

Featured Poet: Deborah H. Doolittle
Blackbirds

call from the trees--like chalk scratched
across a dusty blackboard or like a rusty porch swing,
they could be jangling wind chimes
in too much wind. When blackbirds

fall out of the trees--like leaves
they drift, a few at a time.
They puddle under the trees,
one large shadow that's alive,
moving. A shift in the wind,

all ascend again, become
invisible or turn green
or cling to the darker side
of leaves. Still they continue
to sing rude ditties, grand hymns.

Some sprawl across the lawn, even
the neighbors think of loose trash,
somebody's dark laundry. Some
hop, some strut or pace, some stoop
close to the ground. Even so,

all are black as night, dark as
the dark side of the moon, dark
as the inside of a grave.
Who else would dare carry
that into the light?

Fifty Springs

When I see its red epaulet in the reeds
flash as though the sun had just transformed

its feathers into a mirror, I look
for my reflection, look for the girl

who waded boggy creek banks, ankle-deep.
When I see its staring obsidian eye,

I blink. That's me creeping between cattails,
me with the wan face behind the school bus

window. Each morning a variation
on a theme of looking out through glass

segmented by chicken-wire, fragmented
by maladjusted Venetian blinds. Then

when I see it open its jet black wings,
I think of the indelible ink smudged

on my fingers, the blank assignment sheet.
When I see it cling to a sheaf of grass

as thin as a weed and with my husband,
our hands clasped now by my side, who's to say

otherwise when it sings in primary colors.
With the world and at least half a life-time

made iridescent by its repeating
call, I see how to make our days end.

One Dozen Brown Pelicans

A line of brown pelicans,
slowly slide between two soft
surfaces of the same sky--
one pale, flawless porcelain,

the other as translucent
as a gem. Stiff-winged, they glide
just a feather's breath above
each surface, sparkling white, then

apricot in the sunlight.
In the late afternoon, twelve
pelicans dip and skim, dive
head first, and then adjust, swan-like,

to swim for a while, bobbing
in their own wakes. On the shore,
we watch as they crash and splash,
then lift on silent wings, circling,
taking flight into the night.
We, too, walk our shadows home.

Titmice at Sunset

Sounds like the mother down the street
calling for her son Peter,
Peter, Peter.

Sounds like the neighbor putting her
tea kettle on.

Sounds like the children crying
Why? Why? Why?

In the long lanky length of trees,
day turns dark as leaves
leave off muttering.

Sounds like the sun is finally
answering: I'm over
here, here, here.

Woodpecker's Song

In the slow dusk,
the sun shucks the blue husk.
Dolphins harrow the peach pale waves.
An owl calls, Then two.
A woodpecker raps to its own echo.

How I wish.
How I wish.

To call them back,
to stand along on the river bank.

In my dreams,
dolphins swim serene,
chase sleek fish.
The river gleams golden,
then glimmers mother of pearl.
the air, snapping
like stiff cinnamon sticks,
ruffles the fuzz of my arm.

As the sun unfurls,
blurs into bull's eyes
of bright water extending

across the inlet, I cling
to the curve of the world.

Deep in the woods,
a woodpecker raps incessantly.
at me: this is how the world
works, how it works
and how I wish.

I hope this is what you are looking for.

DEBORAH DOOLITTLE teaches at Coastal Carolina Community College. In addition to two chapbooks, *No Crazy Notions* and *That Echo*, her poems have appeared in *Sulphur River Literary Review*, *Sierra Nevada College Review*, *Wavelength*, and *Yemassee*.

Brad Bostian
A Blue Jay Hits The Pavement And Goes Silent

In Madrasas in the stony hills, schoolboys
Submit themselves, but not to women.
Their minds are deadfall cliffs etched slowly
By the wine of words turned vinegar.

They live in a wind of words but in Calcutta
Through the fetid slums,
Among the bare and hungry arms
A mother wades.

A Queensland spotlight fires the river's eyes.
Half crocodile himself, and half a Nereus
Those red eyes bring him diving down,
A tale among the veering tails.

A blue jay hits the pavement and goes silent.
The boy who gathers it shinnies the pear tree
Tying a white basket with a nest of dandelions.
Weeks go by and wind swings the quiet wicker.

In mountains at the edge of night
A small girl crosses the narrow shaded way
From goldenrod tumble to blackberry brake,
Goes wading deep, deep in.

The boy asks, when will we know
If the little bird made it?

In Madrasas in the stony hills
Boys sit making nests for women
Out of deep, green forests.
The women leave their generous path,
Knife through crocodile waters
And disappear.

Such Slight Bodies For Holding Up The Moon

Building a school for dogs
To cram letters into wagging minds.
Planting corn in snow in neat rows
And water it all winter
Bringing weeds in small vases
And cakes made of sand and pea gravel.
Bringing bath toys for our showers
And running into space with mixing bowl helmets
Breathing the fog on the moon.
Pushing themselves in the bucket swing
With two hands behind,
Shaking feet dry and stepping back into the tub,
Living all day in the disappearing kingdom,
Such slight bodies for holding up the moon.

BRAD BOSTIAN is an English instructor at Central Piedmont Community College. He loves educational research and growing blackberries, and is working on a young adult fantasy novel.

Barry Ballard **Sparrows**

It is too late: the life of all his blood is touched corruptibly, and his
pure brain, . . . doth . . . foretell the ending of mortality.
- Shakespeare
The Life and Death of King John

After my brothers and I shot the baby
sparrows that had fallen with their nest, I
stayed behind. My corruption, you see,
hadn't grown wings, couldn't rationalize
the weight of lead pellets. And isn't it
true that the blood is touched and that the heart
worms around inside the body like a cyst,

like something that rots? And the brain: one part

innocence (as it should have been), and one
part a flowing cave of dread, with “shame” filling
up on all sides. I put the gun away
and never said that the tree became a
mountain, or how much loss was stretched like sky
across its winter peak, or how the winter stayed.

BARRY BALLARD’s most recent collection is *A Body Speaks Through Fence Lines*
(Pudding House, 2006). He writes from Burlleson, Texas.

William Doreski
Organic Pretensions

Something’s blowing from Vermont.
I focus on the zinnias,
my father’s favorite flower.
The red, orange, yellow petals
look rubbery and tough. Honeybees

rummage for nectar, their legs
and wings rusty with pollen.
The zinnias appeal to me but
I’ve nothing to say about the wind
slurring through hydrangeas

and quaking the bobolink nests.
I’ve nothing to say to Rosaly’s
Cut Your Own flower garden;
statia, zinnia, snapdragons,
expect me to do something

about the death of my father,
whose zinnias, grown in eloquent
valley loam, loomed twice as large
as these, humbled themselves
in cloudy western light.

WILLIAM DORESKI most recent collection of poetry is *Another Ice Age* (2007). He has
published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell’s Shifting Colors*. His essays,
poetry, and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *New England Quarterly*,
Harvard Review, and *Antioch Review*.

Margarita Engle
Ox Cart

The carved yoke has been polished by decades of rubbing
against the heavy necks of trapped beasts.

The wood is damp with ox sweat
and tropical rain.

The names of the oxen are delicate,
and the driver sings instead of speaking.

Mariposa, he croons to the one known as butterfly,
Zunzuncito, he chants to the one called hummingbird.

He sings because he understands that only oxen
with lighthearted, melodic names

know how to move swiftly,
hauling sugarcane to the mill

even though they look like they are plodding,
moving along with the rhythmic heartbeat

of an old man who sings fragile words
instead of speaking.

MARGARITA ENGLE is a botanist and the Cuban-American author of three books about the island, most recently *The Poet Slave of Cuba, a Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano* (Henry Holt & Co., 2006). Margarita lives in central California, where she enjoys hiking and helping her husband with his volunteer work for wilderness search-and-rescue dog training programs.

David Filer
Late Elegy
To Neal

A great blue, hunched at the edge of an ebbing
Tide, background of ravens working the mud flat,
Glaucous-winged gull, on the left, waiting—all screened
By rain, as a quiet day comes to its end.

Like last March did, but gentler, with only
Gentle loss. Is it an answer, this drawing
In of deckled clouds, spring storm in the alders

Just turning green, Canada geese, a dozen or
More, crossing far off into the fading sky?

We cant be sure we love things when they are near
And cannot be forgotten. But now, there's your
Grizzled face, when we try to remember it,
Your voice on those unexpected calls, urging
Us to visit, or was it saying good-bye?

DAVID FILER lives and work in Portland Oregon. Finishing Line Press published his chapbook *Night Verse* in 2005.

Eric Greinke
Dilemma

A broad-tailed hawk is using our winter bird
feeder for bait. Yesterday, we watched while it
plucked grey feathers from a song sparrow & ate
her. We grieved for the sparrow, feared for the
chickadees & the two sets of cardinal mates.

You urged me to shoot it, but wouldn't we hate to
see the hawk starve just as much? Frozen in
ambivalence, I wait, not sure what I'll do if I see
red down floating on a cold wind.

ERIC GREINKE is the author of 20 books, most recently *Selected Poems 1972-2005* (Presa Press, 2005). He lives at Bostwick Lake, Michigan and his work can be viewed his website www.ericgreinke.com

Thomas Halloran
A Brewer's Blackbird

Its piercing yellow eye bespeaks
the bird's indifference to my voice,
my camera's flash, my anything--
except a mad rush toward it, I suppose.

There was a time when we were new
at being we and couldn't learn each other,
and we had to.

And perhaps we have.
And have returned from everywhere

to hill grass green or brown,
furrows in our hides
and in our friends', a bird
forever marked from others of its hue
by small sun eyes.

Drakes in the Creek

As raindrop rings link
on the slow water, four
bright mallards splash down,
one after another.
They snake off into a marshy patch
where they all but disappear,
then emerge to glide upstream
a very long time.
Their one wake sweeps both banks
until they can't be told from the stream's own shine
or my mind hard-paddling behind them.

THOMAS HALLORAN's poems have appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Defined Providence*, *Amelia* and elsewhere. He was one of the ten writers featured in a special issue of *The Literary Review*, Fall, 1999.

M.J. Iuppa Present Perfect

Dusk and the lake sky shimmers
inside a freshwater shell

Settled in the pines, mourning
doves purr and coo . . .

At the break of the woods, five
doe stand alert-- motionless-- belly

high in rust colored bramble, waiting
to explode like black powder's sudden

cloud, leaving a trace of white plumes--
ghost tails, vanishing . . .

M.J. IUPPA lives on a small farm near the shores of Lake Ontario. She has three chapbooks and a full-length collection, *Night Traveler* (Foothills Publishing, 2003), and is the Writer-in-Residence and Director of the Arts Minor Program at St. John Fisher College.

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis
Market Day

Such couplings and uncouplings led to us—
lips with lemons, tongues with tangerines,
bellies with beetroots,
our bodies become more embodied, ancient,
our own ancestors, flushing the markets
for the first spring peas, the earliest sweet corn,
the ripe tomato.

Each stall holds baskets of promise,
a colony of cauliflower, whispering curry,
casserole, salad, stir-fry.
Like the maids in the windows in Amsterdam
tarty lemons wink and promise pies,
strawberries beckon, beacons
with a siren song of sweetness,
asparagus thrusts upward from the wet bucket.

BOBBI DYKEMA KATSANIS is a doctoral student in Art and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union. Her chapbook, *The Magdalene's Notebook*, was released last fall from Finishing Line Press.

Celeste Labadie
Body of Coral

There's a shell
Buried deep
in my throat.

I swallowed it
While swimming
In the ocean where I dream.

Hardened like coral
washed upon my own private shore,
Embedded and tumbled by sand.

Better to be cut in many places
And taken by the barnacles
And still, a womanly shape.

You can see it.
There's nothing to hide.
Memory and experience

Etched into me by the big hand
who draws the lines and circles
on this big globe.

You don't have to look very hard.
I'm cavernous,
Shaped by time and salt.

Porous and
Sometimes private.

CELESTE LABADIE is a performance poet, workshop facilitator, and deejay on public radio in Boulder, Colorado.

David LaBounty
We Might as Well
(for Richard Brautigan)

we've gone to bed at least

ten-thousand times

and I know there
are no more secrets
or surprises after

ten-thousand times

and I know the
ten-thousandth time
is a far cry from
the first second and
third time but

I'm here,

you're here,

so we might as well
make it

ten-thousand and
one.

DAVID LABOUNTY lives in Royal Oak, Michigan with his wife and two young sons. His poetry has appeared in *Thieves Jargon*, *Pemmican*, *The Panhandler*, *Dogmatika* and other journals.

Hope Madden
Freedom

I stood
naked on Amelia Island Plantation,
arms outstretched, toes gripping
a balcony rail, face to the ocean.
Love had freed me
and I could stand
naked.
Blessings had freed me
and I could stand
arms out, eyes to creation.
Opportunity had freed me
and I could stand
on this balcony, with this view.
The moon and wind and surf and plantation
ghosts witnessed
my pale body,
unworthy of this celebration in
this place.

Don Mager
At 65
#18

pour a mug of strong
coffee
 snap on the
lid
 go out into the
cool breeze of dawn
 walk
backward up the long
curve of the hill
 watch
where you departed

from
 gaze down on the
steps you took
 sip while
you walk
 inhale the
piquant steam
 as sun
climbs from the hill's crest
behind you
 your shad-
ow stretches before
you
 lean and long
 it
strides to keep pace
 just
keeping up
 where you're
headed or how far
are odder notions
than where you have been

At 65
#17

inexplicably
and without provo-
cation
 you recall
that 41 and
a half years ago
you did not go back
that second summer
to climb Mount Marcy
in the Adiron-
dacks
 even though all
that year you planned to
and now
 surprised to
recall that failure
of intent
 you can't
remember why you
did not go

this is
how
 driving home late
in the day
 amid
traffic and pedest-
rians darting be-
tween the lanes of wait-
ing cars
 you can take
your mind away un-
til you simply don't
hear the radio
news at all
 searching
for explanations

DON MAGER has published over 200 poems as well as translations from German, Russian and Czech since 1960. His books are *To Track The Wounded One* (1987), *Glosses* (1992), *Borderings* (1996), *That Which is Owed to Death* (1996), *Good Turns* (1999), and *The Elegance of the Ungraspable* (2001) are available from The Main Street Rag <http://www.mainstreetrag.com/store/books.php>.

Kelly Morris
Snow on Cedars

It is Monday morning.
There is snow lying on the cedars
outside the window.
The cat is sleeping
on the afghan-covered couch.
Dishes are stacked in the sink.
There is a basket of clean laundry
at the foot of the bed.
I will not pet the cat today.
I will not wash the dishes.
I will not fold the laundry.
The best that I can hope for
is to remember the snow on the cedars.

KELLY MORRIS is a former social worker who now makes her living as a freelance writer. My work has been featured in a number of publications, including *Cider Press Review*, *Transcendent Visions*, *Edgz*, and *The Blind Man's Rainbow*.

Paul Nelson
Tower Hill Pond

I could feel some flesh on his bones,
strength in his rigid hand, but the eerie
fineness of his hair, like a soul's filaments,
had no credible future, though it keeps on
growing, his ears already lilac.
It was like touching a child
without the consequence.

There was a day we found the pond drained.
At first it was like other things he'd said could happen.
He stood beside the silver gray '49 Ford coupe.
Mom took the picture, my arms around my
kid brother's shoulders. Beautiful boy.

They'd opened the dam to repair a gate
so we skirted the craters, lingering pools
on a mud moon, like memoirs.
We ignored the wild concentrations of fish
because the stumps, scrawny limbs and green
haired rocks were decked out with jewelry:
Colorado and Hildebrandt's willow-leaf spinners,
Daredevles , a River Runt, Bass-Oreno, and other
gay plugs with propellers and aluminum lips,
nests of braided line, sinkers and hooks.
We tried to dance, suctioned, calling out,
slipping like drunks: Dad and I cawing finds
dangled from our fingers like earrings,
pendants swiped from breathtaking women.

Then we found ourselves
staring at the sumps. Lured, gluttoned,
calm, we cast our lures and found that trapped fish
don't strike, as if they lose hunger, aggression,
curiosity, clapping their gills, gasping for what?
Justice? Hope? Ursprache? Salvation?
We were perplexed; now we wanted fish.
We were tired and hungry.
We cast and cast, following the paths
of our trinkets through the water.
The fish were ungrateful, failing
to keep the contract.

Did they think they had gone to heaven,

those smallmouth bass, thin-lipped pickerel,
white and jaundiced perch, like quiet citizens
nosing the further shore of Styx?
Dorsals tearing the silk surface?

There had been pictures in the paper:
fingers hooked in wire, striped suits, yellow
stars, goggle-eyes, concave cheeks, horrified
G. I.'s and newsmen at the "camps."
Patten rounded up truckloads of locals,
marched them by the ovens and open pits.
Anger? Or did he just need witnesses?

But our day was so full: free tackle,
the box choked, enough to cast and lose
for the rest of our lives. We talked about how
it must have been something for fish,
before the fall, to dash around in their
lucid world, to swallow things whole,
bottom in sight, swerving for brightnesses
jiggling overhead.

Looking at Dad in the basement cold
of Bibber's Chapel, white shades and
stainless steel tables, I knew he was dead
as the tackle box, that his stiff lips metal
mine froze to. That his small
stories of the Old Country, WW1,
women and children machine gunned
against St. Olaf's wall,
were bait to lure us into grief,
that loss of appetite.

Time to time I open the box from time
to look at these by now collectible wonders.
How could those other fishermen
stand to lose such gorgeous baubles,
side by side in a trays, an array of talismans.
My brother had asked, being a child,
if the fish would survive.

I looked at those bowls of warming soup ...
...their dorsal fins like combs to shape
thinness through lousy hair

yet come away clean.
Yes, I said, some of them do.

Paul Nelson is gainfully retired on the North Shore of O'ahu after many years as Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing for Ohio University. He misses teaching but makes up for it by trolling almost beyond sight of land. **His** *The Hard Shapes of Paradise* (1988) won the University of Alabama Press Series.

Scott Owens
Gradually the Summer Leaves

Gradually the summer leaves
yellow, harden beneath autumn's
drying wind, drift to piles for burning.
Each leaf you see reminds you
of something you hadn't planned,
something that moves on without you.

Another week and sound will travel
like leaves over housetops, through
trees grown bare with falling.

Each day the earth grows duller,
the sky grows larger, putting
itself together like a jigsaw,
one piece at a time.

Each night the wind smells
like somewhere you haven't been
and are not ready to go.

SCOTT OWENS is the recipient of poetry awards from the Academy of American Poets, the North Carolina Writers Network, and the Blumenthal Reading Series. His chapbook, *The Persistence of Faith*, was published by Sandstone Press. Scott currently lives, writes, and teaches in Hickory, NC.

Kenneth Pobo
Whitman Weeding

My large garden contains
multitudes of weeds. Actually,

I don't have a garden, am too
crippled to pull them. My flowers

open between syllables, are more
vast than my mind. Some call me

puffed up. Balloon flowers
puff up more. My ex-boss

called my leaves dirty and
fired me. Perhaps he knew little

of autumn. Trees don't keep
leaves spotless, like dishes

my mother washed and returned
to the cupboard. Rain, mud

and leaves, the eternal trio.
I watch my neighbor pull

dandelions--why yank out
such suns? Their roots pay

the same rent as roses. My dream
garden, a brambly beard,

a hotel full of songbirds
singing all day, all night.

KENNETH POBO has a new book of poems forthcoming from WordTech Press in 2008 called *Glass Garden*. Catch his radio show, "Obscure Oldies," from 6-8pm EST on Saturdays at WDNR.com.