

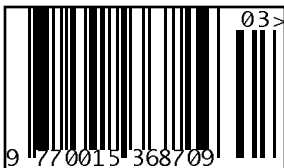
# PoetryMidwest

an electronic journal of the literary arts

NUMBER 3  
WINTER 2002

FEATURING:

ALFIER • BALCOM • BATES • HAMM • HEALY  
• HUA • MULLIGAN • SMITH • SOMOZA •  
TREMBLEY • VAN CLEAVE • WEDMORE •  
ZINZILIETA-PENNINGTON



# PoetryMidwest

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WINTER 2002

EDITOR  
MATTHEW W. SCHMEER

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## Masthead

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**PoetryMidwest**

**Joseph Somoza**  
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**Black and White**

*9/11/2001*

A hummingbird hovers  
just above the dead Christmas tree  
leaning against the back wall.  
Sunny September. Not too cool  
but not summer. Morning light gleams  
off the black metal grill cover,  
the white cat asleep,  
fully hidden in periwinkles  
that need watering.  
The black and white wings  
of a mockingbird  
flutter into the mulberry tree,  
an intrusion from a world  
where children with black eyes  
are honed into knives.

## **Willy and the Swans**

That new guy, Willy, is an odd one, isn't he?

Today I meet him as I'm walking towards the pond, his white hair flying, brown eyes sparked with something I can't understand. And when we come upon the swans, skimming across the water, all grace and white silk, the three fluffy ones in a row behind the mother, and I mention how the day before there'd been 4 babies, the day before that 5, the day before that 6, and I start mulling over the cause of it (What do you think? Coyote? Snapping turtle?) he doesn't blink but looks away and tells me—his words thick, low, charming in a German/Czechoslovakian sort of way—how he and his second wife belonged to a nudist colony, how he likes working on his beat-up old Ford, how he's had at least 20 jobs in his 80 years. A complicated guy!

You sure have seen a lot in a lifetime, I tell him, and he shrugs, raises his arms in a gesture of helplessness, while his T-shirt which reads UNVARNISHED TRUTH rides up so I see his bald belly and the numbers tattooed on his upper arm.

## **Los Angeles to Portland**

*We move in the distance with those clouds  
that could, at one time, almost spell things out.*  
—Brooks Haxton, “Northbound”

inside the womb of redwood,  
we drive our Ford Explorer

like hands shoved into the dark  
of two empty pockets, we ride

in the unpruned August night  
through trees and over valleys

where the horizon is stitched  
with wire fences, telephone lines

like a curious, breathing shrine,  
each refreshment stop a prayer

that this ancient landscape remembers  
the story of heart becoming mind becoming spirit,

but it's late; nearly three in morning,  
still the rock shelf to the north beckons

saying the teal blue peaks beyond  
echo with the promise of storms and winds

at eighty-eight miles per hour, the fire drums  
in the sky are always just ahead, silhouettes

that burn the skin of night red like a liar.

**Li Min Hua**

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**Letter from Chicago, 1990**

As in the thirties, people crowd boxcars .  
More beg than in Hong Kong.  
Come nightfall, they roll themselves in sheets of plastic.  
No one seems to notice.  
The lucky ones sleep in cars abandoned along the lake.  
Others bed behind trees or bushes in Lincoln Park.

Emanciwhat?

In his twenties, he shared a hymnal. After donuts,  
which we both gobbled prodigiously, I asked,  
“Man, what happened to your legs to make you limp so bad?”  
“Doctors done cut off all my toes. Frostbite.”

Evil generation.

**Beijing Cinquain**

summer

hot wet

suck

loose

weeds

## Elizabeth A. Trembley

[<trembley@iserv.net>](mailto:trembley@iserv.net)

### **Blood Stained**

Edith Evangeline Eglington tripped on the sidewalk on account of her shoes bein' too big and the sidewalk bit into her left knee and it bled. I know 'cause I was right there on that sidewalk, and I bit my lip so I'd bleed too, 'cause Edith Evangeline's bigger'n me and it didn't seem right that she'd bleed and I wouldn't. I stood lookin' at her knee bleedin' right in front of the crucified Jesus hanging on the door of the big church where the fags go, so our daddy said, wishin' for a Band-Aid. Only we couldn't go in there 'cause we'd get some disease and die if anyone of 'em bled on us, Jesus or not. I wondered if Edith Evangeline bled on their sidewalk, if she'd still get the disease and die, or if Jesus'd keep her, like when we lay us down to sleep. I looked at his peeling face and grabbed my hands together like I've seen the ladies do at our church. "Don't let her die, Jesus."

Edith Evangeline rolled her eyes at me. "For Christ's sake, Peg, I skinned my knee's all." She scooped the blood from her knee, then wiped her hand off against the concrete.

I looked at Jesus to say sorry for mis-prayin', and saw the peel on his face looked like the blotch Edith Evangeline smeared on the walk. He cured folks with his blood, I knew, so's they could walk or see, or whatever they needed. Maybe Edith Evangeline'd cure the fags of their big disease and make 'em right, 'cause she bled some of her blood on their sidewalk. So, I sucked my lip, tastin' spit like old spoons, and hocked it out by Edith Evangeline's knee.

"Damn, Daddy'd smack you if he saw you spittin' blood. We're s'posed to be ladies." Edith Evangeline stood and walked away from me, steppin' wide and slow so's not to flop them too-big shoes.

I rubbed my toe 'cross our blood, but it wouldn't erase. Then I ran to catch her up.

**Erin Zinzilieta–Pennington**

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**Over**

You ask me if we are over.

What is over? A preposition describing direction.

No. That answer wouldn't satisfy your panic.

How do I know if we are over?

I never knew we were under,  
under the gun you hold at my head.

No. We aren't over.

Not even as I find amusement in your panic.

## **Biography**

“ . . . the sheer volume of evidence.”  
—C. Wilson, *The Occult*

### Volume I: Evidence

Everything you have ever done is in a book somewhere—even the things you thought no one knew about but you. Stop and think about one of them right now: fragments of memory after a fall on the head, the failed pledges of various reform, night sweats, the fracturing enamel of clenching teeth. It's all written down.

### Volume II: Excuses

Start with the number of Cokes your mother used to drink, leaning against the counter at Durwood's country store, the bad teeth which you inherited, the music—Johnny Ray over and over, enough to make anyone cry.

### Volume III: Repair Work

Broken leg, at five, set. In the X-ray, there is still a crack. When your father died, an old man down the street showed you how to lie on your back in the grass and name the stars. An uncle explained how to untangle a ball of string, and mother, much earlier, stood by your crib, dangling over you a monkey puppet.

### Volume IV: Accumulations

Lemon squeezer, thirteen twist ties, spatula, wadded sock, siphon with bulb for sucking fat from the turkey pan, melted candy thermometer, free sample of tampons, toast crumbs, unidentified object from garage sale, cents off coupon for diet Coke, two hundred pop tops too late to redeem for a T-shirt. This seems to go on forever.

Volume V: Opportunities (Taken and Missed)

(In progress.)

Volume VI: Index

If this were on computer disk, you could ask for information by subject or date, or by repetitions of letters, like “trans. . .” in “transcendent,” but the biographer must have been very confused because it is so hard to locate anything by looking for it. You have to let the book fall open, and then take from it the parts that come to hand.

## **Dream Cats**

My cats hate electricity.  
They are scabby, fetid, dark.  
They nose the alarm clock off the dresser.  
They unplug the TV, the fan, the microwave.  
They circle me in the dark,  
teeth shining like  
the memory of that night  
the one I turn the lights on trying  
to forget.

**Eloise Klein Healy**

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**Something for the Portuguese**

*For my Portuguese Water Dogs, Primo and Zabi*

I know it's not honest work  
to be a pet and so do they.

I feel guilty that I keep them  
from their real occupation.

So, just as a reminder  
of who they really are,

they sometimes don't come  
when called,

which is fine with me  
except when we're out in the yard

and what I'm wanting from them  
is that they not eat all the grass

and behave like sheep,  
being wolves under those

black and wooly coats.  
That they come to me—

homeless animal that I am in this world—  
and tell me how it used to be.

## **Leaving People**

Who knew there was so much  
to retrieving an adirondack  
you left behind with friends  
like a house cat or hole in the heart

We drive six hours just to bring it back  
when we arrive there is the chair  
and a bicycle too you forgot  
oh that purple shirt John gave

And there are hands to shake  
people to kiss like New Year's  
people who don't even know you  
but know the place and the sort of talk

Anyway they hold you like they mean it  
one calls you Josie it turns out  
there was a love interest and a card game  
God I don't know which came first

They pull you into the kitchen  
I can't do anything  
but stand here and load the car  
speculate on a whiff of buttermilk

I may never see you again  
it stops raining  
there is a kind of hush  
and gravy and gravy.

**Ross Balcom**  
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## **Climbing Our Cornbread Staircase**

You called me your “milk whistle,” and rehearsed me mercilessly for the recital. What I can’t understand is the farmer’s damned effeminacy. Did he learn that from his cows? (The “milk whistle” was retired to a basement room, where he was suspected of communing with a ghostly teat who called herself Alice.) I champion udders always, even in the dawn of frozen milk that clobbered Indiana sideways. (Instructions for growing your own corn follow . . .)

## **The Couple Down the Street**

They had fought so often for so long that they had run out of all the words in their lives. All the curses, the prayers, the retorts, carried off like malevolent pollen on the winds of anger, to desiccate and rot on rocky ground. But this did not stop their fighting. They continued to shout soundlessly, wordlessly, each convinced that the other wasn't listening, and believing, "If I say it once more, just a little louder. . . ." Eventually, they refused to even close their mouths, afraid that the other one would get a lack of word in edgewise. After a while, small birds began to build nests in their mouths, plucking hair from the couple's heads to bind the grasses and twigs together. The fledglings leaned their necks over the taut lips and opened their beaks wide, and the parent birds dropped grubs and worms into their gaping offspring. The couple stood there, each of them thinking, "What a stupid fool I married. Don't you realize there are birds nesting in your mouth!"

**Jeffrey Alfier**  
<exile3@hotmail.com>

**The Ossuary at the End of All Wars**

*Et in Arcadia ego*

Some, bearing the good fortune  
to lie under the windfall  
of crosses, have only their  
names and earth to shield naked  
bones from leering tourists who  
sigh into your slipstream of  
ghosts, and depart, leaving your  
monument something only  
the Pleiades remember,  
an orphan late in coming.

*Verdun, April, 1997*

## Contributors

**Jeffrey Alfier** is an Air Force officer stationed in Tucson, Arizona. He holds an MA in Humanities, and have served as an adjunct faculty member with City Colleges of Chicago's European Division. A member of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, his publication credits include *Because I Fly* (McGraw-Hill), *A Time of Trial* (Hidden Brook Press), and the journals *Columbia Review*, *Conspire*, *CrossConnect*, *Melic Review*, *Niederngasse*, *Paumanok Review*, *Poetry Greece*, *Stolen Island Review*, and *War, Literature and the Arts*.

Born in Indiana, **Ross Balcom** currently lives in Anaheim, California. He has a B.A. in Religious Studies from California State University, Fullerton, and he is working on an explosive religious biography titled *Jesus Christ: Robot from Outer Space*.

**Thomas Bates** is a researcher and columnist residing in Northern Colorado. His poems have most recently appeared in *Front Range Review* and *Pif Magazine Online*. He is a 2002 Pushcart Prize nominee.

**Christine Hamm** received an MA in Creative Writing 12 years ago, and has had her work published in *New York Metropolis*, *In Posse*, *Bluffmag*, *Babes in Toyland*, *Salon*, *Clean Sheets*, *Kansas Little Literary Review*, *Ennui Magazine*, *She-net*, and *Suite101.com*, among others. She has taught creative writing workshops at SUNY-Binghamton, run workshops in New York City, and is the moderator of the Advanced Writers group on **Yahoo!**. She is currently part of two reading series in New York City: *Thesaurus Head* and *Speakeasy*.

**Eloise Klein Healy** is the founding chair of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Antioch University Los Angeles. Her most recent collection, *Artemis In Echo Park*, is also available on audiotape/CD. Healy's work appears in the new anthologies *Another City: Writing From Los Angeles*, *The World In Us: Gay and Lesbian Poetry of the Next Wave*, and *The Geography of Home: California's Poetry of Place*. In March of 2002, Red Hen Press will publish her fifth collection of poems, *Passing*.

**Li Min Hua** lived in exile in Asia from 1983 to 1987. He has edited special issues of *College English* and *Margins*, as well as written three volumes of poetry: *Sunspots* (Lotus Press, Detroit, 1976) *Midnight Lessons* (Samisdat, 1987), and *Lutibelle's Pew* (Dragon Disks, 1990). He lives in East Orange, New Jersey and teaches English at Rutgers. The University of Michigan collects his papers. His poems in this issue were previously published elsewhere in print, and appear in **Poetry Midwest** by special arrangement with the author.

**JB Mulligan's** poems and stories have appeared in dozens of magazines, including *3rd Muse Poetry Review*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The New Formalist*, *Wilmington Blues*, and *Electric Acorn*; and also authored two chapbooks: *The Stations of the Cross* and *THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS*.

**Leonora Smith** has held a Michigan Council for the Arts Grant in Fiction, and has published two chapbooks of poetry, *Eating Red Meat* (Stone Press) and *Faculty X* (Years Press). Former editor of *Labyris* feminist literary magazine, and of *Muses*, the alumni magazine of Michigan State's College of Arts and Letter, she teaches in MSU's Department of American Thought and Language. A new collection, *Spatial Relations*, from which *Biography* is taken, is just out from Michigan State University Press.

**Joseph Somoza** used to teach at New Mexico State University and edit the literary magazine *Puerto Del Sol*. He now writes full-time. He has published two books and four chapbooks of poetry. His upcoming book, *Cityzen*, will be published by La Alameda Press in Albuquerque in spring of 2002. He lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico with his wife, Jill, a painter.

**Elizabeth A. Trembley** teaches creative writing and literature at a college in Western Michigan. She has published creative nonfiction and scholarship on the works of Dorothy L.Sayers, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Michael Crichton.

**Ryan G. Van Cleave** is Assistant Professor of Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. His work has appeared in recent issues of *Arts & Letters*, *Quarterly West*, and *Ploughshares*; new work is forthcoming in *The Iowa Review*, *The Missouri Review*, and *TriQuarterly*. His most recent books are *Say Hello* (Pecan Grove Press, 2001) and the anthology *American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement* (University of Iowa Press, 2001).

**Suellen Wedmore**, Poet Laureate of the seaside town of Rockport, Massachusetts, has been published in *Green Mountains Review*, *College English*, *Phoebe*, *Larcom Review*, *The Cancer Poetry Project*, and others. Recently she won first place in the national *Writer's Digest* rhyming poem contest as well as first place in the *Byline Magazine* annual literary contest.

**Erin Zinzilieta-Pennington** graduated from Eastern Illinois University with a degree in Secondary Education and teaches sophomore and senior English classes at Carmi-White County High School in Carmi, Illinois. She also teaches English part-time at Southeastern Illinois Junior College.

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