

Ampersand

Poetry Journal

TEXAS STARS 2011



*Poetry is the journal of the sea animal
living on land, wanting to fly in the air.*

*Poetry is a search for syllables
to shoot at the barriers
of the unknown and the unknowable.*

*Poetry is a phantom script
telling how rainbows are made
and why they go away.*

Carl Sandburg

About the Poets

Publication Credits



Dave Parsons



Jan Epton Seale



Wendy Barker



Robert Wynne



They
For Harry Dazey

Now that we know that Harry has Alzheimer's
we catch ourselves wondering out loud

about our own memories, searching
for that small void in our understanding

of time's continuum. This cruel wound
that delicately as some evil surgeon unseals

the mute gray bindings that hold
ineffably the inventory of a life

stuns us again and again with horrific wonder,
leaving us with facial expressions, not unlike his

as he turns his bent spade, again and again,
like some blind farmer through

the rough weed filled furrows
of recollection and recognition.

At the Garden Café, Ruth stately still,
rotely asks him in that wifely way:

Would you like tea or coffee, Harry?
Harry, do you want tea...or coffee?

...then the realization...*oh...oh, give him tea.*
An acquaintance happens by the table,

and Ruth graciously, dutifully introduces her
to Harry, who, as always, smiles affably

and responds, *I am not really here,*
you know. Later, I accompany him

to the men's room, where he becomes confused
and begins to wash his hands before entering

the small dark stall with its endless
roll of blank white sheets of paper.

Standing before the sink, he stares
with what appears to be rapt erudition into the mirror

and whispers in that familiar, gentle fatherly tone,
He wants to come back you know; he wants to come back

And they—they won't let him.

Dave Parsons

Orange County April 29, 2005

It is Friday and though I am over a thousand miles away,
I can see you clearly in the east Texas morning
rolling away from my vacant side of the bed
to your feet, as you are compelled
to do every early morning, moving
militarily through the mechanics—creating
another day: the first call of the toilet,
shuffling to the kitchen, water for the kettle,
the daily doling out of the medicine
to the white counter top, the orbiting shuttle
to our sleepy daughter's bedside
for the exchange of her pills for the small dog
curled resistantly warm under their covers—

And there you are...there between the oak tree
and the row of dogwoods doing dog duty on your birthday—
what are you thinking today? If I were there, with you
I would not know—behind the physical—the mundane
there is the wonder, the mysterious and unique impulse
that resides in the essence of you—the creation of stunning art
out of the dark world of your haunting subconscious—
I have rarely been able to guess those memories,
those thoughts—
even if I were on that common quay—my face inches
from yours, falling, plummeting dizzily into the auburn
framed countenance of your glowing presence—tripping
into the folds of your graceful familiar form, fixed
in wonder on that onyx centering in the greyhound blue eyes,
where that ineffable chalcedonic entity resides and in some
oblique way, *takes dominion of all that surrounds.*

Memories of Camp Mathews in Finnish Rhapsody

To be a Marine, you must love your rifle
for a while, at least until you are free
of Drill Instructors, the keepers of the truth of death.

While you are in this dark state, a boot in boot camp,
you pray for war every evening, desperate for a fight,
a reason for this purgatorial time, a proof.

During the scorched inland days, California summer
skies are rifled with reptilian eyes, sights narrowing
a simple human form, a symbol that could be a child's

sketch of his father or brother, any mother's son
springing up before you, a rapid fire target
with no discernible face, the face of us all.

Color Of Mourning

She awakened to Texas summer bright
in her eyes, throwing on a new yellow
robe, she dragged her body into the kitchen
to make coffee which she dug from a deep
yellow decanter. Awareness steeps through
the heart beating perks, her eyes fall on the child's
drawing that was stuck on the refrigerator door,
a yellow duck swimming on deep dark
water under another bloody sun brimming
with amber iris—Iris, goddess of the rainbow,
adding to the litany of golden messengers, all
bringing to her mind the dress, the yellow
dress that she had given to her niece
for her fifth birthday, the sweet lemon
yellow dress that the child delighted in so
that today she was to be buried in it—the sanctuary
of the summer kitchen felt unusually cold
as she cracked a single egg, spilling
carefully the delicate yoke onto melting butter
thinking, yellow—yellow—
yellow should not feel like this.

Lake Lady Dancing On The Hill

For Shirley Schwaller 1946-2007

Above the south shores of Lake Travis
she moves in the dawn that is breaking
over the railings of the house that clings
to the ancient limestone cliffs—she is the deep
and complex aroma of a dark, rich coffee held
in both hands against gusts of wind that have carried
a chill across the water, a body so deep and blue
that it captures all the light intense morning sun
can send against the hill country valley fortified
with green plumes of Texas plant life barricading
the giant furrow—the sides of the vast aqua catacombs.
Like that steady open vein that flows below, she will
be still moving in the evening that has broken over
that same ornamental ironwork for years, saving
the crow's watch of a porch that juts artfully from
the brow of the hillside she loved, she is this grand house
that will always bring joy to the hearts of memory—
to those lucky travelers that found themselves in her
respiteful inn of light and laughter for a day, or maybe
a weekend—for an, *anytime*—for she is the mother of joy,
she is the girl dancing and singing glory on the hill top
high above the water that like her mind, looking so calm
on the surface, is for always eternally sounding our depths,
she is that energy that makes all that surrounds resound.

Dave Parsons continued

Still Life

It is the day after
your seventy-ninth birthday
and I have been reading poems
by Billy Collins—the one
to the invisible reader
prefaced with the Yeats
epigram: *a poet...never
speaks directly, as to someone
at the breakfast table—*
perhaps, this has been the problem—
my many failed direct attempts
to write about you, to you, celebrate
or bemoan you, that Georgia
red clay realist you...cast
in grand lifelong romantic fervor.

Nancy has been painting a still life
all week, fixing an egg plant's
bold bruise to the blood of merlot
spilled into a single glass stem
beside three green apples.
I have been unable to pick
the specific fruits or wines
from your life-filled bounty
to place carefully on a page
where, the swell of the color
of a moment like my first
awareness of your intense individuality
might be reflected subtly on to egg-
plant skin of my skin—blood
of my blood.

In the Guest House

there's a gray wolf in one corner,
feet planted in contrived tundra,
peering with light eyes around a chair.
His look is mild bewilderment
decided by the taxidermist. Yet
his smell is his own, the curer
never quite able to flush the wildness
from each hair. His scent fills the air.

And though the eyes are yellow glass,
faked windows on his animal soul,
their angle stalks authentic: slanted up,
drawing the muzzle to a near smile,
the snout sniffing back at the guest,
who crinkles his own at this murky wolf.

All night they smell each other,
one stopped forever in his tracks,
propelling himself to the nostrils
of the other, who thinks he's traveling on.

How the Grandmother of the World will entertain Herself

Each time they skitter, soar, float, circle,
birds leave a line on the air. Meanwhile,
She is making of these a tight stringball.

At the last, the Grandmother of the World
will stoop, open the bottom drawer,
shake off thumbtacks and bread wrapper ties,
retrieve the ball. She'll rise slowly—
the Ages make arthritis—and begin to unwind,
rearranging the bird paths to Her liking:

First, those that squawk, scold, screech,
quack. Next will be hoots, chirks, caws
followed by whistles, trills,
and finally, mere coos.

Then the Grandmother of the World
will stand satisfied, the string in a nest
at Her feet, the only sound
the whisper of dreaming feathers.

Jan Epton Seale

Diana the Huntress Goes for her Mammogram

She had to leave her deer
in the underground parking,
check her bow at the door.
Her turn came before she could
put the touch on a woman in labor
or advise a virgin or two.
How did she want to pay? Pay?
Her father had influence.
She donned her gown right over left
and left over nothing.
After they took off her armband,
they asked the date of her period.
She said Pre-history to Golden Age.
The plexiglass flattened
her breast like a discus.
"Ouch!" she said in Greek.
"Hold your breath, miss."
The plexiglass squeezed her
sideways into tableau.
"Ouch!" she tried it in Latin.
"I'm not from Egypt."
"Hold your breath, miss."
Finished, Lady Wild Things
dropped her toga to one shoulder,
fetched her bow and quiver,
exited in long strides.
Her little dog waited
by the elevator.

Riff

At the neck of the word,
the tube that gets no respect,
at the neck of the word,
no, not entirely the head,
with its careful round thoughts,
its cerebral priss,
nor yet in the body,
a nonsense of sounds—
awful palpitations
and twitchings,
ague and gut growl—
not that either,
but at the neck of the word,
where brain and gut meet,
where meaning and moaning
smooth together,
conjoin,
form a tunnel
piping what
we're trying to say—
Hallow! We call—
Hallow! It's dark in here
in here
at the neck of the word.
On the verge of
the truest thing
we've ever spoken
and the chopping block:
this place,
the neck of the word.

Matins, Still Dark

a town first awakens the people with bells
a town calls loud for God with bells
a town speaks glossolalia in bells
a town attends a party of bells
a town makes love to bells
a town delirious in bells
a town chatting in bells
a town cross with bells
a town sad with bells

a town in a final competition of bells
loose, crying, murdering with bells
a town, town, town
a few bells
two bells
bell

Jan Epton Seale continued

Bookmark

Thank you for waiting patiently until we return,
red lace of Switzerland, green leather of Ireland,
papier mâché with sloe-eyed natives harvesting.
Still, you have a life of your own, a job to envy.

Who would not like, hour after hour, to be pressed
with ideas in the den, feel the tickle of feathers
from a coffee table hawk, be allowed to snigger
at a bathroom cousin shut in an academic journal?

Plastic Pharaoh new-dug from the museum store,
embroidered red poppy of an August birthday,
laminated rosemary from a Northwest garden,
tiny zarape migrating from the Mexican market,

placemat laid for a dinner of paragraphs,
rooster crowing from the edge of the page,
prisoner condemned to the medieval press
or a long, long wait on the chopping block,

transformed from souvenir to consort
of the best words in their best order,
what's it like to hold a place in time and space,
to separate yesterday from tomorrow?

And what's not to envy in your life—
to be lifted, fingered, nibbled, held close,
and, when all is known for now,
put back between the sheets?

Crone Texture

I protest.

"But I am," she says.
And she makes me agree.

Then we name other things
wrinkled:

sand dunes
a newborn's scalp
ripples on a pond
a bloodhound's brow
the chambered nautilus
clouds, and
folds of silk.

Near-Earth Object

They said a second moon,
a bright new sphere
orbiting our planet, another
presence we can count on.
Have you seen the moons tonight,
we'll say, they both are full!
And suddenly our small
circumference has swollen
to the size of Saturn's—first
one moon, then two, in time
we might have rings, a crown
of moons all following
the wisps of our transparencies,
the clouds, the drifts of all our storms.
But no—they're saying now
it's the last stage
of an Apollo rocket launched
thirty years ago, returned from
decades revolving round the sun.
A boomerang's ellipsis:
a word we uttered once,
flung back to us.

Solar System

Most stars in other nebulae
occur in pairs,
triplets, quadruplets,
sex-. Not like our own
sultan to this harem
of planetary wives and countless
asteroids, concubines.
We nine (or eight?) revolve, trailing
and unveiling our emerald, our topaz
atmospheres, our eunuch-moons.
But not so much polygamy
as a case of astronomic
solitude. A star alone
without another of its kind.
No one near who can reciprocate
with equal flaring tongues
while we, vague miasmic Venus
and sweet malleable Earth,
are constantly presenting
the rounded colors of our curves,
faces turned from the seraglio
toward all this gaseous heat
that spews atomic particles
at whim, in which we bask
and, agitated, spin.

Mars At Perihelion

Zero dot, Sunya bindu
on the sky's forehead,
but no more nothing than
Sanskrit words for zero
mean even more: abhra,
the atmosphere, ananta,
immensity of space, gagana,
the heaven's canopy in which
this planet glows brighter
than in sixty thousand years.
My mother is dying.
So much surrounding
the focal point of our lives.
This planet named for a god
who once had nourished us
with seeds, cereals, until
his prowess shifted into war.
I would turn back all
the wars between us,
mother and daughter,
the struggles to decide
which of us would survive in
the void where we spun
for decades, isolate orbits.

If I could merge those
rigid circles into a bowl,
a round of offered grain,
before the oxygen fails
to reach her cells, before
her heart disintegrates
into the vast canopy
of the heavens, gagana,
ananta, the space which
(even without this planet
looming larger than
we've ever known) must be,
we tell ourselves, complete.

Wendy Barker

K Crucis Cluster

A ring of stars, a crown
of lights, a necklace.
Pearls, lambent on a strand
like my mother's, the ropes
she wanted us to wear,
her gleaming jade, cool
in the hand, on the throat.
These are new stars, as stars go.
The pearls are cultured, from Japan,
the jade from China, before the War.
Our last dinner, she'd weighted
her fingers, bony chest, her ears.
Erect as always, that body
didn't bend under all those stones.
The Milky Way weaves through
this constellation, south of which
a nebula, black rent, absorbs
the light from stars beyond.
When she died, we twisted loose
her diamond earrings, opal ring.
At the end, we'd heard only
her breathing, slower and
slower till we were left with
her mouth agape, a silent
ring of flesh, the teeth inside
a space too dark to see.

Condensation Nuclei

Sea salt, pollen, and smoke.
Particles the air
needs to form a cloud.
A pebble in the palm.
Phrase dropped on a plate.
Your words I've collected
and lined up like bowls
of ash, or sand,
stared at, and wept.
Or like our lidded glass
containers: oats, wheat,
and opalescent grains
we use to knead
our bread, yeasty
loaves with raisins.
Rain, relief, the irritants
washed back to loam.
Saliva, the body's
juices that digest
grit between our teeth.

Cumulonimbus Incus

Build-up of white
turret upon white, but wait—
half-way, dark, there:
a wedge, break, em-dash—
pause in the tumult as
warm air cools, takes
a breath, forms a second-
story floor, shift in the plot,
new base for the chapter's
finale, moist hot risings
to hammer the storm.

Wendy Barker continued

Thunder

To Descartes, one cloud falling
onto another. To the Greeks,
Zeus's shield shaking, a forerunner
of Hopkins' shook foil, that grandeur,
gathered and charged. For the native
tribes of the plains, Thunderbird's
wings beating. Such magnified
oscillations are beyond us, yet
the very air we breathe is grumbling,
a succession of compressions,
negative and positive ions colliding,
as someone in the next room
is about to explode.

Thermokarst

"Over thousands of miles in Alaska's interior, patches of forest sink into thermokarsts and die as swamp water floods them. It is a frequent sight on the roadside: a stand of tamarack, gray, spidery, dead, rising from muskeg water."

~William K. Stevens, *The Change in the Weather*

Tamarack in old habits—
firmness of permafrost's
hard layers beneath—
till underground ice pockets
thaw, and earth falls in,
diagonal. The sky
no longer up, and roots
awash in bog. Melting
causes spring, and health,
and sex, we think, liquidities
like mother's milk,
kindnesses that would be
kindest if dependable.
When sudden flood
befuddles us, how to find
the bottom, or the stars.

Robert Wynne

Linguistic Lament

Another benefit of language: you
Can use it to describe itself. Forgive
Rhyme its clumsy song. It provides a view
Of one way in which words survive: outlive
Sense with sound. Remember, time will forget
The sirens singing before an air raid
In the still, shrill sky, and letters regret
Containing so much: all history made

Susceptible to interpretation
Only to divide belief. But our needs
Never really matter, just these desires.
No language quite captures resignation,
Emptiness, longing, doubt, like a dark sea's
Tide pulling away from a lone bonfire.

Self-Portrait with Shadow Drowning

The camera captures each rivulet
rolling through the dark shape

my body offers
as an apology to the sun.

Light forgives me long enough
to blanket the rippling water

with all the sky it will hold.
My shadow stretches

farther from shore until
I am rushing river

and swollen cloud, fish struggling
upstream and erosion's power

reducing sedimentary rock to sand,
until breath is nothing

but a memory
and no lens can contain me.

Dora Responds to Picasso's "Portrait of Dora Maar Sitting"

Pablo knew me so well – how
my body always disappointed me
with its soft edges, how I hated
being round as this world

but so small. My breasts
always agree with each other,
holding less mystery than even
this equatorial waist

which has never proved
inviting enough to filter beaches
into being. And my dull hair
is not thick as any great thought –

the kind that barely fits in your head
no matter its shape. My eyes
I had always loved; but now
I see what I was missing:

the new right one's perfect circle
is wide enough to see
the end of everything
and fear has become

a distant memory
because I've found
the diamond of my left eye
is hard enough to cut

through reality itself
until imagination
is all the remains.

Flight

I'm standing on the 5 Freeway
South, my Oldsmobile's V6 quiet
as I watch people emerge

from their shiny vehicles bewildered,
like Hermes, the Messenger God,
arriving empty-handed, his feet blistered,

burning and wondering what their wings
are for. I've been here 45 minutes
already, kicking at the reflectors, musing

when the road will clear. And as traffic
continues to backup, I wonder at how easy
hundreds of lives are stopped. Were baked

brown on this asphalt, waiting
for time to start again, for the black river
to carry us late toward San Diego, or for

the power of flight. I toe the white dashes
and think about her, about Escape From
Witch Mountain and memories

of motorhomes sailing into the sky, of
two kids defying gravity. We allow hope
in the strangest ways. Her voice

always coaxes me back, reminds me
of Hot Wheels, Saturday mornings,
polyester and Lincoln Logs. There are

Sea Monkeys in her eyes. She laughs
like Underdog. Just last week
I saw Herbie the Love Bug two lanes

to my right, red and blue stripes
gleaming, black 53" announcing
the hood and doors of the little car

that could do anything. And she
was at the wheel, smiling.

Robert Wynne continued

Nephew for C.E.W.

You'll never remember
your first 48 hours
without a name,
how Ed told Laura
following months of debate
that after what he saw her go through
she could name you anything.
You are Christopher Edward now.
Welcome to the world

that will call you by name
every time it wants something from you.
From morning roll to baseball tryouts,
from family, friends and lovers,
you will know the sound of your name
better than all the voices that speak it.
It will comfort you at night.
Chris. Chris dreaming
when you were so young
you couldn't be called for anything.

Reflection Against Memory

Race
your bones
to complain
about decay, fire
that leaves too much behind, strong
wind still uncovering yesterday. If hell
exists it must be the past, for memory splices

us like a B-movie, lost teeth rolling loaded dice.
The world won't forget, give us peace for a spell,
find somewhere else to belong.
Perhaps this desire
could explain
your own
face.

Dave Parsons



HIS POETRY

Texas State Poet Laureate 2011, Dave Parsons is recipient of many honors and awards including: a National Endowment of Humanities Dante Fellowship to the State University of New York, the French-American Legation Poetry Prize, and the 2006 Baskerville Publisher's Prize from TCU for an outstanding poem published in their literary journal, *descant*. He holds six writing awards from the Lone Star College System and he was named Montgomery County Poet Laureate for 2005 – 2010. Parsons was elected to The Texas Institute of Letters in 2009. His third collection of poetry *Feathering Deep* (Texas Review Press) is forthcoming in 2011. His first book *Editing Sky* was winner of the Texas Review Poetry Prize and a Violet Crown Book Award Special Citation. Parsons teaches Creative Writing and Kinesiology (Racquetball/ Handball) at Lone Star College-Montgomery and Poetry Workshops at Inprint Inc. in Houston.

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Jan Epton Seale



HER POETRY

Texas State Poet Laureate 2012, Jan Epton Seale teaches life-story writing in museums, retreats, seminars, and retirement centers. She serves on the board of the Valley Land Fund, a natural resources preservation group. Her publications include *Homeland: Essays Beside and Beyond the Rio Grande* (1995); *Airlift: Short Stories* (1992); *The Nuts & Bolts Guide to Writing Your Life Story* (1998); and six books of poetry.

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Wendy Barker



HER POETRY

Wendy Barker was born in Summit, New Jersey, but grew up in Arizona and lived in Berkeley, California before moving to San Antonio in 1982. She has published four collections of poetry and two chapbooks. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Georgia Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Poetry*, *Boulevard*, *Southwest Review*, and *The American Scholar*. Among her awards are an NEA fellowship, a Rockefeller fellowship to Bellagio, a Fulbright fellowship, and the Violet Crown Book Award, which she has received twice, for *Way of Whiteness* (Wings Press, 2000) and for *Between Frames* (Pecan Grove Press, 2006). She is Poet-in-Residence and a professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

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Robert Wynne



HIS POETRY

Poet, publisher, editor and educator, Robert Wynne earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University. A former co-editor of *Cider Press Review*, he has published six chapbooks, and two full-length books of poetry. He's won numerous prizes, and his poetry has appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout North America. He lives in Burleson, TX with his wife, daughter and three rambunctious dogs. His latest books include: *Museum of Parallel Art*, and *Remembering How to Sleep*.

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Publication Credits

Jan Epton Seale

Bookmark

The Wonder Is, 2006

Crone Texture

The Yin of It, 2000

Diana the Huntress Goes for her Mammogram

Inheritance of Light, 1996

How the Grandmother of the World will entertain Herself

Native Soil: poems from South Texas poets. San Antonio. School by the River Press, 2007

In the Guest House

Rockhurst Review, 2002

Matins, Still Dark

Crab Creek Review, 1998

Riff

The Wonder Is, 2006

Dave Parsons

Color of Mourning

Louisiana Literature, 2005

Lake Lady Dancing

The Langdon Review, 2007

Memories of Camp Mathews in Finnish Rhapsody

Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of Poetry, 1997

Orange Country April 29th

New Texas, 2006

Still Life

Louisiana Literature, 2004

They

Texas Review Special Poetry Issue, 2001

Wendy Barker

Condensation Nuclei

The Hollins Critic, 2007

Cumulonimbus Incus

Poetry, 2006

K Crucis Cluster

Harpur Palate, 2008

Mars At Perihelion

Nimrod, 2007

Near-Earth Object

Blue Mesa Review, 2006

Solar System

Southwest Review, 2004

Thermokarst

The Literary Review, 2006

Thunder

Poetry, 2003

Publication Credits continued

Robert Wynne

Flight

From *Driving*, *The Inevitable Press*, 2005

Publication in *Texas Stars* is by invitation-only.
Texas Stars is an extension of *Ampersand Poetry Journal*
published online by *Sol Magazine* Projects.
Project Director: Mary Margaret Carlisle
Project Webmaster: Leo F. Waltz

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<http://www.ampersand-poetry.org/guidelines>

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