Voices de la Luna
A Quarterly Poetry & Arts Magazine
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Volume 5, Number 4

Questions for Jan Jarboe Russell
“Drummer and Drum” by Cyra S. Dumitru
“In This Blind Alley” by Ahmad Shamlu
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Voices de la Luna Monthly Literary Evening
Poetry and Arts Presentation
Every Fourth Wednesday, September through June
Poetry Workshop at 6:00
Featured Poet at 7:00
Poetry & Music & Open Mic at 7:30
Barnes & Noble at the Shops at La Cantera
15900 La Cantera Parkway, Bldg 27
San Antonio, TX 78256

Submission Guidelines
To submit material for publication in Voices de la Luna, go to voicesdelaluna.submittable.com.

Voices de la Luna is a quarterly publication dedicated to the artistic expression of a wide range of perspectives and topics. In the service of that goal, we welcome diverse, well-written submissions from every quarter.

Editor’s Note
Mo H Saidi

Every year the month of April is designated as National Poetry Month. This year it acquired a unique significance because, thanks to Mayor Julián Castro, Dr. Carmen Tafolla, our city’s Inaugural Poet Laureate, led the city-wide celebrations. Voices de la Luna: A Quarterly Poetry & Arts Magazine participated in several events to showcase our firm belief that “Poetry Heals and Arts Advance the Quality of Life.” The annual gala of Voices de la Luna, with Dr. Tafolla as featured performer, was one such event, and the money raised at this event also assures our long-term commitment to advancing poetry and the arts in San Antonio.

In this year’s sold-out gala, the Latino Leadership Committee of the San Antonio Public Library Foundation, represented by Dr. Ellen Clark and Dr. Angelika Jansen, joined with Voices de la Luna to honor San Antonio’s beloved poet laureate. Thanks to the generosity of the gala’s sponsors, we were able to present Dr. Tafolla with an honorarium and a special rebozo chosen by notable San Antonio author Sandra Cisneros.

In an important evolution for Voices de la Luna, with great pleasure we announce three new policies that come into effect with the 15 July issue. (1) We will now offer an honorarium at the time of publication to authors whose poetry or prose work had been requested by the magazine. (2) We will provide a free annual subscription to the libraries of the schools whose students submit youth poetry and prose pieces. (3) Poets and writers whose contributed work is accepted for publication will also receive a complimentary annual subscription.

As the 2013 gala of Voices de la Luna was dedicated to “Medicine, Poetry & Arts,” the chair of the event committee, Dr. Bruce Akright, asked Dr. Rajam Ramamurthy to explore this issue. Her presentation at the gala addressed the mutual influence of medicine and poetry over the centuries. She cited the life and work of many renowned poet-physicians such as Ibn Sina, François Rabelais, Thomas Campion, John Keats, Friedrich Schiller, William Carlos Williams, and Alice Jones. These notable physician-poets all recognized the healing aspects of poetry in their work. In this issue we are publishing summaries and video clips of Dr. Ramamurthy and Dr. Tafolla’s speeches—many thanks to San Antonio’s poet-videographer Lahab Assaf Al-Jundi.

On a sad note, the literary and arts community of San Antonio has lost a beloved writer, educator, publisher, and poet: Henry Palmer Hall was a professor of English literature at St. Mary’s University, where he also served as director of the university’s library and chief editor and publisher of Pecan Grove Press. Hall passed away in the dark morning hours of 9 February of this year. To pay homage to Palmer Hall, a moment of silence was observed at the gala, and a video tone poem, “Morning Five,” was presented. The latter was produced by Maestro Dan Parker, combining Mo H Saidi’s poetry with his own symphonic composition.

In remembrance of Palmer Hall, Voices de la Luna is pleased to sponsor the publication of Palmer Hall’s elegies by Pecan Grove Press of St. Mary’s University. The book was edited and produced by Luis Cortez. To receive a copy of the book, contact Luis Cortez by email, lcortez@stmarytx.edu, or phone, (210) 663-5847, or mail a request with a donation check to Pecan Grove Press, 1 Camino Santa Maria, San Antonio, Texas 78228-8608.
Sylvia Benitez, an artist and instructor at the Southwest School of Art, has received numerous state and national awards for her work. She has also won many grants for outstanding artistic and community projects.

In describing her art, Benitez writes, “My work aims to capture my emotional response to an external encounter. My paintings celebrate an abandonment of real time in hopes of capturing all time. I do this by what my hand and personal rhythm can create in a natural way without overly intellectual prodding…. I seek a gentler voice, the one that does not rush, the one that is timeless. My dedication to this theme has persisted for the last seven years and corresponds to the time I have lived in Texas. In my studio, I pursue atmospheric romantic paintings that are tethered to classical interpretations of landscape. I am not as good as Bierstadt, nor do I want to be; his landscapes are too studied, rendered perfectly and almost soulless. I am more interested in capturing the feeling of awe found in Pinkham Ryder or in Turner’s enigmatic brushwork. It is that lure of beauty that I pursue.”

One of Benitez’s recent achievements is the creation of GAGA (Gentileschi Artemisia Gallery Association). She started the group two years ago after noting that women in their 40s and older were filling her art classes. See page 13 of this issue for additional information on GAGA.

San Antonio Celebrates National Poetry Month

http://npmsa.com/

Wednesday, April 17

An Evening of Medicine, Poetry & Art

At The Bright Shawl in downtown San Antonio, Voices de la Luna, in collaboration with the L3 Committee of the San Antonio Public Library Foundation, staged an evening of medicine, poetry, and the arts, “The Muse Meets Caduceus,” honoring San Antonio’s inaugural Poet Laureate Dr. Carmen Tafolla. To read more regarding the event, please see Tafolla’s and Ramamurthy’s speeches on pages 10 and 12 of this issue.
Featured Poem

Drummer and Drum
Cyra S. Dumitru*

Women congregate in the city’s shadows. They seize at first light, lay siege to newspapers and broadcast stations, overpower police with precision—hardly a shot fired.

Thus spoke my hands
at the end of the contemplative retreat. Thus spoke my hands, pounding the drum
as if they were mothers of a new nation, a new tongue.

Hands swelling up with bruises:
what does that reveal about power?
Force that overpowers from within?
Where the origin of that fire?

What of the djembe, the drum that offers itself?
Its upturned face, long tilted throat, absorbent body. The strength it takes
to be a temple of release,
the strength it takes
to turn wildfire into rhythm.

*Cyra Sweet Dumitru has lived inside of poetry all her life, and written poetry for most of her life. She has three collections of poems: What the Body Knows (Pecan Grove Press), Listening to Light (River Lily Press), and Remains (Pecan Grove Press). She teaches composition, poetry writing, and health communications courses at St. Mary’s University and was awarded the 2012 Alice Wright Franzke Feminist Award for her approach to teaching. Dumitru is about halfway through a poetic medicine facilitator training program designed and led by renowned poetry therapist John Fox and his California-based Institute for Poetic Medicine.

The 2013 Pulitzer Prizes

Poetry: Sharon Olds received this award for her distinguished volume Stag’s Leap, an unflinching examination of love, divorce, sorrow, and the limits of self-knowledge.

Fiction: Adam Johnson received the prize in fiction for his novel The Orphan Master’s Son, which describes a “journey into the depths of totalitarian North Korea and into the most intimate spaces of the human heart.”

Gemini Ink

Readers and Writers: Today and Tomorrow
San Antonio, Texas

Gemini Ink Honors Carmen Tafolla
at the literary organization’s annual INKstravaganza Gala
Friday 6 September at Pearl Stable
For more info visit www.gemininki.org

Gemini Ink is a non-profit literary arts organization that nurtures writers and readers and builds community through literature and the related arts. At Gemini Ink we believe human story in all its diverse and complicated forms and genres—from poetry and fiction to memoir and oral tradition—is essential to developing compassion and richness in both individual and community life. We encourage focused reading, writing, and exchange at every level, from the elementary school student and the incarcerated youth to the polished professional and the elder who has always wanted to record her family stories. For more information, visit www.gemininki.org.

Astronomical Marvels

Summer is a favorite time for aficionados of the night sky. Camping trips and drives into the country to escape the city’s light pollution provide the opportunity to observe the stars, planets, and other celestial objects on warm summer evenings, often accompanied by the songs of crickets, bullfrogs, or cicadas—and possibly the howl of a coyote.

One perennial favorite is the Perseid meteor shower, which reaches its height this year on August 12, although it is visible for a few weeks before and after this date. Caused by debris left behind by the comet Swift-Tuttle colliding with the earth’s atmosphere, the meteor shower gets its name from the constellation Perseus, the area in the sky from which the shooting stars appear to originate. At its peak, meteors may streak across the sky as frequently as once per minute. If you’ve never taken the time to see the Perseids, this year is a good time to do so, because the moon will be in its first quarter and will set relatively early (before midnight in South Texas).

Later in the year star-gazers will be treated to the comet ISON. This comet, discovered in 2012 by two Russian amateur astronomers and named after the organization that owns the telescope they were using (the International Scientific Optical Network), will be visible to the naked eye from mid-November through December. It will make its closest approach to the sun on November 28, Thanksgiving in the U.S., and it may be bright enough to be seen during daylight hours.

Several poems in this issue deal with astronomical themes. See how many you can find!
Questions for Jan Jarboe Russell
Interviewed by Mo H. Saidi


Mo H Saidi: We heard you are writing a new book which has already been contracted for publication. Can you tell us about it?

Jan Jarboe Russell: I’m writing a book entitled The Train to Crystal City about a World War II secret in our own back yard. From 1942 to 1948, Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants and their American-born children were interned in the tiny town of Crystal City, 120 miles south of San Antonio and 35 miles from the Mexican border, as close to Siberia as we have in America. The government camp in Crystal City was the only family internment camp operated by any country during World War II. Enemy aliens from all over the United States and much of Latin America were brought to Crystal City and lived behind barbed wire with their wives and children. Twenty-four hours a day guards patrolled the perimeter of the fence on horseback.

I’ve spent three years interviewing many of the children in the camp who are now old women and old men. All of the people I’ve interviewed were born in America and have stayed quiet about what happened to them during the war. The shame, trauma and confusion of internment silenced them.

My book focuses on two primary characters, both women who were young girls during their internment in Crystal City. Both women are still alive and in their 80s. Ingrid is a German-American, born in New York City, and Sumi is a Japanese-American, born in Los Angeles. In the course of the book, I describe what happened to them after their fathers were arrested, how they came to Crystal City, and how they were caught in a web of international intrigue that took them into Germany and Japan at the height of some of the heaviest fighting of the war. Theirs are untold stories of survival and heroism—not unlike Laura Hillenbrand’s Unbroken except that in my book the characters are American-born girls imprisoned in an American camp.

Is it fiction or non-fiction?

It’s non-fiction, based on investigative reporting. Over the course of the research, I petitioned the governments of United States, Japan, and Germany to release files about the camp itself and individual characters. One of the payoffs of the research is that I’ve been able to provide to Ingrid and Sumi and others who were interned in Crystal City documentation that provided answers to long-held questions.

Even though the book is non-fiction, I’m employing fictional techniques in the structure and writing of the manuscript. Scene by scene, I’m letting the story evolve from many different perspectives. Every day I learn something new. In forty years of writing and research, I’ve never been more committed to a story than I am to this one.

Who is the publisher and when will the book be published?
The book is under contract with Scribner’s, a division of Simon and Schuster in New York. Scribner’s also published my biography of Lady Bird Johnson. I don’t know yet when it will be published, perhaps the fall of 2014 or the spring of 2015, but no date has been assigned. I’m not finished with the manuscript.

Texas is experiencing a demographic shift to a majority Hispanic population. Do you think Republicans will be able to embrace Hispanic voters or do you think our state will turn blue?

At the moment, the ultra-conservative wing of the Republican Party is in firm control and seems to be working as hard as possible to alienate not only Hispanic voters but any of us, no matter our ethnicity, who would like to live in a fairer, more progressive Texas.

Given the fact that demographics are destiny, I believe that eventually the tide of Texas Latino voters will usher in a change from red-state politics to blue. I just don’t know if I’ll live long enough to see it, and frankly I’m tired of waiting.

When Ann Richards was elected governor in 1990, I wrote a cover story for Texas Monthly entitled “White Hot Mama.” The cover was a classic: a photo-shopped Ann astride a Harley motorcycle. At the time, I believed the theme Ann struck in the campaign—“A Fair Deal for all Texans”—would take root. Instead, it provoked a backlash. She made a lot of “Bubbas” very angry, and no Democrat has won a statewide office since Ann was defeated in 1994 by George W. Bush.

In 2011 you wrote in a column in Texas Monthly that San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro was “perhaps the most prominent upcoming Hispanic politician in Texas” and advised readers to get used to him. Is he fulfilling your expectations?

Thanks to Mayor Castro’s appearance at the Democratic National Convention, both he and his adorable daughter, Carina, who was captured on camera looking bored during her father’s speech and twisting her hair, are household names. Everyone is getting used to him, not just Texans. If anything, now Castro’s problem is too much fame, which has brought with it sky-high expectations.

Julián and his brother Joaquín are part of a deep bench of young Latinos in Texas who are laying brick for a better Texas. Others include State Representative Mike Villarreal and State Representative Trey Martinez Fischer. If Texas has a Democratic future, these guys will be the ones to deliver it. I hope they won’t all follow the route of the Hero Politician—each man for himself—but I don’t believe they will. This generation is smart and collaborative.
When I first started out in San Antonio as a young reporter in the 1970s, the racial conflict in San Antonio was vicious. It was Anglos vs. Latinos on every issue. We’re past that now. Latinos have won equal rights, but the issue of justice is still unfinished. The fight for the Dream Act brought together a coalition of every age and all races in San Antonio around the core issue of justice. Even though that fight is not yet won, the network of support that was marshaled for the Dream Act is the winning one for the future.

In your essay “Urban Tapestries,” you wrote that “cities, like people, are formed as much by their stories as they are by the laying of brick or the mixing of mud and water.” Can you point to a story that explains San Antonio?

To paraphrase Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, I see us as the mythical city on the hill for immigrants. For the last two years, I’ve been traveling for my book. Every time I come back to San Antonio, I feel like a brand new immigrant, crossing over again into home. San Antonio is my lodestar; everything expands from here. The lay of our land and closeness to the border make San Antonio stand apart from the American grid. Writers have to separate from the culture-at-large in order to express something fresh and alive.

There are many kinds of immigrant stories here, many layers of mud and water. The river is a primary, even sacred, feminine image of flow and connection. When I think of the river, I think of the ghostly legend of La Llorona, the story of the woman who wanders along the river, weeping for lost children. On the level of the street stands the Alamo, a masculine emblem of complex defenses and identities: Davy Crockett of the wild frontier, the trickster Ozzy Osbourne, and the feuding Medusa-like Daughters of the Republic of Texas. Who cannot love a city with so rich a brew of stories and places?

You experienced writer’s block in the 1990s. How did you overcome it and what is your advice?

It was triggered by a series of losses. My mother died of breast cancer in 1993, and three weeks later, I found myself in the midst of a divorce with my then-husband. I was in my early 40s and had two small children. It seemed as though my identity, like a set of house keys, was suddenly misplaced. No longer a daughter; no longer a wife. The days felt blank.

Only now, all these years later, do I realize the writer’s block was not so much a writing problem as a living problem. All I know is that I went through what the mystics call a “dark night of the soul” and emerged a different person, a stronger and happier person. It was a slow process of unraveling my own and other people’s expectations for me: the prison of my family’s religious beliefs, the culture’s idea about wives and mothers, traditional notions of success, and the claiming of my own individual life.

Three tools helped. I paid attention to my night dreams and tended to the dreams as if they were my secret garden. In waking life as a writer, I took baby steps on the page, writing scene by scene, and taking my time. Finally, I took up a form of dance called Nia that incorporates many different kinds of movement.


Writers are readers. Do you read more hard copies or digital versions of books?

I am a traditionalist on this issue, maybe even a Luddite. To me a book is a hard covered object with pages in between and a stiff spine. I buy and read hard copies. I have an IPad and download books for airplanes. But I can’t say I enjoy that kind of reading. Maybe some day I will.

Art in the City

McNay Art Museum
Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera
June 5 – September 1

Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera is a landmark exhibition exploring in depth Rockwell’s richly detailed study photographs, commissioned by the artist as references for his iconic paintings. Organized by the Norman Rockwell Museum, this presentation reveals a rarely seen yet fundamental aspect of Rockwell’s creative process and unveils a significant new body of Rockwell imagery in an unexpected medium. Rockwell’s studio sessions allowed him to carefully orchestrate each element of his design for the camera, selecting props and locations, choosing and directing his models, even getting in on the action to pose and perform. Rockwell staged his photography much as a film director works with a cinematographer, instructing his cameramen when to shoot, yet never personally firing the shutter. He created dozens, perhaps hundreds, of photographs for each new subject, sometimes capturing complete compositions and other times jigsawing together separate pictures of individual elements.

San Antonio Museum of Art
Rostros de Maria: The Virgin as Archetype and Inspiration
August 18, 2012 – September 29, 2013

Many aspects of the Roman Catholic cult of Mary are deeply rooted in religious beliefs of the Old Testament and pre-Christian ritual associated with fertility, fecundity, maternity, nourishment and other core human needs. This exhibition draws from SAMA’s rich collection of Marian images to illustrate the broad variation of the genre and demonstrate the agility of religious art to adjust to new times, places and cultures.
Collaboration in Literature & the Arts
The UTSA English Department
cffa.utsa.edu/English/

Creative Writing Reading Series

The UTSA Creative Writing Reading Series will host four authors during the 2013-14 academic year. All sessions, which are open to the public, will be held in the University Room, BB 2.06.04.

Ben Fountain
October 11, 2013—7:30 p.m.

A native of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Ben Fountain received a law degree from Duke University in 1983. In 1988, he resigned his position at the Dallas firm of Akin Gump in order to write fiction full-time. His first book, a collection of short stories called Brief Encounters with Che Guevara (2006), earned him the PEN/Hemingway Award and the Whiting Writers Award. His first novel, Billy Lynn’s Long Half-time Walk (2012), received the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, the Jesse H. Jones Award for Fiction, and the Flaherty-Duhman Center for Fiction First Novel Prize. It was also a finalist for the National Book Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Other honors that Fountain has received include the Texas Institute of Letters Short Story Award (which he received twice), the Pushcart Prize, the Barnes & Noble Discover Award, and the O. Henry Award (which he received twice). He reported on Haiti after the earthquake for the public radio program This American Life. He holds the University Endowed Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University.

Kevin Young
November 15, 2013—7:30 p.m.

Co-sponsored by Dr. Joycelyn Moody, Sue E. Denman Distinguished Chair in American Literature


Reyna Grande
February 7, 2014—7:30 p.m.

Co-sponsored by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center
and in cooperation with Gemini Ink

Reyna Grande’s latest book, The Distance Between Us (2012), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and was hailed by the Los Angeles Times as “the Angela’s Ashes of the modern Mexican immigrant experience.” Grande’s first novel, Across a Hundred Mountains (2006), received a 2010 Latino Books into Movies Award, a 2007 American Book Award, and the 2006 El Premio Atlántico Literary Award. Her second critically acclaimed novel, Dancing With Butterflies (2009), received the 2010 International Latino Book Award. Born in Iguala, Guerrero in Mexico, the author was two years old when her father left for the United States to find work. Her mother followed her father north two years later, leaving Reyna and her siblings behind in Mexico. In 1985, nine years old, Reyna entered the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant. She later went on to become the first person in her family to graduate from college. Reyna Grande transferred from Pasadena City College in 1996 and earned her B.A. in Creative Writing and Film and Video from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Later she earned an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Antioch University. She lives in Los Angeles.

Selah Saterstrom
March 7, 2014—7:30 p.m.

Selah Saterstrom is the author of the novels The Pink Institution (2004), The Meat and Spirit Plan (2007), and the forthcoming Slab (2013), all published by Coffee House Press. She is also the author of Tiger Goes to the Dogs, a 2013 limited edition letterpress project published by Nor By Press. Her prose, poetry, and interviews have appeared in such journals as The Black Warrior Review, Postroad, Tarpaulin Sky, and Fourteen Hills, among other places. With visual artist Heide Hatry, she has collaborated on the text/image projects Heads and Tales (2009) and Not a Rose (2012), both of which have been widely exhibited in museums and galleries in the United States and in Europe. A Mississippi native, she has an M.F.A. from Goddard College and a M.Phil. from the University of Glasgow, Scotland. She is an associate professor in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Denver and also teaches in the Naropa Summer Writing Program. Currently she is completing a book of essays about reading and writing practices after genocide, as well as a poetry collection and her fourth novel, based on her time spent in Cambodia.
Two Poems by Bonnie Lyons

Cordelia and the Truth

“Let God be in charge of beauty and let man be in charge of good.”
—Grace Paley

In ancient Britain two old men sin—
one misjudges his daughters, the other, his sons.
Madness and blindness teach them.
Rough justice, but justice.
Then a moral monster issues orders
and a flawless girl hangs.

Finding this unbearable,
Nahum Tate rewrote the ending in 1681.
Cordelia lives and romances,
and Lear survives along with a happy lie:
Truth and virtue shall at last succeed.

How could Shakespeare dare
to tell this terrible truth?
The gods, not God, rule in the play.

Godiva

Luscious Godiva chocolates nestling in brown pleated papers
beckon to the richly dressed matrons
who turn their backs on the mahogany table to resist
temptation. I’ve come to hear my friend’s lecture about Dionysus
and Apollo but now I’m tired of playing country club lady
so I pick up a chocolate and nibble slowly,
and when I stretch out and flatten the crinkly wrapper
with nervous index fingers and thumbs I’m suddenly
a skinny eleven-year-old in a neighbor’s living room
watching a girl my own age perform in a talent show for her parents
and their hard-drinking friends at our annual March of Dimes
fund-raiser. Dressed alike, my sisters and I have just finished singing
“Sisters,” and after polite applause, the neighbor girl enters the smoky
room dressed in a Pilgrim costume and very slowly and confidently strips
down to her panties, cinched into a bikini by red ribbons at her hips,
as I stare astonished at her bare breasts, nipples covered only with candy
wrappers precisely like the one in my hand.

Bonnie Lyons, Professor of English at UTSA, received her B.A. from Newcomb College and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Tulane University. She has taught at Newcomb College and Boston University and as a Fulbright professor in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Israel. Her primary teaching interests are 19th and 20th century American literature and 20th century literature. She has published a book about Henry Roth, co-authored a book of interviews with fiction writers, two poetry chapbooks, and a full-length volume of poems. She has published articles and interviews in many journals, including The Paris Review and Contemporary Literature. She is currently working on a second book of literary interviews.
The *rebozo*, the simple Mexican shawl, used for centuries as a tool, an adornment, a definition of identity, strength, and femininity, has become a symbol for womanhood and for pride in a Latino heritage that stretches from the smallest Indian villages to the most elite of international cultural experiences. With the *rebozo*, the woman carried wood, or corn, cradled her child, dried her tears, hid her secrets, wrapped her dead, enhanced her beauty, asserted her importance. In Catalina Gárate’s richly evocative paintings, the faces and features of these women might not be visible, but the *rebozos* always were.

In their textures and their colors, their drape and their weave, we are able to interpret the woman’s emotions—universal experiences of solitude or grief, longing or commitment, growth and determination to survive. Since Catalina had expressed so profoundly the authenticity and power of these emotions and experiences in her paintings, I set upon myself a task to express in each poem, English or Spanish, the voice of these women, the expression of their emotion. More than ekphrastic poetry, it is *Voz*-ekphrastic: an expression from the protagonist of the painting. Therefore, the language is not always the traditional language of poetry, but rather the language of the common worker, the rural and often unschooled woman who through the simplest of terms expresses a poetry that is the bare essence and the most powerful universal expression of our experiences as human beings—from all cultures, and from all economic levels.

Tonight, I would like to share with you the healing aspects of both poetry and cultural symbols—I spread before you here *rebozos* full of healing.

Perhaps the greatest tool of healing power lies in love, in hope, in the ability to plant seeds for the future. Catalina’s painting *La Siembra*, epitomizes this connection between the seed, the hand, the waiting earth. Because nurturing others is healing, I chose the poem “Feeding You” to express this desire to plant growth and to enhance survival.

**Feeding You**

I have slipped chile under your skin
secretly wrapped in each enchilada
hot and soothing
carefully cut into bitefuls for you as a toddler
increasing in power and intensity as you grew
until it could burn
forever

silently spiced into the rice
soaked into the bean caldo
smoothed into the avocado

I have squeezed cilantro into the breast milk
made sure you were nurtured with
the clean taste of corn stalks
with the wildness of thick leaves
of untamed monte
of unscheduled growth

I have ground the earth of these Américas in my molcajete
until it became a fine and piquant spice
sprinkled it surely into each spoonful of food
that would have to expand to fit your soul

Dear Mijo, Dear Mija,
Dear Corn Chile Cilantro Mijos
This is your herencia
This is what is yours
This is what your mother fed you
to keep you alive

Because retelling the survival stories improves our mental health, gives perspective to the tragedies and the chaos of life, and makes the connections which empower healing, I’d like to share with you a poem (not yet published) about how we make survival possible, even in the midst of searing heat and difficult deserts. It’s a story of how we, here in San Antonio, keep on going, even when tragedy or heat waves strike, keep on being who we are best at being—our tough, sassy selves:

**Survival Instructions, Summer, A Hundred and Three**

Feel yourself sizzle on the streets
Sizzle on the streets
Sashay sassy as salsa
Slip survival into sunglare like a native
Toughen up the soles
Strengthen the heart muscle
Reinforce mind with steel and sunrise
Drink more water
Bless the air conditioner
Fry your huevos rancheros on the sidewalk
Attend the wake
Give a dollar to the homeless man on the corner
Holding his bright blue windshield-cleaner-spraybottle
wiping circles in the empty air
Hoping for a yes
some coins
a bed

Lasso the chaos of your collapsing life like a lost steer
wrangle it with this well-worn rope
made to survive the torrid heat
the chaparral of baked dirt
the creeping cancer of years peeled to bone

Feel yourself sizzle on the streets
Sizzle on the streets
sashay sassy as salsa

Because all healing is essentially an interaction, a relationship between the one growing towards health, and the one pulling the other toward health, healing is essentially a human connection.

*continued on page 24*
Maria Gabriela Madrid a native of Caracas, Venezuela, studied education at Metropolitan University of Caracas and creative writing and English as a second language at Harvard and Columbia Universities. Her book, *Entre los Suroes del Recuerdo* is in the syllabus for the advanced Spanish classes at Saint Mary’s Hall, a San Antonio prep school, and in university libraries across Venezuela and the U.S.

Madrid’s recent book is a bilingual anthology of poetry, “which in addition to being very poetically lyrical, is worked with a careful and educated language,” writes Prof. Emeritus Dr. Ernesto Kahan. James Brandenburg writes about her poetry, “Her poetry often expresses Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung’s idea of opposites and tries to find a balance between opposites. Her poetry expresses both the joy and the anguish inherent in human nature, and she does so with lyricism, metaphors, lively images, and figurative language. Her poetry is equally beautiful in Spanish and English.”

Carmen Tafolla Is Honored

On Wednesday 17 April 2013 at the *Voices de la Luna* annual fundraiser, a beloved poet, teacher, and performer was honored by the Latino Leadership Committee of the San Antonio Public Library Foundation. Dr. Carmen Tafolla, Poet Laureate of the City of San Antonio, has been published in more than 200 journals, magazines, textbooks, and anthologies on four continents, in Spanish, English, German, and Bengali. Tafolla is the author of more than twenty books and has received many national and international awards. Called by *Roots* author Alex Haley “a world-class writer,” Tafolla received the Art of Peace Award in 1999 for work which contributes to peace, justice, and human understanding.

In her speech accepting the honorarium, Tafolla introduced the concept of Rebozos, celebrating the rebozo both as a cultural icon of Mexico and the series of rebozo-inspired paintings by Mexican–Californian artist Catalina Gárate. This bilingual collection of poems gives voices of strength, endurance, joy, and sorrow to the women of Gárate’s paintings. Inspired by the paintings, these poems, in both Spanish and English, are accompanied by a historical explanation of the role of the rebozo in Mexican history, art, and culture.

Poetry and Art around the Lake

Brigitte B. Saidi

The mild climate around Lake Constance in Europe has permitted artists to thrive since Paleolithic times; remnants of intricately knotted fishing nets and highly decorated pottery have survived in the mud of the lake for 15,000 years. During the “dark ages” between 700 and 1300 C.E., monks on the island Reichenau created miracles of illuminated manuscripts and miniature paintings that were treasured all over the known world. In the early 1800s Meersburg castle, overlooking the sunny vineyards of the lake’s northern shore, offered a safe haven to Annette von Droste-Huelshoff, who outraged her aristocratic family when she insisted on publishing her poetry. Originally she used a pseudonym, but her lyrics on the fragility of human existence threatened by nature’s power, and her novels—including an 1842 murder mystery—were so successful that she was able to design and build her own house near the lake.

The artistic tradition continues today with a vibrant contemporary art scene in communities all around the lake. The medieval center of Constance offers studio space suitable for artistic disciplines from music and ballet to painting and sculpting. We visited the studio of Dominik Boehringer, who has astonished the international art scene with his “round pictures” or “circles,” semi-plastic objects created in a time-consuming process that integrates paper with clay, pigment, and other materials such as iron filings, polychrome earths, cloth, and more.

The ability of those diverse materials to create their own union in a process that can take months plays an important conceptual role in his art. Resulting forms and content offer up meaning in multiple dimensions, sometimes promising the force of archaic Ur-forms and sometimes leading the viewer to suspect links to Hindu and Asiatic traditions. Boehringer presents his works in a manner that exemplifies their position between sculpture and picture by hanging them away from the wall, floating in space, thus intensifying the stress on the in-between, the other, the multi-meaningful. Yet his materials also build on what has been at Lake Constance from time immemorial: earth, metal, air, movement.
News & Notes

Clinical Gaze through the Artist’s Eyes: Women Physician-Writers
Rajam Ramamurthy, MD

Through their intimate contact with our moments of greatest human drama—birth, illness, injury, suffering, disease, death—physicians are in a unique position to observe and tell the stories that make us human. The necessity to write is inculcated in all first-year medical students when they learn to take history as their first task with patient contact and thus develop the skill to condense and encapsulate maladies of a lifetime, a few months, or even an instant. Meanwhile physicians in academic medicine write scientific papers, usually in a dry, terse style prescribed by the target journal. Having done my share of scientific writing, I was drawn to advocating for patients, medicine, and physicians. Nonscientific medical writing broadened my writing skills, but it was medical writing for nonmedical readers that introduced me to the world of fiction, of storytelling.

The topic of this article attracted me, not from a feminist angle, but because I knew so little about them, and during my research I became fascinated by their origins, struggles, romance, and writing. The number of women entering medicine has risen sharply in the past four decades, but women are still underrepresented in the top tiers of academic medicine. Women now account for 25% of physicians practicing in the United States, and they claim 32% of full-time medical faculty positions. Only in the last five years have women comprised 50 percent of the students entering medicine. A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine also found a gender gap in publication of original medical research. The study doesn’t delve into the reasons for this gap but suggests that women may be impeded by barriers early in their careers, thus diminishing the pool of female senior faculty in a position to author advanced articles.

But what about women-physicians who are also well-regarded writers? To my puzzlement I did not stumble on even a single woman physician-writer until the modern era. It is a sad but historical fact that though women were an integral part of the healing profession, they were not given the title of “physician.” Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) was the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States, as well as the first woman on the UK Medical Register. It was a long time till a significant number of female physicians who also harbored the talent and desire for writing were able to publish, but then they produced remarkable literary pieces.

A sterling example is Josephine Bell, the pseudonym of English physician and writer Doris Bell Collier (1897-1987). Bell was born in Manchester, England, and began to write detective novels under her pen name beginning in 1936. Many of her works used a medical background. Bell wrote nineteen novels and forty-five mystery novels in her lifetime, as well as radio plays, short stories, and series for women’s magazines. In 1953 Bell helped found the Crime Writers Association and served as its chair from 1959 to 1960. Another prominent woman physician-writer from the early years is Alice Dwyer Joyce (1913-1986), who graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin, in 1936 and went into practice with her husband in Cambridge. During her career she wrote over thirty novels.

In the middle of the 20th century, women physician-writers came into their own. The science fiction writer Janet Opal Jeppson Asimov (1926-2002) published on her own and was credited with 70% of their joint work by her husband Isaac. Another one is Han Suyin, born in 1917 in China to a Chinese father and a Flemish mother. In 1949 Suyin went to Hong Kong to practice medicine at the Queen Mary Hospital. There she fell in love with Ian Morrison, a married Australian war correspondent based in Singapore, who was killed in Korea in 1950. She portrayed their relationship in the 1952 novel A Many-Splendored Thing, which was made into the movie Love is a Many Splendored Thing. The film’s theme song with the same title won an academy award.

More recently women physician-writers have appeared all over the globe. Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi (born 1931) is also a physician and psychiatrist and past director general of the Health Education Department, Ministry of Health in Cairo. Polish maxillary and trauma surgeon Barbara Szeffler-Marcinkowska is president of the Polish Union of Physician Writers. American psychoanalyst-writer Avodah Komito Offit (b. 1931) received the Bread Loaf Writing Scholarship in 1961 and her MD from New York University in 1967. She is described as the Montaigne of human sexuality. Night Thoughts: Reflections of a Sex Therapist (1981) is one of her many notable books. In the 1960s and 70s, more prominent physician-writers emerged, such as Deepak Chopra from India, Taghi Modarressi from Iran, and many from the US.

The current crop of women physician-writers has achieved both best sellers and literary fame. Tess Gerritsen (b. 1953), a graduate of UC San Francisco, is a Chinese American Novelist who went to practice in Honolulu. After her first book Harvest stayed on the New York Times bestseller list, she followed up with bestselling medical thrillers Life Support, Bloodstream, and Gravity. Adeline Yen Mah was born in Tianjin, China. She lived in Shanghai and Hong Kong as a child and won a writing competition at age fourteen. Yen Mah attended London Hospital Medical School, graduated as a physician, and established a thriving practice as an anesthesiologist at West Anaheim Community Hospital. After her first book Falling Leaves made the 1997 New York Times bestseller list, sold over a million copies worldwide, and was translated into twenty-two languages, Yen Mah gave up medicine to write full-time. Alice Weaver Flaherty is a neurologist known for her award-winning book The Mid-Night Disease about the neural basis of creativity. She completed her MD, residency, and fellowship training at Harvard Medical School, as well as a PhD at MIT, and writes in various genres, including humorous essays and picture books.

And then there are the poets. Alice Jones is an American poet, physician, and psychoanalyst on the faculty of the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis, who practices in Berkeley, California. Her most recent collection of poetry is Gorgeous Mourning (2004). The Scottish poet and novelist (and dermatologist) Anne Macleod (b. 1951) continues to win praise and international recognition for her body of work.
Women physician-writers have emerged as powerful voices advocating for women. Taslima Nasrin (b. 1962) is a Bengali author and former physician whose 1993 novel *Lajja* (*Shame*) led her to global fame and a *fatwa* on her life that changed her world. She had to flee Bangladesh in 1994 and finally settled in Delhi, India. She works to build support for secular humanism, freedom of thought, equality for women, and human rights by publishing, lecturing, and campaigning. J. Nozipo Maraire (b. 1964) is a Zimbabwean doctor, entrepreneur, and writer with an undergraduate degree from Harvard University and an MD from Columbia University. She is the author of *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter*. The novel, published in 1996, was a *New York Times* “Notable Book of the Year” and a *Boston Globe* bestseller. It has been translated into at least fourteen languages. She continues as a full-time practicing neurosurgeon.

Perhaps the 21st century will be the time when we will see the number of women physician-authors equaling that of men. Maryland born physician-poet Lydia Kang King attended college and medical school in New York City and has a career in Internal Medicine. “Medicine and the arts run in my family,” she says. Danielle Ofri is both an associate professor of medicine at New York University School of Medicine and the editor-in-chief of the *Bellevue Literary Review*. Her first book, *Singular Intimacies: Becoming a Doctor at Bellevue* traced the experiences of medical school and residency in an inner-city hospital. The essay “Merced” from this book was chosen for *Best American Essays 2002*, and won the Editor’s Prize for Nonfiction by *The Missouri Review*. Her most recent book is *Medicine in Translation: Journeys with My Patients*. Although women physician-authors have struggled to gain acceptance in both fields, it appears that the door is finally wide open, and both patients and readers will be the lucky beneficiaries of this development.

**Bright Star**
*John Keats*

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.
**Youth Poems and Prose**

**Song of Grendel**  
*Sara Tobon*  
*The Winston School of San Antonio*

O happy heroes inside Heorot Hall,  
How dare you leave me out of all your joy  
So awful and alone, a creature that you hate.  
I am not a beast for you to flee from.  
I am a cursed son of Cain’s descent,  
Born to be evil, born to be alone.  
Born to be a monster, through no fault of my own.  
Born to follow the shadow of Cain’s blood,  
Full of bitter hatred and sadness and despair.

This happiness and I am alone in the joyless darkness.  
I swallow your joy when I eat your flesh,  
So the joy you feel goes inside of me.  
The only way I know to feel like you.  
The only joy I know to erase the joy in you,  
And joy, that all you mortals share,  
I cannot feel because of this burden I bear.  
I hear you laugh and sing, I see you dance and drink.

Do you hate a cat for killing a mouse?  
Why do you hate me for playing with you?  
Only in the night, the Heorot Hall is mine,  
But when it is empty, I find no happiness.  
But come one moonlit night, I stand outside the hall,  
And hear your songs of joy, which fill my heart with rage.  
I scream awakened hate, and have to tear apart.  
And throw and hit and kill and rip out human hearts.  
I eat the blood and hands, I also eat the feet.  
From head to toe, you’re mine. Heart and soul to keep.

My nameless mother is forced to hide with me  
Prisoners of pain, unwanted in the world  
Outcasts, monsters, freaks, hated, hunted, hidden.  
My life is in the dark, dreary, damp despair,  
Never to be known, my safety is my jail.  
Why do humans hate me? Is it my ugliness?  
Is it my evil blood? I suffer, scream, and cry.  
My mother always hides, she is afraid of man.  
I hate the fear she feels, and wish we could be free.  
Our lives, forever cursed, by Cain the evil one.  
Did I make this happen? I wish that I could know.  
Why are you born free, and I am cursed to life?  
Eternally empty, no laughter and no light.  
Mother wants my safety, and keeps me locked away.  
At night is when I play. And bring her back a feast.

I go to Heorot Hall, tonight is not the same.  
I see a man unknown, no weapons in his hands.  
Unlike the Danes I know, this mortal man won’t flee.  
With strength of many men, he grabs hold of me.  
What is this I feel? Is this what they call pain?

I do not like this feeling, but I feel,  
He pulls my arm away! Then broken, bruised, and bloody  
I feel fear, not joy, and run back to my lair.

O Mother! O Mother! What will happen to me?  
The mortal man has ripped the blood of life from me.  
I see my mother’s tears, I see her sadness grow.  
She tries to smile at me, she tries to console me.  
I am feeling tired of fighting all my life.  
Where did all this get me? I’m still alone and sad.  
O Mother! O Mother! I should have stayed with you.  
Your wise words I now see. Men will hate me always.  
I should have hidden in our cave away  
So no man could see me, and hate me as I am.

“O Grendel, my son, your arm I will bring  
I’ll make you whole again, and kill the evil man.”  
I see my mother cry, I feel pain again.  
Her suffering sorrow and sadness never ends.  
I feel my blood leave me. Evil blood? Cain’s blood?  
No! No! Grendel’s blood. I am me. Not Cain.  
I fade into darkness and hear my mother scream.  
I will go forever, and sleep eternal sleep.

**A Comfortable Place**  
*Isaac Bernal*  
*Krueger Middle School*

For me a comfortable place would be outside in a tent looking at the moon, because I feel as if the moon is watching over me at night as I sleep. Sometimes I think I can just pull the moon towards me, yet it is so far away. Sometimes I think the moon is God trying to tell me something, like if he was giving me a sign that I belong out there. I like when a fire is burning outside, talking to my cousins, staying up late, and messing around in the summer. Sometimes, with the fire, I feel like I am throwing all my worries and bad feelings into it and watching them leave as smoke into the air. Also I seem to see images of my childhood. Like when my sister was born. The first time I saw her.

**Die for Love**  
*Maria Flores*  
*Ed White Middle School*

Con un lápiz escribi tu nombre  
Con una pluma lo subrayé  
Pero al ver que no me querías  
Con lágrimas lo borré.
Pelicans (and Similar Topics)
Andrew Pietz
The Winston School of San Antonio

Pelicans are one hell of an interesting bird. They’re some dangerous-ass predators. They grow the nicest beards. They’re the masters of Train Simulator. You just can’t beat pelicans. Pelicans are by far the most badass birds of all time, and if you disagree, Mr. T will pity you, fool!

Pelicans are the world’s deadlest bird. On average, pelicans eat twelve people every day. They have spinning razor blades attached to their talons, which they use to catch their prey, everything from pterodactyls to dingoes, snipes, and, of course, humans. They have laser vision, which they use to mercilessly obliterate every living thing in their line of sight. Pelicans often participate in Fight Club, but they don’t often talk about it; if a pelican were to talk about Fight Club, the aforementioned pelican would get harshly beaten mid-flight.

Pelican beards are some of the nicest beards of all time. They’re literally softer than clouds. They’re nice and bushy, but also long. Kind of like a mix between ZZ Top and Dumbledore. Their beards also work as a second pair of wings, as well as a parachute, if the pelicans get bored of flapping, or even cruising. Their beards taste like rich Godiva milk chocolate and angel dreams.

Pelicans are so great at Train Simulator. They always get to the station on time, their trains never flip, or go off track. They have the most successful railway systems of all time. Their secret is that their trains fly using the power of powerful pelican wings. Their excuse for adding the pelican wing mod is that they have their own urban legend involving a pelican saving a train from tipping by grasping it with its razor talons and carrying the train to its next stop.

I guess pelicans are just plain the greatest things to ever exist. They eat people, putting them on top of the food chain. They have razor talons and wing beards, making them more evolutionarily advanced than any other creature. They carry trains, which is just a really impressive thing to do. So, yeah. Pelicans. How about that?

Gehenna
William Cluck and Josh Perez
The Winston School of San Antonio

For millions of years, there has been one enduring question: what lies above us, waiting patiently for us when our time is up, when the hourglass has run out? Some call it heaven, some paradise, and others call it Utopia. Old legends tell of the stars in the sky as openings to another side that has been spoken of so fondly by the books of wise men, creating something worth fighting for—something worth dying for.

There are those who fail to believe. The absence of good fortune has eventually turned them to this crooked fate. They preach that one delusional person is called insane, while a group of delusional people is called religion. The constant waging of war between the two beliefs has been incubating for eons, with no answer in sight.

We are here to tell you that the old legends and sacred stories are very true indeed, but the stories have slowly changed as they were passed on through the years. The tales have always perceived heaven as being high and mighty and up in the holy clouds, a safe haven for only the worthy to enter. Accordingly, people have always prayed to rise up, to reach their paradise, high in the sky, so God has been granting this wish since the beginning of time. The white light at the end of the tunnel that you supposedly see when death is near, has been believed to be the shine of angels’ wings and the holy presence of Utopia, as you slowly make your way toward the clouds. The warmth is very comforting during your journey upwards. As you keep rising, the warmth increases, and increases, and increases, soon becoming unbearable, stinging the skin, scorching the lungs. The white light you see is now revealed clearly, the dreaded thing you would not even fathom, the last thing that you’d expect, the impossible event that distorts all hope when seen—the sight of flame.

Fringed Shorts
Sophia Otero
Krueger Middle School

I have never wanted to marry someone
Or have ever been in that type of love.
If you asked me about that type of love,
I wouldn’t have an answer.
I do know
What it is like to love family.
For as long as I can remember,
I have loved
My mom
My sister, Alex
My best friend, Anissa
And her family,
Mrs. Ana and Alyssa.
I can remember Mrs. Ana’s black pickup truck
Without an air conditioner
Coasting along the highway.
Ani, Aly, Alex, and I were in the truck
And I had gotten the window seat.
It was scorching hot and we were all super tired.
Somewhere, along the way,
There was sweat,
Little diamonds in the light
Along her hairline and cheek.
I have always loathed sweat,
So much that I couldn’t even look at it.
But then,
In my fringed shorts that I had cut myself
I decided that I didn’t care.
We drove the rest of the way like this,
Watching the highway speed by.
When we got there I honestly felt
That I really might not be as lonely
As I sometimes felt.
Select Poems

Meteor Shower
Richard Luftig

We watch them with the lights switched off
to better track their dance of starlight
and firefall that flickers and takes last gasps
along the edges of the frozen night.

They didn’t get to choose but rather
got pulled into our world without asking,
holding no quarrel with the planets
or any moon but forced to ignite

in fusion when struck with atmosphere,
incendiary as a spark in the field
where we once lay on our backs,
our bodies touching in the dark.

Later, we will return to the house,
pretend that there is not less of us
to be wished for, lost amidst
our self-made cosmic debris

that emanates outward from
our own Big Bang, that silent
radiant point, never fully realizing
the gravity of our situation.

Because I Have Never Written a Love Poem
J Gomez

I’m not sure if I love you yet,
but I think about you more than I care to.
Your words
electronic misses, turn Mrs.
and I am now your Mr.

You hold me by the middle,
I am spastic in your face.
You harass me with marriage,
soft emotions,
and a bitter
lip spit smile;
that binds me to a seductive place.
I can’t do this anymore.
There’s a blank place in my brain
waiting to burn
a duplicate of your kiss.

Silences
Tom Keene

Silence is God’s language.
Everything else is a poor translation.
—Rumi

The beggar’s open hand,
the unopened letter returned,
breath’s pause after out, before in,
the seed yet to be planted,
the interlude between movements,
the glance that tells all,
sleep when it sinks beneath dreams,
the peace when prayer runs out of words,
the Abyss before birthing universes.

Piel
Edward Vidaurre

Be aware of caustic
strands, that silt across
your shoulders like breezes
forgotten.

Recalling the years
when fingertips grooving,
with a touch, counting
each lentigo,
were sending a streak of chills

that begged to open the door,
knowing what waits outside
is essential to what grows
within.

At close proximity
to your lips, yet far
enough to hold it at bay,
ecstasies are not all the same.

piel celestial,
piel de miel, en dulcera
piel ardiente,
piel prohibido.

it takes five hours to create
sunshine. In that time, your body sends
echoes heard across
seasons, alleys, shorelines,
and in the last leaf of Autumn.
Messages
Barbara Muller Bowen

Leaves curl like arthritic hands
red and spotted brown scraping along
sidewalks as gusts push down the road,
more leaves,
chlorophyll like
phoenix feathers, settle into
Roman patterns of conquest,
pictographs of shamans
presiding over
the hunt, or the ancient
geometry of the universe.

Wild Fuchsia
Barbara Crooker

Deora Dé, “God’s Tears,” in Irish after Guidebook by Claire Giblin, ink and acrylic on Yupo for Adrianne Marcus

Sunset drags its brush strokes
across the sky, characters
in a language we do not read.
You insisted this world was it,
nothing behind the clouds
which are now turning claret
and lamb’s blood in the last light.
Look at the scarlet litter of God’s tears
on the gravel. Tell me where you’ve gone.

A New Experience
Nabiha Zaman

The first day
I opened my textbook
and immediately became overwhelmed
How was I supposed to learn all this?
Different sounds ran through my ears
Different pronunciations jumbled in my mouth
Some sounds were sweet
some elegant
some stubby and firm
As time progressed
I finally accumulated the courage to squeeze out
Bonjour.

Healer
Tia Downe

I’ve lost myself
In blood
Spilling
Out of cold slivers
Unfolding
Unable to defy gravity
Knocked out
By a stolen kiss
I need your fire
To wrap around me
Like paper over rock
Pull down the stars
And let me listen to the night
Phase my lunar heart
And eclipse into me
Boil our blood
Side by side
Heal my puncture wounds
And run away with me
Take me into
Your dark dreams
My kindred lover
Let me talk to your ashes
As you
Scatter over my universe

The Painter and the Poet
Terry Lee

A Painter and a Poet met on one, one fine day.
One was contemplating sorrow, the other contemporary clay.
In passing conversation, they struck a deal between the two:
You come pose for me, and I’ll compose for you.
One said, “I’ll paint you a picture in dots and lines.”
The other said, “I’ll tell you a story of words and rhymes.”
“Why don’t we get together, and do as artists do.”
“You come pose for me, and I’ll compose for you.”

So they each took plain white linen, as clean as it could be;
And on each, one put the other, for all the world to see.
And each gave to each other a Gift of Love for free;
Saying, “I’ll compose for you, and you come pose for me.”
this is not paris
with its cozy homes
for coffee drinkers or rome
bold buzzing with vespas along
the via dei sonoma
it’s san antonio a peninsula
in the chihuahuan desert
connected to the mainland
mainly by the balcones
fault the fissure
that interrupts austin
and also the road
to houston
in this cafe connected
to a bike shop
jutting out
between broadway and ogden lane
people are industrious
9 out of 10 are reading
or online—make that 14 out of 15
i’m looking around
pen poised in the air
a woman opens the door and enters
but doesn’t look at me
just in case i’m caught in her peripheral vision
i pretend not to see
that would make it 15 out of 16 busy
with the device of alternate reality

Three Poems about the City
Morgan Anderson

Symbolic Architecture

lost American gothic/ and the buildings gawk at each other/
their iron-cage framework wild-eyed and lit up/ odds in
love with evens/ for every brick still laid

Advection

within a residential kaleidoscope of car exhaust/ fog
expands on dim streets knit in hills/ nitrates and phosphates
saturated in cool valleys/ seeking to singe our lungs/ and it
was found in the dipping temperature of our souls too/
never defined as mesmerizing

Downtown Reflection

the highway orchestrates in the distance/ feet stomp/ we
cough/ watch the sky-scratchers lean into the atmosphere/
kicking garbage at their feet/ we stare at the sun 400 times
in the sky/ no—reflected 400 times in the windows/ letting
the light bounce back and forth in our eyes

Stuff and Things
Melanie Robinson

Packrats are nest builders.
Nasty little creatures that burrow in garages, sheds, basements
and attics in moderate climates across the northern hemisphere.
They like stuff. A lot of stuff.
“Too much” is a phrase never uttered amongst them
and happiness is just another storage shed away.

I am made of a different breed… more human than these pests
of mammals,
More primitive than the perfection promised by a plastic surgeon
with a scalpel in hand, I am wandering.

I have that albatross type tendency because grounded is daunting.
Every few years when I do land, my nest is built on a ridge near
the ocean
daring the elements to wreck a home that never looked like
forever.
It’s so much easier to throw things away than it is to fix them,
so I coast on, trail ships and rest on this salt water halfway house.

I am all cartilage and teeth. I sleep swimming with both eyes
open,
I can’t ever get comfortable, tiger shark they call me.
I only breathe when the texture of change caresses these gills
softly.
Those rodents have it all wrong.
Vertebrae are overrated; you need more spine than that.
You need to leave and keep leaving,
abandon carcasses half eaten and give them to the lesser
creatures.

The rats have gotten used to the weight. It feels so heavy to
remember.
I choose to move on, keep moving, never look back, take nothing
with me.
I am this or that, depending on what I can carry. Everything I had
has left me, so I have no problem leaving everything behind.

I wear a feather necklace these days,
keep swimming in my back pocket and keep moving
because grounded is too daunting.

Survival Plan
Darby Riley

make a living save all life
trim the bushes stop extinctions
care for family spread compassion
tend the garden live with nature
build community unite humanity
walk in the woods create awareness
consume organic see ourselves together

in the sacred cosmos
Editors’ Poems

Draft Horse Dreaming
with a Neigh to Walter Mitty
Joan Strauch Seifert

The challengers were eager. My race had been announced, so into the slot I stomped, waiting for the starting gun. Off then I sped; the jockey was so light upon my back that across the line we ran and claimed the roses.

Then the alarm went off. I stumbled from the paddock, made the coffee strong, dressed, went curbside, whinnied for a taxi, plodded to the work load of the day.

Yet, sometimes, when the phones quit jangling, when copiers and scanners quiet their hums, my hooves feel polished, shined and ready, and there seems to be a ribbon in my brow band.

I pulled a carriage decked with festive garlands; we trotted into town to join the line-up. The parade was starting; bands began to play. I gave a carefree snort; time for my high-step!

Then the traffic light turned red. I clomped back, stepped into my cubicle got tethered to the network, began to pull my burden.

Yet, sometimes, when my shoes are newly hammered, and burrs are softly combed from out my mane, and the wagon’s not been overloaded, then I nicker, and I feel a sort of prancing coming on.

Hunger
Carol Coffee Reposa

Astrophysicists predict
A slow death for our sun: No supernova, white
Colossus hurling light Across the Milky Way. Instead our star will grow, Consuming everything Within its field: Satellites Our planet All the artifacts.

She will swallow desperately The works of Shakespeare Newton Einstein Bach Everything Cervantes ever wrote, Or saw: Those Gothic spikes His crazy windmills Whatever might remain Along the Amazon.

In the end, she’ll take Too much. A ravenous old woman Swollen with the universe Bloated with millennia She will fall Through light-years, Grinding everything Into blazing dust Spitting words and works Through space until they spin Into another nebula, some other helix Melding slowly Underneath A new galactic light.

first published in Facts of Life, 2002

River Song
Lou Taylor

Canes populate the riverside Thriving in riparian soil Wind whips in from far and wide The canes do not recoil

Vibrations wrought by moving air Cause a miracle to unfold Wind and cane make music fair The resonance is bold

Mortals living near the shore Thrill to the eerie sound Silently they pray for more Perfect pitch is found

When mortals for a tune do long Oboes play the river song
La Lechuza
Gerard S. Robledo

I see your white face
behind uncertain woods: a specter
vanishing with my childhood
as my daughter ages—the endangered species
of the Borderland. The old people
curse at you, shooing you away
with every expletive. I beg you to stay,
“Vuelve mi querido!” My child
and I have left you

International Poems
Luna en el charco
María Olimpia de Obaldía

La luna asomó su rostro
a los espejos de un charco
y le silbaron los grillos
e hicieron burla los sapos…
pero ella siguió serena
reflejándose en el charco.

El agua quieta y oscura
en plata la fue cambiando
y las yerbas de la orilla
en plantel de lirios blancos…
Y se callaron los grillos
y se escondieron los sapos!

Yo estoy enfermo de soledad
Ricardo Miró

Yo estoy enfermo de soledad…
Amo las viejas calles torcidas,
esas callejas desconocidas
que llevan lejos de la ciudad.

Como en la calma hallo el placer,
en vez de necias voces profanas
amo el acento de las campanas
en el fantástico atardecer.

A esa sonrisa que brota a flor
del labio impuro que amores miente,
prefiero el trino con que la fuente
bajo la luna canta su amor.

Sé que en mí mismo llevo la paz,
y me ilumino de dulce calma
cuando permito que mire mi alma
todas las cosas que dejo atrás.

There Was a Time
James R. Adair

There was a time when my love for you
plumbed depths deeper than ocean trenches,
scaled heights above mountain peaks,
swoaring with the eagles at the zenith of their flight,
when the sight of you caused palpitations
and your scent bored into my soul,
arousing, exciting, titillating both heart and loins,
when a day apart was longing,
and two was anguish,
but reunion was almost unbearably sweet—
there was a time—but it is no more.

Poemas Internacionales
Moon in the Pool
María Olimpia de Obaldía / translated by Gerard S. Robledo

The moon peeked its face
into the mirror of a pool,
the crickets whistled
and the toads taunted…
but she followed peacefully
reflecting in the pool.

The water, dark and still,
turned to silver
and the weeds at the edge
of the field of white lilies…
The crickets fell silent
and the toads hid!

I’m Sick of Solitude
Ricardo Miró / translated by Gerard S. Robledo

I’m sick of solitude…
I love the old twisted streets,
those unknown alleys
that carry you away from the city.

When it’s peaceful I find pleasure,
not in the midst of foolish profane voices
I love the accent of bells
in the surreal sunset.

To that smile that blooms a flower
of impure lips which lie to loves,
I prefer the tremor from the spring
under the Moon that sings your love.

I know inside of me there is peace,
and I illuminate with a sweet calm
when I let my soul see
all the things I left behind.
Tunesischer Abend in Sousse
Hejo Müller

Spatzen, die an satten
Datteln naschen
in quirlige Gesänge verstrickt
Hinterrücks belauscht
vom Meer
Und Pappeln, die sich dehnen und strecken
Im Wind-Wegenlied
Nachts
im spaten Oktober noch
bemüht eine Grille
ihren hellen Diskant
und besiegt
sie allein
das allgegenwärtige Rauschen des Meeres
horchata y biscochitos.

Promised Moon
Lahab Assef Al-Jundi

Night unfolding
Promised
Moon
My God!
I’m feeling romantic
Dance in my blood
Home
Humble planet
Pulsing rivers red
Fish dying
Glacier mountains crumbling
Lady Liberty shines on
Survival
Veiled core
Remedy same
Dance in my blood
Passion
Here and Now
Moon, moon
Bliss-full moon
Swallow me whole!

Tunesian Evening in Sousse
Hejo Müller / translated by James Brandenburg

Sparrows,
nibbling
corpulent dates
energetically entangled
in a round-dance
of song
from afar
the ocean
secretly listening
and poplar trees creaking,
stretching their limbs
to the wind’s lullaby
Nighttime
in late October
the cricket descanting
and dominantering
alone
the ocean’s ubiquitous roar.

Flowers
Larry D. Thomas

They grace the scarred,
rickety tables of widows
with miracles of hue and scent,
their lithe, green stems
stuck in the braids of beggars
dodging the vendors who peddle them
all along the sidewalks
leading ultimately to fresh graves
concave with their fragrant weight.
Even the boats brim with them
in the ancient Floating Gardens
of Xochimilco.
It’s no wonder Mexico City
is famous for its murals,
the restless eyes of artists
falling everywhere through the decades
on their fresh, vivid petals, so radiant,
even through the veils of death.

Larry D. Thomas was Poet Laureate of Texas in 2008.
Select Poems

Untitled
Mark Hierholzer

The days chase on and failure moves to failure.
The words run cold and the music seems to cease.

Oh what failure, what failure when a tiny yellow butterfly
Shames you. Or the restless gray doves flapping in and out
Of sight. Then a hawk, mighty, lands on the stone bank building
Knowing supremacy. The cars fly by and the fat tourists walk
As they buy. How could it be that my energy fails?

How could it be, the me of my youth that fought holy hosts
Of rugged enemy over a mound of dirt my father ordered but would
Never use would languish more than my father’s Iwo Jima fight?
And a bullet through his head that did not kill him or me.

But it may have been his end at a mere nineteen,
Or the shine from his sick helmet rose like a beacon
To the sun and from the sun, to show me the light
Of strength it takes to make the new world its own.

Baseball Haiku
Billy Jackson

Blazing fastball—FWUNK!—
a STRIKE. Next pitch: curve ball h-a-n-g-s
TOCK!—it’s outta’ here!

Letters to My Soul*
Glenna Hall

whilst passing from time to eternity
through slumber’s way.

Now comes shadow, holding the
hidden veils of remembering.

Rainbow’s walk pauses,
by the pool of pondering.

Now, be still, as stars awash in rainbow’s
array beckoning the Ancients, “Come hither.”

*First published in Lone Stars Poetry Magazine, Milo Rosebud, editor
and publisher

When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer
Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and
measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much
applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander’d off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look’d up in perfect silence at the stars.

To Some
Therese Huntzinger

To some come
wings to soar high
others
fins to dive deep
most
feet to plod along

to some come
power of high intellect
others
vulnerability of inadequacy
most
capability of average

to some come
abundance of opportunity
others
thimbles of hope
most
certitude of possibility

to some
it is inherited
to others
it is forfeited
to most
it is earned

to some
it is privilege
to others
it is poverty
to most
it is mediocrity

to some
it is as it should be
to others
it will never be
to most
it is c’est la vie
Hospice
Larry D. Thomas

Those who work here
speak in hushed tones.
They ply the ethereal
trade of the angels,
schooled in the nuances
of reassurance, comfort.
Dazzlingly hale
and brazen,
a shaft of sunlight
astonishes her,
showering her bed
with unexpected gifts.

Even the pills she swallows
are round and smooth
with benevolence,
their passage eased
by the melt of crushed ice.
Death lives here, too,
strangely avuncular,
aloof and taciturn
yet devoid of fear
and terror,
unobtrusive
as light, shadow.

Larry D. Thomas was Poet Laureate of Texas in 2008.

Aldebaran at Dusk
George Sterling

Thou art the star for which all evening waits—
O star of peace, come tenderly and soon
Nor heed the drowsy and enchanted moon,
Who dreams in silver at the eastern gates
Ere ye she brim with light the blue estates
Abandoned by the eagles of the noon.
But shine thou swiftly on the darkling dune
And woodlands where the twilight hesitates.

Above that wide and ruby lake to-West,
Wherein the sunset waits reluctantly,
Stir silently the purple wings of Night.
She stands afar, upholding to her breast,
As mighty murmurs reach her from the sea,
Thy lone and everlasting rose of light.

Travel Profile
Donna Peacock

Seatbelt buckled, loosely fastened at all times,
I sit with drink in hand, a nice dry wine
(complimentary, of course). I have been seated
long before those in back were boarded and paraded
past us, chain-gang prisoners clanking
in unison to the nagging chant
of their unattractive stewardess:
“This is a full flight. Find a seat now!”

I feel guilty, yet pleasantly uppity,
as an aristocrat might eye a pauper in the street.
So nice that someone has provided them each
a brown sack lunch to carry on with their other carry-ons.

I am an in-flight imposter, a tourist-class upgrade
sitting among The Twelve—the Blue-Book bluebloods
of airline social registers from established families
who have, for generations, flown first class.

“Another Cabernet Sauvignon?” Why not?
I study the menu in gold-embossed lettering:
fluffy omelette garnished with fine herbs
or pork tenderloin lightly brushed with jus d’orange.

I am disquieted by the crackle of peanut packages
in the back cabin, the popping of soft drink cans,
passengers rifling through pockets and purses
for correct, necessary cash for alcoholic beverages.

Here, we luxuriate in the absence of rules. No
“seat-backs up,” no “trays returned to place.”
Rather, “Let me get you a fresh cloth napkin,
a warm, slightly dampened towel for your fingers,”

from our exclusive cabin attendant
with high cheek-bones, trim figure, coiffed hair
and “I exist solely for your pleasure” posture.
“Is there anything else I can get you?

No turbulence or crying babies in our section of the plane
and we are first to disembark at our final destination.
Will I be joining other members for a cocktail in the Admiral’s Club
while waiting in between flights? No. Not today.

I am who I am, a steerage traveler who vies for early boarding passes,
scouts the weakest link for an easier place up front in line,
trained to receive—palm up—the offering from aging stewardesses:
one small bag of pretzels, raisins, or almonds, and no more.

I will return to the seat with broken springs and stained-with
something-cushion,
cash or credit card handy for a simple domestic beer. I will fly
with others of my kind: my head in the clouds, still tasting
pieces of upper crust remaining on my lips.
And because I am dedicating tonight’s performance to those healthcare professionals—both traditional and non-traditional, male and female, doctors and curanderas—who have guided me and helped me and pulled me through this healing process—people whose exceptional professionalism and caring humanism has made all the difference—especially Dr. Richard Fischer, Dr. Joseph Marotta, Dr. Kaye Morris, Dr. Richard Elledge, and Dr. Richard Crownover—

I would like to share the poem that appears in the book alongside the image of a wise and timeless healer, la curandera.

Curandera, Your Voice,

like a low mesquite-breeze
whistles softly through half a lung
and crackles like dried leaves in ancient bottles.

Patient teas, potent herbs
stand ready in dusty jars along your kitchen shelves
and in the crowded cabinets of your well-aged mind
where remedios older than mountains
overlap histories with miracles
and love with labor
Memory leaves not one space to waste or out of grace
Lemon rinds, comino seeds, reborn in dessicated age,
grow to their purpose, stronger now
while ojos de venado speak the haunting tenderness
of deer, the power of justice
Half-blind eyes whisper prayers through rippled light,
sifting sunshine through the sounds of centuries till
Shuffling slippers pause…

Barking dogs bow quiet for this Mass…

Hot with blessing,
your hands exceed
the boundaries of their bones
and reach
to make
the cure.

Book Review
Birth Marks
Poems by Jim Daniels

Reading Jim Daniels’ poems from his large number of books, including Having a Little Talk with Capital P Poetry and Trigger Man, reminds us that we are facing a muse, a working class poet who speaks from the alleys of Detroit or the narrow country road when he crosses the country with his bike. However, I’m mesmerized by the poems in his latest collection, Birth Marks. Here he begins with lines such as: “In short, he was a bad magician / and she the nervous assistant, / a match manufactured in a damp swamp. Even though he doesn’t remember that moment the birth marks are there to indicate a few things.”

In the poem “One Word,” Daniels presents an image of his brother in a hospital bed unable to produce a single word; the breathing tubes and stitches speak volumes about the tragedy, man’s struggle between life and death. Here the poem ends in a procession of torches to carry light into the darkness: “…Oh, my brother, we’re lighting the torches / and heading out into the darkness to find the words / and bring them back to you.”

When it comes to rendering serious poetry, Daniels is a true master who can produce remarkable passages such as: “Tears do not add up with firmness” or “Tears fall and evaporate so quickly nobody has time / to lick or collect them…”

The poems are from the city streets, from Detroit, and are about the fathers who worked and spent their lives producing miracles. Daniels is a working class poet who speaks of their struggle and pain. His latest book of poems (his fourteenth poetry collection) travels from Detroit to Ohio to Pittsburgh, from one post-industrial city to another, across jobs and generations.

For a’ That and a’ That (excerpt)
Robert Burns

Is there, for honest poverty,
That hings his head, an’ a’ that?
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a’ that!
For a’ that, an’ a’ that,
Our toils obscure, an’ a’ that;
The rank is but the guinea’s stamp;
The man’s the gowd for a’ that,

What tho’ on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin-gray, an’ a’ that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
A man’s a man for a’ that.
For a’ that, an’ a’ that,
Their tinsel show an’ a’ that;
The honest man, tho’ e’er sae poor,
Is king o’ men for a’ that.
Poetry Therapy

Poets use poetry to deal with such issues as heroin/alcohol addiction, death, abandonment, and sexual and emotional abuse. The following authors illustrate the use of writing to deal with these issues.

Keeping Watch
Josie Mixon

I had to kill the snowman
For drinking my herbal tea
Made from the fountain of omission
He watched the innocence of time disappear
Into such a convoluted story of regret
Heartless and homeless
He stood across the street from where I once lived
Taking notes while readjusting his belly
Judgment fell upon closed doors
It was light when he first appeared
Yet wore darkness like the cape of a superhero
Astonished I still sing his praises in the rain
Without doubt the world around me fades
One member at a time
Behind bruised eyes I still watch in disbelief
Time is sanctioned
Along with every opportunity to be loved
A pale blue moon holds the snowman
Still watching from afar, taking notes
His breath still smells of my childhood
My innocence

The Light from Within
Christian Maloles

One light, darkness all around
A lamppost in the middle of a ghost town
Wintery conditions, blizzard-felled streets
Icy trees, dark clouds, fleeting snowflakes—come,
May whither nigh freeze
Look up, however—
Look to the horizon, rays of light put forth
Nigh, the sun is far from appearing
Cold bare feet sat on cold concrete
Frostbite—hither it comes,
Had it naught nullified by the Light
The lamppost shines ever brightly,
giving Heat to that which was left
Though empty it seems, it hungers for adventure
Before they register, the sun rises on its face
She melts away the snow, thaws the ice from its feet,
The clouds depart hastily in light of her presence.
She accompanies it,
And feels the light from within the lamppost.

Dusk
Edna Kovacs
Breathing is wishing and wishing is having
—e.e. cummings

Touched by the breadth of calm that encircles with each pure dusk
that my heart would find peace and soften
allowing the colors of the world to gather there
stilling the reeds within.
Only then, would I crawl out from the emptiness
of this frail, dark cave
unburdened
like a moonlit wave.

How to Sell Your Junk
Laura Vera and Tamar Senyak

The pink metal glistened from inside the sagging cardboard box.
We grabbed the swords and started fighting.
My opponent blocked my first jab with a shy grin.
Her expression remained till the end of the war.
A small crowd gathered to watch.
The fight stopped, the crowd disappeared.
“We should fight,” said Smiley. “People come when we fight.”
After all, it was a garage sale.

Brother Beloved
Khalilah Bilal

Go my Brother
Seek what your heart already knows

Find out the veils that have left us crippled and estranged
To the One that loves

Study and unstudy
Become what is unknown
By releasing the manmade self

Put back on clipped wings
The mountain is a good place to fly
The mountain is a good place to Dance with the unseen
Hug a tree
Sing to the clouds
Inhale the moon
Touch a star

But until you share
It will stay locked in a dream.
mallness
madness
rohn bayes

merlins’s magic in the apple store
transforms the teenager’s shoulder
into a wiccan’s tattoo
the retail table into
a thunderstorm game played
by a child with a mouse
outside the current carries
incessant people past sliding glass doorways
with mannequined bikinis and sequined sorority sisters
looking pensive
the trees are missing but quadacopters hover
like ravens like owls like an eye belonging to nobody incarnate
in the nook the fountain the traveled trail the cool oasis
merlin would be pleased

The Stars Are the Eyes of Angels
Valerie ThiboDeauf-Moody

The stars are the eyes of angels
Watching over the souls of men
The stars are the eyes of angels
Praying continuously for our sins
The stars are the eyes of angels
Peering down on high
Keeping spiritual surveillance
Guiding us in our everyday lives
In the fresh morning dew
All the angels come back together as one
Forming a big, bright, brilliant sun
In the dusk they break formation
To take their places all over creation
Revealing the galaxy again
The stars are the eyes of angels
Protecting the souls of men

The Livid Lightnings Flashed in the Clouds
Janie Alonso

The livid lightnings flashed in the clouds;
The leaden thunders crashed.
A worshiper raised his arm.
“Hearken! Hearken! The voice of God!”

“Not so,” said a man.
“The voice of God whispers in the heart
So softly
That the soul pauses,
Making no noise,
And strives for these melodies,
Distant, sighing, like faintest breath,
And all the being is still to hear.”

Shout!
Jonathan Fowler

Stand up, sing out!
Don’t sit in a corner and pout
Be loud, vocal, shout!

Is something wrong?
Don’t sit and wait too long
Speak! Louder than a song

You can’t just wait around
On your knees, to be found
Get up, make some sound

Don’t think me a fool
I’m familiar with the dark pool
But listen, here’s a tool:
MAKE yourself HEARD!
Blast out that chord!
THAT’S how to move forward.

Last Night’s Dreaming
Margot Van Sluytman

Creeping Crone Wisdom
Informs my day’s calamity.
Moon time infiltrates all
That would be dancing,
Surrender, trust. Eeking
Out my living spinning
Tiny tantrums of tenacious
Awe, this snow-swelling day
Has abandoned me here
With tsunamiied-emotional
Water, extracting every
Ounce of tiny tendrilled
Energy. Right down to
My gaping nourishing loneliness
And night dreams of
Fish eggs and transformation.
Voices de la Luna own
My blood, my bone, my marrow.
And I want to die to all that
Would be hope, all that is
Healing. As always, words
In submission to this journey
Will not permit me to cave.

Margot Van Sluytman is an internationally recognized conflict resolution and biblio-therapy specialist.
When Nothing Helps
Maria Alonso

The monkey-mind chatters mindlessly
Building random, worthless input
That has nowhere else to go.

And then BANG, POP & ZOWIE
The blackboard is wiped clean
And a new chapter begins.

New Beginnings
Anonymous

New beginnings hold a fragile moment
That is precious and short
It doesn’t take long for the change
Or the journey to find us
Then when it does
The best choice to make
Is the one of embrace.

The Awakening
Melissa E.

As the light shines through my window
I awaken.
I am reminded once more
today another day stolen from borrowed time.
Today I will live and live to will.
I will be thankful for all I love.
Every breath shall be full
as I take in the world around me.
I will push away the pain,
hide my tears and sorrow
drown out all that threatens my very being.
Today I will climb that rock
sit on top
staring and soaking in
the beauty of nature, of life.
I will let the wind whisper in my ears
and flow through me
filling my every sense
breathing life once more into my soul.
Just for today I shall truly live
making the best of everything
because I know as the sun sets and sleeps
so shall I.
I will once more
watch the last ray of the sun disappear
knowing that one day
it may never awaken me.
Just for today I will live.

Owl’s Cry
Maria Gabriela Madrid

I experienced an owl’s cry
That liberated my demons
Cleaned my soul
Bringing me back from the darkest hole

To see beauty and ugliness
To understand the road of life
as a communion of nature and soul
But first you must experience an owl’s cry

Crystallized
Sasha Guzman

Shattered pieces, fossilized thoughts
Forbidden in time, crystallized heart
Glowing moon, aged with time
These combined make a deadly toxin…
The poison apple I am offered in a desperate
Time…
Fix it or don’t, eat it and relax, suffer later
Do not partake and wait to die
Clear my mind never.
Faster, slower, come down
And suffer
Mend my thoughts and make me clear.
Purity is bliss, hold back forever.
Where is the answer?
Why is something so appealing so toxic
Another day…
Is the apple still sitting there waiting for me?
Has it rotted away waiting for me to pluck it
From the garden of Eden?
Nothing is better, I want the apple.

Sanctuary
Marnsa

Open road
open fields
music transports me
to the plane of lento (slow)
clear colors call me
to look more deeply
people watch
connecting
interaction of energy.

A warm car
a clear chilly night
a country road
as I watch the meteor shower
through the moon roof.
Poetry & Dreams
Poetry, Dreams, and Interpretation

Philosophical Tree Voices
Transcribed and Interpreted by James Brandenburg
San Antonio, TX
May 18, 2013

Dream: In my dream it is night. I am outside and the moon is shining brightly. My tree is there in front of me. It is spring; the leaves are green, and there are buds. I am unsure of what kind of fruit or flowers the tree will bear, but I feel close to the tree. It is not an old tree. No. This tree still has many years to grow and will, no doubt, continue to flourish long after I have died. Because it is my tree, I take care of it. I water my tree and provide nourishment. As I look up into the top of the tree, I see two birds perched in the canopy. I recognize them as storks. I am still so as not to disturb them. I stand long into the night, looking at the tree.

Interpretation: The tree is one of the most important archetypes and appears in many cultures and mythologies. Carl Jung writes in *Alchemical Studies*:

> Taken on average, the commonest to its meaning are growth, life, unfolding of form in a physical and spiritual sense, development, growth from below upwards and from above downwards, the maternal aspect (protection, shade, shelter, nourishing fruits, source of life, solidity, permanence, firm-rootedness, but also being “rooted to the spot”), old age, personality, and finally death and rebirth (272).

Several religious ideas are implied in the symbolism of the World Tree. On the one hand, Mircea Eliade states in *Shamanism* that the World Tree represents the universe in continual regeneration, the inexhaustible spring of cosmic life, the paramount reservoir of the sacred (because it is the “Center” for the reception of the celestial sacred, etc.) (271). On the other hand, it symbolizes the sky or the planetary heavens. It is important to remember that in a number of archaic traditions the Cosmic Tree denotes the sacrality of the world, its fertility and perenniality and is related to the ideas of creation, fecundity, and initiation, as well as the idea of absolute reality and immortality. Thus the World Tree becomes a Tree of Life and Immortality, as well. Enriched by innumerable mythical doublets and complementary symbols (woman, the wellspring, milk, animals, fruits, etc.), the Cosmic Tree always presents itself as the very reservoir of life and the master of destinies.

Dog Collapses*
James Brandenburg

In this Mexico
everyone shares
beds, food, money
no rich, no poor—
one community where
animals belong to all—

and a black dog with prophetic eyes penetrates our hearts.

We climb to adobe abodes
created by Indian ancestors
when from beneath the rocks
a poisonous serpent strikes
the back of the communal dog.

The curandero approaches
reaches for the dog
but the dog liquefies
into black solution,
softens into white,
finally melts into crimson hues
the curandero explores fur, body;
eyes alive, heart still beating
the curandero looks up
chants and shakes his head
the dog’s heart explodes into liquid
his eyes dissolve and
the curandero throws the solution
into the ocean

An explosion vibrates under our feet.

*I Want to Go Where the Trees Meet*

Sandra S. Garcia

I want to go where the trees meet
Like two hands crossed over each other
With fingers interlocked
Leaving a dome of security
Yet the excitement of what lies ahead
It’s calm here on the path
Of darkened cracks that lead the way
To a hidden paradise of cozy comfort
Underneath the trees
Look up and all you can see is green
A sparkling light pierces through
Otherwise climate cool
Walking in this special place
When an iced breeze surprisingly encircles
Your body
As playful children would, during hide and seek.
Oh, I want to go where the trees meet
I can feel it!
Surrounding
One large umbrella
Of comfort
Waiting for me.
**Shape Shifter**  
*James Brandenburg*

O, Shape Shifter  
Visitor from another world  
as I bite into that bitter apple  
and spew out  
disappointment  
show me your miracle  
not illusion  
but trickery  
lift me up to the numinosity  
there all along  
inside my heart.

**Art Therapy**

**What’s the Worst?**  
*Frances Ford*

What’s the worst thing that could happen if you saw beyond your  
hurt,  
you saw past my so-called flaws,  
you stopped harboring your resentments toward me for what I  
did way back when,  
you let go of your preconceived notions of how I still haven’t  
changed,  
the things that I wronged you with, if you gave me another  
chance truly?  
Are you afraid to admit that you faltered, that you made a mis-  
take?  
What’s the worst thing that could happen if you realized you still  
love me,  
that you’d realize you were wrong, that your false pride made  
you let go of one  
of the best things in your life?  
The worst thing that would happen is that you’d finally stop lying  
to yourself,  
you’d finally “Be true to thyself.”  
I won’t hurt you; I won’t throw things in your face.  
I’m not your biggest enemy…  
You’d realize that you were your biggest enemy.  
The whole time you were fighting me, I was trying to help you.  
The worst thing that can happen is reconciliation, restoration…  
That we become aware, that we truly start to grow…  
That once and for all we start healing…  
How bad can that truly be?

**So Blessed by You, Mom**  
*Miekayla R. Ford*  
*(teenaged daughter of Frances Ford)*

A Mother who always cares  
A Mother who’s always there

**Walking under Water**  
*Maripat Munley*

Step by step descending  
Down a slippery iron ladder  
Weighted and oxygenated  
In our heavy helmets  
Pinching our noses to  
Balance the pressure  
Reaching the sea bottom  
Ten meters down and more  
Now walking under water  
Petting colorful fish  
Ambling in schools of them  
Yellow, green, amber, blue  
Darting before our view mask  
Swimming between our legs  
Around our shoulders  
Swirling everywhere  
Sea daddy-long-leg-like creatures  
Dancing on our open palms  
Walking under water  
Seduces us to remain longer  
Too soon we must climb  
The iron ladder dockside  
Too soon our whole world changes  
Vibrant color and movement disappear  
Not fade - simply disappear  
Light so bright, breeze rippling  
Over our wet bodies  
Caribbean music playing  
But we are like deft dreamers  
Walking under water
On Pinching Pens
Kevin N. Power

It happens every now and again
I lend someone my favourite pen
And later note that it’s gone missing,
Which gets me down and I start hissing:
“Curse the one who’s pinched my pen;
I’d shoot them if I had a Sten:
In their pocket my pen sits
While I am throwing hissy fits!”
But I’m a culprit now and then;
I, too, can pocket someone’s pen;
Why, only just a moment ago
I saw my colleague’s consternation grow:
She knew her pen was on the table,
Yet to find it she was quite unable.
She searched and searched, but all in vain:
I shared her feeling of great pain—
Then in my pocket found her pen:
I blushed and gave it back again.
She smiled and graciously forgave me;
I smiled back and tried most bravely
To explain my thieving act
Was absentmindedness in fact.
Now documents we both can sign—
She has her pen and I have mine;
And hope we get it back again!

Quantum Particles
Margot Van Sluytman

Courage resurfaced like quantum
Particles dazzling each day’s deep
Desire for delight. Physicist sitting
On my carpet, smiling a Wisdom,
Even as my tears fell. And of a
Sudden all of the deaths, all of
The births blossomed and bloomed
In my vital remembering. Like Spring
Rain soaking sweet, fertile mud,
Readying it for seeds of abundant
Possibility, poetry manifested
Herself moments after you left
For your bed. Water boiled
For sweet tea, and Rumi sat in my
Night scented cell, guiding my
Fingers across empty and
Hungry blank sheets.

Digital Public Library of America Launched

The Digital Public Library of America, a project to make available the contents of U.S. libraries, archives, and museums, went online on April 18. Though the DPLA contains digitized texts in abundance, representation of the written word hardly exhausts its holdings. Also present are digital reproductions of works of art and culture, artifacts of American history, and scientific discoveries. All items in the library are freely accessible to anyone with a web browser.

Several exhibitions are currently featured on the DPLA site, including Activism in the U.S., America’s Great Depression and Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912, History of Survival: Upper Midwest 19th Century Native American Narratives, and This Land Is Your Land: Parks and Public Spaces.

The DPLA currently contains more than 2.5 million records, dating from the eleventh through the twenty-first centuries, using internationally recognized encoding and metadata standards, including HTML5, CSS3, Dublin Core, and RDF. Free apps that can be downloaded and used on various platforms for exploring the data in the DPLA are available on the site, along with instructions for app developers who want to customize their access to the library’s information.

Poetry Contest Winners
Voices de la Luna Gala at The Bright Shawl

First Place Winner

Requiem
The Late Mim Sharlack

when I die
throw an irish wake
for this part-time Jew

no funeral
no burial
just throw
the cremains
in a bluebonnet field
if it’s spring

live jazz a must
polly on 7-string guitar
kyle on vocals and drums
a good send off
for one
who has finished
her ninth life

by then i’ll be
looking on perhaps
having finally learned
the answer

Second Place Winner

What the World Needs Now
Darby Riley

The m.d.’s in the advice column
say loving, trusting sex
is good for you.
Intimacy animates oxytocin
a secretion which eases
pain, blood pressure, sadness,
sleeplessness, sullenness.

And making love augments
immunoglobulin A
in the blood stream.
This helps you breathe better,
helps fight off sickness.

Regular romps radically cut the risk
of heart attack, stroke, prostate cancer.
To kiss, caress, clasp, and cavort
is good exercise
releases muscle tension
increases self esteem
makes you look younger.

Third Place Winner

Totem I
Lauren Walthour

I heard a falcon’s cry on the downtown campus
Crashing inside the glass pyramid;
Greenhouse balanced atop cobalt blue wind tunnel
Creates diverse testament, transparent trap.
Panicked by architecture;
All she has to do is dive down,
Then fly out to freedom.

I whistled repeatedly from the granite steps below.
She responded half-way, chirping for mercy;
Genes prevent her from entering college chaos.

Crawling through a janitor’s window,
Carrying bread crumbs to the roof,
I opened triangles of escape.
She couldn’t or refused to find geometric exits.

They said when noisy students leave for Thanksgiving,
She will go home too.
Instead, dehydrated and isolated,
She fainted and fell from the apex,
Reminding me to trust my guides.

Dr. Akright Introducing Third Place Poetry Winner,
Lauren Walthour

To view the video clips of these winners reading their poems, please visit www.voicesdelaluna.com.
I entered Buckner Orphans Home in 1947 when I was nine years old. The State of Israel was created in 1948. I have no recollection of that event. During my latter years at Buckner, because I had a morning newspaper route for two years during that time, I had some awareness of the existence of a “Palestine-Israel” problem, but I had very little appreciation of the issues involved in the conflict when I left the Home after graduating from high school in 1955.

Over the years I slowly became more sympathetic to the Israeli side. In both my military experience and my medical practice I had occasion to hear more directly of the Israeli position. When I headed the Department of Neurosurgery at the Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services in Baltimore, I had on my staff for two years a young neurosurgeon from Israel who was also in the Israeli Air Force Reserves. He introduced my wife and me to several of his friends from Israel; all insisted we visit them in their homes. He took us to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, and introduced us to the air attaché from Israel, who also insisted we visit. But time and events conspired to prevent us from traveling there at that time.

Two years ago, all the variables dictating such an occurrence fell into place, and we took our long-awaited trip to the Middle East. We began the trip in Egypt, visiting Cairo and Alexandria. We cruised the Nile River visiting the usual sites: Valley of the Kings, Karnak, the Pyramids, the Sphinx. We went next to Jordan and the delightfully mysterious Petra. Finally we crossed into Israel from Jordan in the desert near Aqaba, familiar to those who saw Lawrence of Arabia. At Tel Aviv we found and joined the group my wife and I had been talking about in LA, which included a friend we had met several years before and with whom we had taken several trips together. The group was headed by a couple of Catholic priests who at times were a little earthy, but given the nature of the group they were trying to control, their tactics were understandable.

As Catholics, they started each day with mass in a church of some historical religious importance. One morning I decided not to attend mass but rather to stay in the bus used to get us around. It was comfortable and seated fifty passengers. My wife went to mass with her friend, Belle. After the group left the bus and disappeared down one of the curving streets, the driver came back to me in the bus and asked if I would like to go for a ride—no other details were provided and I asked for none. Without giving the moment an additional thought I agreed. So off we went.

In a few minutes we stopped at an Israeli checkpoint. The driver, a middle-aged Palestinian, and the younger Israeli soldier talked for a few minutes. Once during their conversation they both looked in my direction, but otherwise ignored me. Then we proceeded. At that moment I realized I did not have my passport nor my wallet with drivers license and money. All this was in my wife’s rather large purse. I began to experience a creeping sense of unease. The surrounding neighborhoods through which we were now traveling were less well kept, less attractive than those from which we had come. There were some abandoned houses and buildings, the streets less crowded. We came to another Israeli checkpoint where the previous scenario was repeated. I was not sure where we were (I surmised we were somewhere in the West Bank) or where we were going.

A few minutes from the last checkpoint we arrived at a relatively nondescript building, five stories high. The front lawn was slightly but noticeably overgrown. One of the lesser doors into the building had a window in its center which was boarded up. We took a small dirt road around the east side of the building to the back. There, a garage door, big enough to accommodate our bus, opened as we approached. With full clearance established, we entered and immediately found ourselves going down a ramp in a circular profile, to the floor of the garage. About one-half a football field in cubic size, it was open except for four ramps which created pathways to various areas of the garage. Once we reached the bottom of the garage, the driver placed the bus to one side, parked it, and went immediately through a door a few feet from where we were parked; he said nothing to me. There were two other buses in the garage being cleaned with brooms and water hoses. About the time I had thoroughly oriented myself to my surroundings, the driver returned with two men, one younger than he. He informed me they were to clean the bus and suggested I would be more comfortable if I got out. I exited the bus and sat down on a couch which had seen better days.

Two men similar to our driver in age and appearance, except they had beards several days old, came through the door and began talking with our driver. In a couple of minutes he introduced us. They immediately engaged me in their conversation, speaking in understandable English. Initially they asked me questions about the trip we were on, joking about our driver, and asking minor biographical details. We were subsequently joined by another driver who seemed hesitant to talk in English. His colleagues explained he thought his English was not good enough. I replied it was better than my Arabic. The subsequent laughter opened everyone up. Initially most of the questions came my way, but with some tenacity I began to receive answers to my questions. The discussion was far-ranging and personal. They asked me everything of my family, my work, my education. They did not ask of my military experience, and I did not volunteer any related comments. Nor did they ask of my attitude toward Israel. They talked about their families—I helped with questions. The routine of getting to the homes of families “across the valley,” of shopping for food and other necessities, was commented on openly and without reservations. They spoke with a mixture of pride and pain of their children’s progress in school. It seems they all had two daughters and one son.

During the time I was there I met a total of six drivers, all of similar age, build (rather husky but not obese), and proficiency in English. At approximately the midpoint of my visit there, two men, perhaps in their thirties and with much heavier beards, came through the door and joined us. By tone (they spoke only Arabic) and body language, it was clear they did not consider me welcome. They did not smile; rather they glared. They gestured enough to get my attention but not too threateningly. I heard the word America hissed rather than spoken, but it was clear the bus drivers were in control, and they insisted I was to be treated with respect, at least that is how I read their body language and tone of voice (they were speaking only Arabic at this point).

Our driver asked if I wanted something to drink; it had been approximately one and one-half hours since we arrived. Thinking of my alimentary tract I requested hot tea. In a matter of minutes it was brought to me in a most colorful cup. As I began sipping
the tea, it was very hot. The others, including those cleaning the buses, went into the room. I was left alone, and I remained alone for about one-half hour. During this time I walked the garage floor, trying to make sense out of what I had experienced. As I walked I searched the ground, my usual habit, and came across a US penny (1997), which I kept as a souvenir. Shortly after finding the penny I began to feel pleasantly light-headed and generally relaxed. Nice tea, I thought. I went back to the couch and sat. I continued my thoughts of the previous hour or so, concentrating on what I had just heard. The memory of the two young men kept creeping into the forefront. I couldn’t help thinking of TV programs in which people, including Americans like me, had been poorly treated by men who looked as those two did. Somehow, through some strange tactic of logic and common sense, I was able to finally suppress those thoughts just as the drivers returned.

One driver in the previous group did not return, and there were two new ones. Our bus was the largest one by far, taking longer to clean. The drivers of the smaller buses came and went as we stayed. After the break for tea, the drivers asked more pointed questions about Israel, my specific thoughts, beliefs, opinions. I was truthful and candid. Israel was smaller, supported by the USA, and besides I had never had a chance to speak to Palestinians before in this manner and on this issue. At this time our driver signaled it was about time for us to leave. One of the drivers asked a final question which brought some laughter from the group: what would be my solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict? My answer: the men in front of me should get together as in a union, go over to Israel and meet with like-minded drivers there, form a tour company to bring Americans over to see the locations and artifacts of the Bible (they would come in droves), become wealthy, buy all the land they wanted, and ignore the politicians. There was more laughter.

Then I asked them what they wanted. Including our driver, they became very quiet, they looked at the ground, and they seemed uncomfortable. Just as I thought the meeting was over, the driver who spoke the best English said: “We would like for our children to obtain enough education so they could go work and live in America.” The sincerity and quiet passion with which he said this, looking me full in the face with his dark eyes the nexus of a gentle gaze, left me speechless, almost. Quietly, as I moved forward to shake his hand I said, “May God be with you.” I quickly completed shaking hands with the rest of the drivers and followed mine on to the bus. As we drove off, the men turned and looked toward us. I could not tell if they waved; their images lowered mine on to the bus. As we drove off, the men turned and completed shaking hands with the rest of the drivers and followed me there. I turned around and waved.

The night before the movers came to take everything away, Selma sat on the worn piano bench, stroking the keys so gently they didn’t produce a sound. She thought of playing something one last time but there didn’t seem to be much purpose.

The piano was old, its surface scratched in a few places, its keys yellowed with age. Selma thought it was still handsome. It had weathered the years better than she had. She looked around the living room, resting her eyes on each piece of the furniture—the sofa, chairs, and lamps. They were threadbare with use but rich in her memories.

She stared at the large stain on the sofa pillow, remembering the afternoon her teenage grandson Wally had spilled red soda all over it. If it had been one of her children at his age, she would have been very angry, but she never could muster much anger with Wally or any of the other grandchildren.

“It was an accident. I’ll get the stain out,” she promised, but she never did.

Her eyes wandered to the dining room. How many dinners had she served to her family and friends at the large, oval table. Its polished surface belied the wear it had seen over the years. It was like a proud old woman, all gussied up and ready for the next party.

From the day she and her husband Fred brought it home sixty years earlier, Selma had cared for the table as if it were one of their offspring. She remembered the day they went shopping to buy it. As soon as Selma saw it, she wanted it to be theirs. Its sturdy legs and broad wood surface seemed to promise the solid stability she wanted in her marriage. She imagined children gathered around it, talking, laughing, and sharing the meals she would learn to prepare.

She was crestfallen when the clerk told them the price. It was far beyond their budget. Selma did her best to hide her disappointment from Fred, who suddenly looked vulnerable and helpless. When they left the store, they were both quiet.

As they were driving home, Fred looked over and asked, “You really liked that table didn’t you?”

Selma nodded her head. “I did, but we’ll find something else.” She tried to sound positive and sure.

Fred didn’t answer. He drove a block further and then abruptly pulled the car into a driveway and turned around. Without saying a word, he headed back to the store. They bought the table and chairs on credit. Fred promised they would come back and buy the matching credenza after they paid everything off, but they never got around to it. There were other needs, especially after the children were born. Selma never cared. The table and chairs were enough.

On their way home from the store that day, Selma cried. She reached over to touch Fred’s arm as they drove. She knew he didn’t give a hoot about furniture… would have been happy with something from a second-hand store. He just wanted to give her something she liked. In a storehouse of memories of their marriage—some good, some bad—the memory of that shopping trip was Selma’s favorite. Even now as she sat alone at the piano, it made her smile, made her feel as if Fred were still with her, his arms around her, telling her everything would be okay like he always did.

Selma shook her head. Things were not okay. They were going to be different—very different. Not much of her furniture was going to fit into the apartment in the assisted living center her children had found for her. Besides, they wanted her to get rid of the old stuff, get newer things. When her children looked at the worn furniture they had grown up with, they saw junk fit for the flea

Piano
Maxine Cohen

The night before the movers came to take everything away, Selma sat on the worn piano bench, stroking the keys so gently they didn’t produce a sound. She thought of playing something
Since then creating stories from her life and imagination has become a passionate calling, and she devotes much of her time to the writing process. Maxine, a native Ohioan, has lived in San Antonio since 1968.

I Will Not Go Quietly

Michaud L. Lamrouex
Winner of the Special Award at the Medicine and Arts Gala Contest

Once I was:
swimmer, runner, biker…
musician, composer, writer…
scuba diver, rock climber, skydiver…
attorney, litigator, counselor…
negotiator, educator, problem solver.

Then came three triggering events and the late onset of a devastating mental illness: bipolar disorder.

Now, I am only a shadow of my former self, and I am bent by the heartaches of life.

Proverbs proclaims: “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” or, as I have learned, when you lose your dream, you die.

With every lost dream, I have died just a little bit more.
I have died so much that I have lost the ability to effectuate change in my life, and dreams are hard to hold onto.

So I wonder:

Will I ever love again?
Be loved again?

Will I ever again have music burst from my soul?
Have stories pour forth with no effort at all?
Ever be more than a shadow of what I once was?

Don Henley sings:
“I will not lie down…
I will not go quietly…”

I want to believe that.
I want to embody that.
I want to stand on the edge of the earth and spit defiantly at the encroaching darkness.

I will not give up…
I will not quit dreaming…
I will not go quietly.

Floyd L. Lamrouex is a practicing attorney who is an aspiring novelist, published author, and award-winning poet. His poetry has been published in Inkwell Echoes, Voices Along the River, A Galaxy of Verse, The Dreamcatcher, the Poetry Society of Texas’ Book of the Year, the San Antonio Express-News, and Voices de la Luna.
Strange Times in the Garden of Milk and Wine

In 1994 Mohammad Mokhtari and 133 other contemporary Iranian writers presented a declaration to the Iranian government, in which they pleaded for the rule of law and the right to free expression. In October 1998, Mokhtari, his colleague Mohammad Jafar Puyandeh, and four other prominent writers were summoned to the revolutionary court in Tehran and charged with an illegal attempt to establish an independent writers association. Mokhtari was last seen alive on December 3, 1998, going into a local shop; six days later his body was found in a Tehran city morgue, with marks on his head and neck indicating that he had been murdered, probably by strangulation. Puyandeh’s body was found a few days later. They were the most prominent of the many writers, journalists, and intellectuals murdered by a secret branch of the Iranian security service during the 1990s.

These are strange times when the butchers are in charge of the land, chopping hands in the Garden of Milk and Wine.

A Paragraph from the Text of the 1994 Declaration by 134 Iranian Writers

We hereby emphasize that our principal goal is the removal of all obstacles on the road to freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of publication; we emphasize that any other interpretations of our aim would be incorrect and stress that the responsibility for these misinterpretations lies with those who have wrongly identified our goals.

To read the entire declaration, visit www.unionsverlag.com/info/.

In This Blind Alley
Ahmad Shamlu
Translated by Ahmad Karimi Hakkak

They smell your breath
lest you have said: I Love you.
They smell your heart:
These are strange times, my dear.

They flog love
at the roadblock.
Let’s hide love in the larder.

In this crooked blind alley, as the chill descends,
they feed fires
with logs of song and poetry.
Hazard not a thought:
These are strange times, my dear.

The man who knocks at your door in the noon of the night
has come to kill the light.
Let’s hide light in the larder.

Cyrus the Great Cylinder
The First Charter of Rights of Nations

The Cyrus Cylinder is an ancient clay cylinder, now broken into several fragments, on which is written a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script in the name of the Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great. It dates from the 6th century BCE and was discovered in the ruins of Babylon in Mesopotamia in 1879. To read more, see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrus_Cylinder.

Continuance
Bryce Milligan

All things have boundaries, even sorrow.
—Joseph Brodsky, “To Urania”

I would that we could celebrate continuance,
the putting of one foot before another,
the drawing of one more breath, inhaling
the scent of pinion in the Wild Rose Pass
where our paths have yet to cross except
in these highway idylls where the contours
of the eroded mesa become your profile
as if you lay sleeping across this fifty-mile horizon.
I would that we could celebrate continuance
observing small marvels – invisible ice
that rings the moon with echoed light –
had you not declared all that had been
to be all that would be.
Teju Cole visited San Antonio in February 2013 as a featured speaker at the UTSA Creative Writing Reading Series. During his presentation, Cole explained how he chose the title of the book. While reading about how large ancient cities functioned, especially when they were under siege, he became interested in writing a story about a modern city in similar circumstances. In the book, the narrator, Julius, is in his final year of psychiatry residency at Columbia Presbyterian, but he loves to wander around the city (New York) and discover places that may have historical merit. The novel covers the narrator’s life between the fall of 2006 and the late summer of 2007.

Open City is Cole’s first expansive novel, a diary of a wandering photographer visiting places in New York, Nigeria, and Amsterdam all connected to the author’s life experiences. A long poetic rendition from a voyager with Kodak eyes, the novel travels from “the underground catacombs of Penn Station” to “the creak-creak of the swings” in the parks of Manhattan, to observing “the old woman … with a thin crown of white hair … backlit by the slow-moving music.” The narrator goes through the open city avoiding facing Ground Zero, only to mention, “The place had become a metonym of its disaster….”

Julius tells us that he came to America as a university student. He is estranged from his German-born mother; his father died when he was fourteen. We learn about Julius’s being African, for instance, by following clues. First he discusses Yoruba cosmology. Then he goes to see the film The Last King of Scotland and mentions that “I knew Idi Amin well, so to speak, because he’d been an indelible part of my childhood mythology.” Then in response to an insult by an Indian-Ugandan doctor, forced to flee the country by Idi Amin, he says that he is the only other African in the room. “The detail of my background, that I was Nigerian, made no difference, for Dr. Gupta had spoken of Africans.” Throughout the pages, the narrator explains how he sees the world: the Arab-Israeli conflict, the slave trade, and its effects on New York City’s commerce. As a photographer, the author draws acute images of the characters, bars, symphony halls, and the Moroccan named Faroque who is intelligent and an avid reader but forceful in his presentation and dialogue with Julius. There is an interesting combination of confession and reticence about Julius and about how he sees the world.

Despite the book’s startling literary reviews worldwide and the masterful rendition with poetic narration, the lack of plot, absence of three-dimensional characters, and excessive encyclopedic references were frustrating. Yet the novel is a masterful work of an author who writes beautiful prose and original fiction.

It is considered by many to be the greatest book ever written. No, not Dan Brown’s new novel Inferno, but the medieval literary work around which it revolves, Dante’s Commedia, which so awed his contemporaries that they added the descriptor Divine. Brown’s protagonist, Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon, awakens to find himself in a hospital in Florence with a bullet wound in his scalp. Not only does he not know who shot him or why, he doesn’t even know how he got to Florence! His only clue is a miniature projector concealed inside a cylinder seal, which projects an image of a famous painting of hell by Botticelli, based in turn on images from Dante’s literary description. Langdon sets off on a wild chase through the streets, gardens, and secret passegeways of Florence, accompanied by a brilliant but enigmatic young doctor named Sienna Brooks and pursued by relentless, well-armed adversaries, all the while tormented by hallucinations of a silver-haired woman reaching out to him for assistance. His cries for help rebuffed by his own government, Langdon must rely on his knowledge of the Divine Comedy, graphic representations of Dante’s infernal vision, and his prior visits Dante’s beloved Florence to solve the mystery and prevent the release of a substance that threatens to solve the problem of human overpopulation on the planet with a drastic, Malthusian approach.

Although the plot is quite similar to those in other Dan Brown novels in which Langdon plays a leading role, Inferno is a fun read. The sights and sounds of Florence are portrayed in life-like detail as readers are whisked through the Boboli Gardens, the Palazzo Vecchio, and il Duomo with pursuers right on their tail. Not content to let the plot play out entirely in Florence, Brown also sends his hero to other cities in search of the mouseion of a silver-haired woman. The reader will want to pause from time to time to consult a map of Florence or to find an online graphic of a painting by Vasari, a sculpture by Michelangelo, or the bronze doors created by Brunelleschi. And of course the novel must be read with a copy of Dante’s masterpiece by one’s side. Coincidentally, or perhaps providentially, a new translation of the Divine Comedy by Clive James, which renders the Italian terza rima into an English equivalent, is now available. Along the way, the reader should expect the unexpected. After all, as Dante reminds us, lasciate ogne speranza voi ch’intrate’!
In the summer of 1978, Texas suffered another cycle of blistering heat and drought. Cattle tanks were empty, ponds and creeks dry. The Edwards Aquifer, the main source of water for over a million people in Bexar County, dropped to a record low, and there in the middle of day, Cyrus’s office was packed with patients waiting for their turn, reading outdated magazines, and seeking refuge from the heat outside. As Cyrus was approaching an examination room, the office receptionist stopped him in the hall. “Doc, an Iranian visitor wants to see you.” Cyrus told the receptionist to take the visitor to his consultation office and proceeded to see the next patient.

Months had passed since Cyrus’s last trip to Tehran. The images of Iran, of Bahram, Reza, Parviz, and Habib were slowly fading from his mind, their memories sinking deep in the vaults of his brain. His busy medical practice and his equally busy family life did not leave much time to follow the situation in Iran on a daily basis any more. However, he knew the confrontations between the Shah’s regime and the mounting opposition forces were turning bloodier and expanding to other cities and towns.

The visitor was a young Persian who studied biology at a local university. He had been to see Cyrus before when he needed a notarized translation of his Iranian birth certificate for his university application. Cyrus’s office provided this service free to Iranian students. In return most students brought him Persian mementos like Iranian pistachios or pastries as tokens of their appreciation. On a few occasions a Persian student had even brought Cyrus a well-wrapped plastic bag with high grade grass, which he had only discovered when he unwrapped it at home. That seemed to recover well in the Surgical ICU, but now, just before transfer to the regular floor, the nurse had found the patient’s surgical dressing saturated with fresh bleeding. Cyrus left the office in a hurry, raced the short distance to the hospital, quickly climbed the stairs to the Surgical ICU, and entered the patient’s cubicle. The nurse said, “She was doing so well, I don’t know what happened.”

Cyrus gently pulled the dressing off to expose the incision. Fortunately for both patient and doctor, the bleeding did not come from the abdomen but only from the incision, where a broken suture line had come undone. A gap of two inches was filled with blood clots, and streaks of blood were oozing from the incision edges. He immediately requested local anesthetic solution and the suturing tray and asked the nurse to apply pressure at the bleeding site with two thick dressing gauzes while he went to the dressing room, changed into a surgical gown, and scrubbed his hands.

The patient was still well sedated and could barely open her eyes. Cyrus removed the clots and cleansed the incision with antiseptic liquid, quickly injected local anesthetic into and around the gap, and waited for a moment. The patient had become faintly aware of something happening. She opened her eyes and looked around timidly. Cyrus touched her hand and smiled at her. “Nothing to worry about.” He explained the bleeding episode and assured her that the problem was under control. He then approximated the incision with a series of interrupted sutures and closed the gap. The amount of bleeding had only been a few ounces and did not adversely affect the patient’s pulse rate or blood pressure. “Please run a CBC and keep the patient here overnight,” Cyrus asked the nurse. He picked up the patient’s chart, sat at a desk, and wrote a half-page progress report describing the incident.

Then he returned to the patient’s bed and examined the dry dressing. Normal blood pressure and pulse rate were flashing on the monitor, and the EKG strip showed a normal heart beat. Cyrus left the hospital and returned to his office, where the housekeeping employees were sweeping and cleaning the waiting room and hallways. He went into his consultation room, called home, told his wife about the situation, and asked her not to wait for him for dinner. He stretched his legs over a short stool and examined the package from Iran. The long letter from Bahram was stapled to another letter from Shirin. The letters brought a mixed bag of news from Iran. Reza had been released from Evin Prison after two months, with numerous scars from cuts and bruises on arms and legs and a limp in his right knee. But with rigorous exercise Reza had regained his strength. Amazingly, he also studied hard, caught up with his classes, and had graduated from high school with high marks. After the university entrance examination in early summer, Reza ranked in the top ten among the 60,000 applicants for the 300 slots at Tehran Medical School. However, politics returned to Reza’s life shortly thereafter, and only weeks into the new academic year Reza was again in the forefront of the student marches against the Shah’s regime.

According to Bahram, daily life in Tehran had come to a standstill, because the daily marches against the Shah’s government had gone on unabated for weeks. As more soldiers poured into the streets, more people joined the daily ritual. Bahram’s letter described “Black Friday,” one of the bloodiest clashes during the 1979 revolution. The site of the confrontation between the opposing sides occurred on Tehran’s eastside, where the memorial processions for the victims of previous days had been planned.

It was at the end of a week of massive demonstrations against the regime that the Shah unleashed his military forces and filled the streets of Tehran and other major Iranian cities with heavily
armed soldiers reinforced with armored vehicles and tanks. The government had instituted an all-night curfew that was extended also from the dawn to dusk. The bazaars, the schools, and the universities were closed to prevent gatherings of the marchers.

But none of these efforts prevented the anti-Shah groups from continuing their demonstrations. For Reza and his comrades, that Friday became a holy day that could determine the fate of the revolution. Against his family’s pleading, he joined the marchers in the streets. The prescribed plan, which was coordinated and issued by the leaders of the opposition groups, instructed the marchers to assemble in south and the center of the city and move towards Jaleh Square in the eastern part of Tehran.

Because of the Shah’s brutal measures to stop the crisis by military force instead of negotiation, remaining hopes for compromise between the marchers and the Shah’s regime had vanished. On the one hand, marchers resumed their daily campaign and poured into the streets, disregarding the government’s warnings. On the other hand, tanks rumbled through the city chasing the marchers in squares and alleys.

The skirmishes throughout the city resembled war. The soldiers used bullets, the marchers stones. The military sent armored vehicles, the demonstrators slowed them down with barricades of blazing tires. Ultimately the tanks entered the scenes of confrontation and opened fire on the demonstrators, slaughtering hundreds of people, many of them students, some women, some teachers, and some factory workers. Their bodies were strewn across the sidewalks and in the narrow brooks which were rushing through many quarters. However, the casualties were highest in Jaleh Square, where the body count was estimated to exceed several hundred dead and nearly a thousand wounded. There were so many casualties that Tehran hospitals were unable to care for everyone. That Friday became a fateful point during the anti-Shah Revolution, and thereafter it was called Black Friday. It became a battle cry in subsequent marches and ignited more resistance against the Shah, bringing about the beginning of the end of the Pahlavi dynasty.

The day had begun with a well-organized pro-democracy demonstration in Tehran ignoring the curfew decree. Political opponents of the Shah, religious groups including radical mullahs, teachers, workers, and male and female university and high school students marched together against martial law. Reza and his university friends organized and led a large column of students from various high schools and universities toward Jaleh square.

The coordinating committee of the marchers had brought microphones, speakers, and a wooden podium to set up in the square so that representatives of the various political organizations could speak and proclaim their demands for an end to the present government. The tightly-knit radical religious groups under the Ayatollah Khomeini’s circle were also a part of the crowd, but their loudspeakers repeated only one theme: the Shah must leave at once and Ayatollah Khomeini be allowed to return home from exile.

The Shah was determined to crush the demonstration and enforce martial law. Soldiers were guarding the main streets surrounding Jaleh Square. At the particular intersection where Reza was assembling his demonstrators, a company of well-armed soldiers with two tanks confronted them and blocked the column from marching towards Jaleh Square. As the two groups faced off, the commander of the company ordered the soldiers to disperse the crowd. The soldiers raised their guns and shot in the air, but when that tactic failed, they discharged volleys of bullets above the crowd. Still seeing no retreat, the soldiers moved forward and attacked the crowd with their bayonets. The students responded with a barrage of rocks and bricks. The commander warned the marchers in a loudspeaker that anybody who did not retreat would be shot dead. The students replied with shouts of “Down with the Shah” and “Allah-o-Akbar.”

Now the crowd was calling on the soldiers to disobey their commander and join the demonstrators. The commander ordered soldiers to shoot and move forward. The sound of gun blasts shook the streets. Thick clouds of smoke filled the air and obscured the scene. Hand-to-hand battle with clubs and bayonets ensued, and confusion covered the battleground. The core of the skirmish moved like the eye of a hurricane and swirled near and around the tanks. That confusion gave the demonstrators an opportunity to regroup and pour from the sidewalks. Like a giant school of fish, they surrounded the military unit, linked arms, and moved closer and closer against the soldiers.

In the midst of the marchers’ bold move, Reza and his group attacked the confused soldiers near one of the tanks. Encouraged by Reza’s move, other marchers joined the attack. In the hand-to-hand scuffle, the completely outnumbered soldiers retreated in disarray and hid behind their tanks. Some dropped or gave their guns to students, and a few joined the marchers.

Reza and his group climbed all over one of the tanks and forced the tank commander to turn the tank’s gun toward the other tank about fifty yards away. The other commander who was still on the top of his tank signaled his gunner to aim at the crowd. Reza yelled at the mutinous soldiers to shoot the officer before they were all killed. His order was carried out at once, and the commander tumbled from the tank and fell to the ground. Jubilant demonstrators rushed forward and captured the second tank. Meanwhile, the other soldiers took to their heels. The marchers returned by the thousands to Jaleh Square. The news of the victory of Reza’s group and the soldiers’ mutiny provided a boost to the other marchers in nearby locations, and soon there was a huge rally in the square.

One after another the speakers denounced the Shah and demanded an end to all military operations against civilians. A speaker from Iranian National Front demanded democracy and free election. A pro-Khomeini speaker denounced the killings of innocent people and asked the crowd to end the Shah’s government and invite Ayatollah Khomeini to return to Iran.

The marchers’ euphoria lasted only until dusk, when two large units of military forces moved into the surrounding areas under cover of darkness from their bases east of Tehran, attacked the demonstrators, retook the streets on the eastern side of the square, and then attacked the square from three sides. They bombarded the square and silenced the speakers. Soldiers supported by tanks and armored vehicles dispersed the crowd, retook the square, and smashed the makeshift podium. The casualties were in the hundreds, and the square became a symbol of the bloody war between the street marchers and the Shah’s government.

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All around him the office had become quiet, but the bloody aftermath of Jaleh Square arose in Cyrus’s mind: dead demonstrators, bloody cobblestones, and piles of fallen posters. He could hear the shouts of the marchers running for cover to save their lives. He perused a poem referring to this day in one of the leaflets:

How glorious is our night
when bullets tattoo us
and cries of “Iran is ours”
and “God is Great”
bring together our hearts
when darkness unites the town.
Shirin’s letter, which was also lengthy, began with a happy note, an announcement: “Despite the turmoil in Iran and the war in the streets, Bahram and I became engaged,” she wrote. “We celebrated with a small party at Maryam’s house four weeks after Black Friday.” Bahram’s vow was a poem from Inayat Khan:

It doesn’t matter everyone’s against me.
Being near you gives me life,
your absence, death.
A rose tears open from its center.
Will I go to sleep before you arrive?
Is longing all there is of love?

“Unfortunately Reza couldn’t attend the party because he was in prison,” Shirin had written in her letter. “There are rumors that prisoners have been routinely tortured and mutilated by the Savak agents—many of them maimed, some executed after summary judgments.” Shirin wrote that no family member has been allowed to visit Reza. “But we saluted him during the party several times, and as you may understand we recited this poem from Shamloo in his honor, a poem about a warrior who dies to avoid horrific torture:

Nazeli!
Spring has sprung and the Judas tree flowered,
in the house, the old jasmine under the window blossomed; alas, abandon your dream,
do not battle the evil death,
better to be, than not to be, especially in spring.”

Thereafter, Tehran was in total chaos, the country in turmoil. Even though soldiers were patrolling the streets, anti-Shah marches occurred daily despite all prohibitions. The daily shooting and killing of participants became routine. At night government offices were ransacked in Tehran and in other cities. Police stations were attacked with bombs every night. People believed that like a rotten apple, the Shah’s government was about to fall. Everyone was expecting the final blow against the government to occur at any time.

Although Shirin followed Bahram’s every step devotedly and attended the marches, she was worried about Bahram’s safety, because Bahram had become one of the student leaders and often was at the forefront of the demonstrators, an easy target for the soldiers. She was afraid of losing Bahram, as had happened to many other students.

In the background of this tenuous situation, the Shah was losing his confidence and had become confused. The stubborn movement against him had succeeded in shaking the foundation of his government, and it caused the international community to lose confidence in his regime. Even the police and military forces were shaken by the enormous size of the demonstrations. The prime minister asked the Shah to be relieved of his post. Even foreign advisers who were mostly American were disheartened.

When the 1979 Iranian Revolution arrived, no one was as confused on how to deal with the situation as President Carter. He was awed by the power of the demonstrators and the Shah’s inability to generate a constructive dialogue with his opponents. However, Carter was equally unable to form a clear policy concerning the revolution.

The contagious confusion was most devastating for the regime itself, for the military establishment began to worry about its own survival. Even the intellectuals and secular forces, sensing the end of the Shah’s regime and always distrustful of the mullahs, became confused and worried about the direction of the revolution.

In the dangerous streets of Tehran, the marchers were bravely confronting the soldiers with rocks and bricks. The insane and brutal war was showing no sign of resolution. Although Shirin kept expressing her concerns regarding the danger, Bahram was engrossed in revolutionary fervor, totally careless and oblivious to the unpredictable course of the revolution.

In his letter, he wrote that whatever happened from now on, Iran was heading toward a long-lasting democracy. He didn’t share the fears of Shirin, who worried that in this fluid situation, as had happened in other revolutions, unexpected turns of events might produce unpredicted results.

The venomous snakes are waiting in the dark, soon they will crawl into the pulps.

Shirin believed the government had dug its own grave. By not compromising and siding with the moderates, instead they allowed the mullahs have what they wanted most: the return of Ayatollah Khomeini and control of the revolution. The regime’s leaders foolishly dreamed that the return of the Ayatollah Khomeini would divide the revolution between the clergy and the secular forces. They believed the division would produce an opportunity for them to gain control of the situation. They didn’t realize that the return of Khomeini to Iran would be the last nail in the coffin of the Shah’s regime.

Shirin believed the clever mullahs were manipulating the nationalist and secular parties for the purpose of achieving their ultimate goal of taking over the country. They had temporarily spoken of democracy and human rights and freedom of press and genuine elections. With the help of the radical left and nationalists, the mullahs needed first to strip the Shah of his power, crush the military, the police, and the judiciary, and then they could take over Iran and remake the country following their own dreams. Shirin was worried about the religious aspects of the revolution manifested by Khomeini’s emphasis on Islam.

Late one night about a month later, Cyrus received a call from Parviz in Tehran regarding his mother’s health. Parviz complained that despite all medical and dietary treatments, mother was still suffering from pain and lack of appetite.

“Believe me, Cyrus, this ulcer is a stubborn one. Her symptoms come and go,” Parviz explained. “But every time they reappear, they seem to be worse than before and force mother to be bedridden for days. The last couple of days she has been hit by waves of cramps, and she rolls over and sob. I don’t know how long she can go on like this.”

Cyrus suddenly remembered that the lesion had not been accurately biopsied, and the persistent symptoms might indicate a lesion more serious than a simple ulcer.

Parviz continued, “You are the doctor in the family, Cyrus. What should we do?” But as usual Parviz did not stop for a response and immediately went on to talk about his own family and about the situation in Iran. Then he cleared his throat and said in a happier voice, “But I have one piece of good news for you. Borrowing international pressure, the Shah has released many political prisoners, including jailed university students. Can you guess who is here and wants to talk to you?” Cyrus was still pondering their mother’s medical situation. “Reza is free! He is here right now and wants to speak with you.”

The news was indeed a welcome surprise. “Great! I am so glad to hear that! Please, put him on,” Cyrus said.

After a short pause, Reza’s voice came across the thousands of
miles. He sounded weak and his voice was shaky, “Hello, Uncle Cyrus.”

“What a pleasant surprise. Tell me, how are you, and what’s going on there?”

Reza coughed and cleared his throat and said, “There is a pause in the situation here. I was released from Evin Prison yesterday.”

Cyrus was delighted to hear Reza was free but wondered whether someone might be listening to their conversation. “You sound wobbly. Are you okay?” Cyrus asked, trying to be circumspect in his wording, “I hope they didn’t hurt you badly.”

“I am fine. I just have some pain here and there, a swollen knee and a few new scars, but I can walk all right. Fortunately, the damage is small. I will recover. By the way, thank you for sending me the medical textbooks. They are really useful!”

“Read them instead of marching in the streets,” Cyrus admonished him. “My friend, now is a good time for you to focus on your medical studies.”

Reza laughed and said, “Of course, that is my first priority. Things are changing so rapidly that I may be able to leave politics very soon and become a full-time student again.”

“Listen, Reza, above all you really need to complete your medical education.”

“You’re right. If they capture me again, I don’t think anyone will see me again,” Reza sobbed, suddenly overcome. “I don’t think I will survive any more torture.”

Reza spoke only a few more words, but Parviz gave some details regarding the shocking tortures Reza had experienced in the prison. Cyrus was shaken by the brutality of the Shah’s regime. He looked up at the row of books above his desk and saw the cassette tape player, which still had the tape of Ayatollah Khomeini’s sermon. He pulled it down and turned it on. Now he knew enough about the Iranian political situation, the war of two giant moguls, the severity of terror and the horrific abyss that the Iranians were falling into. He played the tape again and heard Ayatollah Khomeini’s aged voice proclaim, “Freedom, justice, and independence can only arrive when the Shah is gone from Iran forever.” Deep in thought he listened to Khomeini’s repeated references to Islam and his appeal to all Iranian Moslems to rise and create their own destiny.

Chapter Sixteen

For Political Prisoners the Darkness Was a Refuge

For political prisoners the darkness of the cells was a refuge, the only solace they had to meditate and ignore the primal daily life imposed on them. The prison complex was a giant concrete monster, the ugly gray blocks of buildings connected to each other by narrow hallways. The prisoners entered each building via a one-panel steel door leading into the entrance hall. Inside the first building, the administrative offices were on each side of a dark hall from which narrow dark corridors branched out eastward and westward. Rows of prison cells ran down both sides of these narrow corridors, at the end of which were common bathrooms with basic toilets and ceiling showerheads. Each building had a large basement divided into several chambers dedicated to interrogation and torture.

After the arrest, Reza was taken to a cell measuring about six by nine feet, with a small window up near the ceiling. A metal sink was set against one wall. There were already two prisoners in the cell who had been arrested in a pro-Khomeini demonstration in the city of Qum more than a month ago.

For Reza, the first day was the longest day of his imprisonment, for his mind was filled with a sense of apprehension. There was preparing himself for the call by the interrogators and their specific questions about his activities at school. There he was ruminating over the events of the last several months, the meetings with his like-minded classmates. There he was remembering the faces of his friends, their names and their enthusiastic speeches about the imminent downfall of the Shah’s regime. And there he was preparing himself for beatings and insults. However, for the next several days, Reza was left in the cell untouched while the other two prisoners were regularly taken for interrogation. Their beaten bodies would be dragged back into the cell, their faces swollen and damaged.

Day after day time seemed to slow down. The sluggish passage of time in the dark cell started to wear on Reza. He gradually lost his initial anxiety and realized the interminable process of imprisonment he was facing, wasteful hours and days that came and went by so ever slowly. During the second week in prison, after a breakfast of bread, cheese, and tea, a guard came in and called his name, took him to the basement of the building, and pushed him into one of the chambers. When the steel door clanged shut, Reza stood and looked around. Dim lights in the chamber barely illuminated the steel frames of two cots placed on the opposite side of the room. One of them had a wooden surface, the other just a plain grey metal plate. An assortment of electric tools, wires, and whips lay on a long wooden table in a corner.

A police officer sitting behind a square table was observing Reza. The officer got up and circled the chamber, turned one of the small electric machines on and returned to his chair. A burly plainclothes man entered and grabbed Reza by the shoulders, pushed him down on the wooden chair in front of the officer, and covered his eyes with a smelly handkerchief.

The interrogation began with routine questions: Reza’s name, the address of his apartment, and the classes he was taking at Tehran University. After the uniformed officer had noted the responses, he grew quiet and stared at something in his paper. Then he lifted his gaze straight at Reza’s covered eyes. His expression did not change, except he struggled to subdue a repeated tick under his left eye. He continued with the list of questions and asked Reza, “Who is your contact with Ayatollah Khomeini’s group? Tell me about the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Iran!”

“Sir, I do not know anything about that group.”

Reza was telling the truth. His only political contact had been with the Islamic Student Association at Tehran University. Without hesitation, the officer got up, slapped Reza hard in the face, and sat back down. “You liar! You are asking for trouble.” He read a few more lines of the paper on the desk and spoke again. “Tell me where you got Ayatollah Khomeini’s tapes and photos!”

“I am telling the truth,” Reza insisted. “You can buy these tapes everywhere, even from regular vendors at Tehran Bazaar.”

The officer’s expression grew grimly angry. He stood up again, but this time he came around the desk and punched Reza’s face several times until blood started to flow down Reza’s cheek. Then he calmly wiped his own hands with a rag, waved his left hand at his Savak assistants, and exited the room.

As soon as the door shut behind him, the agents pulled Reza from the chair, pushed him toward the metal table, and began kicking Reza with their boots repeatedly in the chest and stomach. The beating went on for a while, until Reza collapsed on the floor.

When Reza regained consciousness, he was back in his cell. It was dark, and the cell was cold; his entire body trembled with pain. Luckily, his cellmates had saved his ration of cooked
vegetables, rice, and yogurt in a metal bowl. Sadly, the sight of the cold food gave Reza stomach cramps. He had no appetite but crawled to the sink and drank some tap water. Then he squatted in a corner and succumbed to nightmarish stupor. For the next several days, he was left alone, but as soon as he could talk and walk without assistance, he was brought back to the chamber for more interrogation, in the same chair and with the same officer, who told him in a friendly, eminently reasonable voice, “Look, Reza, I don’t want to beat you any more than you want to be beaten. We are not against you or your buddies. Everybody is for democracy. Remember, we are fighting terrorists here. They are not good for our country. Listen to me. I’ll free you as soon as you tell me how you got those tapes. Who was the contact person at your school?” Reza recoiled. Suddenly a twitching pain radiated from his face all over his scalp. The officer observed his discomfort and ordered one of his minions to give Reza two aspirins. Then he walked with calm steps to a far corner of the cell where another prisoner awaited interrogation. The howling of the other prisoner, the sizzling of his skin from electric contacts, the banging of a barbed wire whip against the metal table, and the thumping sound of punches shattered Reza’s fragile state of mind. When the officer returned, Reza trembled with anxious anticipation. Now it would be his turn to suffer a series of beatings and electric tortures.

“Reza, you see I am kind to you. I gave you aspirin, but if you don’t answer me honestly, I’ll whip your ass and grill your butt. The choice is yours.”

“Believe me, sir, I never met or even knew any member of Ayatollah Khomeini’s team.”

“So, how did you get your materials?”

“From members of the Islamic Association at Tehran University.”

“Are you aware that you and these idiots are violating the Iranian constitution?”

Reza kept silent. The officer jumped up from his chair, punched Reza in the face, and shouted, “You are out of your fucking mind if you think the constitution will protect a bunch of hooligans like you—you’re an idiot! You don’t appreciate the great things His Majesty has done for you and your friends. You would not even be in medical school without His generosity. Now you have to learn the truth the hard way.”

The other Savak agents proceeded to force Reza into a prone position, strapped him onto the wooden bench and began whipping his back with the barbed metal wire, while the officer continued in a booming voice, “I need names, Reza. Talk to me, Reza. Do you have anything new to say?” But Reza had nothing new to say, and soon he fell into a deep stupor.

In October 1978, the Iraqi government asked Ayatollah Khomeini to leave the holy city of Najaf. His supporters in Europe arranged for a visa to France, where he settled in Neauphle-le-Chateau near Paris. From then on, Ayatollah Khomeini became an international sensation, a media darling. His photo and interviews appeared frequently on TV and in newspapers and magazines in hundreds of countries.

Reading the Sunday New York Times coverage of Khomeini’s pronouncements, Cyrus went to the phone and called Maryam in Tehran. He asked her about their mother’s condition and then inquired about Bahram. Maryam hesitated to mention Bahram’s name or say anything about him, but when Cyrus insisted, she told Cyrus that Bahram was away and quickly changed the subject to the weather in Tehran. Cyrus became concerned. It was late in the evening in Tehran, and Bahram should have been at home at that hour studying. He asked again. Maryam broke down with tears and sobbed, “He doesn’t live here anymore. He moved out a week ago.”

Cyrus suspected that Bahram’s departure from Maryam’s house was related to his political activities and asked for his phone number. “We have neither his phone number nor his address,” she said. It became obvious she was reluctant to talk about the situation. Cyrus concluded she was afraid of eavesdropping by the Savak, so he abandoned the subject and asked about Habib.

“He’s very busy these days,” Maryam said, eagerly. “He’s participating in a government project to control inflation.” She then talked about the pollution in Tehran and about her own medical problems.

A week later, Cyrus received a call from the same Persian student who had brought the first package from Bahram.

“I am calling about Bahram,” the student said.

Cyrus asked, “Is he all right?”

“Well, he is in Evin Prison.” The student went on to describe how Bahram had been injured during a night raid against a police station in northern Tehran. His friends rescued him and took him to a private hospital in Tehran, where a sympathetic surgeon treated his injuries. A week later, when he was released from the hospital, it seemed the secret police had known about him all along. As soon as he stepped outside, some men ambushed him, dragged him into a nearby car and drove away. Shirin had not heard from Bahram since that day.

“How is Shirin?”

“She is safe but has gone into hiding.”

The chaotic situation in Iran continued to move with twists and turns. Under international pressure, including from the Carter administration, the Shah decided to release some political prisoners. However, the move backfired. It emboldened the movement internally and encouraged more Iranian demonstrations in Paris, London, and New York. The marchers took advantage of the pause in the crackdown against them to demand more political reforms from the government. Soon teachers, government employees, and some factory workers joined the movement. Well coordinated national strikes began to rattle the already shaky foundation of the Shah’s government. Even the U.S., formerly the most loyal ally of the Shah, joined the chorus of international critics and quietly advised the Shah to relax his iron-fisted approach against the marchers.

The Shah focused his attention on Marxists and communists and other more radical adversaries, while he freed some moderate political leaders with great fanfare, hoping to split the opposition. The regime was confused about how to deal with the Khomeini supporters and began to ease the pressure against them, unaware that this one policy change would produce a tectonic shift in the revolution. Now the mullahs were the only group left. They were well organized and operating freely in mosques around the country, under direct instructions from Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris. They benefited greatly and grabbed the initiative from the secular elements of the uprising. Once again the Shah unleashed his might against the wrong elements of the revolution, the secular and educated classes.

Cyrus worried about Bahram, who was still in Evin Prison, and decided to call a few people who might have useful contacts. Soon he had the names and phone numbers of several Iranian activists, including an Iranian-American pediatrician in Houston who was an ally of Khomeini. Cyrus knew both the doctor and his wife from Tehran Medical School, where they all had been active in the student organization. He kept calling until the physician’s wife answered.

“I am trying to get some suggestions from your husband on how to help a prisoner in Iran,” he said and explained Bahram’s situation.

“My husband is in Paris, where he has joined Ayatollah Khomeini’s organization. Events in Iran are unfolding very fast, and the government in Tehran could change any time. Give me your address and telephone number, and I promise I’ll talk to my husband about this.”

Cyrus said, “I just hope Bahram survives the present onslaught against leftist students.”

“From what I know, the Shah may flee Iran any time,” she said, dismissing his worries, “and that may solve all the problems in Iran, including that of your nephew.”
San Antonio Small Presses

PECAN GROVE PRESS

Established in 1988, Pecan Grove Press is sponsored by The Louis J. Blume Library of St. Mary’s University. The press publishes books and chapbooks of fine poetry and, very rarely, short works of prose. PGP also publishes a regular chapbook series for students at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas. Among the most recent poetry collections published by Pecan Grove Press is a new book by San Antonio’s Bonnie Lyons, Bedrock.

And So Now We Come to It, a collection of 36 elegies and five interludes written by H. Palmer Hall during the several months preceding his death, has been recently published by Louis A. Cortez, the managing editor of Pecan Grove Press. The book may be ordered by sending request and contribution check to:

Pecan Grove Press, c/o Luis Cortez, One Camino Santa Maria, San Antonio, TX 78228.

San Antonio Small Presses

Word Design Studio

www.WordDesignStudio.com

Word Design Studio, founded in 1998, is committed to publishing selected high quality poetry collections, anthologies, and other paperback books, fiction and non-fiction. Word Design Studio is author-friendly and strives for author satisfaction through every step of the process toward the final published product. Editor Valerie Martin Bailey has been in the writing, editing, and publishing field since 1970. An accomplished writer and award-winning poet, she dedicates much of her time to promoting poetry at the local, state, and national levels. The latest books from Word Design Studio are Shelia Darst, A Poet’s Palette, and Loretta Burns Vaughan, What Angels Bless. For more information, please visit www.worddesignstudio.com.

New Releases from Wings Press

Again for the First Time

by Rosemary Catacalos

Again for the First Time was originally published in 1984 by Tooth of Time Books in Santa Fe. Wings Press is proud to publish this 30th anniversary edition. Again for the First Time received the Texas Institute of Letters Poetry Prize. It was the first full-length collection of poetry by Rosemary Catacalos, who went on to become a Dobie-Paisano fellow, a Stegner fellow, a recipient of an NEA creative writing fellowship, and numerous other honors.

Wings Press

www.wingspress.com

Wings Press, founded in 1975, strives to publish multicultural books, chapbooks, ebooks, and other literary products that enliven the human spirit and enlighten the mind. Writing is a transformational art form capable of changing the world, primarily by allowing us to glimpse something of each other’s souls. Good writing is innovative, insightful, and interesting. But most of all it is honest. This is the Wings creed.

The publisher, editor, and designer since 1995, Bryce Milligan, tries not to let commercial considerations cloud the decision to publish any particular work. What does get published is often called by Milligan “necessary work.” Since 1995, Wings Press has published over 130 books of poetry, novels, short story collections, historical and biographical works, works of literary criticism, and books for children by a wide range of authors, from unknown, first-book poets to the poet laureate of the United States (and the laureates of at least six states). Wings Press publications have been honored with the American Book Award, the International Latino Book Award, the PEN Josephine Miles Award for Literary Excellence, the Balcones Poetry Prize, the Premio Coatlicue, the IMPAC Dublin International Literary Award shortlist.

Rebozos by Carmen Tafolla

Wings Press

Rebozos by Carmen Tafolla wins International Latino Book Award, First Place for Best Book of Bilingual Poetry, First Place for Best Art Book, and First Place for Best Gift Book

The month of May was a big one for San Antonio’s poet laureate, Carmen Tafolla. Her latest book of poems, Rebozos, beautifully illustrated with full color paintings by Catalina Gárate, received the International Latino Book Award in three different categories — First Place for Best Book of Bilingual Poetry, First Place for Best Art Book, and First Place for Best Gift Book. The awards were presented at BookExpo America (BEA) in New York City. Also in May, Rebozos was Book of the Month for Las Comadres: The National Latino Book Club. Tafolla participated in a nation-wide call-in teleconference.

On May 20, Wings Press and Public Studio released for free public use a unique web-based resource devoted to Tafolla’s poetry. On the website, seven poems are presented by Tafolla in her own voice, and explored via creative writing exercises created by other well known poets in individual performances, discussed by groups of scholars and writers, and explored via creative writing exercises created by other well known poets. A TEKS-oriented curriculum guide for teachers is linked to the creative writing exercises. Further video resources include five public readings (and the presentation ceremony as Poet Laureate of San Antonio), a biographical documentary interview, book trailers and comments from the public. Mayor Julián Castro introduces the site. Go to www.salsa.net — Click on “Carmen Tafolla Performance and Resource Site.”

Bryce Milligan, publisher of Wings Press and executive co-producer of the Tafolla site, points out: “Although web sites devoted to individual authors are nothing new, this one is designed to work as a resource for everyone from middle and high school teachers to adult book clubs and the general reader. Carmen’s poetry is so important to so many people, we saw this as an opportunity to give something back both to Carmen and to her fans and future fans.”
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Poetry & Arts Events in San Antonio

DISCLAIMER: All venue information listed has been provided by third parties. These venues have not been verified. It is the sole responsibility of parties interested in attending these venues to verify the validity of the post.


Tuesdays 6–9 pm – Jazz Poet Society – Guadalupe Street Coffee, 1320 Guadalupe St. – (210) 573-5115. Bring poetry and songs and work with other poets and songwriters to present works on stage. A drum circle accompanies poets.


Tuesdays 10:30 pm – Puro Slam – The Heights–9315 N. Broadway (just north of 410). Weekly open mic certified by the National Poetry Slam allows poets to deliver their work and get heckled. DJ Donnie Dee spins before and after the show. Sign up begins at 9:30 pm. Slam begins @ 10:30 pm. For more information visit www.purosalam.com.

1st & 3rd Wednesdays 7-9 pm – Barnes & Noble, Ingram Festival, 6065 NW Loop 410 (same side as Ingram Mall). Features and open mic. (210) 522-1340. Host: Josie Mixon.

Every Fourth Wednesday – Barnes & Noble, The Shops at La Cantera, 15900 La Cantera Parkway, Bldg. 27, San Antonio, TX 78256. Host: Voices de la Luna: 6 pm Poetry Workshop / 7 pm Featured Guest / 8 pm Open Mic. Thursdays 6:30-9:30 pm – South Presa Bar and Grill – Open mic: poetry, music, and storytelling Host: Andi.

Last Thursday of Each Month 7–9 pm – Awaken the Sleeping Poet – Features and open mic – Northwoods Barnes & Noble–18030 HWY 281 N, Suite #140 (281 & 1604). (210) 490-0411. Host: Floyd L. Lamrouex

2nd Saturday 7–9 pm – Gallista – Features and open mic, Gallista Gallery and Art Studio, 1913 S. Flores – (210) 212-8606. Host: Thom E.

3rd Saturday 1-3 pm – San Antonio Poets Association – Monthly at Bethany Congregational Church – 505 Pilgrim Dr.

Poetry & Arts Places in San Antonio

“A poem … begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. … It finds the thought and the thought finds the words.” Robert Frost (1874–1963)

BOTANICAL GARDEN — The facility includes 33 acres of formal gardens, pools, fountains, and natural areas; Native Texas Trail, Lucille Halsell Conservatory, www.sabot.org

CARVER COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER — This venue traces its historic roots back some 85 years. It is both a gallery for contemporary art exhibits and a theater for performing artists. www.thecarver.org

GUADALUPE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER — The center is dedicated to the development, preservation, and promotion of Mexican-American arts. www.guadalupeculturalarts.org

INSTITUTE OF TEXAN CULTURES — The Institute is concerned with the people who produced Texas events — people who created the robust kaleidoscope that is Texas today. www.texancultures.com

JAZZ AT THE LANDING — NPR’s acclaimed radio show, Riverwalk Jazz, is produced in San Antonio at The Landing, one of the country’s oldest jazz clubs. www.riverwalkjazz.org

LA VILLITA — This restored Mexican village captures the charm of the past amid narrow streets and authentic adobe houses with arts and crafts shops. www.lavillita.com

MAJESTIC THEATRE — Opened in 1929 and restored in 1989 as a performing arts center, the Majestic is said to be one of the finest “atmospheric” theaters ever built. www.majesticempire.com

MCNAY ART MUSEUM — The mission of the McNay Art Museum is to maintain an art museum on the premises of the estate of Mrs. McNay for the advancement and enjoyment of modern and early art, and for the educational advantage of the public. www.mcnyart.org

MEXICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE — This venue includes exhibits of contemporary Mexican artists. portal.sre.gob.mx/culturamexsiaing/

SAN ANTONIO MUSEUM OF ART — This six-building complex of renovated historic buildings, opened in 1981, focuses on art of the Americas, past and present, but also houses Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and East Asian collections. www.samuseum.org

SAN PEDRO PLAYHOUSE — Call the box office for tickets and more information: (210) 733-7258. www.sankanedenplayhouse.com

SAN ANTONIO SYMPHONY — The mission of the San Antonio Symphony is to inspire, educate, and entertain the people of, and visitors to, San Antonio and South Texas through the performance of live music. www.sasymp.org

SOUTHWEST SCHOOL OF ART — The organization is committed to use its leverage to inspire youth, promote poetry and arts through their involvement, and use the magazine as a platform for all poets and artists to share their work with others, and it is dedicated to use poetry and arts both for educational and healing purposes in the communities.

Joint Voices Monthly Venue

Poetry Workshop, Reading, Open Mic La Cantera Barnes & Noble every 4th Wednesday – 6 to 9 PM from September to June

Voices Mission Statement

Voices de la Luna publishes a quarterly poetry and arts magazine in four formats, focusing on writers and artists of South Texas. The organization is committed to use its leverage to inspire youth, promote poetry and arts through their involvement, and use the magazine as a platform for all poets and artists to share their work with others, and it is dedicated to use poetry and arts both for educational and healing purposes in the communities.