

# PoetryMidwest

an electronic journal of the literary arts

NUMBER 4  
SPRING/SUMMER 2002

FEATURING:

ANAWALT • ANSTETT • BOWEN • BURNS •  
CALLAN • FOLEY • FREEMYER • HOLT-FORTIN •  
JANZEN • JENKINS • LANGLEY • ROTH • RUBIN •  
RUGGIERI • STARK • WEBSTER • WHEELER •  
WHITLEY • YARBROUGH



# PoetryMidwest

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NUMBER 4  
SPRING/SUMMER 2002

EDITOR  
MATTHEW W. SCHMEER

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## Masthead

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**PoetryMidwest**

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**Blue**

Earth's thin pale skin  
holds us all as memory  
blue, floating, contained.

**Suzanne Burns**

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**The Elephant Man Models**

*for Joseph Merrick (1862-1890)*

The halls exhale antiseptic venom,  
Dull the lemon tiles. Visitors whisper  
Rehearsed platitudes to patients  
Warring death with menthol  
And passages from Genesis.  
But in the London Hospital attic  
Merrick, a marriage of Man and Elephant,  
Eases into the genus of Lilliputian craft.

While gray whorls of British parliament  
Debate war with tea and artifice,  
He bewitches crepe and toothpicks  
Into bipartisan monuments.  
An agreeable caucus of paper  
And rubber cement. Fragile the trestles,  
So delicate the domed archways, yet  
Merrick caresses dwarf dimensions  
In the bony culverts of his palm.

Soon to be a sideshow superstition,  
Bones cataloged and prodded  
In folklore and museums,  
In Merrick's well-lit overlook  
He sits, content to snip  
Cellophane into little panes,  
Master of this expanding city  
Mortaring brick by minute brick.

Downstairs casualties are cut  
And malpracticed, cavities  
Of sickness nursed or bled,  
But here perfection comprising  
Miniature stately rooms  
Pushes back the gouts,  
Starves the cancers,  
Consecrates the English noons  
Dappled with imperfect mist.

**Mark Jenkins**

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**On Sale**

They're on sale today she says  
With the enthusiasm sucked out  
Like a rolled up tube of toothpaste,  
With just a hint  
Coating her lips  
As if she's spent the last few days  
Repeating herself  
Squeezing  
Until empty.

**August 23**

My neck bent like a crane's,  
I turn to each August quadrant  
hoping for falling stars.

Once, in a graveyard,  
with friends they fell so fast  
we quit counting.  
Now, single-minded, they're stuck up there.

Morning, I look past the kitchen  
through the living room glass door  
to the spot where I spun last night

And see, in the dew, starshot.  
A yellow-white, morning brilliant  
fallen from the mind that wished it here.

**Stan Sanvel Rubin**  
<[srubin@brockport.edu](mailto:srubin@brockport.edu)>

## **At the U.S. Space and Rocket Museum**

In Huntsville, you can escape the sun  
in the improbable shade of a Stealth fighter,  
you can touch a reassembled V-2, cram yourself  
into a perfect mock-up of a space capsule,

and, if you're not careful, lose your balance,  
crack a knee against a bulkhead, seeing stars,  
descend tipsy as a kid to common ground.  
Rilke knew space lives inside us like destiny,

like pain. The measure of distance  
the hand of a child. The map of love  
an internal sky. Here in the shadow  
of the predator's wing, while the camera

makes its chemical memory, and you stand  
still aiming at me—my love, my stranger—  
I am as distant from myself as a newsreel.  
I cannot forgive my own heart's wars.

## **The Fair**

From the front seat comes  
my sister's voice like water  
plashing stones. The pale roots

of her voice have taken hold  
and are spreading. Miles fall away,  
bold pennies dropped from the

Eiffel Tower, rushing oblivion,  
unrecoverable. Once it was my task  
to brush this sister's fog-white hair

before bed: I smoothed out fisted  
rubber bands, the kink easing  
the page-straight transparency

between us. At the airport, dawn  
wheels the night away, a sturdy  
miniature suitcase. My sister

pours juice into red plastic cups  
sited on the fender like duck targets  
at the Fresno Fair: all the new milk

you could gulp for a dime, a piano-  
playing chicken's two-four thrill.  
A sideshow barker shouted after

our whipsmart wheatlong braids,  
Last chance, Blondie! If you  
don't see it now, you never will.

## **Savoir Faire**

*Let us kill it [the evening] in slow parley, over the leisured savourings  
of fare both simple and elaborate, in the tempered colour of a room lighted  
softly, clearly, by living fire of wax or oil or wood, or by the most artful  
disguises of electricity.*

—M.F.K. Fisher

Let us be gracious  
in all the wood  
that holds our  
whisperings precious,  
in the dessert  
that starts  
with a Crème Brulee  
or Raspberry Torte  
that works  
to diminish  
only the hours  
not the time.  
Grant us  
the simple wish  
to remain  
under whatever magic  
makes us immortal  
from the kitchen:  
carmelized,  
glazed,  
fully realized.

## Chris Stark

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### **Baby**

I'm sorry. *I'm sorry baby that you have to go through this I'm sorry baby.* I open my eyes. Mom's crying *sorry sorry sorry* petting my hair *baby I'm sorry* I pull the sheets up to my chin *he's gone he had a drink he didn't mean it.* I see her face in the moonlight white through the curtain *he didn't* I say nothing she told him about the permission slip *Baby* my arm hurts from his fingers *Baby* her tears drip on my face *forgive him shhh go to sleep it's going to be all right* her cheek is bruised in the dark I can see it under the white moonlight. *Get some sleep I'm sorry baby you don't deserve this he didn't mean it go to sleep we'll forget about it in the morning okay we'll have pancakes* she wipes her face her tears drip down my neck they're cold.

**Kaija Langley**  
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### **This Homecoming**

The baby kicked, wetness graced her thighs. It was time. She woke her husband and with one glance, he knew too. At the hospital she whispered, "Thank you, Father," as they wheeled down the hallway, both pain and peace engulfing. Stillness. The delivery complete, she gripped her husband's hand and wailed for the baby with the umbilical cord around its neck.

## **Her Idea of Order**

at Key West was like her idea  
of order in the classroom. I was to sing,  
sing beyond all others, genius student  
in an eager ocean over which she professed,  
tragic-voiced. She proclaimed me brilliant,  
classically beautiful and so I braved her, let her  
phrases unbury passions I had burned  
only for words of Shelley, Dickinson, Stevens,  
alone in a room of my own.

But the money

was not mine and so I sunbathed nude,  
like a body wholly body, for an hour  
in exchange for lunch, chicken salad.  
I was nineteen and still ate flesh  
but the gristle chewed glue-like in my mouth,  
shuttering sound, all my words pasty and stuck.

In such light, she dreamed there was a world  
for us, there by the sea where I sang.  
I wanted to stretch my voice *l,l,l,l*, beyond lust,  
wanted to lick my tongue around lovely and linger.  
What I remember of stuttering back up  
the East Coast is that I could not sing  
and longed for one clean drink of water.

## **Amalfi Drive, 1966**

Climbing up the switch-back  
from Salerno to the Amalfi Drive  
the road and trees dripping  
in the early morning humidity  
rising to mist,  
we headed north.

You wanted to walk the whole 35 miles.

I remember the outside of the cliff,  
a drop straight to the pale green sea.  
Boats anchored to  
Shadows thirty feet down.

Demon drivers in an onion-laden,  
three-wheeled truck  
showed us a stone  
Madonna.  
“Formed by the wind,”  
the onion farmers told us.  
Just off the edge of the cliff,  
on a rock ledge,  
she stands holding her child,  
figured against a depthless sky,  
the bougainvillea splashing like spilt wine  
down white villa walls,  
the sea and grey mountains,

I see her so easily  
but cannot remember your face.

**Aaron Anstett**

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**Bees**

The keeper makes the bees sleep. Her smoking bellows lulls them.  
They're lighter, hypnotized. They do not do the dance of remembering

or warble and hum. They roll in her gloved palms, legs tucked  
against stomachs, stunned intelligences, hazardous animals.

She would like to be small and have somebody stun her,  
even a giant in canvas collecting. She would like flying

by dint of will, flower to flower and marrying them.  
The drowsed bees are bristly. She puts each to her lips

to feel the heart beat. One by one, she wishes *Sweet dreams*.  
She calls them by their many names.

## Ask Anyone

The stranger who lifts my drink hand and not one drop spills  
as the antique trees these blond boards were blossom  
elsewhere in those latest shakings of rain, men drunk in the villages,  
wants to kiss me, but his mouth is every expression it's ever made.

Fistfight from so great a distance it might be a dance craze  
called *Smacked in the Head and the Asterisks Swam*, the world  
bewilders, like television news from another country. I let him  
take me home and kill me. And now I'm your unreliable narrator.

## **Crows**

I see them every day but I studied them  
in the November dusk the day after Anna died.  
Crows sashayed and finally settled  
in the oaks and maples. I pulled over  
and ambled to the woods through sharp grass  
to crouch in the undergrowth.

The air was hollow. My car was running.  
Someone could have stolen it  
while I squatted and stared into a crow's  
seedy eye. When I fell back onto my elbows  
the whole tribe lifted away over the bridge.  
I told myself to get on the road  
so they could return to their trees.  
I told myself *go*.

**His Mother**

*for Scottie*

She, who knows more than I do  
what it is to say, "I will lay  
down my pen for you and never

pick it up again," she thinks  
I ask too much. If he knew  
what he wanted, if my silence

somehow eased that want, I would  
fall dumb at once. Easy for me  
to say, of course, since he

will never ask. But still.  
If he knew what he wanted  
I would tie this pen on a silken

cord to hang around his neck  
and say, "I'll have it back  
when you are full." Again,

easy to say, since he is full  
of me and I am full of words.  
But still. But still.

## **Treasured Wisdom of the Ouija Spirits**

Today I  
am fifty

a relic

the dried fingers of childhood  
leave prints  
resembling the powder  
dashed from  
three hundred moth wings  
on a Kansas automobile windshield

they almost remind me of  
the day my mother  
entered me in  
a Ouija Board contest  
at a local toy store—  
I couldn't have been older than 10—  
and I contacted  
three hundred departed  
spirits  
in one hour—  
no other contestant even came close

each of the three hundred spirits  
I contacted on this special afternoon  
told me  
the same thing

which was this:

you'll never see  
forty-five

## **The Landlord**

When I crush the glass and stick my tongue deep in that bulb hole, that's when the neighbors across the street can watch my eyes light the gloom. Some people don't believe the religion of the electric. The glowing electric reveals to me the way. Abraham sometimes speaks to me as the flashes go. Moses corrected my spine once, while I twitched in the wall socket. I eat watch batteries like aspirins. I chew wires for gum. I can't worship during prime time because it interferes with people's reception. The landlord is complaining again about the smell of the burnt hair. Maybe I'll move to the midwest where they get good thunderstorms.

**Helen Ruggieri**  
<[hruggier@localnet.com](mailto:hruggier@localnet.com)>

## **Beethoven On Line**

He's in the air like the whir  
and whoosh of the printers, taptap  
of the keys, the soft click of the mouse.

From every screen Beethoven's face blooms  
like a threat the world has pronounced  
on angels: listen, wind through dead stalks

of grass, hiss and shush, hiss/shush,  
the faint gurgle of water groping  
to the fountain, snow melt on the roof.

Our logical melody, vibrating along  
a nappy carpet, the static strike we make  
reaching for the knob, blue streaks

like ghostly inspirations singing,  
otherworldly, electronically into  
our irrevocable world with the dim

susurrations of electrons dancing  
off the ends of our fingers—  
the beat goes on.

**Pluvial**

*Love is a desert and I need it to rain.*  
—Macy Gray

Every now and again  
your resolve slips, practicality  
stumbles slightly over

the debris remaining from some  
previous shower, and,  
despite your knowing better,

you entertain daydreams  
of a deluge, a monsoon of  
soothing tears of relief

streaming down, released  
from the sky's presently  
dry blue eye.

You imagine  
your entire body  
immersed,

your arms lifting  
like the jubilant lavender  
petals of the cyclamen,

the dainty yellow cups of  
the tulips  
filling as if to toast this

much-needed sustenance,  
this sweetness drenching  
everything everywhere,

the once-parched world  
alive again  
with a newfound effervescence.

And then sunlight  
riding  
along the back of the flow.

And then sunlight  
expanding its repertoire—  
gushing, plashing, purling.

**Hush**

*Winter, 1902*

The creak of the stairs  
is like a lock unhinging,  
a hinge unmolding,  
a sigh in still air.  
We are tethered here,  
like a hook in eye,  
the rooks in the attic,  
their claws holding  
fast as winter.

I've dreamt of words  
in books the size of windows,  
they say nothing of mourning,  
or our mother,  
the thin thread of her memory  
wound like a sash  
through these rooms,  
through this small life.

We've been waiting here  
among the linens,  
the losses, for the fall  
of skirts, of evening,  
the tick of the parlor clock.

Forever wishing for the tug  
of our hair in the brush,  
the whisper, the reprimand  
at our back, the hush of  
pencils lined perfectly in drawers  
like our dreams.

We are learning not to listen,  
not to list, at that footfall  
upon the stairs, not to notice  
the catch the heart makes,  
or the knock that never comes.

## Contributors

**Howard C. Anawalt** lives in northern California.

**Aaron Anstett** is the author of the poetry collection *Sustenance* (1997). His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Indiana Review*, *Thin Air*, *Tampa Review*, and *Yellow Silk*. He currently lives in central Illinois.

**Kristy Bowen's** work has appeared in a number of print and web-based publications, including *Stirring*, *Eclectica*, *Moon Journal*, and *Poetry Midwest*. She holds an M.A. in Literature from DePaul University, where she focused primarily on women's writing. She is currently editor of the online journal *Wicked Alice*, and has written book reviews for a number of publications. She lives and writes in Chicago.

**Suzanne Burns'** first full-length poetry collection, *Blight*, debuted in 2001 from Archer Books. Her second poetry collection and first short story collection will come out in 2002 and 2003. She is currently working on her third poetry collection, *Vacancy*. She has recently been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

**Ptim Callan's** fiction has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, and his independent films have been screened at The Palm Springs International Festival of Short Films, the San Francisco Independent Film Festival, among others. See more of his work at <http://www.ptim.org>.

**Ruth E. Foley** co-edits the online poetry journal *The Lightning Bell* <http://www.lightningbell.org>. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in over two dozen publications, including *Zuzu's Petals Quarterly*, *Oxford Magazine*, and *The Comstock Review*. Her poetry has also been translated into Japanese for the web anthology *Happa-no Kofu*, for which she occasionally assists with English translations.

Born in San Francisco, California, in the midst of the fog famine of 1952, **John Freemyer** survived the first seven years of life without benefit of fog or low clouds. Life has greatly improved during the ensuing years. Nowadays, John spends all waking hours staggering about in a daze somewhere in Houston, Texas. John's recent artwork and writing can be seen at the website of his *nom de plume*, Gus Horne, at <http://www.gushorne.cjb.net>, where the fog never clears.

**Cher Holt-Fortin** has been publishing in small magazines for nearly 20 years. Her chapbook, *Waving a Banana Leaf*, recently won the 2001 Moonfire Prize. She also writes long fiction, quilts, and practices *aikido*, a Japanese martial art.

**Rhoda Janzen** held the California Poet Laureate Award in 1994 and 1997. She has new work of mine is forthcoming in an anthology edited by Heather McHugh, and in the journals *The Ledge*, *Windhover*, *American Poetry Review*, *Seeds*, and *Laughing Dog*, *Borderlands*, *Vallum*, *Connecticut River Review*, and *New Scriblerus*. She teaches Creative Writing at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

**Mark Jenkins** recently graduated from Miami University of Ohio with a B.A. in Creative Writing.

**Kaija Langley** is a public relations professional residing in the San Francisco Bay area. Her work will appear in the forthcoming anthology *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity* from (RedBone Press, 2002). She is currently working on a short fiction collection.

**Cynthia Roth's** poems are recently published or forthcoming in *Mind the Gap*, *Grasslands Review*, *Moxie*, and *The Pittsburgh Quarterly*. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2000, and reviews books of poetry for *Crab Orchard Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and *Harvard Review*.

**Stan Sanvel Rubin** lives in upstate New York and on the Olympic Peninsula. His poems have appeared most recently in *Hubbub* and *Atlanta Review*, and are forthcoming in *Free Lunch*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. They have also appeared in *Chelsea*, *The Laurel Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Ohio Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. His literary interviews have been widely published. He was the recipient of a 2001 Constance Saltonstall Foundation grant in poetry. He teaches at S.U.N.Y.–Brockport.

**Helen Ruggieri** lives in Olean, New York and teaches at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford. She has other works online at *Salt River Review* and *hackwriters.com*. Her book, *The Character for Woman*, is available from FootHills Publications at <http://fhp.freehomepage.com/catalog.html>.

**Chris Stark** is a writer, poet, visual artist, activist, and speaker. Her work has appeared in numerous periodicals including *Poetry Motel*, *The Florida Review*, *Off Our Backs*, and *Woman and Earth*. She is currently writing a series of prose poems which she has turned into a novel called *Nickels*. *Baby is from Nickels*. She is a graduate student in the MFA department at Minnesota State University in Mankato.

**Colleen Webster** lives at the junction of the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay where she sometimes comes inside her house to write poems. Mostly she can be found running, biking, kayaking, and sailing when she is not in the classroom at the local community college cheering students through literature and composition. Her poems and essays have

appeared in several journals including the *Maryland Poetry Review* and *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. This is her first online publication.

**Sylvia Wheeler** lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico., and has published fiction and poetry in numerous literary magazines. She is the author of seven books including poetry, anthologies, and a play. She has won various awards, including a Witter Bynner Publication Award for *Counting Back* (poems) and a fellowship to The MacDowell Colony.

Although originally from New York, **James R. Whitley** currently lives in Boston, Massachusetts. His work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has been published in several journals, including *Coal City Review*, *Coe Review*, *Icon*, *Peregrine* and *Xavier Review*. His book-length manuscript, *Immersion*, was selected by Lucille Clifton as the winner of the 2001 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award and will be published by Lotus Press.

**Wynn Yarbrough** teaches high school and community college English in Northern Virginia. His food poems can be seen at *One Block West* in Winchester, Virginia. He currently attends Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont.

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