

The Federal Poet

Spring 2007



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THE FEDERAL POETS

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Introduction

THE FEDERAL POETS is the oldest continuously active poetry group in the Washington D.C. area. First convened in 1944, it is a nonprofit organization open to all poets without regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or political affiliation.

Members of **THE FEDERAL POETS** meet at the West End Public Library in Washington, DC, on the third Saturday of every month to read, analyze and discuss their poetry. Visitors are always welcome. Members and visitors who are planning to attend should bring 20 copies of a recently written poem for distribution to those present. The poem will then be discussed with a view to enhancing its chances for publication.

The chief aims of this organization are to improve the members' poems by the exchange of constructive criticism and to increase their exposure through publication and readings.

The Federal Poet, containing the best poems written by members, is published semiannually. Local and corresponding members receive it and may submit poems to the editor for consideration and publication.

THE FEDERAL POETS is a chapter of the **National Federation of State Poetry Societies** and the **Academy of American Poets** and is also affiliated with the **Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines**.

For membership information, write us or visit our website.

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President, Federal Poets: Nancy Allinson
Vice President: Judith McCombs
Treasurer: H. Alexander

Managing Editor, *The Federal Poet*: Pam Coulter Blehert
Spring 2007 Editor: Dean Blehert
Publication design and typesetting: Words & Pictures East Coast
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**Lunch with Kelley, at the Montgomery
Museum of Fine Arts *Café M***

My coat draped across the extra chair
Was like a third person. You didn't care
About my awkwardness, or that I stole
A glance at your reflection in the window.
I hoped your legs would brush against mine
Beneath our tiny, wooden table.

When

We stood outside to part, it seemed a second
Sign – your blush, I mean. The first, I reckoned,
Was the way your hair settled softly
Against your neck, while, matter-of-factly,
A pair of geese flew across the lake,
Just above the water and leaving no wake.

Mark Dawson

Whose World Is It Anyway

the world is toying with me

all afternoon
gray and white clouds play musical chairs
water races in fat and lean patterns on the glass

waiting for the bus
it's come to a dry departure
and menacing skies

things happen in the move from bus to subway
a whoop and rush of rain like horses let out at the
starting gate
bodies hurtle to escape

through the subway tube
in the elements again
overflowing from the dance of cupped leaves and wind

a bird flies to a lamppost
brush of black ink
a bird on the wire

awareness emerges
laced with surprise
that I look to the bird for a sign

bird, show your knowledge
of this corner of the cosmos
of the likely continuing of rain

like a colonial power
I expect response to command
the bird stays seconds
then flies

all I gave
brief, untutored glances
small change
and got what I paid for

Brenda Radford

High Noon

the flock sweeps into the city

hives in the leafhead of an oak
and from its shadowy oasis
dispenses song

and then bursts forth
to seed the sky
and shoal off into the clouds

leaving the tree
shorn of its minstrelsy
and dwarfed
by the brute monotony of a seven-tiered parking garage
slabbed up against the sky
to shag the air
with a more uncanny green

Charles G. DuBose Jr.

A Seagull on the Chesapeake Bay

“They call it
Moewe
there at the Baltic Sea”.

And she turned
her sunburned shoulder
into the wind.

The ship was easing
its way through
sharp little waves.

The sky had darkened
ready to release some of
its heavy clouds’ fullness.

“They call them *Kleine Moewen*
there at the Baltic Sea
- so far away - “

And she backed away
from the bow of the ship and
the memories of times long gone by.

Ingeborg Carsten-Miller

The Lament of a Roma Boy

Mother!

Today at school I read a book in the library
with pictures of the rest of our country,
so neat and pretty.
Why is our dwelling so shabby?

The sweetness of spring
The emergence of butterflies swinging
And the humming birds cheerfully singing
Why is my heart crying?

I met her!

She was kind
She was nice
She admired my tan and dark hair,
so she declared.
“You have the blackest eyes
with the stars twinkling in the center.
Like the ebony night with a full moon, I adore you!”

Mother!

Could you imagine how I felt?
I was drowned in the pool of her blue eyes.
As deep as the ocean.

I never knew sorrow!
Until another pair of blue eyes
stared at me scornfully
making me feel naked!
Her painted lips uttered nothing,
but the arrow shot from her eyes
stabbed profoundly at my heart.
And I was bleeding, but chose to ignore.

Yet, I failed to forget
my little friend's blushed cheeks
that quickly changed to crimson red.
She tried to protest and reached out to me.
Her topaz eyes suddenly got so pale in shock.

Her left hand was jerked rudely
as she was led away forcefully;
while, there, stood I helplessly.

We were just innocent boy and girl
We were just innocent boy and girl

Mother!
I was born in Austria
You were delivered in Czechoslovakia
Grandma was from Romania
Great granny lived in Yugoslavia
We are European, we are European
Every bit of it, no more nor less

I'll take train to Vienna;
I'll ride buses
I'll explore street after street
and walk from door to door
'till I find her, my admirer.
It doesn't matter how long.
Whatever it takes!
She and I shall prove to her elders,
that beneath our skin colors
The same old red spurs!

Ninie G. Syarikin

Everlasting Umbilical Cord

The phone stretches to her ear
Coils around her heart
Fuses with her daughters cry
Spoon-feeds all her doubts
Bouncing thru a tunnel of sweetness
Without a tear in the lining
Seamlessly long and never ending
Even scissors cannot separate
The life from the line.....

Pamela Passaretta

Summer Night

for Lori and Howard

To go where you are embraced
To offer without duplicity
To accept without demur.

To make yourself light as a dandelion seed,
or heavy as felled redwoods.
To be cautious as a tributary,
or rash as Grand Rapids.

To die in tranquility,
and wake in the arms of something divine
like the swelter of a summer night.

Marjorie Sadin

Portrait with Buddha & 7-11 Big Gulp

I stack my Big Bite with relish,
onion, thick, mustard yellow, gooey processed cheese.

I approach a shiny metallic cube, push the square red button
& wait for chili.
The machine groans as though I had interrupted what had
been a much-deserved sleep.

I think of diarrhea as gobs of brown mush splatters my bun.
I fill my Big Gulp plastic cup with 64.ounces of coke & ice.

The world is my oyster. I bite into the bun,
step in line behind a short, Hispanic man with a silver cross
hanging from his thick, tree trunk neck.

He removes a sombrero from his head as bellowing clouds of
flesh drooped out from under his white t-shirt like a dog's
tongue

falling to rest on his moccasin skin belt. He's bald and
seems almost sublime this afternoon, an American Buddha

fully present. The tall, butter knife thin African behind the
register shouts NO NO.

Pay before read. The bearded homeless white man hugging
his crutches mutters fuck off,
dropping the Sunday edition of the Washington Post which
scatters like several napkins

as it hits the floor. I reassemble the Post, step back
in line & hand the man behind the register a twenty then
collect my change.

Buddha holds 7-11's front door open
while I walk outside & into another day where we're both
alive sharing a single moment.

Steven Russell

Crows Eating a Dead Rat

On my long run—heading onto Hains Point
in a downpour—I came across two glistening black
crows tearing intestines from a dead rat.

I thought about crows that whole run.
When dead rats get flattened on pavement, tails
sticking out like string, even crows won't touch them.

Crows, you know, are supposed to be a bad omen
and have negative effects on artists, like Van Gogh,
who painted that flock circling overhead darkly,

then shot himself in the same cornfield.
In Hopi legend though, Crow gets the last laugh
on Hawk, who invites him to a rabbit feast.

Secretly, Hawk serves just gizzards and skin—
not knowing it's a dish Crow really loves. Poets
running in rainstorms see things like crows eating rats

as good news. Crow, clever bird, is cleaning up
the mess of creation. Whether by design or not,
Crow has a job to do. So do poets.

Martin Dickinson

Pond, Late Summer

Where herons once fished, rafts of algae
drift like false green islands, riding
the silt-laden waters. Somewhere upstream
construction blooms. Here the wood duck glides
with her brood of nine, male and female now
revealed in crests or white-ringed eyes;
their grazing paths meander through green
like silica in marble.

Then a V of ripples,
the low rafts heave on their swollen sea,
a young muskrat surfaces, shakes water, dives
as we count, one thousand and six, then rises
in the shallows beside us to dabble its gleanings.
Past the ducklings another furred stone goes under,
rises and splashes, then heads for the first--
we see its back gleam, its arched tail swing
like a rudder as it swims the strait they have cut
through land-shapes of drifting green slurry.
The first does not flee, they nuzzle like wolf-cubs,
then dabble their harvest.

We watch their tiny
rat feet lifting weeds, their small faces munching.
I want to give thanks for their trust. Around us
the pond is a breathing sea at rest:
if I were to kneel and slide my hands
into that living water, I would drift
like a stick in that warm green lapping,
like a ripple, lifted and freed.

Judith McCombs

"Pond, Late Summer" appeared in *Snowy Egret* 67, no. 2
(Autumn 2004): 14-15; and in *The Habit of Fire: Poems Selected
and New* (Washington, D.C.: Word Works, 2005).

Herakles (and Hebe) on Olympus

though wed in the heavens above
his soul still hunts the forests of death
each time he lifts the festive bowl
lion or boar draws dying breath

his talk is with the gods
and with his golden bride
but his eyes stalk the nether world
where he ranges in mortal pride
(another stag from the rocks is hurled)

like a piece of banished night
he dwells in the gods' everlasting day
and Hebe's lute never dispels
the gloom of hunter wed to his prey

ah, pity the wife chosen to play
for this immortal castaway

Charles G. DuBose Jr.

Solstice Haiku

Spotted fawn spooked
by my car sprints alongside.
Shall I let her win?

Blair Ewing

Balloon Animals

No matter how hard I tried I could not twist
the pink balloons into dachshunds nibbling
at the lips of the children, or circular hats,
plastic crowns turning them into tyrants.
At the parties the other clowns jeered me,
poured out my seltzer in the bathroom sink,
stole my giant shoes, threw out playing cards
I used to believe contained magic.
Makeup and blood ran down my chin
each time I fought their stupid pranks –
a wicked punch and a run in with a unicycle
before 32 jumped in their car and sped away.
At night, though, my floating blobs rose up
outside in the summer air, with fireflies inside.
They were UFOs or the northern lights. They
could have been almost anything, and beautiful.

Donald Illich

Office Bop

To Brandon Johnson who showed me how

My fingers walk along the keys tip tapping here thumb clicking mouse
in this rhythm that looks like I'm at work but I pray that the Bop
will keep me from slamming into the walls of my cubicle
with the uneasy mood swing queasy feeling that I have
just don't want to be here no offense to my mates they're all
going through the same dance but we show it in different moves
if my fingers could talk out loud folks would accuse me of being disruptive
but I just don't know what it is the weather or the rude commute
this morning when the edge of my newspaper brushed against
this woman's face enough to make her shoot me a look that made me ask
for forgiveness and hide behind the newsprint no solace in the news either
looks like Iran could be the next Iraq and what can we do about it anyway
my fingers keep prancing around making it look like I'm ever so involved
in my beloved job sorry mates no offense we're all jitterbugging
away some kind of anger or protest that we try to control most of the time
my paycheck reflects the 2.2% that gives me a few more bucks for a job
well done. Goodnight or good day, thanks for the pay, got to run,
the phone just buzzed, can't swat it down, I'm here, hello and how can I help.
My fingers take a snooze. My mouth opens and the smooth words
of customer service ooze and we glide away until the lunch bell rings.
Good night, good day, have a good one.

Nancy Allinson

A Man in Business Dress

A man in business dress,
just putt-putting –
no Harley: A leatherless
moped.

Dean Blehert

Mechanics

This morning my dad escorts me
to the Chevette's operating table
where I'm expected to save a life
by propping up its body, replacing
a worn tire with a limb from the trunk.

I turn the crank slowly, awkwardly.
The car lifts up in seizures.
I fear it will crumple over:
a heavy man falling on his doc.

My father rolls the black wheel
next to me, the tools gathered
in a grimy white cloth on the road,
parts and fastener gleaming
in the sun's surgery room light.

Turning the bolts the wrong
way, nearly knocking the jack
aside, my dad screaming at me,
I would've rather been in school
without my algebra homework
and no way to translate symbols
crawling up the blackboard.

My dad takes over, ordering me
to just hold things.
He has the patient up
and around in five minutes,
our drive to the grocery store
unimaginable in my hands.

You better do well in school and
hope strangers are willing to help
your ass, my dad says as we walk
through the front of the store.

He chooses sausage for the barbecue.
On the other side of the aisle
I pick up a yellow carton of eggs.
I secretly crack them, one by one.

Donald Illich

The Color of Drink

My father darkened his days
with a black snarl. He struggled
to loose the butterfly wings of despair,
foraged for a funnel to crawl into, slipped
on sidewalks sad as strewn trash on gray streets.

My father, empty as a yellow bowl
without the smell of honeysuckle.
Life for him joyless:
the green lay silent, the red invisible.
He did not hear the blue of a baby's whisper,
did not ponder the lemon moon,
the ocean bottom brimmed with gold.
The bottle held secrets those long purple nights.

Mary L. Westcott

"Mechanics" appeared in *Lullwater Review*, Fall 2006, Vol. XVI,
No. II

Death of a Barber

The woman in the smock hacks at my hairy
Scalp with her scissors as the daylight fades.
"A heart attack--he went so fast. Poor Larry,"
She says with all the warmth of her steel blades.
A magazine from June 2002
Lies dogeared in an empty chair. The shears
Snap briskly to the swish of rinsed shampoo.
My disembodied hair drifts down like years.

The strip mall's lights begin their nightly glow.
Across the street, the Pilgrim Holiness
Church's neon sign blares JESUS SAVES.
The streams of peacock efflorescence flow
In waves along an orphaned patch of grass--
What Whitman called the uncut hair of graves.

Miles David Moore

"Death of a Barber" first appeared in Rattapallax 13.

Please, Please, Please

Bury James Brown, please.
Does someone believe he will
return to revise his will?
I think not.

Imagine if he could return.
James would leave that coffin,
dance the good foot,
sing 'Superbad, Superslick.'

It's crazy to hold his body hostage.
He's not coming back.
Put James in the ground.
Please, please, please.

Averille E. Jacobs

Andy Warhol

Psychedelic pop superstar St. Vitus dancing
killed people: sycophants, hangers-on
(losers, they said) in the Factory.

After all, it was the 60s, time of turmoil anyway,
Vietnam war, assassins, Woodstock,
kids dying of heroin at 28.

(One young man waltzed out the
window on speed because
he knew he could fly.
Warhol said, "too bad I wasn't there to
get it on film.")

The uptown boys were
boring. The drag queens had
the better ideas. (Where are you now,
downtown boys?)

You stopped painting.
Movies were the thing, music, multimedia,
(panting, redefining Art as everything, anything,
nothing special about it: pornographic,
piss paintings, proliferation of photographic
portraits.

Dying by SCUM
would have been appropriate
but you lived on, corseted, closeted,
finally killed by
medical malpractice,
in for a gallbladder op.

Pop pope, critics now catalogue your work
call you legend, man who destroyed people,
man who killed art, icon converting himself
into non-icon, non-person, perfect replication,
perfect reptile.

Someone should “do” Andy Warhol,
a silkscreen replica, garish colors,
scarred, scared pretender,
replicated thousands of times, each
for 15 minutes of fame.

Where are you now,
downtown boy?

Pam Blehert

Skype you old Monte man

Skype you old Monte man
Will you not stay
Put up your AT & T network
Just for one day

All things I'll give you
You will be my guest
Bells for your jennet
Of hafnium the best.

Hunter Alexander

A Dis-Scourging Word

We pray for an end to criminality,
but I fear the boredom
of Batman, Superman,
and all the other out-of-work
scourges of crime. Whom will they
scourge? Staring sullenly at a street
peopled by new, shining beings,
the Lone Ranger swigs from his bottle,
pulls his gun, aims it (hardly wobbling)
at Tonto's feet and yells "Dance, Injun!"
The Special Victims Unit is peering
at shiny new faces, seeking the subtlest indicators
of CHILD ABUSER (you, sir, did you smile
at that girl jumping rope? Was that a leer?)
The cold case unit is mobbed by shiny
new people who want to confess their
20-year-old unsolved crimes. Homeland
Security is tottering, looking for kids
with fire crackers and babies
not yet pacified by Prozac.
The old guys who get jobs wearing
uniforms as security men at banks
and big buildings are hoping to bring back
the art of elevator operation. Spiderman
is just hanging there, over Times Square,
sadly rocking.

Dean Blehert

Nietzsche's Imaginary Pistol

Divine Lou,
Your silent absence gives life and not
the lie to my illusions. In truth, I yearn
to be in your harness again, feel your
traces lick my back without mercy.
In the company of procax lumps,
I conjure a pistol to cool my burning eyes
& calm the storms which still my pen:
A rampant eagle rises like a banner
above a base trademark, over its round
body of braided steel & tongue-like trigger.
Pregnant shells add weight to the hand.
My hands grow bigger by half as you
stroke stippled rosewood haunches,
abrased hammer. Like you, it entices the index
in a most lewd manner. A bullet launches
& I banish my trenchant stammer. A splashy
moan proclaims your triumph, evaporates low
thoughts of the unworthy women. A metaphoric
Marysas, now dying, remembers his manners.
Dionysus' capacious laughter raises us up
& you turn & clamber once more to the top,
imaginary revolver tucked into my suspenders, I pursue
an ecstatic dithyramb (which you will never understand)
escaping my small mouth, rising into unwalled mountain air.

Blair Ewing

Procax is a Latin word, meaning insolent.– ed.

On Seeking God

He thought it would be fun
to play hide and seek. These were
simpler times, when his only playmate
was God. "God," he said, "you hide,
and I'll try to find you." He covered his eyes
with his hands and counted for a long time
(and in those days, a long time
was a real long time), but when he opened his eyes,
God was still everywhere,
in plain view, which spoiled the fun.

He said, "No no no, you've got to HIDE,
get it?" (God has always been a rather
difficult child. We used to know that.
It didn't bother us. We thought that was
how it was supposed to be.)

So this time, he counted...and counted
like forever – more like forever
than what passes for forever these days.
But when he opened his eyes, there was
God, the big goof, as obvious as an ostrich's ass,
except more so, since God didn't even
turn away from man, much less hide his head.

So he said to God, "OK, I see this is
difficult for you, sort of like ceasing
to be Yourself, so let's turn it around: I'll hide,
and You come find me. Don't forget
to count...", and he looked for a good hiding place,
but where can you hide when everywhere is God,
nowhere to hide but within God? How could he not
be found instantly? But he had a bright idea:
He would simply not be there. He'd be elsewhere
or nowhere at all. He simply wouldn't be,
just go dead, unconscious, oblivious, unfindable,
so that's what he did, and God couldn't find him,
and, he noticed, he couldn't find God either – if there was

a God, and if there was himself, for that matter – he couldn't find himself either and couldn't recall what the hypothetical-he had been looking for.

That worked fine, except the game was no longer a game, since it had no ending (so far).
And from then on something, perhaps a trace of himself, sought himself, occasionally, in the process, catching a glimpse of divinity, or sought divinity, occasionally catching a fleeting glimpse of himself.

Dean Blehert

A Night at The Imperial

Power is the theater,
and conspiracy the play.

Blair Ewing

Ode to Sarah

What must it be like to quiver
against a leg at mere touch,
lounging with a wide white belly exposed,
paws drawn in like the folded hands
of a sleeping nun? To lay back humming
on a quilted bed, chin vanishing into furry neck,
hair ruffled like an untended garden?

What must it be like for eyes to sink
half-closed at sweet-talk murmurs,
to blink in dazed drunkenness, lips curved
in a half smile, then a purr drumming slow music.
It's love, really, a meditation on the moment,
hushed and slightly sad.

Mary L. Westcott

Do you recognize this cat?

If we ever got divorced
I'd have to abscond with the cat.
They'd put out posters, perhaps —
"When last seen..."
and use an aging morph
on Gypsy, giving her
wise eyes
and a touch of grey
around the ears.

Pam Blehert

Seeing Is Believing

In the light between shadows,
in the grass between houses and woods,
the orange deer with one good antler,
two points on the left, stands ready to leap,
tense flanks rippling, head lowered,
half-turned to the neighbor's cat who stalks him,
ears flat, spine low in the grass, keeping
one deer leap away. What staring young
animals they are, caught between danger
and play, unsure of their place
on this peaceable slope. Cat sinks down
in the grass, its hunter's tail lashing
and lashing, its haunch weight shifting
as it readies to spring--then settles, chews grass.
Deer waits and waits, looks away at last
to nuzzle the grapevine that smothers
a young cherry beside it. When deer starts chewing
cat moves in a rush like an arrow--deer
leaps backwards and sideways, stops,
sidesteps to circle the cat, still hoping
for a game they can play, still keeping
one deer leap apart. Cat waits, looks elsewhere,
ears up, till some rustling or flutter
pulls it to life--cat races
past deer, disappears in underbrush.
Deer quivers, gives up and grazes.

I still want to believe, like that Quaker painter,
in open green clearings where no one is prey,
where light streams down like palpable grace,
where even the animals--green-eaters, blood-hunters--
lie down believing, lion with lamb.

Judith McCombs

"Seeing Is Believing" appeared in *Snowy Egret* 67, no. 2
(Autumn 2004): 14-15; and in *The Habit of Fire: Poems Selected
and New* (Washington, D.C.: Word Works, 2005).

In Praise of Cornish Cows

Silly to come so far, just
to enjoy cattle, to admire their colors,
honey, rust, black on white. Their shapes
move across green Cornish hills, leaning slightly
toward the upward thrust of the slope.
In the half-light of evening, things appear
closer. It's easy to imagine stepping
from one slope to another, across this small valley.
Our mingling would not disturb the cows
if we walked with them to the barn, like trusting monks
to vespers. This afternoon a small herd came
to see us, pressed up against the gate
by the old tin mine. When you leaned forward,
the tan cow licked your forehead with her great
tongue, a rough benediction.

Ann Rayburn

Time

Time backwards is a special case
of time forward.
It is not impossible,
just unlikely.

But does time exist at all,
or is it something we have reified?
What underlies it all is change,
but if you say that change
occurs at a certain rate,
time sneaks in the back door.
Or if you try to explain
the lock-step correlation of like change,
you cannot.

Cesium clocks tick in unison.
They are picks
plucking the fabric of change,
and this gives time its fine grain.
But is the fabric time itself,
or the warp of fields that link all change?

Time is a scythe
slicing through a field of wheat.
Stem by stem it ticks . . .
like the background hiss
of the universe.

Lee Giesecke

Before Sunrise

(reviewing two films)

Calculate the possibilities
of Céline and Jesse, two seraphs in grunge,
keeping their last-second promise to meet
again at a Viennese railway station
on Beethoven's birthday. Remember,
they already vowed not to write each other
or exchange addresses; correspondence,
in their young experience, serves only to speed
love's death. So what might happen?
Neither returns; he comes, she doesn't;
she comes, he doesn't; one is too late
or too early; his plane crashes; her train wrecks;
they reunite, and within minutes
exhaust their previously inexhaustible
conversation, or within hours
open the wounds they failed to inflict
before; or they elope,
find jobs, have kids,
and spend ever after at each other's throats.

This is the point: possibilities
are not to calculate. The chances
of their meeting at all; of their wandering
those streets where rats in Homburgs
exchanged conspiracies with sickly smiles,
drove vans over each other, were run aground
in sewers; of their ascending
that Ferris wheel where Harry Lime
offered Holly Martins a hypothetical
twenty thousand pounds for each crushed rat--
"Tax-free, old boy, absolutely tax-free"--
and redeeming that evil with a simple kiss
were just as infinitesimal
as the black-and-white trees of the Prater
regaining their green, the rubble
being cleared away, the Schönbrunn and Staatsoper
seeing illumination by night again.

Miles David Moore

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Peaceful Movement In The Cemetery

The stones don't move
But the trees sing
With fluttering leaves—
The bench is green
So is my bike
My hand writes these words
I'm not dead

Pamela Passaretta

Cover art: "Forsythea in East Potomac Park" by Coulter