

POETRY MIDWEST

NUMBER 1
SPRING/SUMMER 2001

FEATURING:

BARRINGTON • BOWEN • CASE • DALY • JETT
• KIRKLAND • KLOPPENBORG • MILTNER •
PALMER • PHELPS • REESE • SUTHERLAND

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NUMBER 1
SPRING/SUMMER 2001

EDITOR
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Masthead

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Editor's Note

Thank you for downloading and reading our journal. We hope you enjoy the poetry contained in this issue's selection. We are especially proud of this issue, as it is the inaugural issue of the journal under its new title. *Poetry Midwest* was published under the title *Poetry Ink* from 1995 to 1997, and then went on a longer than expected hiatus until this year. In bringing back the journal, we felt a change in name would differentiate us from our previous incarnation as well as from other electronic journals, web zines, and e-zines currently on the Internet.

The name change also renews our sense of purpose; we are now a journal aimed at presenting the best poetry possible—and only poetry. We also aim to showcase work by Midwestern and near-Midwestern writers. We define the Midwest as Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and their surrounding states. However, we invite and encourage submissions from other regions of the United States and from international writers as well.

The magazine is also now distributed in the Adobe Acrobat™ PDF format. The PDF format allows you to download this file to your hard drive and read the magazine off-line, when you have time to read and reflect. You can even print it so you have a paper copy, if you so desire, and the printed version will be an exact duplicate of what you see on screen.

While it is possible to create complex and artistically compelling documents and publications using the PDF format, we have opted for a clean and simple design. Our goal is to focus on the poetry being presented and not on fancy typography, bold colors, or confusing layouts. We hope you share our sentiment that it is the artistry and craftsmanship of the poetry that matters, and not the complexity of the presentation.

Thank you for spending some time with our journal. We encourage you to share it with your friends, family, and co-workers. **PM**

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POETRY MIDWEST

Marc Barrington

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Points of Departure

My fine needle points
become blunt in these dreams

where flowering capsules
cut with blades
open like tiny mouths
imparting milky promise
into slight breezes
under a noontime sun.

The eyes, becoming dry,
rattle faintly in their sockets
through movements of difficult sleep,
the rise and fall of veins,
blood-speckled linens,
and a sulfurous, constricted air.

I return to the streets
learning Spanish,
three types of hepatitis,
an economy of trade,
and subtler indignities.

Signs That We Were Here

Stamp red handprints
shoulder high around the schoolroom.
Keep the blood dripping. Before nothing
is left of us but a memory vague
as smoke, of hands fitting one into another.
Of the blackening shapes of hands on doors.
Across your palm a scar opens like the jagged river
matching a welted seam on the back of your fist.
Let a willful heart burn like storms
through Kansas for the last day a wild child jumped
from the jungle gym, metal crashing
through the branches of bone in her hand.

The dead child cannot speak to the living
woman who sweeps the sidewalk of the school
while the water tower glows plain blue
with St. Elmo's fire. Light candles
between stabs of lightning, for girls
with faces dark as life. Burn incense for the one
who came back to leave her handprint
bloody on our dormitory door.

Michele Reese
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Following Phia

With a Campari haze settling over the sound,
we pedal along a thin strip of sand.
Looking back, she says through the distance
that a bike with a bottle of wine
in the basket suits me.

She leads me to the road
and then into pine.
My toes feel too far from earth.
I tremble around corners
and slide off the seat to stop.

I stare at the curve of her
shoulders imprinted by the afternoon sun.
Over the grass she shakes towels and folds
them over a clothes' line. We take turns
in the shower, and I know I don't want to share her.

In the pulsing push of a nightclub, I clutch
the white cotton of her sleeve,
not her hand,
wanting to be mothered
and not to be lost in the crowd.

W. Luther Jett
<MagenDror@aol.com>

Amnesia

walking the shell road: a blank square
of metal nailed to a tar-leach'd pole.
low clouds scudding landward. a vacancy
we cannot fill with sand
the colour of ash nor water the colour
of sky. scattered beside the trail—
broken homes of oysters. the refuse
of centuries. one lone building bleached
and scoured of its purpose by sun
by water wind and sand. a round
smooth stone. the invisible crash
of waves returning. returning.
we do not know what it is that draws
us back to this grey place. the birds
have followed us and they
do not know why. we carry buckets
but have forgotten
what we meant to put into them.
was it the sky? if we leave here
empty we may remember. then the taste
of salt will fill our mouths.

David Hunter Sutherland

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City of Mars

This city whose borders impart more distance
than balance, more history than last year's bomb,
hoards what's left in a clogged nasal, mere sand.

And if left to their own devices our camels
would wander the delta in strips, mince the fleshy bits
of yesterday between cuspid and hump.

Today's footprint moves in thunderous claps,
wedges its toe in the soft divide, imparts a desert
onto the substrate of artifact, then layers its lotus

where a Caliph might have seeded . Our objective,
articulate in its silence, falls prey to history.
Ahead, the flashy bauble in rearview, behind,
the golden fleece turned rug.

Cairo, the red land of earth's footstool, where a Sphinx
reflects its skeleton over a crumbling acropolis, and a
buried queen dampens the kohl of mascara

then lines her sallow countenance to sing, "Dig into the
physics of your omission, with each thrust draw up half the
body, half its shadow, let the glitter of stars and dust
fill your eyes, let the end of all mirth define you. . ."

Joni Palmer

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This Place Is Made of Sky

and some call it flat
adjective noun
that it has no depth—
they just haven't learned to see
yet.

This place is made of sky

and I watch it every morning
and every evening
religious attention
trying to learn the language
so that I can speak with her.

This place is made of sky

of air and vast spaces
the vertical and the horizontal
I move freely
and sounds
carry easily.

This place is made of sky

and earth
and fire
and water

it is not flat—
only to those who don't look closely
missing the subtleties
of this Midwestern body.

All you have to do is listen
to this land, to its people
rolling gently
slowly
towards heaven.

Robert Phelps

[<sipaleroberth@hotmail.com>](mailto:sipaleroberth@hotmail.com)

Pastoral

Breathing, bleating
seeing
seen together
the melding of flock
flocking eye to eye
dull, unfocused eye
straining to find
the beholding eye:
security, communion,
in the scarce grass patch,
then to move...
procession
mover and moved
Leader and led
leaden trudge on exhausted hills
exhausted grass
ewes nursing their lambs anxious
as lambs are milked distracted...
mothers' weary eyes
strain to find
if they be gazed upon
as they
graze upon this hill
of need and bond
sitting low slacked
with cracked tongues
immobile
dulled
half alive
scorch of the day
cooking away bleating
and breathing,
and
in the dark
huddled all cold
promising them nothing much
a whispered wind
an opinion about tomorrow's sun.

Breathing, bleating
seeing
seen together
the melding of flock.
He knows all their names
gazes into their frightened eyes
until they see him,
so they'll know they're seen,
as is his duty.

Catherine Daly
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After Memorial Day, Wear White

Pack hastily. Join spring.

Featherweight, translucent cottons
burst from boxes,
wing their way to willows and shade.

No patent leather post-Labor Day

Cease using tattered, diaphanous rags.
Tramp to the cellar to unwrap sweaters and jackets
like treasure. They are colored like jewels.

The Earth's Clock

Though it has the lips of the living and the gone,
The earth cannot use its tongue.
The dead weight of ages sucked to its centre,
Struggles upwards leaden
Without direction, without turning.

A clock, too. The little springs and wires
Twist and stretch like nothing in this world
Made by man for time, yet man is its past,
Conscious of the sunflower's petals occasionally,
Yet coiling silent in its flourish towards light.

Over the clockface sweeps the second hand
Able to touch nothing,
Like the twitching inside the stem itself.
Or shifts, as if the clock's motor pushes onwards
To a single thrust purpose.

Digging the soil and winding the clock
Flowers struggle against the darkness—
A broken machine in an empty field
Rusting under changing conditions,
Is buried, always under shadow.

Tick after tock, season after season,
The ground overgrown and strewn.
And this is neither a newer model nor first chance;
It is where the seeds spill over dirt.
It is where the pendulum stays.

Katherine Case
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Ice Breaks on the Menominee River

April 19, 1999

The first thing that happens is the smell of dirt,
my father walking down the driveway
in flimsy sunlight and then a warm sniff.
Memories of rototillers and green lawns
send him eye balling the base of snow drifts
where ruddy dirt shows through.
Snow melts from firewood piles and old cars
and it is Lent, and the next thing that happens
is he returns to the garage after dinner,
clicks on the light, and wipes engines down
with filthy rags, pours oil in drain pans,
while the ice on the river swells invisibly,
movements of the great earth around him.
He hauls wood, snow recedes from the picnic table
like the next act, a ponderous,
slippery dialogue among crusty drifts and dripping water.
River pressure builds day by day
under its harness of ice.
He feels restless, and the white sky
crouches low on the earth and the river moans,
scrapes against itself,
wet rumblings push at the windows.
He smooths a newspaper
with small, callused hands,
sees that the shingles need fixing,
as ice on the river explodes in slow motion
like a black hole expanding through space.
Floes push downstream like barges,
send boat-sized shards up riverbanks as dark water
escapes through rotten ice
that buckles under the old pressure—
then my father stands, hands in pockets,
one part of the ancient earth watches another
tear itself free.

Rounded

from "Reclining Figure" by Henry Moore

Like vegetables, the universe, your stomach, hills on the
outside of town—flat on the bottom like a
cumulonimbus showing off
its oblique liquidity, its relationship to gravity.
Like the Venus of Willendorf—her round, hidden hands,
the orbs of thigh and buttocks, braided head.

Nature is primally rounded, sublime
and ordinary, like when my mother walks barefoot
across morning grass to the birdfeeder,
nightgown loose around her ankles
and I see the generosity of ancient forms,
the way we recline to the earth
like the fold of a mountain.

Gravity is the agreement
that everything will settle
to the curve of the horizon
as if to a rounded stomach—
each toe a single orb
pressed flat against
the earth.

Robert Miltner
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Walk Like a Man

Among the rough-barked trees winds a path.
The north-sided mosses indicate my direction.

There is a silence as in offices where men work,
or of journeymen, whose livelihoods are their hands,

leaning in close, faces taut with concentration.
How deep and widespread the root systems

of these rough oaks and smooth beeches must be,
how much their canopy keeps hidden from the light.

My father often drove past these woods
going and returning from his sales trips.

One cardinal calls to another; I whistle, too.
A burrow where an animal has entered the earth

is like a dark unblinking eye which stares back,
as empty and uncertain as a closed mill.

Museum

Suddenly, I am aware of my hands,
Flesh resting on the smooth slick of glass,
The snow white bed, laid out
In the dim still light of the museum.

The princess rests, feather light and dry,
Sun browned and curled
Deep into herself, her arms tight
Across the dessicated chest,
Where once perhaps a lover wept,
Cradled in the black of Egypt.

Her wrists, once smooth and perfumed,
Oiled and powdered, luminescent
As she reached for him,
Now mere dried husks forever in the act
Of pulling away, withdrawing.

Perhaps he lost her finally,
Kept her near enough in death
Where he couldn't reach in life,
Kissed her in the fertile air
Her hair like dying flowers,
Her heart constant, eternal,
Resting contained, deep
Beneath the sun lipped desert.

But here, there are no Pharoahs,
No one to bend, to touch the smooth
Round of skull, to gaze into eyes
Blank and erased, a beauty kept
In a crystal coffer, an ocean away.

Plentitude

Whatever is there
Is never enough.
Even long honeyed nights,
Floods of wine
And diamonds

Will not hold
The ropes, or call
The sailor home.
As if you didn't know.

As if you didn't watch
Him along the shore,
Eyes cast toward home
And ridiculously faithful

Penelope. You find him gone
From your arms, sheets cool
To the touch, as if
You, or anyone,

Could hold everything
You love to you,
Like armfuls of fruit,
Or flowers, or keep

The loaded ships
From sailing,
Finally away.

Contributors

Marc Barrington is a graduate of the University of California–San Diego, where he was a two-time winner of the Stewart Prize for Poetry. He is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing at the University of New Mexico. He resides in Albuquerque

Kristy Bowen holds an MA in English Literature from DePaul University and currently lives in Chicago. Her work has previously appeared in *Moon Journal*, *American Poetry Monthly*, and *The Feast: Rockford College Journal of the Arts*. She received her undergraduate degree from Rockford College, where she won the College Poetry Prize of the American Academy of Poets.

Katherine Case grew up in Marinette, Wisconsin. She received a BA in Art and English in 1994 from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. After serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana, she received her MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College in 2000. Her poetry and artwork have appeared in *Cicada*, *The Walrus*, *580 Split*, and elsewhere. She lives in Richmond, California.

Catherine Daly was born and raised Decatur, Illinois, and now resides in Los Angeles. She has published poetry and essays widely online and in print. She works as a software developer and teaches an online poetry workshop through UCLA Extension. More information regarding her writing and courses is available at <http://members.aol.com/cadaly>.

W. Luther Jett lives in Washington Grove, Maryland. He is the author of the chapbook *A Leather Dress Fur Mother*, and his poems have recently appeared in *The GW Review*, *Salon*, *Syncopated City*, *Synæsthesia*, *ABRAXAS*, *Red Booth Review*, *Corduroy*, and elsewhere.

Leigh Kirkland is a Marion L. Brittain Post-Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Literature, Communication, and Culture at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia. Her poems have appeared in various other journals, most notably in *Raritan* and *Weber Studies*. Another is forthcoming in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

Paul Kloppenborg is a librarian at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. His poems have been published in both print and online formats. He is fiction editor of *Recursive Angel* and list administrator of The Muse Listserv, an Internet discussion group.

Robert Miltner is an Assistant Professor of English at Kent State University Stark Campus in Canton, Ohio, where he teaches creative writing, American literature, and composition. His poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Luna*, *Pleiades*, *Barrow Street*, *Montserrat Review*, *CrossConnect*, *The Mochila Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Chiron Review*, and elsewhere. He is the author of three poetry chapbooks: *On the Off-Ramp*, *The Seamless Serial Hour*, and *Against the Simple*, which won the Wick Chapbook Award.

Joni Palmer is a landscape architect as well as a visual artist and poet. Her work involves making connections between land, people, place and time. She is an Assistant Professor at Iowa State University, Department of Landscape Architecture, where she is developing a Center for Reading and Writing the Land, a joint effort between the Departments of English and Landscape Architecture.

Robert Phelps is a Franciscan priest living and working on the island of Guam. He has two chapbooks currently in production, and has been published in *Penwood Review*, *The Nassau Review*, *The Long Island Quarterly*, *Guild* and other journals. He has also been seen in various e-zines, such as *Electric Acorn*, *Alicubi Journal*, *Apples and Oranges*, and *Ancient Paths*.

Michele Reese recently completed her Ph.D. in Creative Writing—Poetry at the University of Missouri—Columbia with poems published and forthcoming in *Folio*, *Lake Effect*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Poetry Motel*, *Reed Magazine* and elsewhere.

David Hunter Sutherland was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His work has appeared in *The American Literary Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *The Northern Michigan Journal*, *The Reader* (Oxford University), *The Cortland Review* and *The Midwest Quarterly*. Sutherland serves as managing editor for the online journal *Recursive Angel*, and his second collection of poetry *Steel Umbrellas* was recently published by Archer Books/Cadmus Editions.

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