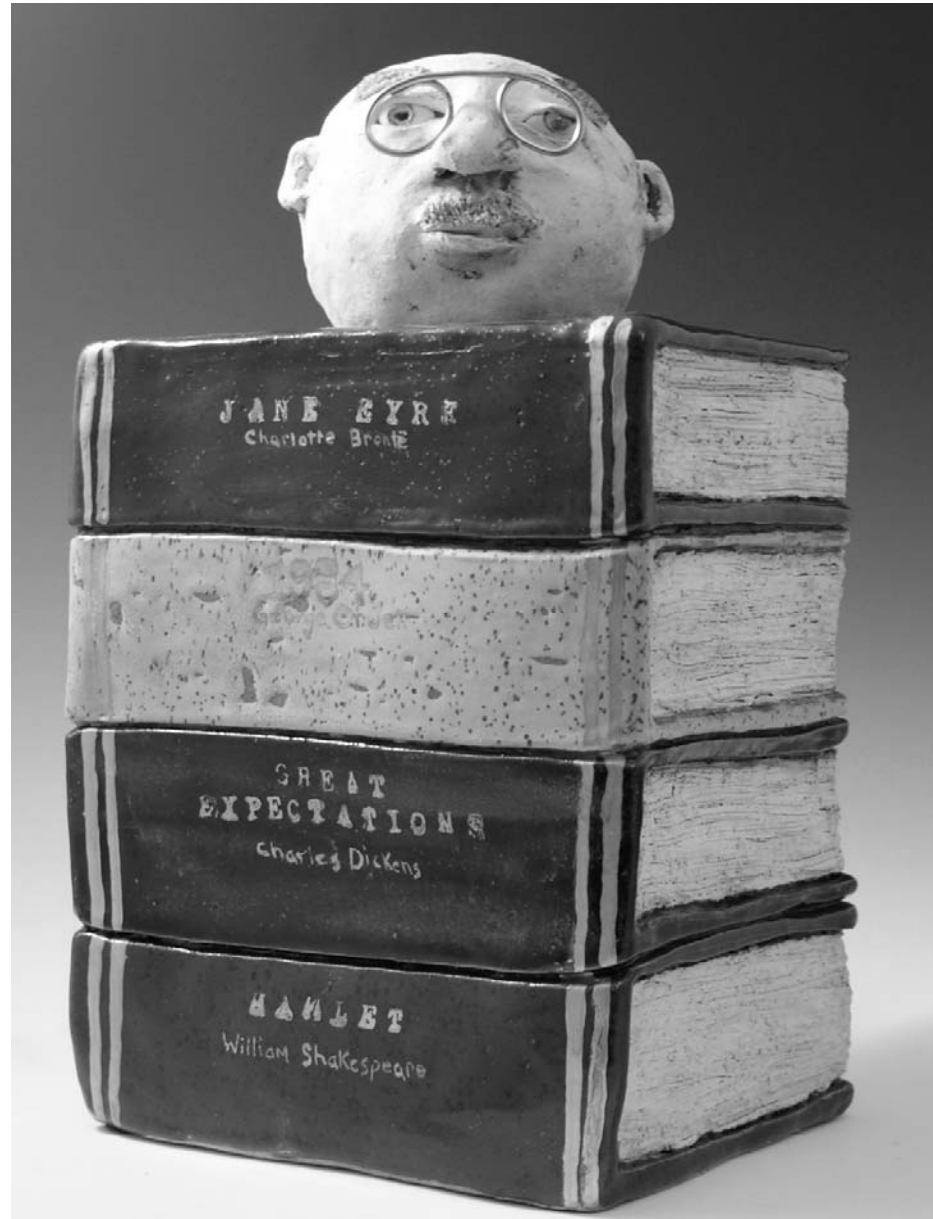


# Birmingham Arts Journal

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# Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **PROFESSOR**, Kris Golden, Ceramic Sculpture, 16" x 9" x 8"  
*Kris Golden, a native of Montana, enjoys creating pieces that aren't predictable, but stretch the imagination. Many times an idea for a new piece arrives unexpectedly during a conversation with her son. Kris lives in Alabaster, Alabama, with her husband, Jim, and son, Jack. [www.krisgolden.com](http://www.krisgolden.com)*

Back Cover: **FRACTURED FRIEND**, James Knowles, Ceramic Sculpture.  
 18" x 6" x 6": *James Knowles teaches art at Hoover High School and lives in Trussville, Alabama. His work, as well as that of some of his students, has been published previously in Birmingham Arts Journal. [jamesknowles1@mac.com](mailto:jamesknowles1@mac.com).*

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## WINDOWS

Digital Photograph

Mary Puckett

*Mary Puckett is a licensed professional counselor who lives in Birmingham, Alabama, and spends her spare time photographing her world. This photograph was taken in Gloucester, Massachusetts.  
interpersonalmatters@yahoo.com*

## ONE EYE THAT WORKS

Irene Latham

Mama pulled a chicken egg from behind the azalea bush in our front yard and narrowed her eyes. “Ludelphia Bennett! You go back in there and get your eye patch.”

I jumped off the edge of the porch. Mama always noticed right away when that old triangle of denim wasn’t strapped to my right eye. Didn’t matter that she hadn’t hardly slept a wink on account of the awful cough that seemed to come from someplace deep inside her. She knew my eye was bare.

I walked two steps toward the woodpile. “I’m only going out to feed Delilah.” Now that I was closer to Mama, I could see her cheeks was missing the brown glow that always reminded me of the smooth bottom of an acorn. The brown glow that made us look so much alike. Instead her whole face had a tired gray look to it, and her long, thin fingers shook as she slid the egg into the deep pockets of her apron.

Mama moved on to the next bush without giving me another glance. “Don’t matter,” she said. “Ain’t polite to be showing that eye.”

“But, Mama!” I stomped my feet in the dirt. I didn’t like that old eye patch. It itched so bad sometimes I couldn’t think of nothing else.

Besides, Delilah was waiting for her breakfast. She stood at the corner of the barn same as she did every morning, her big ears standing up tall and her eyes bright, not doing nothing at all except waiting for me to get past the woodpile so she could start braying to the whole wide world that she was about to get her belly full.

Daddy said he ain't never seen a mule disagreeable as Delilah. Seemed like if the sun was shining too bright she'd up and decide not to work. But me and Delilah, we got on just fine--I reckon because Delilah never once complained about whether or not I was wearing my eye patch.

Suddenly a fit of coughing took hold of Mama's body. She bent over and grabbed on to her knees till it passed. As she straightened herself up, she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand then reached around and pressed the palm against her hip. A sharp breeze caught the tail of her apron and made it fly up like a kite. Beneath the apron, Mama's belly bulged with baby.

"Delilah can wait just a minute," Mama said, her voice coming out jagged as a saw blade. "She won't starve in the time it takes you to go back in there and get your eye patch."

I crossed my arms against my chest. Ain't my fault I only got one eye that works. Just because the other one's stuck in my head like an old marble that nobody can play with. Ain't no need to cover it up, like the whole thing never did happen. Folks in Gee's Bend got better things to think about than what's polite and what ain't. Like them fields. Don't matter what season it is, there's always picking or planting or pulling to be done.

I mean to tell you, there ain't no place in the world like Gee's Bend. For one thing, you can't hardly find it. It's like a little island sitting just about in the middle of the state of Alabama. Only instead of ocean water, it's caught up on three sides by a curve in the Alabama River. Ain't no place in Gee's Bend you can't get to by setting one foot after another into that orange dirt that likes to settle right between your toes. I reckon the hard part is how once you're in Gee's Bend, it ain't all that easy to get out.

But that didn't matter much to me, not on that November morning in 1932 when I was just ten years old. And wasn't no point in arguing with Mama, neither. She'd take a switch to me if I sass'd her. Didn't make no difference that she had a baby on the way and a barking cough that was keeping her up nights. Wasn't much of nothing that would keep her from doing all the chores a mama's got to do.

I turned back to the cabin and climbed the steps two at a time. I knew I'd best get on back in there and get my eye patch from under the pillow. But I stopped on the top step when I saw the way Mama hunched over the last azalea bush, the baby in her belly pulling her whole body low to the ground. Three times in my life I'd seen her look like this. But them babies didn't make it, on account they was born too soon.

What if this one didn't make it neither?

Mama always got real quiet after Daddy shoveled the last bit of dirt over the grave and Reverend Irvin stuck in one of them little white crosses. Last time that quiet lasted from planting time to harvest.

I slipped my fingers into my front pocket of my sack dress and felt of the needle and scraps of cloth that was tucked inside. I sure didn't want Mama to fade away again. Wasn't but one thing I could think of that made Mama smile no matter what bad things was happening. And that was stitching quilts.

Mama always said every quilt tells a story. Every piece of cloth, every stitch and every bit of cotton stuffed between the seams tells a secret about the one who made the quilt. And same as me, Mama sure does love a story.

Which is why I decided this next quilt--the one that so far was just pieces in my pocket--I was making that one for Mama. So no matter what happened with the baby, Mama would have my story to give her something to smile about. It'd be just big enough to wrap around Mama's shoulders when she sat in her rocking chair telling us stories before bed. And since I was making this quilt all about me, I was gonna make it *my* way.

I grinned. Wasn't a single thing Mama would be able to say about that.

.....

*One Eye That Works is excerpted from Irene Latham's novel for children, Leaving Gee's Bend. G.T. Putnam, 2010. Irene's short stories and poems have been widely published. She writes in Shelby County, Alabama.*

*[www.irenelatham.com](http://www.irenelatham.com)*

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**“In style all that is required is  
that it convey the message.”**

**--Confucius**

## HELEN KELLER COMES TO KNOW WATER

Sue Brannan Walker

Young, deaf, and with eyes that could not see,  
a victim of brain fever, this distraught child  
of Tuscumbia, Alabama holds her tutor's hand  
as Anne spells into her palm, the word *Water*,  
each letter--W A T E R, an unseen gift  
flowing over lithe six-year fingers.

Those small whorls at the tip of her fingers  
were eddies at hand. In things she could not see,  
in each etched a, b, c, she found the gift  
of language. Soon this deaf, blind child  
learned what the letters meant as they spelled water,  
spelled out an offering of love that came to her hand.

Thirty new words were soon at hand,  
and with insight there at the tip of her fingers,  
she said the words: corn, soup, cherries, water,  
grapefruit. "I am blind, but I can *see*."  
A new world was born, as this miraculous child  
found light in darkness and received the gift

she found in words, in the naming things, felt a gift  
of life in water and vowed that with her own hand  
she would reach out to every newborn child  
whose small outstretched fingers  
waited to grasp the world and see  
flowers, anemones, a running brook, water



flowing from a pump, a cascading water-  
fall, a lake, river, ocean, the treasured gift  
of sight. She espoused a cause and vowed to see  
that Nitrate of Silver was available and ready-at-hand  
to be administered, drops that with deft fingers  
save every newborn baby's eyes. No child

should suffer perpetual darkness alone. Every child,  
like a plant, waits, ready to bloom. Helen spoke of water,  
told how it first flowed through her fingers,  
told how a river of words became a gift  
of life that brought a new world to hand,  
a world filled with all she could say and "see."

Helen knew that life compasses shadows, but a child,  
though blind, learns that a hand brimming with water  
is the priceless gift of wanting fingers.

.....

*Sue Walker is Poet Laureate of Alabama and the Stokes Distinguished  
Professor of Creative Writing at the University of South Alabama.*

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## THE DIAGNOSIS

Terry Miller

It echoes like some great impossibility  
in valleys where only the dead hear,  
the sound of a curtain pulled from rings  
as hands grasp at the fabric of nothing.

You feel the parachuted tears of your beloved  
upon your cheek as mortality floods the room  
with a staunch gray smoke of pyres and incense.

You never sleep again without facing the door,  
ears perked to hear boney feet and trailing robe  
on the slab-cold tiles of the dark hall floor.

.....

*Terry Miller is a poet from Fort Bend County, Texas. His works have appeared in publications of the Gulf Coast Poet's Society, Sol Magazine, and other Texas publications. He is the founder of the Fort Bend Poets Group and a professor of eMarketing for Kaplan University.*

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## CONFESSIONS OF AN UNREAD REVIEWER

Jim Reed

As a reviewer, it's hard not to cheat.

Some publisher or hopeful author sends me a package of material, including a book, and hopes that something within that package will inspire me to write a review. Actually, that's not quite true. Said publisher or author hopes that I'll write a favorable review, something that will inspire readers to rush out and purchase the book. That's not quite true, either. Often, said publisher or author wants me to say something that makes people--whether or not they are readers--rush out and purchase the book. That, too, may not be the whole truth and nuttin' but. Said publisher and author would be happy (mostly) if the book became a million-seller, even if *nobody* read it!

Non-readers often buy books to give to people who accept them but never get around to reading them. Nothing sadder than a stack of unread books.

This is nothing new. In my rare book loft, I have lots of century-old books that have never been read. The proof is irrefutable. The unread volumes are full of uncut pages--pages that the publisher has failed to trim so that the book can be fully opened. These unread books are a joy to read, because it's fun to take a bone letter-opener and slit each page open as the book is read. It's a nice romantic notion, the notion that this author's book lay there for a century before anybody took the trouble to open it. *And I am the first to read it!*

Anyhow, as I say, it's hard to refrain from cheating when I receive a book to review. First of all, it may come into my hands

because my editor has heard great things about it, or because the author has been annoyingly persistent (this often works, fellow authors!) and I feel I have to review it just to be freed of this person, or the book may be by someone the literary world has deemed godlike--the writer who is good, therefore, everything written by said writer *has* to be good and don't *you* the *reviewer* be the one to think differently! And so on.

There are other factors that can influence the unwary reviewer. If you're in a hurry, you're tempted to skim the book or just read the jacket or the blurbs or the extensive synopses accompanying the book. Truth is, these synopses are designed to help the lazy reviewer get the job done, or to make sure the reviewer doesn't miss the *point* of the book. Heaven forfend, the reviewer should find great meaning in the book that nobody else, including the author, has found!

So, the reviewer has choices. Read the book cover to cover without looking at the cover or the jacket or other reviews or synopses or blurbs, without regard to reputation and track record and age and sex and background.

This is almost impossible to do, so most reviewers don't do it. *But it can be done*, fellow reviewer, just in case you are tempted to try it.

Try walking blindfolded up to a table of books-to-be-reviewed, pick the first one your hand touches. Have someone remove the jacket, tape over the title and author information. Then, for once in your life, read a book about which you have no pre-conceived notions.

What do you think would happen?

There are all kinds of possibilities: you might pan a book everybody else loves (your social life will be diminished), you might

make inappropriate assumptions about the author (female, male, old, young, experienced, unknown?), you might mistake fiction for autobiography, you might lose a friend (Yipes! I just trashed a book written by someone whose company I cherish!), or, for once in your career, you just might write a review of great integrity, freshness, insight and importance.

You might start a trend.

Probably not

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*Jim Reed writes in Birmingham, Alabama, where he curates the Museum of Fond Memories at Reed Books Antiques. [www.jimreedbooks.com](http://www.jimreedbooks.com)*

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**You don't have to burn books  
to destroy a culture. Just get  
people to stop reading them.**

**--Ray Bradbury**



### **LADIES, ANKLES CROSSED**

Lindanne Phillips

Charcoal on Paper

41.5" x 61.5"

*Lindanne Phillips teaches art at North Jefferson Middle School, and writes, paints, and gardens in her spare time. A resident of Hayden, Alabama, she graduated with a Master of Art in Art Education from University of Alabama in Birmingham and has been teaching and making art for 25 years.*  
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## THIRTY-SIX

Erik Sakariassen, 2009 Hackney Literary Award Winner

The induction notice arrived in the Saturday mail. And so this was it. It came a lot sooner than I thought it would. I hadn't been prepared. I hadn't really thought it all through. There was some rainy-day money, saved up from the months on the construction job, but I hadn't crafted any plans. I always thought somehow there would be time for making plans.

I found the envelope torn open, the letter spread flat on the kitchen table, my father's reading glasses angled beside it. I had come in just then, through the back door, but apparently he didn't hear me. The sound of the television blared from the living room. It was tuned to the news, the CBS Evening News.

And he said nothing to me when I entered the living room, nothing as I stood there beside him. He didn't even look up. He simply sat in his chair, staring blankly at the glowing TV set, working his chin between his thumb and his fingers. On the news, Walter Cronkite read the Vietnam body counts. It seemed routine to him, disappointing, like he'd get more excitement reading baseball scores, something that meant something, had some perceptible significance. According to the figures, what they'd expect you to believe, our side should have had them on the ropes. It was a statistical certainty. But that didn't matter. Statistics wouldn't reassure my father.

I made my way quickly down the hall to my bedroom. I had to work fast. There was no time to think. No time for weighing decisions. I scooped together the loose clump of cash I kept hidden in the back of my top dresser drawer. Then I straightened and folded it and stuffed the wad into the pocket of my denim jacket.

So it had come to this. I had never really imagined it would all come down to this. Here I was taking matters into my own hands. Initiative. Screw them, I thought. I noticed my hands were shaking. I held them straight out in front of me and watched them shake. Things had always seemed way off somewhere, conceptual, in the distant future--nothing ever to have to deal with now. I didn't even *read* the induction notice. Why should I want to? What would be the point?

I glanced around this small square room which contained my pitiful worldly possessions. Unnecessary things--they would burden me now. I would have to travel light. Start out with next to nothing. Make my own way, unencumbered.

I lifted the cord from where it hung around the bedpost, the crude bone charm fastened to its end. Then I pulled the leather cord down over my head and tucked the charm down beneath my collar. *...All of his stories, the ways of our people--these things he told me to remember...*

The lock-blade knife lay closed upon the dresser top. I picked it up, wrapped my fingers over the smooth surface of its ebony handle. I knew the knife by memory, every detail. The weight felt good in my palm. I opened the blade--perfect balance--then I ran my thumb across the sharpened edge, snapped it closed and shoved it into my pocket. It was Kirby's knife, lock-blade Buck. *...It's a loan, Fletcher--to prove that you're coming back....*

When I returned to the living room, I found my father standing by the picture window, looking out over the porch, into the yard, the street. He'd switched off the television. "You're going out?" he said. He didn't turn around.

"Yes. I'm going out."

"I'm sorry I didn't get anything together for dinner. I should have made you some dinner, something to eat."



"I understand. I'll grab a bite at Muttsy's."

"There was a phone call earlier. Your friend Harmon called. He's back from Fort Dix. On leave. He was calling from somewhere here in town. He said he'd be out and about tonight. He wanted to see you. I thought I should let you know...."

Harmon--back from boot camp? Already back? I should have written a letter, kept him up to date. I had meant to write. But I'd always been a piss-poor correspondent. "I'll probably run into him." I tried to fasten the metal buttons on my jacket. My hands were still shaking.

"Fletcher--"

I looked up. "What is it?" I said.

He turned, squinted a little, to get a steady look at me.

"Tomorrow is Sunday. Let's go fishing--just the two of us, you and me. We'll drive down to Smith Bay--just like we used to. We'll spend the whole day fishing. Forget our cares. We'll pack a lunch, make a day of it."

"I'd like that," I said. "Really, you know I'd like that." I finished buttoning up my jacket then reached to turn the knob at the front door.

"Fletcher--"

The sound of his voice was killing me. "Yes?"

He paused. My father paused, continuing to stare at me. The cast of his eyes seemed flat and glassy. "It's nothing," he said, "--just that you so remind me of your mother right now, standing there like that. It's your eyes--I've probably told you that a hundred times--you have your mother's eyes."

I nodded, but I couldn't look at him anymore. I didn't think it would be this difficult. "Good-bye," I said as I stepped to the porch. "Good-bye," I said again, this time just a whisper. My hand shook as I closed the door behind me.

\*\*\*

I walked the long way to Muttsy's, Fort Street to the river, beneath the tall cottonwoods in front of the old brick agency buildings. The sun had dropped below the western horizon, and the sky was streaked in orange and purple and red, reflected in the open backwater of the Missouri. I came upon the monument, the old Standing Rock, which had been erected opposite the agency buildings more than 80 years before. A patch of weeds choked the stone base of the monument, an uncut patch that spread to the edge of the road.

*...Walking is good for the soul, Fletcher boy. It makes you think. All the time you're walking, you're thinking--it's good for the soul...*

A gust blew up and rattled the trees, and the woman of stone seemed to move somehow. Beneath these long shadows, she seemed to be gesturing to me, a cautionary gesture. A cold shiver stopped me dead in my tracks. When the wind gust subsided, the shadows grew still. I stood for a time in the middle of the road, and then I drew a breath and passed on.

The streetlights came on along Standing Rock Road. In the dusty lot next to the Super Valu, a wiry-looking dog sniffed the tattered remnants of a brown paper bag. I heard geese honking overhead. They were flying low, southbound. I paused and watched their dark forms slip away to disappear against the cold sky. Then I climbed the concrete steps before the door in front of Muttsy's and entered.

"Hey there, buckaroo..." He was wiping down the counter, really putting muscle into it. Muttsy DuBois was always wiping down his counter.

I stepped over and grabbed a stool near the till. The place was empty now--not like in the summer. Saturday night and I was the

lone customer. I planted my elbows on the gleaming surface of the counter.

"Snow," said Muttsy.

"How's that?"

"Snow--it's gonna snow. I can tell, feel it in my bones." He tapped his fist against his ribs. "Tonight--maybe tomorrow. Tomorrow for sure."

There was a plastic sign on the back wall above his head, a Coca-Cola advertisement. Drink Coca-Cola. The pause that refreshes. The light inside the sign kept flickering, going out, then flickering, then going out again.

"Blizzard maybe even--wouldn't that just do her? Knee deep in snow tomorrow, comin' down hard and blowing like hell?"

"That would just about do it," I said.

He resumed wiping down the counter. His mouth was working as hard as he was. He sucked his teeth.

"Still got the grill fired up?" I asked.

"Knee deep," he said, "and colder than the nipples on a nun!" He laughed at himself.

"I'll have a cheeseburger--and some potato chips." The plastic sign flickered again. "And give me a Coke."

Muttsy smiled and licked his lower lip. "Comin' right up, buckaroo."

The meat sizzled as it hit the grill, splattering grease on the grease-spotted wall behind.

"Say, I hear Harmon is home on leave..."

Yes, everyone's heard that. I wanted to tell him how incredible the timing was. It was just like him, waiting for the worst possible time to show. But I kept quiet and didn't respond.

"Home from boot camp. I hear he's up in Yates tonight. He's still drivin' that old truck. That's what I hear. Can't figure how he

keeps that old bomb running." He scraped at the grill and then flipped the meat. "You want your bun toasted?"

"Just remember the cheese," I said.

"Yes sir," Muttsy said, "he called on the phone lookin' for you. Says he's stoppin' in here later. Says he wants to see you right off...."

Enough already. Why couldn't he change the subject? Right now, I just wanted to wolf my burger and go. "No, forget about the cheese," I said.

The Coca-Cola sign flickered.

\*\*\*

At the Standard Oil, I noticed a four wheel drive, a Jeep with a rag top, pulled up in front of the gas pumps. The Jeep was green or maybe some dark shade of blue. I couldn't really tell in the haze of the fading twilight. It looked dusty, though, coated in a layer of dust --a hunter's rig. I spotted two hunters standing around outside. Both wore khaki hunting outfits, baggy trousers and loose-fitting vests and pockets all over the place. One of them, the heavier man, stood looking over the shoulder of the station attendant who fueled the rig. He was telling him something, relating a story, but I didn't hear.

I walked over to the station building where the second hunter stood beneath the glowing yellow bulb of an outdoor light. He had his khaki-sleeved elbow resting on a motor oil display--Quaker State. The cartridge loops in his hunting vest were stuffed with shotgun shells.

"Been hunting?" I asked.

He looked put out. It was all he could do to answer with a nod.

"Any luck?" I went on. I tried to sound casual.

"Yep."

"Birds?"

"Yep." He scratched his neck.

"I'm not a hunter myself," I said. The remark didn't seem to surprise him any. "Never been hunting a day. Never even fired a gun."

"Virgil, Virgil, you got any cash on you?" The first hunter hustled toward us, the station attendant close at his heels. "Got to have cash, Virgil. Man says he can't take no credit card."

"Receipt machine's busted," the attendant explained. "Credit card machine is jammed, can't get a receipt to spit out of it."

The second hunter shook his head. "Tell him we don't need a receipt," he said.

"We don't need no receipt."

"Can't charge you gas without a receipt," the station attendant said.

"You guys traveling north?" I asked.

"Give him the credit card, Dwayne. Tell him we don't need a receipt."

"I need a ride north," I said.

"I can't do that," said the attendant. "Got to have a carbon, a signature. I got to run it through the machine."

Virgil shook his head again. He scratched his neck. Then he removed a shotgun shell from his hunting vest and started tossing it loosely in his palm. "I haven't got any cash, Dwayne. Tell the man I haven't got any cash."

"If you're going north, maybe you wouldn't mind if I rode along? I could really use a ride--as far as Mandan--if you guys have room, I mean."

"I have to have cash," the station attendant said. "I insist on it." He looked increasingly adamant.

"Insist all you want," replied Virgil. "We haven't got any cash." He stopped tossing the shotgun shell. He squeezed it, and I flinched a little, like maybe I expected it to explode.

I reached into the pocket of my jean jacket and pulled out the wad of bills I had taken from my dresser drawer. "I have money," I said. "I'd pay for the gas if you'd give me a lift..."

"What's that?" said Virgil.

"I'd pay for the gas if you'd give me a ride."

"Hear that, Dwayne?" Virgil pushed the shotgun shell back into its loop on his vest. He gave me a slap on the back. "Kid says he'll foot the gas."

The station attendant stared at me. For a moment, I feared he had sensed my desperation. But in the yellow glow of the outdoor light, I could see only a flush of relief overtaking his pale expression. "You understand, don't you? I just can't charge the gas without issuing a receipt."

.....

*Erik Sakariassen is co-owner of Saks News, Bismarck, North Dakota. He holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Montana. Erik was a finalist in the 2009 Wordstock Competition and the 2008 Cutthroat Rick DeMarinis Award. His work has appeared in Boundary Waters Journal, The Wordstock Ten, and Surviving the Western State of Mind. This is an excerpt from HONOR SONG, a novel.*

*eriksaks@btinet.net*

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## KIDS AT FOUNTAIN

Jenn Gaylord  
Digital Photograph

*Jenn Gaylord is a 2007 graduate of the State University of New York College at Geneseo where she worked as staff photographer. She has a freelance photography business in Jamestown, New York. [jenngaylord@yahoo.com](mailto:jenngaylord@yahoo.com)*

## PASSAGE

Christine Poreba

*You have kept a record of my wanderings. Put my tears in  
Your bottle. Are they not in Your book? Psalms 56:8*

When I opened my mouth to sing  
nothing surfaced but the body's

chords of grief, record of a sound  
that will live beyond us.

If to sing means to join  
the sound of soaring, voices

moving through crescendo  
and breath like limbs swimming,

leading the body while yet  
following the body's lead,

then to weep is to follow  
the body's own breaking

and grief is the volleying between,  
between sleep in which she might



still be alive and waking in a space  
where she isn't anymore.

Calling my dog to follow me, once,  
I watched him leap and fall

from the steps he'd been resting on,  
so attached to the idea of coming

with me he forgot his own paws,  
and for a moment he was nothing

but a scramble of motion, blur  
of a life behind me, charging ahead.

.....

*Christine Poreba's poems are forthcoming or have recently appeared in The Southern Review, RATTLE, Potomac Review, Natural Bridge and Subtropics, among others. She lives in Tallahassee, Florida, where she teaches English as a Second Language to adults. eng\_smm@shsu.edu*

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## BIRMINGHAM COLLAGE III

Ty Evans

Digital Photography

*Ty Evans lives in the Birmingham area and enjoys taking pictures of local icons during his spare time. With the media constantly reminding us of all the division in the metro area, Ty decided to create something to remind us what a great city we have in Birmingham, one rich in history and culture. Ty's interests also include collecting antique books, playing the guitar, and traveling. [ty.evans66@yahoo.com](mailto:ty.evans66@yahoo.com)*

## **MILAGRO OF TRANSFIGURATION**

Melissa Morphew

She leans a rusted aluminum ladder  
into the bee-haunted branches of an apple tree,  
climbs the unsteady rungs into the canopy  
of copper-freckled leaves--

her fingers a litany  
of touch, as she picks each pippin, each russet,  
skin blotched, dappled by shade, by sun,  
anticipates a bite's sweet-savor  
in rich alizarins, unripe greens,  
cream-pale yellows blushed crimson-pink--

hard-cider smell of October-rot  
rises from the ground; bees bejewel  
the soft brown spots of unsound fruit, hanging  
from the switch-slim limbs too high to reach.

But still she fills her basket  
--enough for a cobbler, a heaping skillet  
of fried candied-peels. A small harvest,  
no doubt.

People assume Satan tempted Eve  
with an apple, but the Bible doesn't say.  
Perhaps he handed her a peach, a fig, a kumquat.  
Seduced her with a pear. Pomegranates have been  
getting girls into trouble for thousands of years.

And never forget, devils and gods  
disguise themselves--a snake, a bull,  
a swan, a man, a wounded songbird,  
a squeaking mouse.

Years ago, a young man  
came to her as a circlet of bees,  
slept in her hair, kissed the lobes of her ears,  
the nape of her neck with the marigold bitterness  
of a hundred velvet stings, honeyed electricity.

And why else had she strayed into the orchard,  
wearing a rose taffeta dress--music from the party  
centuries away, an old fashioned waltz,  
the communion-wafer-virgins  
safe inside, keeping quarter time, locked  
in the stiff drawing-room-embrace of decorous  
young men honored to escort  
such fragile virtue home  
by 10 o'clock.

And the seductive susurrations  
of bees should have augured a ladylike unease  
in the plum-bruised dusk,  
but she  
attributed the phenomenon to the heat,  
summer--  
any mirage can seem plausible  
in the stark desert of wanting.

The next morning, she hid her ruined pink dress  
inside the coiled silver springs of her mattress.

Her maiden-hearted sisters asked,  
“Lord have mercy, girl, what in heaven’s name  
made those welts on your throat?”

“Bees,” she answered, “bees.”

.....  
*Melissa Morphew’s poems have appeared in various literary journals and in the  
full-length collection FATHOM (Turning Point Press, 2006). She currently  
teaches English and creative writing at Sam Houston State University in  
Huntsville, Texas.*  
.....

## THE FAN

Betty Ivy

Behind the altar of St. Paul's,  
A clear glass window shows a live oak in the garden,  
its branches thick as trees themselves.  
A narrow table just below the window  
Holds a cross of gold  
and two vases of blue iris and white roses.  
On the floor beside the pulpit  
stands a little fan.  
It hums. The head goes back and forth.  
No no no no no.  
And up and down.  
Yes yes yes yes yes.  
"We cannot understand the ways of God," the preacher says.  
Yes yes, nods the fan.  
"But he will never send us sorrow  
more than we can bear."  
No no, says the fan.  
"To suffer is God's way to test our strength,"  
the preacher says.  
No no, no no, says the fan.  
"But he will send us peace. Amen." The sermon's over.  
The fan hums yes yes yes.

The church stands empty in ten minutes,  
but the fan hums on and on  
in the silence of the oak tree  
altar, table, cross of gold  
and the vases of blue iris and white roses.

.....

*Betty Ivy grew up in a small town just north of New York City and has spent most of her life in Illinois and New England. She taught French and history with not much enthusiasm and prefers to struggle with nouns and verbs. She has three children, all perfect, and six grandchildren, some great, some not so great.*

.....

## INNOCENCE AND TERROR

### --THE HEART OF HORROR

Robert McCammon

Let's talk about the tale of terror.

And about one particular tale of terror: in this story, a spirit of the dead hauls its chains up a long, dark staircase, images of the past and future flicker like wind-whipped candlelight, and a man falls wailing upon his own grave.

Of course you've read that tale of terror called "A Christmas Carol," haven't you? Oh, you hadn't ever considered that a horror story? Why not? Because it had a statement to make about the human condition, and tales in the horror genre don't? Well--*wrong*!

In "A Christmas Carol," Charles Dickens used the elements of horror fiction to emphasize characterization and to explore the life of one man in the space of a night. What would that tale be without its three ghosts, its spectral time-traveling, or its unflinching glance beyond the grave??

Unwritten, that's what.

I'm a writer of tales of terror. To me, the beauty and power of horror fiction is that every tale is a reinvention of the struggle between good and evil--and by that I don't mean necessarily the fight between angelic and demon hosts, though God knows that goes on often enough, but also the inner struggle in the heart and mind of everyday people just like you and me.

In horror fiction is the essence of struggle. You create characters and cast them into the wilds of imagination. Some of them fall into tar pits, others are lost in the thicket, but the characters who keep struggling to the final sentence will be smarter and stronger, and so,

hopefully, will be the reader. So, is horror fiction just a bag of bloody bones, or does it have meat and brains? I think it's both meaty *and* brainy. If I didn't, I wouldn't be writing this, would I?

I once participated in a seminar called "Morbid Literature." I went knowing what it was going to be like. I wasn't disappointed.

They accused me of  
killing kittens and  
hating orphans and  
being an all-around,  
demented, *bad person*  
who should not be  
allowed within a  
mile of a schoolyard,  
lest I infect their  
children with green  
mindslime.

The audience was full of people who wanted to know why writers of horror fiction persisted in slopping gore on the page and calling it either entertainment or even readable. They accused me of killing kittens and hating orphans and being an all-around, demented, *bad person* who should not be allowed within a mile of a schoolyard, lest I infect their children with green mindslime. Nothing I could say would make a difference. I talked about "A

Christmas Carol," and they screamed "Friday the 13th!" See, those folks had come to talk about morbid literature, and that's *just* what they were going to do.

But they were reacting to a label, confusing fiction with film--and they're two different dragons, believe me--and considering that *horror fiction* by its own tag exists simply to scare the jellybeans out of

people, or make them sick, or cause them to run riot in their neighborhoods and wear white socks with black trousers. Horror fiction *is* more than mindless emotion--*isn't* it?

I think it is. The best of it, that is. What other type of writing involves life, death, good, evil, love, hatred, the base and the best, decay and rebirth, sex, God and the Devil? I mean, horror fiction is IT! If you consider the authors who've used the elements of horror fiction in their work, your list is going to include H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell, Mark Twain, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Edith Wharton, Flannery O'Connor...

Well, you get the idea. I have to use the label "*horror fiction*" for the kind of work I and so many others write simply because we live in a world of categories. But the term *horror fiction* implies writing that socks the bejeezus out of the emotions while leaving the intellect untouched. Horror fiction is perceived as going for the gush of blood and the quick shriek, as a superficial exercise in typing, instead of logically constructed writing; in other words--and I think publishers are at fault for promoting the lowest common denominator--horror fiction is perceived by its critics as about as much of an art form as those sound effects records of screams that appear in the stories of every Hallowe'en.

But...isn't it kind of *fun* to be scared? I mean, there's nothing *wrong* with writing fiction simply to terrify, is there?

I like to read a good, go-for-the-gory-gusto horror novel every now and then, but they don't stay on my shelves. I read them and toss them out. The novels that stay do *more* than terrify. They resonate with human emotion, thought, and--yes, a kind of innocence--long after the pages are closed.

Some of the horror-fiction titles on my shelves include Charles L. Grant's *The Pet*; Peter Straub's *Shadowland*, and *The Talisman*,



written with Stephen King; Anne Rice's *Interview With The Vampire*; Clive Barker's *The Damnation Game*; and Joan Samson's *The Auctioneer*. There are many, many more, and they stay there because, to me, they're complete worlds between covers, worlds I want to return to and explore again and again. The best of horror fiction contains chills and frights, but it's not constructed around a scream but rather around a solid core of human experience.

Humanity's what's missing from bad horror fiction. How can a reader feel the delicious anticipation of fear if the book has no humanity, if the characters aren't real enough to reach out and touch, if the world that book represents is not detailed and colored and lavished with attention?

How can a reader  
feel the delicious  
anticipation of fear  
if the book has no  
humanity...

When I begin to construct an idea for a novel, I begin with a problem to be solved--not with a list of scares and scenes to be included for the sake of the horror-fiction tag. I began *Mystery Walk* with the thought of flipping the traditional idea of what

constitutes good and what constitutes evil. *Usher's Passing* is about a young man's struggle for identity. *Swan Song* is about the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust and the subsequent fight for survival. Another is about the inhabitants of a southwest Texas town whose way of life is rapidly coming to an end--but, of course, there are horror fiction elements in it because that's what I enjoy reading and that's what I enjoy writing. But I do *not* begin work by outlining a list of scare scenes; those scenes--the good-vs.-evil confrontation scenes--all

those should be thought out and judged on their merits apart from whether the book is horror fiction or not.

Fiction is, after all, fiction. Good writing is good writing, and bad writing kills a book on page one.

I mentioned *innocence* a little while ago. Innocence in horror fiction? Yep. And by “*innocence*” I mean the author’s sense of wonder, at the characters and the setting and even the spooky elements. Without that sense of wonder, a novel goes nowhere. I think most good authors in any genre retain the innocence of a twelve-year-old kid just on the verge of finding out what the world is all about. Those innocent authors can take a reader anywhere, and the reader willingly goes wherever the sentences lead because wonder can *reinvent the world*--and isn’t that what reading’s all about?

Horror fiction must be more than scares. Yes, it’s great to create a good scare, and that can be difficult enough in itself; but the best of horror fiction is about human experience. Maybe it’s a kinked view of humanity, and maybe gore splatters the pages here and there, but that’s because we’re horror writers and it leaks out of our pens on its own. The best of horror fiction is not that bag of bones I spoke about earlier; it’s a whole body, complete with beating heart and questing, introspective mind.

So: I think it’s neither right nor wrong simply to terrify; yet the works that have no more ambition but *just* to terrify are sorely lacking. You can spot them from the first chapter. The characters are hollow shells designed to ramble around a maze of scare scenes, and they have nothing to say about the human experience because, of course, their creator has nothing to say.

*I say, don’t sit down to write horror fiction. Sit down to write fiction, pure and simple. If your voice has a horrific edge, that will come out in your writing and the story will flow naturally. But I’ve*

never, never sat down to write a horror novel. I've always simply sat down to write, and what came out is what came out.

And don't be afraid to address complex issues, either. The demon-possessed child, the old dark house, and the crazed-killer-in-a-small-town-hacking-up-prom-queens have lurched off the plot line horizon--and none too soon! I say, dare to be different! Politics, the phone company, computers, urban sprawl, frozen yogurt, *whatever--*

Urgency, immediacy,  
strength of conviction--  
all play a part in  
designing a plot, ...

a plot is stronger  
if the writer *feels*  
strongly about it,  
if he or she feels  
something *must*  
be said before  
the brain  
explodes.

Urgency,

immediacy, strength of conviction--all play a part in designing a plot, no matter what kind of novel you're working on.

Gee, I just heard myself, and I sound like I know everything. I certainly do not. I'm a working writer; that means I'm still learning. I used to think the writing would get easier, the more I did it. I was wrong, it's harder now than ever because I keep pushing myself to write on a deeper, more instinctive level. My first book, *Baal*, was a snap to do. It also is extremely superficial. And aspiring writers hear this: Your books may stay around a long, long time. In some cases, longer than you'd like them to.

But, of course, there must be beginnings. Without those, where would we be as writers?

Human experience. Detail. Deep characterizations. The innocence of wonder. The risk of writing from the soul. The essence

of struggle. All these are important in writing, and all of them elevate a horror novel to the status of a world between covers, waiting to be discovered and rediscovered. They are elements not easily measured--and maybe *never* mastered--but surely worth the effort if we're to continue to learn our craft.

I'm proud to be a writer. My books are called horror fiction because no one has yet come up with something more descriptive of what can be humanity's most powerful and expressive literature. I want to do what I can to benefit that body of work.

Writing simply to terrify? Sounds morbid to me. I know where a seminar's being held on that subject, if you care to go.

.....

*Robert McCammon is a native of Birmingham, Alabama, whose first novel, Baal, was published in 1978. More than a dozen books later, his newest novel, Mister Slaughter (the third in the Matthew Corbett series) is being published by Subterranean Press. [www.robertmccammon.com](http://www.robertmccammon.com)*

.....

**At a certain point, what people mean when they use a word becomes its meaning.**

**--William Safire**

## PEWTER BOWL

Trina Gaynon

I am the pewter bowl she eats from each day,  
filled with the rampion her mother craved enough  
to send her husband over the wall to poach it

from an old woman hungry enough for a child  
to accept Rapunzel as payment for the theft.  
With the curve of hammered pewter, I show

Rapunzel her reflection as she finishes her meal--  
her face a blur of pox marks like the witch's,  
a nose bent to match the broken arch of her captor's.

These are the only faces she knows, but even so,  
she shrinks from them and the witch's litany of curses  
for unknown men who leave gardens bare.

Rapunzel prefers the changeable songs of mockingbirds.  
She insists on gazing out the tower window  
at softly feathered jays, with their insistent voices,

and the tendrils of kudzu vines, as curly as  
the glory of the braid she combs out each night.  
She begins to compare her white hands to the witch's.

.....

*Trina Gaynon earned a Master of Fine Arts degree and moved to southern California for love, not the air. She currently volunteers with WriteGirl, an organization providing workshops and mentors for young women in high school who are interested in writing. Recent publications include Poetry East, Yemassee, and Natural Bridge.*

.....



## EARLY DAYS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Weshon Hornsby

Oil on Canvas 20" x 16"

*Weshon Hornsby is a visual artist who loves to paint landscape scenes, animals, still life imagery, cityscapes, and portraits. Although his collection is eclectic there is a common thread of brush stroke, bold colors and personal style that makes his work cohesive. His work can be found in private collections, in web galleries, brick and mortar galleries and in print. He lives in Newark, Delaware. [www.WeshonHornsby.mosaicglobe.com](http://www.WeshonHornsby.mosaicglobe.com). [wephunk1@yahoo.com](mailto:wephunk1@yahoo.com)*

# A (SHORT) HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Rick Spuler

Scholars would disagree, but I would say:

It began here, in Freiburg.

Somewhere near the intersection  
of two paths and a point in time.

Let's say: on the Schloßberg.

In silence.

Where all languages begin.

And I suddenly became

fluently speechless

in several languages simultaneously.

I've been gathering words ever since,

In a language that probably resembles

English, but I can't be sure,

because you're leaving now,

and when you're gone,

I won't know where to look for the meaning.

I gave it all to you.

.....

*Spuler's writings have appeared in journals and magazines such as Ugly  
Cousin, BlazeVOX, and the Miranda Literary Magazine. Someday he  
would like to write a book, but at the time, it's the poetry that counts.*

.....

## SECRET PENCIL

Llewellyn McKernan

Its razor edge cuts  
down deep between  
the quick and the dead.

In the clenched hand,  
it proves itself over  
and over again. Its

night-shade dances  
between two blue  
borders, its rubber

rubs against the grain.  
When it hides in every  
period, when it floats

across the page like  
smoke from a faraway  
fire, the curse becomes

cursive and clear,  
truth divides into  
the petals of a flower.

.....

*Award-winning poet Llewellyn McKernan has published poetry books for adults and children. Her work has been accepted in many anthologies. Her writing fellowships include ones from the American Association of University Women and the West Virginia Commission on the Arts. She has lived in West Virginia longer than anywhere else on earth and considers it home.*

.....





## SEINE RIVER, PARIS, FRANCE

Linda Stephan

35mm Film

*Linda Stephan is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. Paris is her other favorite city. In addition to her black and white photography endeavors, Linda is also a free-lance writer, very amateur painter, and an adjunct professor of Art History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. lnewby@aol.com*

## THE FLOWERS DON'T SEEM TO KNOW

Frank Dawson

The flowers don't seem to know.  
I ride the hills that as a kid I loved.  
Each Spring a revelation.  
A shock  
A riotous display of new life.  
The flowers don't seem to know --  
Or care.

The route I used to ply when I was young  
Is desolation now  
And sad to see.  
I sigh  
But what good?  
The flowers don't get my pain.  
They don't seem to know.

My red Cushman whizzed past these houses,  
Up and down these hills,  
Past these yards.  
With thrilling clatter I rambled  
Past these very gardens  
On my pharmaceutical pursuit,  
Past these plants--these mindless  
Growing things.  
They don't seem to know.

So neat and sharp and vital  
A drug dealer was I,  
With sun and wind and  
Seasonal elation.  
You couldn't get by now with such an act.  
What? A kid coming to your door  
With money for change  
And a sack full of federally regulated  
Chemicals?  
Ah, but the flowers don't give a rip,  
Or realize how things have changed.  
They just don't seem to know.

Every Spring is a surprise.  
All of a dash each flower and shrub  
Explodes doing its thing.  
The houses in such poor repair,  
The yards untended,  
Cannot defeat the rushing display.  
For the flowers don't seem to know  
What's happened,  
Nor take note of time passing.

The trees are dropping white and pink,  
And bushes bear their bosoms full  
Of reds and purples.

What ignorance has disposed each leaf and stem  
To shout in vivid hues  
The triumph of its cause?

I know what life has done  
In its cruel bending of my limb and love,  
And what around me has crumbled  
Dust to dust.  
This cannot be, sometimes I say,  
In awkward dispute of all that's all too real.

But then it's Spring again,  
And I am made to wonder  
About the flowers  
And how they just don't seem to know.

.....

*Frank Dawson is a retired English teacher. He lives in Leeds, Alabama, with  
his wife, Joan.*

.....

## ARS POETICA

Hannah Stephenson

The man is late to the airport again.  
His wife drives the car. Speeding east,

she eyes the westbound crew repainting  
yellow highway lines. Their vests

are festive in the dark. *Moon*  
*River, wider than a mile.*

He sings along with the radio. *This song*  
*should play at a funeral. A river always*

*means death.* She doesn't agree. *A river*  
*means a journey. Listen: "off*

*to see the world."* They pass the rows  
of rental cars. She veers toward

the terminal, slows to find the Delta  
entrance. Their goodbye is rushed. A cop

stalks their embrace, shoos her away.  
*Gotta move this car, ma'am.*

At home, she finds her atlas, locates  
a Moon River in Ontario

that empties into Georgian Bay.  
That afternoon, she types in an email,

*Even for composers, a river  
is a river, not a road,*

*not an empty grave.* And then  
holds the delete key, watches the lines

peel off like exit only lanes.  
The cursor appears and disappears,

an even metronome, a light  
that men in orange wave to planes.

.....

*Hannah Stephenson is a writer currently living in Vancouver, British  
Columbia. She has been published in Ophelia Street and Design for  
Mankind Magazine, and is the Culture Editor for GLOSS Magazine. She  
also keeps a daily poetry blog, The Storialist: [www.thestorialist.blogspot.com](http://www.thestorialist.blogspot.com).*

.....



## HIKING BOOT

Don Stewart

Drawing

21" x 18"

*Don Stewart, both artist and writer, practices his dream from his studio in Homewood, Alabama. [dsart@bellsouth.net](mailto:dsart@bellsouth.net)*

## **BLUE**

Fedra Yazdi

When you finally come back  
I will hear your footsteps from stars away  
You are in a distant town  
Then there is a knock at the door  
We finally touch again  
All the roads in the world will guide you to my breasts  
You will be covered in blue, me in all colors on earth  
I can't hear right  
You are a constant mirror in front of me  
My heart can't beat without you  
The flowers will remain dead without you  
Where did our love cottage go?  
Why should my body move?  
You are not a temptation, you are a reason to breathe  
Why are you covered in blue?

.....

*Fedra Yazdi is a native of Iran, and lives in Seattle, Washington. She has written more than twenty short stories and currently is working on a play. Her work has appeared in literary magazines and on-line publications.  
fybrune@gmail.com*

.....

**As soon as you feel too old to  
do a thing, do it.**

**--Margaret Deland**



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### **State Story**

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2. K. Brian Ingram, Pelham, Alabama
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### **State Poetry**

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