

# PoetryMidwest

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NUMBER 10  
SPRING/SUMMER 2004

FEATURING:

AUCHTER • BEAN • BOGGESS • BOWEN • CARLISLE •  
CRITTENDEN • HESTON • MINCZESKI • MINTZ • ORR  
• PALMER • POE • POWELL • REYNOLDS • RHODES •  
TUCKER • VEGAS • WEST • XIE



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NUMBER 10  
SPRING/SUMMER 2004

EDITOR  
MATTHEW W. SCHMEER

POETRY MIDWEST  
PRAIRIE VILLAGE, KANSAS  
2004

## Masthead

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quack

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# PoetryMidwest

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## Jeffrey Bean

### July

Six crows rattle to a standstill  
in a maple's noon body. It's their bodies  
I envy, their God-healthy  
black-purple, their night inside  
night inside the drenching limbs  
color. They cry  
out: sound like a father's  
table-saw's scream.  
It moves on a hinge in the strange  
air the town's made.  
O watch them crackle!  
O hear them sway beneath the wind-washed white sky!  
And when the crows drop at last into the sun  
I am babbling to God about the husk of myself  
I've left in my breakfast chair, the hard-drink scarred boy  
I've become, calling to the mother-mouthed sun,  
cawing *coal, coal-coal!*

## Chris Crittenden

### **Spoon**

this spoon,  
hugged by the viscosity of peas,  
embraced by the scent of stew  
will go unnoticed into death:  
no sage to decipher  
its nicks and scrapes of use;  
no eulogy to extol  
the silver personality of aura;  
no percussionist to imitate  
that clink clink clink  
from patting wells  
of stoneware.

maybe fifty hands have plied it  
in as many years,  
heat seeping from palms  
into cool straightness  
while a perfect oval  
draws steaming food  
then shares it like a kiss.

fifty hands  
dipping a design of scallops and scrolls,  
small violin curved toward a delicate arch.  
fifty hands—times of celebration  
and sustenance, ritual and chore—

now only one remains,  
soon to release, and what is fate then  
but desuetude as long  
as dinner was short?

## Kristy Bowen

### **The Language of Objects**

By winter, we excel in precision,  
collect leaky pens, fallen leaves,  
stones smooth and round  
from a hundred rivers.

I pull my mother's hair  
from the tortoise shell comb,  
pilfer the unraveled lace  
of a dressing gown,

try to capture baby shoes,  
the triangle of sun against,  
the yellow wall, the tangle  
of wind chimes in June,

the rhythm of her fingers  
tapping the kitchen sink.  
I once watched my father  
slyly pluck the pit of a peach

from her napkin, slip  
it carefully into his pocket—  
once watched my sister  
cradle a robin's egg

in her palm, bending  
toward me in the yard,  
her small hand cupped,  
blocking the wind.

Our desires wear thin as rice paper.

## Amanda Auchter

### **The Being of Oranges**

They are what Icarus kicked out  
of the sun before his descent.

The star bellowed and twinged,  
spat out the burst and flare

of its jeweled eye, not quite  
to singe his wings. He was

too heavy to fly with his arms  
full of them. He took them down,

spread out their seeds  
with the pulp of his skin.

## Jenny Xie

### Historical Fact

You recall this man arguing  
until his reasoning was muscles stretched taut  
over bone, logic so firm

no argument could tear away at it.  
Nothing was the same, now  
that it was war, and someone like you

needed love, he explained. And love, love  
was split toes and the violent odor of rotting flesh,  
rations that would never fill, and newsboys

at street corners, sated with adrenaline.  
Love was a girl you saw  
at the inners of your eyelids, during mealtimes of  
beans

and fat. Love was her  
rather than the pin-ups, caked and dry,  
fixed hard like desire on each soldier's mind.

She had a middle name,  
little feet made for wooden clogs,  
a father who offered a clerk job when you returned.

No God, he'd smile, equaled one concrete woman,  
no faith inspired the same  
awe, the same holiness.

She brought desperation, he said,  
sixty-five years carved onto his face,  
the only thing you really needed.

## **Disobeying Daedalus**

In English class,  
I am punished  
(six nights copying  
Greek myths by hand)  
for forgetting who Icarus is,  
forgetting that he fell  
in a mess of wax wings,  
burnt pride.

Maybe,  
I simply chose not to remember.

I am sick of judging,  
of predicting fatal flaws  
before the expected glories.

If human nature is perfect by its imperfection,  
we are all perfect with desire.

I've got in me a million  
flapping birds,  
each with its own melted wings.

## S. Brady Tucker

### **We Are as Primates Playing With the Elements**

The gorilla boy ties the boat  
to a crumbling dock like

hemp rope to a cross. Here,  
where the desert meets the sea,

where black shale scrapes diseased foam  
from the waves, which forever beat themselves

to death against the rocks.  
Here, his misery, a scow lifting a nose

from the water like an opium whore  
from the pipe, over and over

the water creases the sky  
time and timelessness, both—

the sky licks rivulets in the sea.  
And the gorilla boy ties the boat,

or sadly, the gorilla boy ties the  
boat, loosens the moorings,

stands in the hull,  
beats his chest against

the sky in fear. He  
misunderstands the winds

and the secrets of direction and force.  
He is not really listening to the sea—

gorilla boy squints against the  
glare of sun, raises an empty hand

that is tied at the wrist and  
looped around a chafed ankle; it

is corded into a Gordian Knot  
Alexander would dare not cut.

The sky remembers him.  
The water does not.

## Steve Rhodes

### **Of Pond Scum and Other Damp Places**

I'd lie to you if I didn't say  
I love it when my shoes get wet  
on the muddy banks of ponds.  
My own sweat, the oil  
behind my ears, the stored ripe smells  
yank me to steamy islands  
in the dark sea no one sees  
beneath my skin. Since God made  
all wet things, who am I  
to turn up my nose at my outpourings  
each morning? All of it  
part of some great watery plan.  
Scum from pollen in backwaters,  
kelp that undulates by rocky shores,  
jetsam by ship docks—  
I swirl them with my finger.  
What is clammy damp is where birth comes.

## **Special Offer**

In the interest of time  
the manufacturers wish to inform you  
that the end of civilization as we know it  
has been temporarily postponed  
in order to bring you this special offer  
requiring your immediate attention.

Please respond  
within thirty days  
to what may or may not be  
a terminal condition  
until we conduct further tests  
in your interest,  
which is currently at an all-time low—  
apply today.

Should you or any of your family  
wish to take advantage of this one-time offer,  
no exceptions can be made,  
except in cases of death or dismemberment,  
during which time  
the manufacturers shall retain the right  
to take possession of your premises.  
Certain conditions apply  
in Oregon, New Jersey,  
and Hawai'i.

## Wendy Taylor Carlisle

### **To Show Squalor, Add Flies**

to the scene, though they are nothing special,  
nothing more than a conversation with an ex-  
lover, fly-blown and mean, words  
spoken to improve, to prod the heart to  
stumble along under low ceilings.

Picture a yellow room, the pillows, the paralyzing  
moon at the window like a crusted tongue,  
flies landing on the sill and balcony, the afghan  
thick with them. Imagine the moist evening  
with its narrow eyes. Pull it over you like a summer quilt  
and drift until the subtext wing vibrates you awake  
with no way to fling your heart beyond the subtle hum,  
the swarm on the furniture, on your forearm,  
on the photos of his family so elegantly framed.

## Valeria Vegas

### **Shape, Moon, Myth**

Shape is moving across black, fog-hugged as it morphs across the sky, slowly, like wandering through the woods. Shape is a guide: round, almost round, not round yet, a bowl, a bowl almost full, a sliver curved into points, a sliver, no shape. It is thought that this is how the oceans know when to pull forward up to the shore's streets, when to pull back past the sandbars. That the fish may or may not bite because of shape. That this is how the women know when to bleed. Phobus and Deimos need each other to equal half the force of the shape that moves the waters and the women in Georgia. But shape affects nothing. Shape plus earth-shape plus sun-shape exert force on water. Never women. External gravitational pull only affects unbounded bodies of water, never the bound.

It is possible to live according to myths despite the facts.

**Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz**

**short note for a friend**

265 miles &  
I forgot to say I miss you

forgive me

## Ace Boggess

### Letter to Ralph Fiennes

Were someone to title your eyes, that phrase  
would borrow from Kawabata, his novel,  
*Beauty & Sadness*. Two simple words  
connected, one for each orb blazing with austerity.  
Your roles steal bits of Kawabata's plot as well—  
lover of infidelity, torn between what's just &  
private justice law-bound by desire. Too,  
as sociopath, Nazi enraged, sharing your torment  
with others—there, your expression proves you  
hurt, dark wells drowning all the inner play.  
We, your audience, in our abyss of theaters—  
vicarious sufferers, faces tear-slicked from yearning—  
exist as what infirm, twisted, lonely character you share  
with looks at once that tell a thousand stories,  
eyes Scheherazade's hypnotic voice.

## Deborah Poe

### **Roll Call for Absent Fathers**

Nampa nag champa  
sand hollow in the base  
of the throat  
love them black  
and white eastern  
Oregon birds who've flown  
their highway evangelism  
towards my own kind  
of cowboy utopia.

## **Vashon Island, of Einstein's Dream**

Two women do not exhaust conversational possibilities. A wood-burning stove gauges its temperature and turns itself on and off. The afternoon spreads its arms, letting time fly by it with the motorboats. At the grocery store, the wine steward talks of a local vineyard. Labels are named after family. Serella. Wife in reds and yellows. Dark hair on a deep green bottle. Andrew Will is a velvet merlot for a nephew and son. The wine steward talks, because he has all day. Time is what he does.

What is now? Now is the dog that comes in from his late afternoon swim, spraying golden mist off his body as he runs across the rocks and the half circle of driftwood on the point. The past is the sound of the canoe dragging across rocks, and the car doors slamming a distant return. Who knows what tomorrow is? Please raise your hand.

## Leonard Orr

### **Leaving Town**

It's always so freeing on the fringes.  
We pass certain imaginary lines,  
arbitrary marks, the border guards  
asleep at their posts; holding hands  
we limbo to liberation, then lie low.  
I hold you with my cradled hands;  
you stand in mountain pose, tree pose,  
and the earth erupts into the Cascades,  
the pines, those cottonwoods, seeds  
floating puffballs in these shafts of light.  
Bouncing tails of the squirrels are  
necks of swans gliding on the water,  
and before your breasts butterflies  
flap their art nouveau stain glass wings  
cooling us, quail coo and grosbeaks hoot.

## Sarah Heston

### **Cochise Crossing**

I cross over the Tecate Divide, leaving California to accept or not an engagement gift: a chicken. My man sweats somewhere by the Cochise Stronghold. How does a chicken survive by the humming rocks when these days, trouble is unavoidable for all of us. A man George the Indian knows was taken by Africanized bees: Another sailor in the desert, he told me, The Chiricahuas can tell. I hear West Nile has come, working its way from Mexico in mosquitos, and I'll get bit the most—veins are showing through my white skin, noticable more on the light-sand trail where I'll meet him, deep in, where living things aren't seen but certain. What people driving from LA to Tucson know: Yuma is a shitpile. What is uncertain: if a chicken will go in a car and the exact second skin burns before the red shows; I know the first sex flush will push me over my edge, somewhere near an edge of Stronghold, and dry air will bring me back to something not the same. All these crosses held by rocks on the way mark places where people crashed into nothing; I can't stop thinking that as I drive through it, and we have to drive back through it.

## Joseph Powell

### **The Carnelian Arrowhead**

When the garden dirt washed off,  
the orange agate light  
bled toward gilded edges  
like some folk painting  
of a swaddled Christchild.  
The polished swirls  
sleek and watery at the neck  
suggested one who loved  
the stone as much as the shape it took.  
And I loved thinking of the hand  
that had chipped it so it hovered  
above the table on a thin  
invisible seam,  
the edges catching light,  
casting an arrow shadow  
the craftsman shaped a thousand years ago.

When it slipped through my mother-in-law's  
fingers and hit the tile floor,  
it was only the treachery of too much care,  
the way caution can freeze us  
into stumblebums, five thumbs and thick feet,  
the way love can strangle what it loves.  
I couldn't hide my look of stunned surprise.

After ten years, what I remember most  
is her old hands rising to her temples,  
a helpless horror flashing across her face  
as her fists shook slightly, opened  
and held her head like an injured knee.  
Hers is a deliberately selfless soul,  
whose kindness is quietly thorough  
and reads the signals in a scene,  
so all feel, in company, free to be themselves,  
a gift much like the hunter's gift for stone.

She glued the tip back on  
and the light is much the same.  
Now along the glossy scar  
I feel her hands aligning edges  
and that seam on which  
so much time balances.

## Thomas Reynolds

### Stone

Bending down to pick up a flint  
just as my daughter calls out,  
a swirling red and white marvel  
with several frail black threads  
and a nearly perfect gray circle  
permeated with three jagged holes  
connected by a thin red filament,  
I pick up this stone instead.

Descending this slow grassy hill,  
I anticipate my daughter's joy  
at discovering a whorled beauty,  
suddenly oversized, in her grip.  
But this stone resting on my palm  
is unbeautiful, a lump of gravel  
to test even a child's sensitivity,  
inspiring only gray indifference.

What story could I tell my daughter  
to spark interest in this stone?  
That it was once a mountain  
encircled with rings of evergreens  
and through forces of erosion  
is small and puckered as a walnut.  
Possibly place her finger on a vein  
and tell her to feel for a pulse.

Tell her this stone is a tiny casket  
with stiffening body curled inside  
whose spirit escapes into air  
when chucked against a wall.  
Or that this stone preserved my life  
walking toward her in a wind gust,  
its slight weight just enough  
to keep my body from stuttering away.

Holding out her hand as I draw near,  
my daughter clamps her eyes tight,  
picturing a whorled red flint chip  
or jagged diamond of pink quartzite.  
This is a burnt piece of a star  
fallen ten million miles to reach you,  
I tell her as I bludgeon her hopes  
and slip into her hand this stone.

## John Minczeski

### **Rocks**

#### *1. Jack Hammer*

Oh, terrestrial fart  
reverberating through the tympanum  
of my window; oh sledge,  
simple disciple of earth quake  
drilling through concrete.  
Little jail buster,  
workers hovering over you  
like guardian angels. Prisoners  
prefer your elegance to their pickaxes  
and mauls, tokens of high civilization.  
They look, as they break down their rocks,  
like they're practicing to be ants.  
Here, there's just the sound  
like thunder that is trying,  
but just can't manage, to rip  
the sky.

*2. Stars*

The sun filters through green leaves.  
A chainsaw is biting into my life again.  
Beyond these clouds and this atmosphere,  
the mars robot presses its mouth against another rock,  
its teeth whirring.

*3. Bench*

The old guy sat on the concrete bench  
rubbing back and forth to scratch his ass  
unaware high school students watch  
from a window. It's July, sunlight  
flares where yesterday  
there'd been trees. It must be  
uncontrollable, like a curse  
this itch, like a performance.  
It could be shown next year at the art center  
on a black and white screen.  
The guy could be coasting toward  
a genius grant as the camera pans  
to the window and catches them  
laughing as stars begin to swarm,  
worrying their way to heaven.

*4. Teeth*

Tombstones behind the smile,  
tiny mountain range,  
pillow for the tongue.

Ground away at night,  
rebuilt by day.

A bridge connecting two banks,  
and no river between.

## **Planting**

November drags its claws  
across the ground. It happens  
when I'm sleeping or awake,  
it doesn't matter. It is a radio  
report—25 dead Italians  
in Iraq: car bomb. First sleet,  
then a little sun. First wind,  
then the wind of the stars  
and the hack-sawed moon.  
I dug so many holes in the yard  
this year—for trees, not grief—  
but there's still room if you need,  
to plant your grief.

## Charles West

### **Tanka**

Amber, gold and brown,  
we punish the fallen leaves  
for hiding dead grass.  
They are raked, blown, and bagged,  
and put out with the trash.

## Jeffrey Bean

### **October**

What silt  
What melt  
What loam  
What bone  
What coals  
What gold  
What lake  
What flock  
What fled  
O fled  
O fled  
That want  
That wren  
That west  
That red  
What turned the woods to stone

## Michael Palmer

### Season's End

1.

Labor Day, and white has fallen  
from fashion. A thrush stirs  
in the still warm breeze.

2.

Late Autumn, and a carved pumpkin rots  
on our porch; 4.00; already,  
my shadow extends.

3.

Dear Diary, it's June;  
—*cowbells in the distance*—  
I've almost lost my place.

4.

October. Your things  
in the closet, in boxes,  
away. I dry tulips, press leaves;  
this world undoes itself  
slowly.

5.

Your photo, face down, on the bureau.  
Court dates.  
My children? Your children? Who knows?  
First snow of the year: I think of you  
and feel.

6.

Spring again: each bud breaks  
into blossom; the heads of flowers  
explode. In the garden,  
another hair grays; within you, without you,  
I am becoming.

7.

Your post in the mail.  
—*Autumn returns*—  
Another leaf loosens;  
another hangs on.  
Shadow by shadow  
—*your face in the distance*—  
—*dry tulips. Dear Diary. cowbells.*—  
These leaves I have gathered  
are scattered  
by wind.

## Contributors

**Amanda Auchter** currently works as the editor of *Pebble Lake Review*. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Antietam Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Mad Poets Review*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Plum Ruby Review*, *Willow Review*, *Writer's Journal*, *Writer's Digest Year's Best Writing 2003*, and others. She is the recipient of the 2004 Howard Moss Poetry Prize and won third prize in the 2003 *Writer's Digest Writing Competition* for memoir/personal essay. At present, she is completing a degree in creative writing at the University of Houston.

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**Kristy Bowen's** work has appeared in a number of publications, including *Small Spiral Notebook*, *Stirring*, and *Poems Niederngasse*. She is the author of two chapbooks, *Bloody Mary* and *The Archaeologist's Daughter*, and a hypertext collection, *lattitudes*. A two-time Pushcart nominee, Bowen was recently awarded first place in The Poetry Center of Chicago's 10th Annual Juried Reading Competition. She lives in Chicago, where she edits the online journal *Wicked Alice*, and is the founder of Dancing Girl Press, devoted to publishing work by women poets. More of her work may be seen at <http://www.angelfire.com/poetry/wickedpen>.

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**John Minczeski's** most recent book, *Circle Routes*, won the 2000 Akron Poetry Prize. Recent work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Poetry East*, *Rattapallax*, *Meridian*, and elsewhere. He works as a poet in the schools and does occasional adjunct teaching in colleges around Minnesota

**Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz** is a poet and fiction writer.

**Leonard Orr** teaches literature and creative writing at Washington State University. His work has appeared in many journals including *Black Warrior Review*, *Poetry International*, *Poetry East*, *Writing on the Edge*, *PoetsWest*, *Pontoon*, *Rosebud*, and *Rocky Mountain Review*.

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**Deborah Poe** has lived in the Pacific Northwest since 1995. She has worked as an editor and reader for publications such as *The Poem and the World* and *Bellingham Review*.

**Joseph Powell** has published three full-length collections of poetry and three chapbooks. *Accent On Meter: A Handbook for Readers of Poetry*, which he co-wrote with Mark Halperin, is forthcoming from NCTE. He teaches at Central Washington University.

**Thomas Reynolds** teaches at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. Publications which have accepted his work include *Aethlon-The Journal of Sport Literature*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *New Delta Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Cape Rock*, *Potpourri*, *American Western Magazine*, *3rd Muse Poetry Journal*, *Ariga*, *Miller's Pond Poetry Magazine*, *The Green Tricycle*, *Eclectica*, and *Prairie Poetry*.

**Steve Rhodes** is a freelance writer and Presbyterian minister living in Berea, Kentucky. His poems have appeared or will soon appear in *Plainsongs*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Windhover*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and *The Cresset*.

**S. Brady Tucker** received an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University in 1998, where he founded and worked as Poetry Editor for *Thin Air* magazine. His most recent publications have appeared in the *Lullwater Review*, *The North American Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Poetry Motel*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, the *Spoon River Poetry Review*, and in the following anthologies: *American Diaspora* (2001, University of Iowa Press), *Like Thunder* (2002, University of Iowa Press, winner of 2002 Anthology Award), and *Clockpunchers* (2003, Mammoth Books).

**Valeria Vegas** writes novels, prose poems, essays, and plays. Her work has been produced and published in venues large and small, including most recently *How To Fix Your Ford* at Luna Sea Theatre in San Francisco and a redneck epistolary pornographic novella titled *XOXO, Bobby Jo* out on H.E.A.D. Press. Her essays and stories have been widely anthologized, most recently in *ReGeneration: Stories from Our Twenties* by JP Tarcher, a subsidiary of Penguin publishing. She is the editor of *Stewed, Screwed, and Tattooed*, an anthology of today's most fucked geniuses, due out in Fall of 2005. She lives in San Francisco and worships all things Dolly Parton.

**Charles West** lives in Madera, California.

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## Links to Other Quality Online Journals

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