

# POETRY MIDWEST

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NUMBER 2  
FALL 2001

FEATURING:

GORDON GRAY • GUENETTE • HOLLAND  
HORN • JANZEN • KENDIG • LISOWSKI  
MCLAUGHLIN • MULROONEY • NEUMIRE  
PFINGSTON • RUDY

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EDITOR  
MATTHEW W. SCHMEER

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## Masthead

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### **Thriller for the Middle Years**

Tonight proximate stars stand bored  
(but never touching), like strangers  
in a queue. Across from me, a couple  
fronts the middle years: she shovels down  
her white-lipped Caesar salad; he toys  
with the same forkful of mashed potatoes.

At their hotel she'll demonstrate  
indifference by disappearing into the bath  
for an elaborate shaving of legs. He'll go  
straight to bed. Fortunately there are two  
beds and a black-out curtain. In the bath  
she'll unaccountably remember a writer,

twenty years ago, whom she came close  
to loving. (Once she leaned into his  
Floridian night from which moss hung  
like hair flung against humidity.) But  
their rage can wait it out, arms folded,  
in the dark outside the bathroom.

She emerges pink and steaming. Ah, now—  
don't look: anger swiftly closes its fingers  
around temptation's throat. In the seconds  
before she chokes, let her remember  
Lake Alice, the full moon a plump sponge  
somewhere above the mist, whitening out

the dark smudges of alligators, the long  
ragged grasses that bend over histrionically,  
as if sick. Such a moon is its own  
temptation. If she squeezed it, what  
cleaning properties it would drip!—  
Ammonia to streak a cloudy world.

## **Kinderplaats**

The guy inside the bee waves placidly.  
I smile for the hundredth happy ending,  
a label for the Polaroid. The bee,  
adorable or monstrous depending  
on degrees of innocence, benignly  
signs autographs or high-fives a Kinder book.  
Bee Well can shake a bee leg divinely;  
he leads aerobics for the kids who look  
like Nazis, curiously alike. Their shoes  
are tiny clogs, as wooden as the smiles  
on moral Christian parents. Without views  
like theirs there'd be no Tulip Time, no miles  
of flower-bordered streets, no big parades,  
no gated lakeshore mansions, and no maids.

**T.B.Rudy**  
<tbr3@cornell.edu>

## **Wrestling, Slapstick, and Pornography**

These tickets come a thousand to a roll  
in seven colors. They spin empty off the spool  
before the second show-people are nuts  
to see reality's stretched limits:

a body pliant as a rubber hose that coils  
across the stage, plays a thousand fools  
and heroes, lubes and sweats like mad  
against a counterweight when contact's made.

These masses flaunt their scripted physical  
juices, their unrepentant passions comical  
and operatic, acting out scenarios  
of life's anatomy with Marxist pose:

always a well-oiled victor, a straight man  
slapping someone silly, a top and a bottom.

## **Tiff Holland**

[<tiffholland@earthlink.net>](mailto:tiffholland@earthlink.net)

### **No Need for Room Service**

Between home and homesick is the highway,  
the Day's Inn at Cave City, Kentucky  
thirty-seven fifty per night for  
king size, bleach-white sheets.  
There's a "Triple A" discount and  
catfish buffet, "all you can eat."  
Just past claustrophobia, I slip  
from Central to Eastern Standard Time.  
I forget to eat lunch and can't decide  
"supper" or "dinner," "sweet corn"  
or "greens." I talk to the dog too much.  
He lifts his leg at every rest stop in five states,  
knocks us into neutral outside Bowling Green.  
I don't know about "true North,"  
but I've come to know the South,  
barbeque smell on everything,  
the shiny-leaved magnolia trees  
refusing to curl up into fists, fall brown.  
"Y'all" is contagious as boiled peanuts  
and sweet tea, but I miss that glaze  
of frost on the windshield,  
a small rectangle scraped  
horizontally away.  
I like my peanuts roasted, my tea hot.  
I like extra blankets, their weight  
holding me to dreams, seasons  
so cold they seem clean, devoid  
of any other living thing, so that I can't help  
but believe in myself, my foggy breath  
an echo, my limbs filled with down.

**Christopher Mulrooney**

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**El Segundo Blue**

here is a road that stops  
and another and another and  
the last one goes up and over

there you are

you can see  
at last from here  
the old folks see it all  
kids

dead vacant

at the Wayfarers Chapel  
little verses mar the view  
the little view

up the hill  
the little view

the dead cove  
the shuttered pleasure palaces

**stop the presses**

I see his image rude immobile  
standing there holding outright a paper  
with its headline  
a stack of them under his arm  
statuesque

**Diane Kendig**  
<kendig@attglobal.net>

## **Acute Angle**

During years of living at a four-way stop half-way  
between the Rocking U Restaurant and Stoney Ledge Bar,  
I'd swear the intersection lane markers must've meant  
tear along the dotted lines, but I slept  
through the breaking, skreeking, ripping away  
without even dreaming of noise. Now  
living on a cul-de-sac so quiet  
it could be intensive care, I find

I'm on the wrong ward, wakeful, reading the labels  
on canisters and life-support equipment,  
shuffling hallways like the nurse who closed  
the gashes of disasters in midnight alleys  
and salved the friction burns of brains, making her rounds.  
I shut down the heat till the day crew comes on.  
When you're working a double shift, you hold back,  
like walking in San Francisco, making

an acute angle of yourself.  
I'm working double shifts these days,  
the real source of my insomnia, and not,  
as my comparison suggests, locale.  
One shift, I do the job. The last eight hours,  
I do the day again plus the one to come,  
all on my back, eyes open. I rise up, feeling  
I've been run over by an emergency vehicle. You know.  
You've had this job, too.

**Roger Pfingston**  
<snapshot@bluemarble.net>

**Lush or Dry**  
*Indiana, '98*

Such a warm winter. . .  
El Niño's doing. They  
said it would lessen spring,  
kill off unsuspecting buds,  
the early ones like lovers  
who can't help themselves,  
the wet opening suddenly shot  
with late frost, and yet  
the world is lush again,  
more so perhaps: at the end  
of the driveway, one tulip,  
cup so ablaze with red  
and yellow, a drink from it  
would risk rapture.  
And this morning, along  
the highway, flaming out  
of a rock wall, a bright loner  
of a redbud below the steep  
ground above, rich with sheep  
and trees and tall mottled  
grasses measured by a line  
of barbed wire, one man's  
rusty grip on the world as he  
sees it, no matter lush or dry.

## **Joseph McLaughlin**

[<JosephMcL@aol.com>](mailto:JosephMcL@aol.com)

### **An Incurable Romantic**

Wherever you go, you will always carry  
this shadow, this darkness with you  
before the sunshine of your bluster and laugh:  
the knowledge that you never will be happy  
or content.

It is a moon which eclipses  
the sun forever; the light you radiate  
streams out from behind the shadow-disc  
of your eternal longing for another world  
in which you are wealthy, indolent, feared,  
and even more beautiful.

A character in  
an opera by Puccini, tragic and bittersweet,  
you see yourself at once as a patient martyr,  
long-suffering, yet oddly noble and heroic,  
whose only chance at victory lies in defeat.

**William Neumire**  
<kujospalace@hotmail.com>

**Returns**

Perhaps there are two Mexicans  
With wet boxes full of empty bottles,  
And they want to return them

But the boxes are wet, and some  
Have attracted bugs, and the fields  
Need to be worked long, so this is

Night, and the store is almost closed,  
And their words aren't quite English  
Yet, and they need the nickels

For whatever people need nickels for,  
But perhaps you won't accept them  
Because they are wet, and bugs

Disgust you, especially when it is night  
And you have worked long here, and  
You can't seem to make them understand.

**Lynnette Horn**  
<lahorn@socket.net>

**Mañana**

Paco was a good man. Badness required too much energy. We lived side-by-side along the river in a lean-to of salvaged driftwood and junk. He would sit on the bank, worrying the current with a bottle of cheap whiskey, and anoint my head with *mañana* blessings.

“*Mi querida, no te preocupes,*” he’d flash a smile as broad as Texas. “I work and make money *mañana*. Soon I will give you all the fine things you deserve.” But the next day *mañana* was still another sunrise away.

Friends, family, and assorted drifters showed up on our threshold daily. Song and laughter were constants fueled by humble food and a little whiskey. The men would congregate on the riverbank to pass a bottle with their *mañana* dreams of moneymaking schemes, while the sad-eyed women smashed pintos in the campfire kettle or flattened tortillas between their weathered hands. Like the other women, I held no illusion to the blessing of *mañana*. Our anointing had long turned to ashes, dulling our spirits and our faces.

“I’m going to leave him,” I’d say. “I’m going to leave him, *mañana*.” But I had no more power over *mañana* than Paco. We spent forty-five years together waiting for its arrival.

Now Paco *está muerto*. He died, as he would’ve wanted, overlooking the current with a bottle of cheap whiskey in hand. His brothers buried him on that same riverbank, while I made a marker for his grave. I crafted it out of driftwood and carved an epitaph on it that read:

Here lies my husband, Paco.  
I will mourn for him *mañana*.

**Matthew C. Guenette**

[<MGuenett@usi.edu>](mailto:MGuenett@usi.edu)

**Postcard from a Bar Near a Small Lutheran College**

Sunlight through the blinds assumed a darkness.

Genie and Ed, let's call them that, came in,  
took their seats at the bar.

In a few weeks the woman I was with  
would leave me, I already knew it,  
the two of us engaged  
in our colorless conversation while Genie  
shook loose a few cigarettes,  
while Ed turned the sports pages, reading aloud  
in his gravelly voice all the noteworthy stats.

Behind the bar, a mirror  
with dark patches along its edge.  
In its reflection I could see curlicues  
of smoke circling Genie's head, Ed waving  
at the bartender.

We're dying over here buddy, he said,  
what have you got to eat?

**Joseph Lisowski**  
<[jlisowsk@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:jlisowsk@mercyhurst.edu)>

### **A Ring of Orphans Singing**

It is 1926 and five children  
travel down the mountain.  
Locusts are no longer in pitch,  
a family garden gone to seed.  
They are taken into strife:  
enameled walls, slick stone floors,  
a tapping of nuns in their cells.  
They find fall dark, splintered to the bone.  
The oldest, at ten,  
fingers beads a good sister gave.

Each child is numb,  
their ears stuffed with whispers:  
God is gone, God is gone.

**A Good Marriage**

She hugs heat  
while they sleep.  
He shaves ice  
blue as Arctic tundra.  
Their dreams  
touch light.  
Windows are barred.  
Night is turned out.

They are at home  
in the bed they make  
and unmake.

## **Jennifer Gordon Gray**

[<scotwish@merr.com>](mailto:scotwish@merr.com)

### **True North**

I think of Alaska these hot summer days  
as glaciers of sliding sweat creep  
down my back, flooding the street.  
I have a stand of tall white pines growing  
god knows how outside my parlor  
here on the rocky (some say cursed) prairie.  
They smell like winter, their soft needles  
a piece of wilderness, and they help keep  
me from missing too much the true north.  
And though most would refer to Wisconsin  
as the northern climes, I know better,  
and better do I know the true boreal.  
But I see relief—a band of grey clouds racing  
east, towards the great lake, and I hope when  
work is over I can lift my face to rain, and drench.  
The rain, if it falls, will wash away the  
rivers of sweat, calm the temperament  
and let me think of where I am.

## Contributors

**Jennifer Gordon Gray** is a newspaper editor & writer in Sauk City, Wisconsin.

**Matthew C. Guenette** originally hails from New Hampshire and is currently an instructor at the University of Southern Indiana. He holds an MFA from Southern Illinois University, and has published recently in *Quarterly West* and *Rattle*. He also has poems forthcoming in *The Sarasota Review*.

A former 911 dispatcher and insurance adjuster, **Tiff Holland** is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Writers. Her work has previously appeared in *Kalliope*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Journal*, *Red River Review*, and other journals.

**Lynnette Horn** lives on the outskirts of metropolitan St. Louis. A graduate of Maryville University, she is a freelance writer and co-author of *The Natural Childbirth Book*. She has written numerous features for newspapers and regional publications.

**Rhoda Janzen** teaches Creative Writing at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. She held the California Poet Laureate Award in 1994 and 1997 and was recently nominated for the Prix de Rome. Her work has recently appeared in *The Yale Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Grand Street*, *The Ledge*, *The Malahat Review*, *Cimarron*, and *The International Poetry Review*, among others, and is also forthcoming in an anthology edited by Heather McHugh.

**Diane Kendig** teaches creative writing, Ohio Literature, and E-Poetics at the University of Findlay. She has published three chapbooks of poetry, most recently *Diane Kendig's Greatest Hits* (Pudding House). The recipient of two Ohio Arts Council Poetry Fellowships, she has conducted a prison writing workshop since 1984.

From 1986 to 1996, **Joseph Lisowski** was an English Professor at the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas. He now teaches at Mercyhurst College North East along the shore of Lake Erie. His recent chapbooks of poems are *Letters to Wang Wei*, along with two essays, (Words on a Wire), *After Death's Silence* (2River View), and *Grief Work* (Kota Press) Other work may be seen online in *Niederngasse*, *Kota Press Journal*, *Thunder Sandwich*, *2River View*, *The Cortland Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently poetry editor of *New Works Review*.

**Joseph McLaughlin** recently retired as an Associate Professor of English at Stark State College of Technology in Canton, Ohio. His current collection of poems is *Memory, In Your Country* (Pale Horse Press, 1995).

**Christopher Mulrooney** lives in Los Angeles. His poetry, fiction, and translations have appeared in *The Brooklyn Review*, *Frank*, *Nimrod*, *The Jacaranda Review*, *Elimae*, *The Burning Bush*, *Shampoo*, *Fire*, and other journals.

**William Neumire** currently resides in Brockport, New York.

**Roger Pfingston's** work has appeared online in *For Poetry*, *Web del Sol*, *Perihelion*, *In Posse*, *The 2River View*, *The Melic Review*, *Disquieting Muses*, among others. Among print magazines he has work in recent issues of *Poet Lore*, *Rhino*, *The Harpweaver*, and *Southern Indiana Review*.

**T.B. Rudy** recently completed his MFA at Cornell University, where he will begin working as a lecturer this fall. His poems have previously appeared in *Clackamas Literary Review* and *Salt River Review*.

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