

# Fall 2012

Wild Goose Poetry Review  
Fall 2012

## **100 Thousand Poets for Change 2012 Special Issue**

On September 24, 2011, more than 700 poetry events centered on the theme of “change” were held in 95 countries. On September 29, 2012, they did it again. This time more than 800 events were held in 115 countries: Iran, France, Italy, Korea, Brazil, Nigeria, Trinidad & Tobago, Egypt, Jamaica, Mexico, India, Ireland, Canada, Greece, and more, as well as 45 of the 50 states of the U.S.

The purpose behind 100 Thousand Poets for Change is to promote meaningful social and political change through a sharing of poetry, music, and ideas. The exact definition of change is left to the discretion of local organizers. This year’s event in my own area (western Piedmont NC) was an intimate gathering of about twenty poets, friends, and interested listeners in the home of Claremont author, Shari Smith, to share poems on tolerance, diversity, peace, and sustainability.

To help these important poems and this vital initiative reach an even broader audience, the fall issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review last year consisted entirely of poems read at some of the 25 events in NC. Again, this year, the fall issue includes only poems read at the various 100 Thousand Poets for Change events held across the state, including the Claremont reading as well as events in Wilmington, Hayesville, Raleigh, Winston-Salem, and many other NC cities.

These poems are published without the usual bios and commentaries so that readers can focus entirely on the poems and their social and political contexts. As always, of course, comments from readers are welcome. In fact, in the interest of political dialogue, they are encouraged more for this issue than for any other. You are also encouraged to subscribe to the comments or to check back frequently to fully participate in the continuing discussion.

Wild Goose will return to its usual format with the Winter 2013 issue, due out in mid-February. Submissions for that issue are being read now and will continue until the end of January. Follow-up 100 Thousand Poets for Change events have already been scheduled for September 2012 with the official date for next year set for September 28. More information on upcoming and past events can be found at <http://www.100thousandpoetsforchange.com/>.

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Scott Owens

DEFINING WRONG

So I've had this argument before  
at 10 when I was told  
I was being hit so I would understand,  
at 13 when my friends tried  
to beat into me  
that the only thing worse than a nigger  
was a nigger lover,  
at 17 when my father said  
if they didn't want to be raped  
they wouldn't go into places like that,  
last year when my mother's new husband  
told me god hates fags.  
I don't care what anyone's god  
believes is wrong.  
I know what is wrong.  
What causes harm is wrong.  
What takes away freedom is wrong.  
What makes another feel small is wrong.  
And silence is wrong.  
It's easy to keep your mouth shut.  
You keep your job that way.  
You keep peace in the home.  
It's easy just to go along.  
It's easy, but it's wrong.

Scott Owens

AT THE OUTRIGHT YOUTH MEETING

They ask me if I am,  
and I say, *No*,  
*but I have a son*  
*and if he is,*  
*I want him to know*  
*that nothing changes*  
*in my love for him.*

*And I have a daughter,*  
*and if she is,*  
*I want her to feel*  
*the same free unashamed*  
*passion I have felt*  
*for the women I've loved.*

*And this morning a lovely girl*  
*with green eyes and red hair*  
*served me coffee,*  
*and if she is,*  
*I want her to have*  
*cheaper insurance, lower taxes,*  
*visitation rights,*  
*all the benefits and privileges*  
*committing myself to one person*  
*has bestowed upon me.*

Scott Owens  
HISTORY LESSON

It all started with the Star-Spangled Banner  
my daughter's teacher was trying to teach her at school.  
She asked me whose bombs were bursting in air  
and why they wanted to fight with America.

So I told her about 1492  
and how the white people didn't see the red people  
as people and how the Arawak were slaughtered  
for gold, and the Cherokee, and the Creek, and the Kiowa,  
and how in time the whites who stayed in America  
didn't want to pay taxes to the whites who stayed overseas  
and so they went to war to be their own country  
and she asked if that was how the Civil War started

so I told her about 1452  
and how the white people didn't see the black people  
as people and how the Ashanti were enslaved  
and the Yoruba and the Mendi and the Gbandi

and how in time the whites who stayed enslaved  
in their minds didn't want to pay taxes to the whites  
who had become free in their minds and so  
they went to war to be their own country

and I knew from the silence in the back seat  
that she was thinking, but as she opened the door  
and stepped out toward the school  
of the Star-Spangled Banner, of proud hailing

and gallant streaming, of the free and brave  
a clear understanding came to her and she shouted back  
in her limited, disappearing 7-year-old vocabulary,  
*White people suck.*

Anthony Abbott

WHAT DO MEN WANT?

"Drums, sweat, and tears," says Newsweek Magazine, telling of wild-man weekends in the woods and tales of missing fathers in the sweat-house. It's not so simple.

In my fifteenth year my mother died. Embarrassed not to cry, I tucked my head under the sheets and feigned tears for my older sister's eyes and ears.

In my thirtieth year on the Monday after Easter my daughter went to bed and never woke. Strong men carried her out. Her arm hung down below the stretcher's

side. Dry-eyed I picked it up and put it back. At thirty-five I struck a boy for stealing from my son. I spun and spun, darkly off balance,

hearing my voice, as if a stranger's, ringing in distant ears. By forty I learned the stepping stones of grief and how the smallest things are joined.

Bach and the Beatles and "Amazing Grace," the quaking aspen leaves and sugar maples in the fall could set me off on cue. At fifty I fake colds instead of tears,

blowing my nose at "Thelma and Louise." What do men want? I don't know. The right to grieve and not be mocked, to touch and be touched, to walk

beyond the porch steps of the soul, to have dreams and speak them without fear. To lie under the willow tree of love. To seek truth in whispers not in shouts.

I like that better than drumming.

Brenda Smith

THE OFFERING PLATE

The collection plate passes

On down the pew row

Empty

“I know this guy named Pete.

A black guy. A really nice guy.

In downtown Greensboro—homeless.

I give to him whenever I can.”

And the plate travels farther

Empty

And which is more pure a gift?

Five dollars in the plate

Or one dollar in the hand?

The five goes farther, further

All around the world

To the poorest of the poor

Or so we hope, by faith

But the dollar goes deeper

A brown hand reaching out

Not to beg, but accept an offering

A kind word passed between two humans

A gift of dignity, more precious than the dollar

To be treated like a human being again

Like someone with a name and face

To accept what a young white boy

Is offering

Not the dollar

Although it will do some good

But a smile and a look

Right into

your eyes.

Brenda Smith

WHAT THE GARDENER KNOWS

The gardener snips the border hedge  
Even, precise  
As the owner has instructed  
The frame of green now uniform  
As he stands and stares  
At the geometric path  
Behind him

He is not a lover of precision  
Still, he smiles to himself  
For he knows that already  
On yesterday's path, blossoms,  
A profusion of pink and draping blue  
Escape over the flat top  
Of the border hedge

He leaves the formal paths  
Descends the hill on ancient  
Stone steps  
Each footfall echoing tradition  
Approaches the wilder beds  
Whose borders are only  
The taller, unruly flowering stalks

Here he pauses for a think  
A stalk of hollyhock blossoms  
The pale pink of an eggshell  
Arrests his gaze  
The thick stem leans out  
At an angle that would never be allowed  
In the formal garden  
The flower begs to be noticed  
A rebel among its obedient sisters  
And he smiles broadly now  
As he passes by without trimming

The gardener knows  
He is the shaper of order from chaos  
That he takes his instructions from the owner  
But his spirit feels the deeper truth  
That no matter how diligent his shears

The plants take their instructions  
From nature herself  
And the natural will always  
Win over the geometric.

And the natural order  
Will always outrank  
The instructions of man.

The gardener knows  
That no matter how powerful  
Is the owner of the garden  
His hedges and flowers  
Will do as nature bids them  
Once he and his clippers move on  
The gardener saves his admiration  
For the power of nature  
Over the power of any man.

Brenda Smith

195

195 countries on this earth

195 potentials for cultural prejudice

195 possibilities of national pride

195 opportunities for oppression

in the name of patriotism

or despotism

or the greater good

Perhaps there can be 195 paths

to heal all differences

195 ways to come together

195 threads to connect with the past

195 views to understand the present

195 dreams to create a future

an endless number of roads to reach Nirvana

Maren Mitchell

BREATH

Since storms and fear affect us each alike,  
no count of limbs can measure depth of pain.  
With two or four or feathers, hearts maintain  
the same innate, intense desire to spike  
all hours of need and hope, also the right  
to loll in light and warmth—not live in vain.  
Could we, confirmed as carnivores, still sane,  
decide to change, not kill to eat, but hike  
the trail of true equality, yet not  
fall prey to further motives to dispatch—  
stretch fields for food, obliterate, not learn,  
for power and wealth, possession, down with shot?  
And would the war against our mortal hatch,  
the killing just for killing's sake, still burn?

Helen Losse  
PRODUCT OF WAR

I am a product of war:  
a product made large  
largely from passion  
grown strong in England  
and America.

Long before egg and sperm united,  
Elsie, who became my mother,  
used her tiny arms  
to move a capstan lathe  
as part of the war effort.  
in days of brown outs, long walks  
when Earl, an American soldier  
stationed in Europe—  
came courting....They married in England,  
and in America, worked long hours  
to make home,(he back home,  
she on this continent for the first time).

I was the growing child,  
running in quiet evening, chasing fireflies,  
tasting raspberries, while they  
let love make me the person I am.

(first published in Iodine Poetry Journal)

Addy Robinson McCulloch  
BENGAZI, SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

Like mothers everywhere, she worries  
when her son doesn't come home on time.  
Lately he's been out all night,  
won't say where he's been or with whom.  
She works as a maid in a hotel, her daughter in another,  
but for her son there is no work.

Still, he does come home.  
By morning he is passed out on his pallet  
outside the one bedroom she shares with her daughter.  
Until tonight. Just after midnight he returns,  
his face black with soot, his shirt torn.  
She watches him fall to the floor, sobbing.  
She hears yelling in the street, goes to the door.  
In the distance, flames leap in the sky.

Calmly she closes and locks the door.  
*Go and wash, she says. Give me your clothes.*  
If she's careful, she can burn his clothes  
in the hotel incinerator.  
One fire to hide another.

Janice Townley Moore  
INDIAN MUSEUM

Living on the site of Fort Hembree,  
we hear the moan of wind  
circling our house.

We show guests the greenest spot  
on the lawn where the sunken well  
now yields a weeping cherry.

Our son finds stones in the garden,  
declaring them arrowheads,  
and disks of granite

where he says Indians once ground corn.  
Today he brings for my belief  
two jagged triangles, says

This little Indian was just starting  
to make arrowheads  
and that's as good as he could carve.

These with a dozen tomahawk heads  
smoothed by the creek  
line our carport for all to admire.

We bruise our toes upon them in the dark.

Marsha Mathews

THE GIRAFFE WOMEN

Because their moms  
and their mom's mom's  
and their moms centuries before them  
wore heavy gold bands on their necks,  
the girls of the Padang hill tribe wear them, too.

Though they bruise the flesh and push  
their spines till their shoulders slope.  
Once on, at five years old, they're on for life,  
no reprieve, even at night.

Myanmar outlawed neck-banding,  
in 1990, women fled  
and settled in a Thai forest,  
where tourists now pay big bucks to snap  
photos of their lovely  
long  
necks.

"They're ignorant,  
poor things," the American says, unable to cry  
because the eyelash growth hormone  
applied that morning  
has robbed her dry.

Marsha Mathews

BEACHING

Some call whales who beach themselves  
a mystery, but I don't know why.

White sand glows, iridescent.  
Gulls toss weightless shadows against it.  
Waves lap it,  
leave wriggles of wine-colored sea weed strewn  
sparks of cowries, whelk shells.  
Sandpipers dart into foam  
billowing like veils, glistening.

Every morning the beach meets  
a new spectacle as the sun pushes  
color into sky: orange,  
pink, teal, blue, so many shades  
of blue; and goes out trailing  
lavender like kite tails.

Douglas McHargue  
EARTH TALK

He comes down the hill  
head held high, toughened  
cheekbones, eyes searching  
horizon like some Mayan warrior  
emerging from lost cities  
long slipped into vine-laced fog  
leaving altars, stone work  
and him.

Crossing the road, he slings  
post hole digger weapon-like  
across his shoulder  
ready for spilled blood,  
but lines up with bronze men  
slicing red clay, laying it open  
for wire talk so we can  
all go on and on about  
airline peanuts' shocking cost,  
cellulite ruining our lives,  
end of world football lockouts.

Ground gutted, cable goes in  
and he remembers  
how his grandfathers  
laid hands on the earth,  
heard everything.

Douglas McHargue  
GENERIC PEOPLE

Gold circling their wrists  
clink like forty carats  
and you wonder why they marvel  
over Cascade, Palmolive,  
ooing at Big Box prices  
when their clipped accents  
and proper nouns,  
designer sweaters scream  
We Own the Franchise.

Why don't they leave stuff  
for people like you  
mortgaged to infinity,  
duct taped car,  
generic soaps  
generic pills.

Generic you,  
khaki pants  
tan shirt  
tan shoes  
that pasty pallor  
people mistake you  
for the wall  
always bumping into you  
startled when you  
blink and breathe.

Brenda Kay Ledford  
PROGRESS

You know the old logging road,  
the one behind the red house,  
the one winding past Mama's garden  
where morning glories climb the corn;  
and you know the path reeks  
with trash and broken pines weep  
where the loggers butchered trees.

And a mourning dove moans  
from the spring where you drew  
water for tea and light oozes  
through the black gum like bile  
as the shadow of a crow passes  
over trillium that will soon fade  
away like all of us.

You know the Shewbird Mountain  
quivers beneath the Thunder Moon  
as the mining company  
creeps up the mountain  
to grind her bones into dust.

(first published in American Society: What Poets See)

Mary Ricketson  
ESCAPE AT FIRES CREEK

Welcome to the wilds  
where woodpeckers,  
hemlocks and river birch  
remember me,  
where trout lily, trillium,  
and dwarf iris  
take my breath away,  
where I hop across  
mossy creek bed rocks,  
then lie down  
on a cold boulder  
and watch Leatherwood Falls  
race down the mountain  
all evening long.

Mary Ricketson  
TOUCHED BY SUICIDE

Tearful nodding heads  
hope for harmony,  
almost start the music.  
Hands across the silence  
grip the current void,  
helplessly hooked by one  
man's painful exit.

We pay our respects,  
droplets of painful love,  
speak words of deepest knowing.

My heart beats one refrain:  
If he had known this love,  
on eve of yesterday, then  
he would be alive today.

Ann Chandonnet

SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING

You've topped three hundred pounds,  
and wear an oxygen mask to sleep.

But you don't care.

You couldn't possibly change.

It goes back to those Saturday nights  
and Sunday mornings.

There's no food in the house,  
and your little sister is hungry.

You push a chair to the cabinets,  
and climb up to reach the crackers.

They are the only edibles in the house.

Arranged in quartets,  
the crackers smell almost like cake.

You are afraid to eat them all,  
so you carefully break off three squares  
from each quartet,

putting the fourth back in the box.

You lick the salt before you bite,  
cautioning Becky about crumbs.

You wait for the sound of the garage door.

You are not to go outside,

talk to neighbors,

use the phone or touch the thermostat.

You sit on the couch with Becky,

sharing an Army surplus blanket that smells of dog and diesel.

When you turn to check the picture window  
behind you, it is the same picture as Saturday afternoon.

Solemn drivers skid wildly past, out of control on ice,  
throwing dirty slush onto the white lawn.

You wait for the sound of the garage door.

You huddle on the threadbare couch,

Becky whimpering, covertly wiping her nose on the blanket,  
the room growing colder and colder.

You dream of a refrigerator  
stuffed with pizza and cheese,

roasts and corn salad,

of a carton of licorice and potato chips  
open on the kitchen table.

At three, the sun slinks below the white horizon ,  
and the cold room grows dark.

Slush curdles.

You wait for the garage door.

Time for a glass of hot water.

(first published in *Referential* magazine)

Lucy Cole Gratton

## QUESTIONS

Were we divided at birth  
in that water of creation?

In those violent beginnings of earth  
were we marked for separation,  
neither part whole?

What else could explain the deep divide,  
the bitter disparity of diversification,  
the widening gulf of opposite sides,  
the threat to our foundation  
that will inevitably take its toll?

Why are ones blessed with prosperity  
so blind to those mired in poverty?  
When did they stop seeing the desperate?  
How did the powerful turn on the weak, separate  
themselves, use others for gain or control?

Why must we always criticize?  
How do we approach the other side?  
Where do we find the will to compromise?  
When will we learn to put vanity aside?  
When ... will we seek humanness for all souls?

Tony Ricciardelli  
THE SAME

One man follows  
the retreating surf.  
One man welcomes  
approaching waves.

One man looks east,  
One man looks west.  
One imagines beyond the horizon,  
the other listens for a clue.  
They are the same.

Miles separate souls,  
that gaze upon stars,  
and sky and mountains.

Miles separate minds  
that grow to understand  
how easy it is  
to upset the balance.

The stranger is your mirror.  
Look into his eyes,  
You are the same.

Anthony J. Rankine

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

Afghanistan can be summed up in five words:  
Child slavery enforced by starvation.

I never grew up under the threat of starvation.

I never grew up with narco-corruption,  
Addiction all about me.

I also never grew up in an Islamic republic,  
Where all intoxicants are banned.

I never grew up feeling vexed  
Because children do not vote.

I never grew up in a country  
Occupied by military forces  
Occupied by Hitler,  
Occupied by Tojo,  
Occupied by Bush,  
Occupied by Obama.

A corn crop failing,  
Starvation an act of nature.  
Planting no corn seed,  
rather opium poppy seed,  
That's not a world,  
Occupied by acts of nature.

Fascism shows its demoncratic face.  
Occupied by corporate-state Banksheviks.  
Occupied by acts of the Overlord.  
Occupied by deliberate zero-food agriculture.  
Occupied by premeditated starvation.  
Occupied by humans who don't vote.  
Occupied by starvation enforced poppy-ninny slavery.

Hitler, Tojo,  
Bush and Obama.  
Enduring Freedom then.  
Enduring Freedom now.