Fortieth Anniversary Celebration of the Poetry Workshop at Cuyahoga County Public Library October 20, 2013
Like the legendary hunting knife that has had five blades and three handles but is still the same knife, the Cuyahoga County Public Library Poetry Workshop meeting at the South Euclid-Lyndhurst Branch has maintained itself through many changes. We have had two moderators and five names, and have met at one college, three churches, a Friends’ meeting house, a bookstore and a library, but we keep doing what we have been doing for forty years.

I believe we are the longest-running public poetry workshop in Cuyahoga County and surely among the oldest in the country. Cyril A. Dostal held the first meeting at Cuyahoga Community College’s Metropolitan Campus in September 1973. Cy continued to moderate for thirty years, until his death, and I was then appointed. Now, as the workshop celebrates its fortieth anniversary, we have chosen to represent both ends of our time span. Most of the poets in this collection are currently attending the workshop, but poets Christopher Franke, John Gabel, Diane Kendig, Joan Nicholl, M. A. Swiniarski, Zena Zipporah and I were all members in the 1970s. (And I am glad to say that Franke, Kendig, and Zipporah continue to attend today.)

The CCPL Workshop was born and remains an open poetry workshop. We try to help one another write better poems but we don’t – and don’t try to – all sound like one another. Everyone should find a lot to like. We hope you’ll enjoy them, and we hope you’ll look for our fiftieth anniversary celebration in the fall of 2023.

Robert E. McDonough, Moderator
Mister Same Thang

Standing in some empty alley holding a basket full of hope, waiting for a truckload of trouble, watching the tear stained meaning of an empty promise turn to poison; Mr. Same Thang caresses temptation with a hopeful hand and a wishful smile.

One day closer to a sorrowful meeting of two empty souls, he hears the wind called Maria whisper Mary. Lost ambitions and broken promises leave Mr. Same Thang restless and lonely. Mr. Same Thang works his way past a blues song sung by a drunken bumblebee and hears maggots gossip about the distance between death and decay.

Funky, tired and defeated Mr. Same Thang crawls along 7 mile hills with 10% grades counting the distance between pessimistic days and satisfactory beginnings, the blues echo across the back of his head scarring his mind with the emotions of a time when his experiences painted a picture of success.

Well dressed soothsayers fill his pockets with the wishes of Wall Street junkies and past the hopes and dreams of his children with a Frankenstein hero.

Life leaves Mr. Same Thang in disbelief as his flesh shrinks with age; gray hair, stiff knees, slow reflexes, and short breath giving way to wisdom, understanding and deliberate actions. The music changes and so does the flow of ink between the pen and the word. Mr. Same Thang sits wondering can John Lee Hooker sing the blues.

His eyes dance along the pages of life wondering how far he is from the answers to the questions asked by a thousand empty eyed broken hearts and forgotten memories of lost love.

A phase between fall and winter carves an image of spring on the face of October causing a smile and a tear and Mr. Same Thang stumbles and drops dead in a pile of snow.

Yaseen Assan
At Raymond Carver’s Grave

I’d give a lot
to keep you
standing among the pines
with the blue sea
in front
while I
read Carver’s
gravestone homage to
finally finding the one
who made him whole.

I imagine
being left behind
on a day like this—
where, for most,
clarity strips away spiritual sludge—
how I would wrestle with joy,
but find the crispness dull,
the call of the gull, cloudy.

I remind myself – you are here.

I’d give a lot
to keep you
standing among the pines
with the blue sea
in front.

Jane Floriano Blackie
Blackberries

Up to my shoulders
in blackberry brambles
on a hot July day.
I pick handful after handful
of ripe, luscious berries.

One for me.
One for the bucket.

My fingers and mouth are purple,
sweat drips down my face,
prickers scratch my arms,
but I press on toward the edge of the woods,
where the biggest, juiciest berries grow,
dreaming of blackberry cobbler.

Kathryn Brock

First published in Tributaries 6, 2003
To the piano in his own sweet way
on the arm of the conductor,
while the packed-in crowd stood,
sang *Happy Birthday* through tears.
On his ninetieth, not just another gig.

He pulled us back to festivals
and the 50’s college stands,
our youth now gray throughout,
old ladies in dress circle
dancing again to *Take Five*.

His chops still simple, straight, lyrical,
no pyrotechnical improvisation.
Our age ordered silence on the solos
as we grazed back through lives
to sounds once lost,
now avengefully heralded
by today’s Downbeat recognition.

The Cleveland Symphony played backup,
then stood and cheered.

Robert E. Farmer

First published in *New Verse News*, December 8, 2012
Bone Soups

Bone stock soups
I cook for hours.
I’d sooner be out
picking wild flowers.
Leach out the minerals
Extract collagen too
Heal my gut
Thank goodness for food.
It smells like gravy
It thickens over time
It nourishes the soul
Spill a drop? What a crime.
Toil to make it
Never question the task
My energy shall return
I’ll move real fast.
Osseous wonders are used
East and West were most wise
Broths provide me with help
My spirit doth rise.

Lola Farron
The S. S. Meteor

In forward holds they sleep  
In stacks five deep on canvas  
Stretched on iron racks two feet  
From cot to cot ten to top

A thousand men in each  
Less those who would not sleep  
For fear or stench or heat  
Or overwhelming madness

Who choose instead to lie  
The night on steel decks to watch  
The strange southern sky unaware  
Of the throbbing ship’s gentle roll

Six thousand miles  
Six waiting weeks  
Saltwater showers  
Two meager meals  
To Leyte  
Island by island

The morning deck is covered  
Rail to rail with green fatigue  
While the bow cleaves two  
Rolling waves  
In relentless zigzag pattern

And she not meant for this  
Labors heavily remembering  
Other cargos other trips

John Gabel
“Drink this wine,” they said, “to find your destined mate,”
Like some magic love elixir, some romance potion.
So I grasped that bridal cup and brought my lips close,
And wouldn’t you know it? I spilled it all over me.

“Take this broken shard,” they said, “to meet your true beloved,”
Like some miracle pottery, some wondrous earthenware.
So I reached for that wedding plate, that little shattered piece,
And wouldn’t you know it? I cut my finger on its sharp edge.

“Hold this lighted candle,” they said, “as tall as you want your husband,”
Like some enchanted torch, some supernatural flame.
So I held that Sabbath candle and raised it above my head,
And wouldn’t you know it? I lit the house on fire.

“Eat this bread,” they said, “to catch your other half,”
Like some Divine manna, some holy sustenance.
So I bit into that wedding loaf, that warm, doughy morsel,
And wouldn’t you know it? I began to cough and choke.

“Recite this prayer,” they said, “to uncover your betrothed,”
Like some sanctified liturgy, some sacred hymn.
So I said those ancient words and I began to cry,
And wouldn’t you know it? He handed me a tissue.

Sara Ireland-Cooperman
Six for Cy

“not a map of choices but a map of variations
on the one great choice.”
Adrienne Rich, *Dreamwood*

1. Sand between fingers and toes,
irritating, even grating on those places,
the webs we all came together in.

2. Hemingway said writers needed
a built-in shit detector, but shit, he didn’t say
it had to go off like a Geiger counter.

3. Soft-boiled eggs, white slavers, the elms
of Shaker Heights, moon roadsters, and doing
carpentry: don’t they conjure him for you?

4. But Jeez-us, just write
one true poem, and he’d grant you that for life—
not to say he turned the detector off for you.

5. This summer I got a message to call him, though after
we talked an hour, I didn’t know why—
till now: to say he was still here.

6. More like sandpaper at the dark desk top,
against the grain, lifting the dirt, letting
the stripes of tiger oak surface, suggest, and gleam.

Diane Kendig

In memory of Cyril Dostal, 1930-2002

Fear of the Freeway

The fright I fear is my Fate on the Freeway.  
A fast force, unforgiving and final (following  
A foolish fault).

A ferocious field of fast fearless figures  
Fleeing by in a flash  
Making me frightened and frantic.

I try not to freak, forging forward  
Forgiving the impatient frowns on the faces  
Of those flashing by.

Does my fear of the freeway show?

Betty Kovacs
A Villanelle

I’m in the middle of a villanelle
It should be saucy, short and sweet
But it’s not going very well

Trying to write is giving me hell
What words will make my thoughts concrete?
I’m in the middle of a villanelle

It’s prying a pearl from an oyster shell
To find a line I can repeat
And I don’t think it’s going well

Will it be a classic? I just can’t tell
I just won’t know till it’s complete
I’m in the middle of a villanelle

I don’t care if it’s good, I just want it to sell
If I have to hawk it on the street
But I think it’s going not so well

The poem should ring like a carillon bell
It should be good enough to eat
I’m in the middle of a villanelle
And I don’t think it’s going very well.

Geoffrey A. Landis

First published in *MagnaPoets*, January 2010
A May Day

It’s Saturday
early May
a cool and sunny morning.

I refill cat bowls,
boil water,
carry twig tea in a blue cup
upstairs to bed.
Settle among pillows,
open a book,
think of small gifts.

My black and white companion
finishes breakfast,
races up the stairs,
jumps onto the white spread.

I expect purrs.

He throws up.

Jill Lange
The James Beard Memorial Meal

Perhaps he should have died in spring; we could have had *pasta primavera*, then or fall—venison and squash. But he died at the bottom of winter, he’s been cremated, and the newspaper says he left no survivors. We can’t let that be true.

Come early and bring a salad. Use red peppers and carrots; he liked color and you have an eye for it. We’ll make beef stew and steam the windows—he taught us to be simple, sometimes—and plan a garden while the loaves rise.

Robert E. McDonough
American Dream

I clean toilets for a living
Part time
At McDonalds
When the economy improves
I’ll work full time

Raymond P. Neubert
Streetlights

At dusk
when streetlights come on
ghosts appear
in a row beside the bed, watching.

Paler shapes come preceded by whispers
pass through them
like wind
blowing through stones.
Sometimes they merge
float together, suspended
then disappear in the fireplace
or down the hall.

At last
they leave my ghosts
to keep their watch alone, baleful
and growing weak
as dawn presses
their shoulders to the wall.

Joan Nicholl
Rip Van Winkle

Sleeping Beauty awakes to a
Peck on the cheek from a
Crow.
Her knight in shining ardor
Split.
She’s been sleeping for 25 years?
Mirror, mirror
Her kingdom for a mirror!
Her kids have grown …
Oh let them sleep
A little longer.
Beauty trucks into town and
A few people recognize her
“Where the hell have you been?”
It feels weird …
The local coffee shop
Fills her up
With the day to day.
They take her pulse and
She takes theirs.
She cries to think of
All that she’s missed.
Really lets it
Rip.
Then picks up her crown
Grabs her train
And choo choos out to
Check on the
Royal Children.
She’s back.

Elise Panehal
Acrobats

I’m as cantankerous
As Teng Yin Feng—
Sometimes
I don’t even think
I’m an Immortal—
After he had inquired
About ways men had died
He chose to depart
Standing on his head
As no one had before—
To bury him
His disgruntled sister
Had to poke him
With a stick
Till he fell with a thud—

I can’t help being cantankerous
And contrary—
That’s my nature—
No good has come of it—
If I maintain
A conventional way is wrong
How can I delude myself
That my way is any better?
But it always takes that old fool
To deflate our pretensions—

I certainly don’t expect to die
Standing on my head—
Horizontally inclined
In bed with a good book
Sounds good enough to me—
My intimates know me
As most pliable and sweet
Contrary to my personal opinion—
Just let me promise
That no one will have to beat me
With a stick—

Charles Scheitler
Connected

Worldwide consumers’ voracious appetites for cell phones, laptops and MP3 players fuel Africa’s darkest side where minerals containing tungsten, tin and tantalum are mined at gunpoint by terrorized workers conveyed by smugglers to far east processors for anonymous rebirth as electronics purchased in countries by people who don’t want to know.

Fred Schraff

First published in New Verse News, November 16, 2010
Family Business

Federal agents
liquor banned
arrested Grandma
searched her land

Chased her brothers
firing guns
prison time
served three sons

Illicit spirits
in the hills
homemade whisky
copper stills

Carefully cooked
blended fine
country chemists
made moonshine

Marilyn Thornton Schraff

First published in Moonshine: Illicit Spirits in the Appalachian Hills of Rural Southern Ohio, 2011
Last Week in the Nursing Home

I kidnapped Cy in his wheelchair,
took him to the outside patio
for his first look at the world in two months.

He whispered,
“From the swamp next to the nursing home,
alligators come up and snatch patients left unattended.
The nursing home makes money for a few months
before any one knows someone is missing.
Heh-heh.”

Leonard H. Seyfarth
Left Out

We sat at the table trying to stay focused on the reason we were there.

It had crossed my mind, was I there for the reason I was asked to come, or some other reason I hadn’t imagined or planned?

She seemed to be involved in the same train of thought. Her eyes told on her. Her intermittent smile spoke volumes.

Provoking it all could have been the perfume she wore, or maybe the way her eyes sparkled as the sun would shine on her delicate features.

I never touched her, but I could see the softness in her hands as they lay close to mine. She asked me, “Did I say something?” I said, “Not out loud.” She said, “I heard everything you said.”

I asked, “Should I apologize?” She never answered.

She thought:

As I sit here and listen to his thoughts, they echo through mine. I never touched his frame, I know it’s solid. I know his hands and arms could crush me. That never entered my mind.

His voice sounds like Conga drums vibrating throughout my body! His presence distracts me. He was always at a distance.

Her lips were moist when she spoke; her voice is inside my head. If I lived with her would it be the same?

We dare not look at each other too long. She was the wife of a good friend of mine who just passed away. She could never belong to me.

M.A. Shaheed
Four Valentines

Majorette meets All-star
She leaps, catches the high flung baton
He jumps, captures the rebound
The crowd roars.

G.I. Bill meets sorority Sergeant-at-Arms
He naps through class; she pokes, passes notes
She dreams their future becomes ballast to his memories of war.

Grads attend economy wedding
They cut cake, kiss to chimes, and lead all into dance
A hundred friendly flashes freeze snapshots.

All-star takes cheerleader home to dinner
She opens the album
He calls the roll
They laugh at the silly hats.

M.A. Swiniarski
Ballade of Lost Poets

Daniel Thompson, Barbara Tanner Angell, Alberta Turner, Cyril Dostal, Alois Zimmerman, Kate Murphy

Tell me, Daniel, where on earth have you gone?
Tonight, full of your latest enterprise,
Whose windowpane will you be tapping on?
What neighborhood now celebrates your fame?
Do you still hang a star above your I’s?
But where do songs go after they’ve been sung?

And Barbara, where are you, whose poems taught
The music of tires on a rainy night,
The beauty of a speckled coffee pot,
Mystery in a blue bead: in the gloom
Beyond that river, have you found your light,
There where all songs go after they’ve been sung?

Alberta, what far island have you found
Where age’s tolls are never spoken of
And single malts, antiques, and cats abound?
Ah, Cy (sigh!), has the bitterness been wrung
Out of your heart and left a space for love
Somewhere where songs go after they are sung?

Alois, who from your insulted brain
Extracted fragments of amazing grace,
And stalwart Kate, who marched from wound to wound
Creating laughter out of your own pain—
Unlikely love birds, have you reached some place
Where even sad songs go after they’re sung?

Wellek and Warren tell us where to find
The “Existence of a Literary Work of Art”:
Not just in the artist’s or the reader’s mind,
Nor on the page or any speaker’s tongue—
But in all these, in our collective heart,
Where every song goes after it is sung.

So, prince of reprobates, François Villon,
Long since redeemed: welcome these souls among
The company of those who still live on
Wherever songs go after they are sung.

Leonard Trawick
Old Poet Calls Me Up
(for Cy Dostal)

Old poet calls me up
says he’s lost his poems
his hard drive crashed, do I have copies?

His ex wives might have copies, but he thinks
one of them has a restraining order on him
and the other a bench warrant.

He’s drinking a bottle of peppermint flavored beer
sure as hell wasn’t Great Lakes
and the Imp wasn’t Indigo, it was maybe Puce
he found in the stop & rob near his house
can’t stand it, but too broke to throw it away.
I can smell it over the phone.

I might have his poems, maybe in a Fazio’s crate
with my old taxes and my son’s crayon drawings
of a giant gila monster stomping on the Rock Hall of Fame.
I promise to look.

There’s this one poem, he says, about a dog so wild
his first wife locked him out of the house on Mayfield
until he build a fence to keep it in, which took until four in the AM,
whereupon the dog jumped the fence, then jumped back in,
just to demonstrate he could do it.

And after the dog peed their clean laundry
his son had to stop him from shooting the dog in the city limits
so they took the dog out in Old Bainbridge cemetery,
thought he could run it over to save a bullet
but the dog was faster than the car.
And he says, you know there’s this one poem about how the mob was going to break my dad’s knees because somebody stole the prizes out of the candy machine.

and then he tells how his father sang the Internationale going through Shaker Heights. Took him to a Wobblie meeting when he was only five. The police broke it up after the riot started, and his dad dragged him into the ladies’ and hoisted him through the window to escape.

There’s this poem --

And he’s singing the Internationale. “Arise, ye prisoners -- “ I think he was five then, before I was born.

His hard drive crashed. His songs are gone. What’s he need with a computer? For him a bottle of bad beer and a telephone make a time machine.

Mary A. Turzillo

First published in *Your Cat & Other Space Aliens*, 2007
Biting Words

My mouth gave up
choice words flew out
and couldn’t possibly
be taken back
to tuck away on a shelf somewhere.

Knowing when they left
a small section
of my soul died
believing the vast capability
the viciousness of inflicted pain.

I let go some more
and added to my deficits.
After saying my piece
you peacefully asked,
”Are you done yet?”

Alyson Widen
The Angel of Life and
The Angel of Death

Are elegant in their demeanors
Graceful in their pronouncements
But argue in unkind voices and throaty groans
They are absorbed in a game of chance
And you are the prize
They are acting a play
With no third act
They are building a house
With no windows
They are reordering the alphabet
To make it spell the word you choke on
They are driving you to tomorrow
Carrying worlds of yesterday in the trunk
They tell the joke
That rends your heart in two
They come in your dreams
Disguised as your mother, sister, lovers
They tickle your bare skin
And feed you sweet pickles
They are floating over your bed
Drinking tea in the thinnest of china
Spinning in tiny pirouettes
One taunts you with danger
The other saves you from death
While weaving shrouds of flowers
To wind around your head.

Zena Zipporah