



2016

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FOURTH ANNUAL  
**BATTLE**  
OF  
THE **BARDS**  
POETRY CONTEST

.....

WINNING ENTRIES



Poudre River  
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**POUDRE RIVER**  
**PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
DISTRICT

# BATTLE OF THE BARDS POETRY CONTEST AND POETRY READING

To celebrate National Poetry Month 2016, the Poudre River Public Library District is holding this special program to engage both adult and teenage creative writers in our community for a multi-generational poetry contest and poetry reading event.

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- THE POUDBRE RIVER FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY  
WOLVERINE FARM PUBLISHING COMPANY & BOOKSTORE
- MICHAEL LIGGETT *Mike has practiced law in Fort Collins for 39 years. He is a former President of the Poudre River Public Library District. He is a lover of poetry and those that write poems. Mike is returning as a Battle of the Bards co-host for the third year in a row and the library district is grateful for his generous donation in support of this year's program.*
- MELISSA BEAVERS *Public Services Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Adult Poetry Judge*
- KEN DRAVES *Deputy Director & Harmony Library Manager; Battle of the Bards Committee Member*
- MEG SCHIEL *Library Assistant; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Adult Poetry Judge*
- MOLLY THOMPSON *Jobs and Career Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member*
- DIANE TUCCILLO *Teen Services Librarian; Battle of the Bards Committee Member; Teen Poetry Judge and Battle of the Bards co-host.*

## TEEN CATERGORY JUDGES:

- ELIZABETH CHOQUETTE *Elizabeth is a freshman at Fossil Ridge High School and a member of Poudre River Library's Interesting Reader Society (Teen IRS). She enjoys reading, writing, and swimming, and is a co-host for this year's Battle of the Bards event.*
- SHEALA DAWN HENKE *Sheala is a writer and elementary school teacher who enjoys mentoring and working with young writers as they develop their own voice in writing. She has published two books in her IDEA-33 young adult science fiction series and collaborated with "The Muses," a group of local teen writers in the Poudre School District, to share in the creation process of her debut novel.*
- CLAIRE FLIPPEN *Claire is an 8th grader at Leshar Middle School and a member of Poudre River Library's Interesting Reader Society (IRS).*

## ADULT CATERGORY JUDGES:

- ABY KAUPANG *Aby Kaupang, is the author of Little "g" God Grows Tired of Me (SpringGun Press, 2013), Absence is Such a Transparent House (Tebot Bach, 2011), and Scenic Fences | Houses Innumerable (Scantly Clad Press, 2008). She holds master's degrees in both Creative Writing and Occupational Therapy from Colorado State University. She lives in Fort Collins with the poet, Matthew Cooperman, and their two children. More information can be found at [AbyKaupang.com](http://AbyKaupang.com).*
- CHLOÉ LEISURE *Chloé Leisure is a poet and community creative writing educator. A Yooper at heart, she now finds her home in Fort Collins, Colorado. Her poetry has appeared in Matter, PANK, Paterson Literary Review, A Poetic Inventory of Rocky Mountain National Park, and Permafrost. She was the 2014 Fort Collins Poet Laureate, and is the author of the chapbook, The End of the World Again.*

# ADULT FINALISTS

## LANGUAGE FIRST

*by Allison Cleymaet*

I can find my mother in any schoolroom photo  
The prettiest in a negative sea, waves of brown faces capped with darker hair  
Smiling when all the others stood at solemn attention  
Stern nuns, flanking the columns, heads shorn like sheep instead of shepherds  
No wonder my father, severe, of Old World stock, chose such laughing imported gaiety

In second grade, I learned you could find me in any photo too  
A new boy was coming to class, heralded as the Other Brown Kid  
Other? Who's the first? You are, they all said – confused  
Looking down at my hands, darker than the wood of a Ticonderoga #2

The same hands that, pulling weeds from the family lawn, waved at new neighbors  
Who, in a fine Mercedes Benz, wondered aloud if I might know if the owners were home -  
Could I tell them they'd come?  
I stood dumb until the young man shook his head, "No English" – stage whispered to his bride

When grown comfortable at last in my nutshell, the skin around my mouth bleached  
I used those hands to scrub at what I imagined were streaks of pillow spit  
Frightening pigment into clusters around plaques of white  
That spread inexorably across cheeks, hands, limbs. Dalmatian spots -  
A mutt revealed  
A miracle of sorts, this talking dog  
Which, when told it speaks so well, no accent, no slur,  
Growls, "Thank you, Sir."

# IN THE NURSING HOME

*by Bear Jack Gebhardt*

My old momma, this learned woman,  
is in this moment a child again---  
her dust bowl eight year old farm girl self--  
innocent, open, wide eyed, calm,  
trusting me, her silver haired son  
to bring her lessons from the wider world,  
most especially where she'll sleep tonight.  
"Right here, mom. This is your bed. Your name's  
on the door, and on the list of who gets meals."

She nods her head while learning, the way she once nodded  
when her brother showed her how a horse needs brushed,  
her mother how the eggs need whipping,  
and, last year, the doctor decoding MRI anomalies.

My heart breaks, or at least goes soft.  
"Here mom, drink your milk. I'll hold the straw  
it's good for your bones."  
She smiles, nods, sips.

# UNDOCUMENTED, LEFT IN THE DESERT

*by Bear Jack Gebhardt*

I've come looking for my bones  
I dropped them south of Nogales.  
I could not carry them further, my thirst...

and then your truck came, men piled  
my bones in on others where they -- my bones--  
were numbered, chipped, tested.  
My brothers, my sisters, gave up on my ghost.

I've come now for my bones  
This graveyard of John Does,  
Jane Does, Hernandez, Gonzales, Hermillo,  
I've come for my ankle, your elbow  
My thigh, your skull, my jawbone  
we are one skeleton, one family structure:  
some in the desert, some in the truck,  
some with guns in a tower guarding that fence,  
some home weeping with hearts broke.

I've come for my bones.  
I will not rest  
until we are again one body,  
whole, back together again.

# THE HAGGIS

*by Daniel Harvey*

There is a beast in Scotland  
I hear the locals tell  
who doesn't love the company  
of others all too well

He lives up in the highlands  
betwixt, between the trees  
he won't be seen  
by man or beast  
he's sneakier than these

He only ventures out at night  
to creep along the dells  
and eat up little children  
(he tracks them by their smells)

He stalks amongst the houses  
and raps upon each door  
and hopefully you're fast asleep  
on dreamland's happy shores

For if you're not he'll find you  
and snatch you from your bed  
and shove you in his gunny sack  
(of bed sheets it is said)

He'll hobble back the way he came  
and slip into the night  
the only trace he'll leave behind  
are footprints of his flight

So go to bed my children  
and say your little prayers  
and don't you mind the tapping  
of The Haggis on the stairs

# DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

*by Erik Hokanson*

We chose to be alive, yet barely alive  
Like business districts in quiet gray cities.  
For too many years of our lives tomatoes  
Appeared on the vine changing from green  
To red in a manner mostly unnoticed.  
For too many years we waited a day too long  
To look up a long-forgotten friend  
Supposing there would always be time.

The skeletons assembled and said  
For too many years of our lives  
We met the succession of days and places  
Fretfully thinking of what we would become  
While the blue jays and green leaves  
Appeared on cypress trees  
Like exclamation points  
Without pretension or preoccupation.

We twisted ourselves into question marks  
Around our moment of evaporating time  
While fertile mists infused the damp woods  
With revitalizing fragrance of rainfall.

It all happened so quickly, this swift breeze  
That shifted the sands, this quick sprint  
Through childhood and first love,  
Adolescence and jobs that weren't yet real jobs.  
We joined hands in marriage perhaps too soon,  
Gave life to children while working long days.  
Our grandchildren arrived in the moment  
Of incapacitation, when our legs  
Began to lose their limberness.

We are the dead subtle echoes in the woods  
All around you. We remember the long hours  
And days in which you presently live  
Like elemental parables of sunlight  
Reminding you  
Not to take yourself too seriously.

# OH MY COD! (FISHFUL THINKING)

by *Dennis McDonald*

The well-cooked cod  
Flaky and regal on the platter, bones and all,  
Hears the clatter of knives and forks  
And the complimentary conversation  
And is pleased with her destiny

Pity the uncaught others, she thinks.  
sisters and brothers,  
Lost at sea, the monotonous extrusion of kelp  
and creel,  
The centerpiece at no table,  
The small fish in a big pond

They never knew the searing thrill of  
evisceration  
The glowing heat of the oven  
The flake of flesh and the smack of satisfied  
lips  
The pleasure of giving the ultimate pleasure

Life had always been tragic  
Until now,  
Full of fear and desperation  
Lying low in the murky deeps of the ocean

Feeling the current of rushing jaws  
That swallowed friends and family  
Their diminishing numbers  
Then languishing in the stories of their prime  
When they were so plentiful  
They caused wars  
And changed the flow of history

But much had changed  
And in her quiet moments  
She often thought  
There must be more  
And now she knew

"More fish daddy," she heard  
"It's not just fish, dear, it's cod,  
and a well-cooked cod at that."

She smiled as the four prongs of the fork  
entered her flesh once more  
And peeled the last of it  
from her bones

That might have been the end of her  
satisfaction  
But later her skeleton roiled in a tub of salty  
water  
Even better than her cold home  
Now her marrow ebbed into the water

And as the segments of her spine separated  
she knew she might live well beyond her time  
Farther than anyone's hopes  
Maybe forever



# THE CASE OF THE MURDERED BARD

by David More

To all you Shakespeare fans out there, I say  
The Stratford actor never wrote a play,  
No way: **Kit Marley** (known as “Marlowe”)  
wrote

Four centuries ago the words we quote  
From the collection called the *Folio*  
*Of Shakespeare Plays*—and scores of  
*Sonnets* too,

So listen up! The evidence makes clear  
That Marley used the pseudonym

## SHAKESPEARE—

Which worked out well for Mr. **Will**

## Shakspeare,

Whose *name* got him a sinecure and share  
Of ticket sales at the Globe Theater door—  
Although not knowing whom he stood-in for:  
The greatest poet of his time for sure.

None stood above him in dramatic art.  
On top of that, Kit played a secret part  
In England’s anti-Catholic war: a spy  
Who gave *good service* to the Queen, no  
lie.

But his belief in Jesus Christ fell short,  
According to a sland’rous, signed report  
Addressed to Privy Councilors at Court  
(A list of blasphemies Kit spoke in sport).  
The hearsay was heresy—*dangerous* it  
read:

His *mouth must be stopped*. (His words  
had ‘street cred’)

The upshot was a dagger in the head  
Two inches deep, the Royal Inquest said.

But Marley’s *sudden end* did not mean  
*dead*,

Because another head got stabbed instead—  
That of a Welsh reformer with bad luck,  
Into whose cadaver the blade stuck.  
In fact, Kit Marley’s murder in a fight  
Was faked by friends who had their story  
tight—

And tacit right (per royalty’s discernment)  
To end his plight and foil his internment.

The punishment for blasphemy was certain—  
A tragic scene before the final curtain—  
Burned to death—or strangled by noose  
end—

Would be his mortal fate. (Oh, Muse forbend!)  
The plan to rescue him had no loose ends—  
The jury bought the story they confabbed,  
How Christopher allegedly got stabbed  
By his companion in a “tavern brawl”  
About the tab for food and alcohol.

Th’ equation was simple. Do the moral math:  
Instead of punishment to take his breath,  
They banish him for life and fake his death;  
Thus saving Kit from certain prosecution  
For heresy—and painful execution—  
So he’d continue dishing-out sublime  
And timeless poetry while in his prime:  
The greatest poet-playwright of all time.

# REBELS OF BLUE SAGE

by *Belle Schmidt*

(To my sister Irene,  
a borderline bibliomaniac)

There is a story I must tell  
That happened at Blue Sage  
About the books that came to life  
To deal with stress and rage.  
T'was in the very dead of night  
That novels jumped off shelves.  
While deep in sleep lie man and wife,  
Titles danced about like drunken elves.  
Hundreds of volumes marched as one  
Clutching their pages close and tight  
And while advancing up the stairs  
They cried, "It's time to fight!"  
The hallway hardbacks did their part  
by blocking windows and doors —  
Clearly a declaration of war;  
What next would be in store?  
Tipsy texts in towers on the floor  
Leaned, swayed, then toppled down.  
The helter-skelter of books converted  
Rooms into a battleground profound.  
Pent-up hatred fueled the heated hoard  
The time of reckoning had come  
With vengeance in its very core  
They behaved like savages, or scum

The Mighty Tome for order called,  
"The master plot we must carry out."  
The killer classics, their anger rife,  
Cheered like a troop of honor scouts.  
"The house is ours," they roared,  
"Together we can finish the task."  
Onward to the bedroom they charged.  
What they did there, please don't ask!  
Non-fiction fought with all its might  
To be free of their strait-jacket life.  
Rebels — they conquered Blue Sage  
With violence, verve and strife.  
They fought a fight beyond mere words  
And like the historic battle at Troy  
They relished the taste of victory  
Chanting, "Destroy, destroy, destroy."  
The written works showed no remorse  
And like many conquests of old  
From living room to living room  
The story is embellished as it's told.  
The sad saga of Blue Sage Drive  
Tells how a house faced its doom,  
And how disgruntled books rose up  
And sealed it like King Tut's tomb.

# BREATHING TO REMEMBER, A SESTINA FOR MY PARISIENNE, ANONYME

*by Morgan Taylor*

This morning I sat down without your name,  
without your presence, with only a vague  
memory of your face. Again I looked  
through that old, brown, paper bag of  
photos,  
hoping for some clue, some overlooked hint  
of you. As always though, you're still not  
here.

I have just the one faded snap, pinned here  
to the wall beside my desk. There's the  
name  
of the street, 'Rue Charles de Gaulle', as a  
hint

of where we were. There are trees, and  
that's vague,  
yes, but they point to springtime. As photos  
go, it's quite eloquent. It's how I looked

that day. But there's no sign of how you  
looked.

The camera I handed you? It's here.  
It's boxed in the garage with the photos,  
Metro stubs, postcards, matchbooks, and  
the name  
scribbled on a cafe napkin. A vague  
and inscrutable scrawl. Barely a hint.

I have nothing that says, "This is a hint  
to remind me of her eyes, how they looked  
by that April river." Nothing so vague.

Still, a strong sense of you has drifted here  
from then 'til just now. It's not in a name,  
or a thin cache of letters, or photos.

It's in lavender's sweet flavors. Photos  
share faces, shapes, and forms, but just a  
hint  
of real life. They're color without a name.  
They're hand-caught, bright, stunted  
moments that looked  
grand to fascinated eyes. They were here.  
They were captured. Now they fade. Fade  
to vague.

You're here because lavender isn't vague.  
That spring day, it was your scent. No  
photos  
captured that. It was a rapture there. Here,  
it's a glory remembered. It's the hint  
that shares the fierce sugar of how you  
looked,  
bright and wild in the grass, saying my  
name.

When you grow more vague in my eyes, the  
hint  
that trumps those lost photos of how you  
looked,  
though you're far from here, lets me taste  
your name.

# A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC', A SESTINA INSPIRED BY A DREAM OF YOUR DARK EYES

*by Morgan Taylor*

Your hair will smell of fire, of soot perfumed  
by the immolation of sweet sedge grass  
and the purple flower that draws thick bees,  
as night honey draws me. Your glowing skin  
will curl you with its motion. It will shine  
as truly in its gloss of effort-sheen

as misted grapes or the still water. Its sheen  
will be subtle and pearlescent, perfumed  
like the salt of a warming sea. The shine  
of life in your dark gaze, calm as dusk grass,  
will flash as sternly as the drumhead skin  
does when it's struck to pulse and bind the  
bees

in a wing-tipped waltz. When those feral  
bees  
tighten their locked step, with rhythm and  
sheen  
across swept wings, is when the haired  
wine-skin  
will lay full but ignored. When the perfumed  
shisha is quenched, its coal crushed in the  
grass,  
the moon will stroke your hair and it will  
shine.

The violin will skirl up. The fair shine  
of the guitar will hurl its wax of bees,  
and its strings, against the firelight. The  
grass  
will bow before the tune as the lithe sheen  
of your bared feet glides close. With a  
perfumed  
swirl, your skirt eddying 'round the fire; skin

hot, exhilarant, glistening as skin  
exertion-taut must do; the tune will shine  
in your eyes. I'll see your foot, dust-perfumed  
and ashen-soled, rising to stamp. The bees  
will hurl themselves aloft and whirl their  
sheen  
around your upraised hands, above the  
grass.

The stars, the pyre, the moon upon wet  
grass,  
will blaze through every movement. When  
your skin  
is full aglow with dance abandon's sheen,  
and as the song bursts through the guitar's  
shine,  
your conflagration will ignite the bees.  
They'll rise, a sparkling cloud, blazing,  
perfumed.

Daybreak will bring grass freshened by  
moon's shine.

We'll dream, sun on skin. Sleepy clouds of  
bees  
will swirl past, their sheen, by you, salt-  
perfumed.

# ADULT HONORABLE MENTIONS

## THE AUTUMN PEOPLE

*by Krista Beucler*

I climb up up up into the oak tree  
past the fresh, new pale green leaves that  
haven't grown to their full size  
or deepened to their darker green  
babies on such an old old tree  
Ethan is already sitting high on a branch  
waiting for me  
"Do you think we'll still leave?" I ask after a  
while  
looking out over the city  
the big oak is an ideal vantage point if one  
wanted to watch Coldwater moving sleepily  
"Yes," Ethan says, "I do."  
"But—" I can't think of a good argument  
"If we're going,"  
I say at last  
"to stop looking for her, for The Place, we'll  
stop moving, right?"  
Right?  
Ethan sighs like northern winds  
"It's more complicated than that.  
We've become nomads. I don't know if we  
know  
any other way to live  
anymore."  
"We could learn," I say,  
"We could learn anything."  
"But can't you feel it?  
It's itching under my skin like it's time to get  
out, to see new things and people and  
places."

I shake my head  
"No, no, I don't feel it.  
I'm happy here. I think I could be happy here  
forever."  
Ethan holds out a hand  
my lifeline  
I take it  
"I know," he says, "how it feels."  
We sit in the sturdy branches of the oak tree  
and we remember all the places we've been  
"Beware autumn people," I say  
"Ray Bradbury?"  
a nod  
"And why does he say they should be aware  
of us?"  
"Because the night wind stirs in our veins  
instead of blood.  
Because we can hear the abyss between the  
stars.  
Because we sift through the human storm and  
find souls.  
Because we frenzy forth."  
"Frenzy forth," Ethan says, "so we are the  
Autumn People through and through."  
"Yes," I say with a gusty breath of my own  
"I suppose we were always fated  
to frenzy forth to find  
new Octobers."

# MY QUANTUM HEART ENTANGLED

## (A PANTOUM)

*by Stina Branson*

The particles of love go unobserved  
So yet he loves me and he loves me not  
The function, in this moment, remains curved  
Our super status of position taut

So yet he loves me and he loves me not  
All thoughts can share at once a common state  
Our super status of position taut  
And thus we stay the fickle eye of fate

All thoughts can share at once a common state  
We ride the wave and pray it not collapse  
And thus we stay the fickle eye of fate  
Avert your gaze for unending perhaps

We ride the wave and pray it not collapse  
The function, in this moment, remains curved  
Avert your gaze for unending perhaps  
The particles of love go unobserved

# DERACINATION

*by Stacy Bustamante*

What courage it took, that first day out of the Garden. Shoes had to be made, because the ground had a hardness to it, a contrariness to the misty, damp earth that had been a table, a bed, a chair. Fortitude, as well, because life was onerous. He had to work the land. No one had ever done this before. There were no tradesmen, no masters of the craft. His was the truest form of loneliness. Yes, she was there, and their bodies cupped one another in the crepuscular light, but her plight was to strive after. His, to lead, by the sweat of his brow. He formed tools with his soft hands. The skin broke open and oozed with crimson water. Unthinking, he put his hand to his lips and sucked, and he tasted the earth from which he had been formed. The hardness began to form upon his palms, little bands of smoothed skin, as if the toil upon the earth was an exchange- his callous for its reception. He would recall the place from which they had been removed, as he bent on his hands and knees to pull stones out of the tilled earth. He had not realized the magnitude of his exchange, or the curse of his insouciance. The words, "Thou shalt not eat" had in one moment, a moment too late, become inviolable. And so he gathered and collected, amongst the things for which he has toiled, to present an immolation- a way of agreeing that they had chosen wrongly, and had been chagrined. The smoke of flesh and blood, the embers of work sacrificed rising and swirling, climbing to the heavens. Burning their eyes, burning their noses, burning his lungs, all in agreement. The heavens, and the earth, mollified. He could not know; how could he- that his longing for the land, the one in which mankind first drew breath, would become his heritage. Stretching forth, like a sinew, almost imperceptible, through generation upon generation. The imprint of the beginning, reminding the sojourning sons of the earth of that native land- the one that has never really been known, except for in the loss of it.

# BLUE HERON LAKE

by *Barbara Jones*

The blue heron returns to the lake on the summer breeze.  
The water has thawed and awakened from its winter freeze.  
Regally he stands among the tall swaying grass,  
Keeping close watch over the water, still as glass.  
Gracefully he wades at water's edge, hunting for his food.  
High atop a tree, in a nest of sticks, awaits his hungry brood.  
Silently he stalks his prey, keen of sight, with natural skill.  
Effortlessly he spears a fish with his long, sharp bill.  
Hearing our footsteps, he stands rigid with fright.  
Craning neck forward, spreading vast wings, he takes flight.  
The lake wears summer colors—greens of every shade,  
Lime, forest, and emerald—shimmering like precious jade.  
Velvety cattails surround the lake, standing at attention,  
“soldiers” straight and tall.  
Soon bursting open, casting seeds on winds of fall.  
Rowboats in the grass, waiting to set sail,  
The blue one looking just like a slumbering whale.  
A family of turtles peacefully sunning on a rock senses us near.  
Mother and father slide quickly underwater. Baby knows no fear.  
Three fuzzy, yellow ducklings swim quietly behind, keeping mama in view.  
Their first summer at Blue Heron Lake—uncertain, exciting, and new.  
A shiny, black mare keeps close watch over her foal sleeping away the day.  
Seeing us, mama perks her ears, warning with a neigh.  
Long, lazy days go by slowly as Blue Heron Lake thrives.  
Providing homes for many diverse and unique lives.  
Summer heat wanes with the arriving crisp fall breeze.  
Winter returning soon, the blue heron leaves before the freeze.  
The great bird begins his winter migration.  
Mama and young ones follow, seeking the warmth of the sun.  
Until again the summer breeze beckons life to awake,  
And the great bird returns to his place on Blue Heron Lake.



# THANKSGIVING LAUD

*by Diane McCrann*

Gather us in  
Golden sun as you flower and fade  
Naked branches scatter  
Crisp leaves of red and orange  
Kissing mounded earth to stillness.

Gather us in  
From arid plains  
High into forest spires and limestone buttes  
Where mountain moisture  
Nourishes edible bounty.

Gather us in  
Through doors wide open  
Footsteps on worn floor boards  
Fractions of a shared wholeness  
Past and present engulfed in gratitude.

Gather us in  
To the glowing furnace of family  
Guests of the harvest  
Seated at the universal feast  
Being the alleluia.

# TEEN FINALISTS

## REFLECTIONS

*by Alexa Coester*

You say I am an animal  
But evidence I do not see  
My fingers don't twitch with fear primeval  
I don't scurry from tree to tree

My eyes are they like cats' eyes slitted?  
My teeth are they like wolves' teeth sharp?  
My skin is it with coarse fur fitted?  
Beneath are there thin bones like carps'?  
My throat does it bloodied send out wild howls?  
My lips do they utter inscrutable, soft words?  
Thick drool does it trickle from my jowls?  
Whisper do I weeping, wishing I would be heard?

No, my eyes hold round pupils.  
My teeth are blunt as worn, streams' stones.  
My body is but skin smooth, soft, and beautiful.  
Beneath as strong as anyone else's are bones.  
My throat, even bloodied, still hums harmonies.  
My lips sing a language that's known to all.  
Sweet tears mingle into melodies.  
While I whisper: "I will not fall."

Even though you seek to wrap your chains  
Around my neck, my brain, my heart  
And beat me till I can't feel pain  
Then arrogate my pens, my books, my means of art  
Remove my clothes and leave me bare  
Display my form its bones, its scars, its skin  
To warn them not to fall into the snare  
Of my unforgivable perceived sin  
And still I will endure, because perhaps within my eyes  
Reflections will reveal where true monsters still lie

# SEVEN DEADLY SEAS

*by Boston Lee*

"The man, the beast,  
C'est triste, C'est triste,  
The sun eats up the sky,

"The moon the stars,  
Hoorah, Hoorah,  
Their light is just like ours.

"The light explodes,  
The sun it goes  
Round and round the Earth,

"The air I breathe  
Is just a seed  
Of burning fire, dearth."

So spoke the beggar insular  
Upon his road to grief,  
He drank the sun and ate the seeds  
Of poison berries three.

He fell upon the crusted ground  
A groan and yet a heave,  
A good cure he needed dear,  
The ground: It did not give.

"I've died, I've died!"  
Cried the man  
Upon the road of heat.

"My lungs they burn,  
My stomach churns,  
My soul falls to defeat!

"Why have I sinned?  
The devil wins,  
I'll burn forevermore,

"And rot behind  
The jail-bars  
Lined underneath the shore!"

And so his dying breath he took  
And fell into the waves,  
For one step was the man  
From glorious water, saved.

So washed the beggar's body  
'Way from the blazing sand  
Insular no longer,  
Not captive of the land

And yet not one man saw him  
Drift to the broken crests.  
Their eyes were only focused  
On self, not on the rest.

And so when one man stumbles,  
And falls onto the shore,  
Not one man moves to help him,  
Or cure his body sore.

And so when one man stumbles,  
So do all men fall.  
And so the beggar's lonely death  
Is the death of all.

# NATURAL WONDERS

*by Shaylee O'Loughlin*

Stars are balls of fire.  
They stretch as high as we can see and higher.  
But sometimes I wonder  
If natural things,  
Like lightning, rain, and thunder,  
Are part of something no eye can see,  
Something bigger than you or me.  
What if every star is a dream? If thunder and lightning are not what they seem?  
Perhaps lightning is a star's last breath,  
Our dreams forgotten, a humble star's death.  
Maybe rain is the tears of souls departed,  
Forgotten by souls departed.  
Perhaps thunder is the angel's cries,  
Lamenting at our thefts and lies.  
It just goes to show, pay attention to natural things.  
It just goes to show, nothing is as it seems.

# HOPE

*by Rachel Poulsen*

Shimmering  
Slightly out of reach  
Sometimes it seems  
Half a world away  
A thing for another universe  
Something you can never grasp  
Something you don't deserve  
Abandoning you  
Leaving you  
Gasping  
Choking  
Desperate without it  
For it is as necessary as air  
You long for the time  
When it was normal  
Yet cynically deny  
That you ever needed it  
Even as you shrivel  
In its absence  
For it was  
Hope  
That helped you live  
Not just survive

# I'M TRYING

*by Greta Richardson*

I'm trying to escape the hate and thoughts of the mistakes I must have made  
I'm trying to ignore the abuse, and the use of words I would never excuse  
I'm trying to drown out the hounds of self-doubt and disgust  
I'm trying to rise above and use words of love in place of ugly  
I'm trying to smile away the pain,  
promise I'm okay,  
say that nothing could hurt me that way  
I'm trying to produce words that no one could misuse for the sacrifice of another  
I'm trying to pretend that when I saw her wrists, it was just a trick  
of the light  
And that she was alright  
I'm trying to fight the fear, while I'm standing here  
the shouts of the crowd beneath me  
The sentences they spew can't beat me  
I'm trying to blink aside the doubts about my ability to survive in a world  
where not abiding to the rules are the only tools we have left

# REFLECTION IN THE MIRROR

by *Beth Sawhney*

Holding yourself up with all your strength  
Staring at the similar soul in your mirror  
Do you recognize the reflection staring back  
at you  
It's me, do you know me, do you care for me  
Do you even notice me at all  
Do you dare to take the chance  
Do you dare to take the fall  
We are one and the same  
Playing the game  
In this crazy, messed up world  
We're at odds and ends  
With each other and against each other  
Am I the protagonist or the antagonist  
Are you my ally or my enemy  
This is chess and we're the pawns  
This is a crime scene and we're in the wrong  
This is a prison and we're the jailbirds  
This is a trial, and we're the criminals  
Innocent until proven guilty, that's all a lie  
We're not innocent, but we didn't commit a  
crime  
But what does it matter, in all honesty  
Our protests aren't doing anything  
We are one and the same  
Playing the game  
In this crazy, messed up world  
Holding myself up with all my strength

Staring at the similar soul in my mirror  
I recognize the reflection staring back at me  
It's you, I know you and care for you  
I promise I notice you  
I will never let you break  
I will never let you fall  
We are one and the same  
Playing the game  
In this crazy, messed up world  
I'll never stand against you  
We'll always fight together  
You're both the hero and the villain  
But no matter what you choose, I am always  
on your side  
This might be chess, but we're the players  
This might be a crime scene, but we're the  
detectives  
This might be prison, but we're the escapees  
This might be a trial, but we're the judges  
We've no need to be proven innocent, we've  
done nothing wrong  
We're not guilty, but we've still had fun  
It always matters, it's part of our story  
Our protests are everything  
We are one and the same  
Playing the game  
In this crazy, messed up world

# SHE WHO CANNOT LOVE HERSELF

*by Kaili Schroeder*

Just look at me,  
I'm cracked toothless, a shining mirror  
Ready to fall apart.  
I'm a moth: filthy, powdered, thumping wildly  
Into the walls and light fixtures  
In my headlong  
Unplanned  
Rush  
For freedom.  
I am confused  
Too heavy for flight,  
Plummeting  
Stupefied  
By this sudden loss of gravity  
Realizing  
I am not built for my own good.  
Shattered mirror fragments do not fall.  
They float  
Shocked into unmoving horror like when  
The gravity fell out from beneath my filthy moth wings and  
I saw the mirror and  
I realized  
I was sickening.



## DANDELION EYES

*by Regan Thomas*

She has dandelion eyes, she has a name  
on her lips

She dances,  
Wind in her hair, the breath of ghosts  
She is fading...  
She fights a little more

She used to watch  
The wax girls and boys-  
She saw them as planets

She is older now.  
The paper people are crumpled,  
and torn  
She crumples and tears

In her mind, she has sketches  
Of all of them  
They are gray  
And worn.

She is tired now  
It's been a long day,  
Fighting wax people  
They don't know her

She lies down, in the dark...  
Where she can see me best  
She sees best when she is blind

I am the girl with the dandelion eyes  
I look almost like her, but I am not as cracked  
A picture of innocence in her mind

I am who she was  
The version who still believed. Dreamed

...

I can see her now  
I can feel her  
Her skin is growing hard

The cement in her veins  
My dandelion eyes

## SEASONS

*by Regan Thomas*

Winter-  
The world is cold and soft and marble-white  
The wind breathes wisps of whispered  
promises  
Whispered by the hopeful hearts and lines  
Before we'll feel the hopelessness of time

Spring-  
The purity and innocence of minds  
Lit by tales told by the ones who know  
When growing up seemed an idea that shined  
Back when we were innocent and blind

Summer-  
Our wild hearts that jump and taste the sky  
Shattered glass we reach; it's beautiful  
Pieces falling over dark blue nights  
Reckless years consume us, burning bright

Fall-  
Burning with untouched passions of youth  
Playing with speckled fire; we are gold  
Drinking up the stars; rising with the moon  
Lit like the secrets we are, living it all

Someday like autumn leaves they'll see us fall

# COURAGE

*by Elizabeth Urynowicz*

Without one flash of fear it walks the earth in shadow.  
With a glimpse of hope that peers from its ever wandering eye,  
It infuses strength to the weakest of souls,  
Breathes life into the lifeless,  
And comforts those whose windows to the world are clouded by sorrow.  
It is coveted by all those whose path is riddled with woe.  
And when contained, life's metamorphosis is on the verge of a butterfly.  
When uncertainty gnaws at your goals,  
Let the walls that trap your dormant warrior to recess,  
And bring the courage in all of us to the light of tomorrow.

# TEEN HONORABLE MENTIONS

## THE WING OF THE WIND *by Isabelle Bodley*

The wind, begotten to the sky,  
(and fraught with passion)  
Hardly stops when day is nigh  
but blooms when by their graces  
the flowers rear their heavenly faces.

For never to pause the wind has choice  
As all need hear its empty voice  
the wing of the wind, though cold and lonely  
is viewed by some to be most holy.

Not by thoughts of petty kind  
but by the other type of mind  
a tree bears when without its fruit  
though't seems to us but mute  
the wind can fill the trees cold boughs  
and comforts it if time allows

# I AM FROM

by Maggie Hubbeling

I am from the loud laughter  
Of late summer days.  
Making connections with people  
Not yet met  
And straining to fill the days  
For as long as  
Parents will let me.

I am from blood and dirt,  
From stumbling feet and falling bodies  
Just trying to stay  
Up until the end.  
I am from scars  
Made from moments of child play,  
Complete with falling and failing  
And always getting back up.

I am from private schools,  
White socks and plaid skirts  
Pulled up to my heart,  
touching my knees.  
I'm from bees and bushes  
Playing together during break  
Wishing for one degree more  
To show up on the wall  
So I could escape the heat  
of my winter coat.

I am from windows open on winter nights  
My doorframe swollen with snow and cold  
Buried beneath blankets  
Head peeking out to look at the heavens.  
I am from long nights beside the fire  
Throwing an extra log on  
While trying not to burn my book,  
My closest friend.

I am from new schools and new people  
Each one with a new me,  
Whether what has changed is  
The clothes I am allowed to wear  
Or a new hair color as my blazon;  
And yet I am from the same mind  
One striving to learn  
And weighing itself down with new activities.

A person constantly evolving  
And looking for new  
Ideas and experiences.  
One most a home when  
There is quiet and peace  
In the mountains of her mind.

# HOURLASS

*by Boston Lee*

"Follow me," whispers Time,  
"Through me only, your delight."  
Sun rises and soon falls to earth  
Moon bright but yet of little worth

A tiny flicker, candlelight  
Back to day, through the night.  
All the stars, lives short-lived,  
Praise by life they dearly give

Grip with hunger, ravenous  
My soul devours, lays to rest  
He my mind would have believe  
That from his eternal grip  
I would have no reprieve

But know not I the freedom,  
And know not I the peace,  
Which comes after the death of time;  
Which seems far out of reach.

Insidious his nature,  
And foul countenance complete,  
But temporary is his rule,  
Soon, I will be free.

# MORNING'S NUMBERLESS SKYLINE

by *Kaili Schroeder*

I was never one to classify those few dead  
hours after midnight  
as morning.  
when I was younger it was always as simple  
as  
when it is dark it is Night,  
when it begins to light it is Morning.  
my time could never be explained to me  
by numbers. the Sky softly sang to me,  
humming and mixing pigments,  
a constantly revolving turntable  
of color palates.  
I listened and painted as best as I could.  
but people voices often talk louder than Night  
Skies  
if you lose your attention  
for the moment it takes a Star to blink.  
they kept confusing me with their talk of  
mornings  
in the dead middle of the night.  
I never understood  
why they would want their new beginning  
to blink fleetingly across a clock face  
while they're sleeping away their possible  
Reincarnation,  
or stumbling around a dark room unable to  
find the door,  
or even the light switch.

or even the window because  
we can't blossom without  
The Sun,  
can't breathe without  
Fresh Air  
can't see in  
the dark.  
Listen to the Morning Sky –  
it is softly humming as it paints, singing  
wisdom  
to any who are groggily clearing the sand  
away  
from gently waking eyes and ears.  
Learn from the Morning Sky –  
See the first brushes of a honeysuckle paint  
stroke, humming  
the closing stanzas of Midnight's lullaby.  
Watch as the Sky's color palates  
mix and spread, dabbling over the last few  
inky splotches  
of 4 am Darkness.  
Listen –  
the Sky is singing,  
Listen –  
may you Begin with light  
may you Arise with the morning  
may you Reincarnate with the sun.

# NERD

by *Tate Thurgood*

There is a word which sends tremors  
spilling across my nerves,  
a shiver for each of the four letters:  
N-E-R-D

Except nerd is not what bothers me –  
I use the word myself, in a sweet, playful way,  
same as if I were to say you're adorable –  
but the edge with which others say it is;  
the crack in their inflection, a whip through my  
ribs  
into my heart

What is so wrong with nerd, I wonder,  
when I hear it spat out like it's poison,  
when I see complacency in their eyes as if  
a word I love can bring me down?  
What is so wrong with being clever,  
with loving what you do?

Because that's what a nerd is, I think—  
someone who doesn't just like but  
loves, passionately, in everything they know  
They breathe in their desires as air,  
a nostalgic toxin they cannot bear to part from,  
a piece of their hearts they continually retrieve

So why am I called nerd in that way,  
as if I am only my A grades and bookshelves,  
only the glasses and suspenders I don't even  
wear?  
And why does someone have to be friendless  
to be a nerd, even surrounded by their kin?  
Why does someone have to choose between  
being human and being nerdy?

Perhaps this piece of who I am is tossed  
around  
with so little care, so little respect,  
because others don't know me and so they  
don't  
see me, don't see past my constantly raised  
hand and  
the eloquent, urbane diction I use without  
thought  
But how can they expect to stop seeing a  
blurred image  
if they don't stop squinting before they speak?

Nerd is certainly not misused because of  
misunderstanding—  
this I know more than anything, a fact deeper  
than the marrow of my bones  
How many times have I explained a word is  
not a word  
when you try to fit a person into its shape?  
How many times have I screamed out the  
truth  
and found hands over ears, closed eyes  
blocking out the pain in mine?

No, I think I am ignored because the world  
likes simplicity,  
likes to use nerd instead of incredible person,  
one who loses and loves and lives  
I am neglected because the world has fallen  
in love  
with an ugly, eternal lie we all know:  
Ignorance is bliss

But not for everyone.



FOURTH ANNUAL  
**BATTLE**  
OF THE **BARDS**  
POETRY CONTEST



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