas Morning News. He lives in Augusta, Kansas.

Luke Taylor Gilstrap earned his MFA at Seattle Pacific University and teaches writing and English literature at Sterling College. He is the co-founder of the Wingdings Writers' Workshop and founder of the Cabin Fever Writers' Workshop, both based in Wichita, Kansas, where he lives with his wife and son.

Grace Marie Grafton's most recent book, *Jester*, was published by Hip Pocket Press. Recent poems appear in *basalt*, *Sin Fronteras*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Peacock Journal* and others.

Kelly Johnston is a life-long Kansan. He was born in Lawrence in 1955, and graduated from Wichita State in 1977 as a creative writing major. He has published poems in *Mikrokosmos*, *The I 70 Review*, *The Flint Hills Review*, and *The California Quarterly*. Kelly's poem "In The Desert Near White Sands" won Best Overall Poem in the Winfield Kansas Voices Poetry Contest in 2017. Kelly's chapbook, "Kalaska" was published by Blue Cedar Press in 2017. Kelly loves to spend time on 70 acres in the Chautauqua Hills near Cross Timbers State Park where most of his poems are inspired.

Kyle Laws is based out of the Arts Alliance Studios Community in Pueblo, CO. Her collections include *This Town: Poems of Correspondence* with Jared Smith (Liquid Light Press, 2017); *So Bright to Blina* (Five Oaks Press, 2015); *Wildwood* (Lummo Press, 2014); *My Visions Are As Real As Your Movies*, *Joan of Arc Says to Rudolph Valentino* (Dancing Girl Press, 2013); and *George Sand's Haiti* (co-winner of Poetry West's 2012 award). Granted two residencies in poetry from the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), she is one of eight members of the Boiler House Poets who perform and study at the museum. She is the editor and publisher of Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press.

Born 1964, (Liverpool, England) to a difficult birth, **David Mellor** didn't find his voice until his youth. Years of thinking he was nobody and treated as such, including a period of homelessness in the desperate Thatcher Years. However, he hit the paper, papering over the scars, found understanding belief through words. He has been published and performed widely from the BBC, The Tate, galleries and pubs and everything in between.

Mike Pantano has poems in or is forthcoming in *Third Wednesday*, *San Pedro River Review*, the *Museum of Americana*, *Gravel*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Slipstream* and elsewhere. A husband and father, he lives with his wife and an assortment of spoiled pets in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Marilyn A. Pellini recently published a grief book titled: *Dear Al, A Widow's Struggles and Remembrances*. It has been selling quite well. Her other credits as a writer include a recent article titled "Memories in My Button Jar," pieces in *Westchester Parent Magazine*, *Bay State Parent Magazine*, *On The Water*, *Balanced Rock* and others. In May of 2018, she took the first place prize in the N.Y. State Federation of Women's Clubs writing contest.

John Timothy Robinson is a mainstream poet of the expressive image and inwardness from the Kanawha Valley in Mason County, West Virginia. His poetics were developed in the tradition of James Wright, Rita Dove, Donald Hall, Marvin Bell, Maxine Kumin, WS Merwin, Tess Gallagher and Robert Bly among many others. John's works have appeared in ninety journals throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and India. He is also a published printmaker with sixty-four art images and photographs appearing in nineteen journals, electronic and print in the United States, Italy and Ireland.

Recent Work: *Trajectory*, *Aries: a Creative Journal of Literary Expression*, *Green Briar Review*, *Pulsar Poetry Magazine*, *Toe Good*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Black Lawrence Press*, *Indefinite Space* and *Red River Review*.

Steven Sassmann is the author of seven books of poems and poetry. His next book will be out in Spring 2019 from Spartan Press. His is published in magazines like *Chiron Review*, and in anthologies like *Men in the Company of Women*, by online magazines like *Wingposse Art*, and has done a series of poems on High Plains Public Radio. Steven has evolved a new style of poetry which uses large font Interior Titles, innovative punctuation and color. He aims for brevity and wit, and favors content over style and form. He draws a distinction between poems and poetry and usually writes unintentionally. He writes for the nonAcademic—who may need poetry most. He lives in Smith Center, Kansas with his wife, Mary.

Christine Swanberg is a well-known, award-winning Midwest poet who has been writing and publishing for about forty years. Nine collections of books or chapbooks have been published by various national presses, most recently *Wild Fruition: Sonnets, Spells, and Other Incantations* (Puddin'head); as well as *Who Walks Among the Trees With Charity* (Wind); and *The Red Lacquer Room* (Chiron Press) to name a few. Hundreds of her poems have appeared in anthologies and journals such as the June Cotner books (*Earth's Blessings; Gratitude Prayers*), *Chiron* (regular contributor), *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Soundings*, *Out of Line*, *Plainsongs*, *AVocet*, *BEloit Poetry Journal*, and many others. She has been interviewed extensively in *Poet's Market* and other venues as well as garnering featured readings at the Frye Museum in Seattle through *Poetswest* contest, Untitled Town conference, the Emily Dickenson Poetry series in Door County, and Waterline. She has been nominated for several Pushcarts and won several literary and community awards.

Madison White is a recent graduate of the University of Manchester's MA program in Creative Writing. She has since returned from the UK to her home state of Kansas where she teaches English and works as a freelance writer. She also blogs about writing and other creative endeavors on her website *Madison White Writes*. Madison's poems have appeared in *The Cardiff Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *Vinyl*, and elsewhere.