

Ampersand

Poetry Journal

TEXAS STARS 2007



Poetry is just the evidence
of life. If your life
is burning well,
poetry is just the ash.

Leonard Cohen

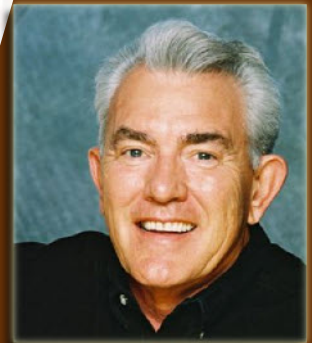
About the Poets

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Larry D. Thomas
2008 Texas
Poet Laureate



Peggy Z. Lynch



Budd P. Mahan



Alan L. Birkelbach

Larry D. Thomas

Sunflowers

In a storeroom
of stagnant air
aswirl with motes of dust,
they stood on bent stems

in a shaft of sunlight,
six disks of blinding yellow
rising from a vase
of clear, cobalt glass.

They looked so real
I had to touch them
to see that they were silk,
imposturous to petals

as words, hardly wrought
and artfully
arranged on a page,
to poetry.

Fire

In far West Texas,
the size of the brims
of Stetsons and sombreros
is a testament
to its violence.
Days, balled into the sun

like a bright light bulb
drawing its moth of earth
ever closer, it blazes,
hardening desert plants
to the texture of leather
and wrenching them into thorns.

It's even staked its claim
on the clear, black nights,
streaking them with comets
and branding them with stars
glowing like the tips
of sucked cigarettes.

Balsa Wood

With two wings, a fuselage,
and a tail, all of balsa wood,
we'd construct our little planes,
the wings and tails so thin
we'd scissor their plastic sheaths
painstakingly as Mama
cutting coupons from the Sunday paper.

Through a slot in the side
of the fuselage, we'd slide the main wing,
toward the front for gliding,
the back for loops. The tail
slid into a groove atop the back.
Sometimes, the fierce West Texas wind
would dislodge the tail, causing the plane

to cartwheel over rocks and cacti
till the wings broke like dry kindling.
We'd patch them if we could with Scotch tape
and throw their weightless mass to the wind,
clenching our fists as if our lives
hinged on the next safe landing.
And at the age of ten, they did.

Shrimpers' Hands

Their boats, booms lowered
And dragging their nets,
Dot the Gulf at first light
Like strange, thick-bodied moths.

Their hands are a blur
Of motion, their fingers
So knobby and muscular
It's a wonder they flex,

Stabbed with the spines of hardheads
And slashed with the pincers
Of crabs, calloused with scars
Yet deft enough when mending nets

To make a seamstress marvel.

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Larry D. Thomas

Soap

Coyotes

Suddenly
they break
into a dead

run, desperate
for crest
or butte,

sluicing
through the draw
unobtrusive

as moonglow,
a flash flood
of buffy-

gray shadow,
their great
throats clotting

with the warm,
sonorous vowels
of the howl.

In dishes
set beside sinks
or shoved
into the corners
of showers,

it waits
in waxen bars
of pinks, greens,
blues and yellows.
It diminishes

each time
it's touched.
Rubbed against
wet skin,
it cleanses us

over
and over again
with the scented,
pastel ghosts
of horses.

The Darkroom *for Ramona*

She dons latex gloves,
enters her domain
of chemicals, skill and trays,
clicks the door shut behind her,
and stands in utter darkness.

Her art emerges there, rippling
in a dance of light and shadow,
gradually as a patient
shaking off the stupor
of anesthesia.

The Writer

He navigates
the mazes of his days
with the mice of strange
personalities.

His major
capability
is negative.
Idle, he crackles

Black Widow

Sorrel

His mane and tail
are light-colored,
his coat a light
reddish-brown.

Every time he passes
from shadow into sun,
our pupils shrink
like pouches

drawn taut by a string.
By his coat
we know and name him,
his coat so dazzling

in the sun
God gave him
a great heart
just to ripple it.

Belief itself, animate,
she dangles in the maw of night
from gossamer spun by the weightless
spinning wheel of being,

so consumed with devotion
she devours the squalid
little lives of her lovers,
rendering them radiant

as minutes of mercury
to issue like the music
of the spheres through the doubtless
red hourglass of her abdomen.

like the husk
of a cicada,
his new body
shrilling in the leaves

of his manuscript.
He remembers
everything he reads,
savoring new words

like bonbons,
his *raison d'être*
teetering on the brink
of a well-turned phrase.

He works well into
the night, grinding
out the chapters
of his life.

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One Night Stands

Staged in segments of today and yesterday
anticipating tomorrow
when the curtain goes up
and the play begins
she lives in a series of acts.
never mind which play,
an actress such as Connie
always is one character
or another.
Comedy or tragedy matters not
since she is familiar with each.
Playing for capacity crowds
or empty houses
she becomes accustomed to fate
cuing to direction
until the final curtain.

Paris, 1991

Peggy Zuleika Lynch

Fire

Your being I remember
so vividly my nipples tingle.
The thought of your touch
sends the thrill of you
rushing through my veins
totally out of range of your
being ever near to touch
me again.
But beginning fire of desire
rekindles the burning intensity
of you coming though.
Distance makes no change
for these embers fare same
wanting the ecstasy of completion
of the flame out immensity.

soul cringe

how many
for years
have had their souls
cringed
with
diabolic criticism
thrust at them
before their friends
or even strangers
near enough to
hear?

how many
for years
have felt the seared
embarrassment
within,
so much that eye
could not behold
another's
for fear of being
seen
so naked
and exposed?

A Lifetime for This

And you come to this:
only a name on a list,
a list most will miss.
How many read obits?

Haiku

a polar bear stand
an ice fog envelops him
a ghostly vision

the moon barely shines
starlight brightens the dark sky
sequins of the night

shedding an old life
is like shedding the cocoon--
a new butterfly

rain pounds the pebbled roof
wind picks up the loosened stones
scattered togetherness

To the Top

Yeast rises
expands
with its movement
yielding itself
to compelling
need of its
fermentation.

Love rises
and the blend
of all senses
stimulates
vigor's need
for fertilization,
ecstasy of completion.

Paris, 1991

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Beach Sand

The white blazing sand
reflecting the sun glints,
sifts, and sifts
as wind and water
play upon in.

Joggers jog, people walk
upon it.
Children build sand castles
with it.

Whirling off in tiny cloud puffs
goes the fine sand
as wind blows
and human hands cannot
keep it safe and sound
on the ground.

Each tiny fragment clusters
to the other.
Clinging together
until some object
moves it here or there.
Its destiny can be anywhere.

What you may Leave Behind

Something for your mind, perhaps-
a word or phrase
that, to you, did not sound
so intelligent or profound,
yet characterized your mind
for those who listened, retained
your statements. Sage or foolish,
you are again imaged and heard
with whatever were your words.

Speak, then, carefully, wisely,
with knowledge of possibility
that sometimes, somewhere,
your words will be heard
and, to your surprise,
are being quoted and used as true
but forgotten by you.

Peggy Zuleika Lynch

the artichoke

it's the core
it's the center
it's the heart
all are the inmost portion
into which one must cut, peel, prove
with whatever difficulty is needed
searching into the heart of the matter
always means transference of insight
into the core one probes
transferring emotions
from one center to another
holding the leaves
of the artichoke
briefly one by one
until the light of understanding
breaks through to the heart

Texas Land Whisk

Texas land has become
clean swept like
tornado alleys
devoid of cattle,
horses, houses
and barns.

Such drastic change
from before.
Poetically,
there are no
more doors.

Dancers

There is a candlelight glow
over all our yard below
against which the oak trees
stand
in sculptured relief
like dancer frozen in
a state of momentary grief.

Engulfed

In womb of living
in void of our being
in heart of all
we struggle as fish
swimming, swimming
through channels unknown
rushing, trusting
pausing, eddying on
never sure of our destiny
never sure of our space.
Like submarines periscoping
from their probes
we look our limitations
allow out as far as we can
still unable to know anything
not revealed to eyeing.
A bottle ship,
we exist in our fluidity
imprisoned, contained, linking
with our God
who determines
what, where, when
without ever revealing why.

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Budd Powell Mahan

Blizzard

A Tree can Teach the Meaning of *Endure*

At the Oklahoma City National Memorial

In April when the wind is warm with spring,
the great Survivor Tree lifts up its leaves
into whatever sky the day may bring.
And in a morning hour a zephyr weaves
a memory of this once humble tree,
the asphalt parking lot beneath its arms
until that hour and minute nine-o-three.
The shock wave stripped its limbs, and car alarms
howled madly underneath the splintered pole,
but even as the smoke choked air, new roots
began the dream to sprout the wounded bole.
An icon now, the elm sends tender shoots
to celebrate the blue of April sky,
and shade the lips that plead the question, "Why?"

Holding Hands

I study the vast topography of flesh,
the desert of cracked surface and parched cell
scaling itself into dunes.
Once this map held the flourish of youth,
the rivers promised eternal flood,
the surface pulsed with the throb of life that
quaked pliant skin to mountains.
Now the sharp edge of my nail
trails its way through palms and arid knuckles,
stirs in its wake
a landscape of barren ridge and
spotted plain without oasis.
I miss the callow days,
feel the crust grow brittle
and cloud in wind.
There is no way to redeem loss,
no shower that could revive this sterility,
not even the downpour that spills
wet and salty
from the monsoon
of my
regret.

Old fears
crawl out of bone
on nights when wind is
high
and moonlight fails. The
cry
of one alone
draws tears.

Below
the howl of wind
the wolf grows silent, still,
as shadows stripe the hill,
and bare limbs bend
in snow.

Too soon
the midnight yields
to sweeping drift that
mutes.
One primal voice refutes
from furrowed fields
the moon.

There Is No Voice In Stone: At Iwo Jima

A sentinel above the wide plateau,
Mount Suribachi breaks the sea and stands
on lava feet it grew too long ago
to hold a memory of birth or man's
ascension to the highest form of life.
The beaches, black against the ocean's lip,
retain no spot of blood, recall no strife
of battle, hold no scar of landing strip.

Yet, in an atom of its history
it held the blood of heroes, cupped the dead
into its stone, entombed in artery
of tunnels thousands who met death instead
of victory. If air could claim our tears,
this island sky would rain a million years.

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Three Shades of Moonlight

Budd Powell Mahan

May Morning, After the Tornado

French Sonnet

I.

Once, as a child, I was lost for a night
in the woods behind my grandmother's house.
In one gulp I was swallowed into that
eternity of green, everything I knew
vanishing in one giant step.
I don't remember being afraid,
but even summer nights are cold
to thin child arms. I curled where
the canopy was broken and felt warmer
in that soft white light, watched the full
round moon and imagined myself nesting
to sleep in the plane pulsing its wings across
the circle in the dark.

II.

Another night, I walked home from a high school
basketball game. I remember the way the
headlights of passing cars made my steps seem bigger
than life, and farther along, how the whole January
night turned to that full moon almost-brightness.
It's not that light of discerning, like that false moonlight
in the Rex Allen movie -- although I loved that movie and
felt that shine -- but that edge of dark, like a dream,
where you cannot quite focus on anything.
In that frozen night, no thought could warm,
I pulled my letter-jacket tight to my neck,
pictured the snack my mother had left for me,
letting that river of cold moon flow.
I felt the magic in the night, my spine iced
with its glow.

III.

Tonight, the porch swing creaks where my sister sits.
Here the pond reflects the misty light of our best full
moon. I cannot find the form of objects, my eyes blur
in the light and the soft wash of tears.
"Breast cancer," she said, and moved away, leaving me
stunned at water's edge. Her autistic rock makes the
swing chains scream, trances her to cure,
and I stand white in beaming,
hope stirring my steps toward home,
remembering a thousand shinings --
the good that has always come from the face
of the moon.

She heard him call when lights went out,
when shirts unpinned were blown about
the yard, and danced in lightning flash
like ghouls of flesh. She heard him shout
as eddies whirled, above the crash
of hail against the clapboards, saw
him in a bolted light tableau,
ascending opposite to law
of gravity, his clothes aglow,
the sheets wrapped into wings. He rose
and then was swallowed by the night,
and fell to earth, or not, God knows
his fate. At dawn she stands in wilt
of green, her life atwist with guilt.

For the Soldier Who Saw Hiroshima

He never spoke
of the melted people,
the shadows etched on walls.
He never called up the voice
to tell of kimono designs
burned on
hanging skin,
the charred who lay
blessed by death,
of the walking seared
who wished for it.
I know he saw things
he was afraid
to speak to life.
His words died in embryo,
too weak for the task.
And I never asked,
let him hang the uniform
out of sight,
let him bury
what he'd
seen deep and cold.
I wanted him to be free,
as free as his sacrifice
had made me.

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Pan de Muerto
(for Trinidad Sanchez)

Alan Lee Birkelbach

Trinidad, I am afraid I am too white
to talk about you
But, my brown amigo,
this is my ofrenda for you
If I walk down the streets on
El Dia de los Muertos
some of my steps will be for you.
I cannot trill my r's like you,
and the tilde's, like paqueno, sueno,
malaguena, sound flat and artificial.
But I do not think you will hold
that against me.
I think
you would think
it would be fine.
On this night
you would expect all lovers of the word,
be they brown, white, or otherwise,
to raise the agua de tamarindo,
to flake away the sopapillas,
and to tell stories of what it is you loved,
wrapped up in a metaphor of masa.
a metonymy of mole'.
Ah, The bread that is passion.

The passion that is poetry.
The poetry in the pan de muerto.
Hey, Trinidad. I am only a white man
with a white dog; how wonderful!
Did you know a white dog of this breed
is called a Spook? Aaaiiee! It is a
symbolic sign! I am afraid
we live only in the moment,
me and my dog,
and that we do not know how
to call on our antepasados
as well as you.
But this season, this night,
The Day of the Dead,
being what we are,
we will live in the moment of passion,
and because I met you,
because I remember you,
my ghost dog and I will split
a loaf of dead bread together,
and we will howl joyously,
and full,
at the moon.

After Auden's "Musee' des Beaux Arts"

She was just an after-dinner flirt and we both knew it. It was what we generally worked our way through the meal for. Well, that and the consummation afterwards. She knew her role and I would play my general reluctant, 'no, I shouldn't be doing this' lines, like everything was already penciled in. It seemed to give the moment, to me at least, more meaning and importance, but I was only fooling myself. As I recalled the first few times we'd met we'd tried to sit as far away from the window as possible but after a while we dared anonymity. Occasionally I would see some man walking by outside who would try to catch a peek down her blouse. (Funny and odd in so many connotative ways how that was part of both the foreground and background at the same time.) But the man walking by would never stop; he had another role, some other place he had to be. There were always people on bicycles, delivery trucks,

cars passing by—people who never knew our names. One day the sun was just right and I caught our reflection in a window across the street. Who knew, who cared, what did it matter if my fork was raised up or down, my elbow on the table, whether I spilled my tea? I felt like I was always looking away, munching on some insignificant cud, until we had ten more minutes of banal conversation left. Or did I just imagine in the reflection I saw that day that her foot was already rising to climb up my leg? I thought maybe if I stared at my hand in the reflection long enough I could convince myself to push up from the table, could call the waiter over, ask for the check, could even pound on the window asking a passerby for rescue. But no. I just sat there thinking, chewing, waiting, anticipating, thinking no one would pay attention to what had already fallen, would pay attention to what was sinking before their very eyes.

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Continued on the next page

During late October
if your truck is tough enough
you can drive the old road
up to where the factory was
(where they would extract wax
from the candelilla plant).
It's not an easy trek,
past small but steady Fresno Creek
and the ruins of Harve Dodson's ranch.
You really have to want to go there.
But you go there to hear the voices,
the thing they don't describe
in the hiking guide.
The other hikers talk about it last
after they tell you to make sure you take
lots of water and some extra food
and good boots and a durable camera
that can take some jolts.
They'll say, "Oh, by the way..."
and their eyes will look off to the side
like they're talking to themselves almost
and they'll mutter how

it's both mesmerizing and disquieting
to stand by the Glenn Spring cemetery.
It will seem as if there's an extra
wind there,
like something is moving through
that isn't rollicking any dust or leaves.
And you'll think your hiking buddy is
saying something quiet-like and he'll
think the same thing of you but neither
of your lips are moving and you'll slowly
come to realize those Mexican bandits
might have taken the folks from the town
but those folks left their voices behind,
permanent things, stained onto the rocks,
like old wax, still telling stories of flames
that used to burn
in this vast and stony darkness.

Poet's Note: On a remote dirt road in the Big Bend National Park sits the ruins of a town called Glenn Spring. On May 5th, 1916 dozens of Mexican bandits raided the town and took hostages. American troops did cross the border and reclaimed the hostages but the town never recovered.

Waiting for Branches to Fall

Again, this morning, I found myself looking up,
peering at the broken branches.
It is a phrase and motif, a state of mind,
I keep returning back to.

A particularly large branch is hung
in the boughs far too high for me to climb.
Here, wrapped in the last few rags of night,
I sit on my deck and drink my coffee
and wait for a big wind
to come through.
It might be days away.

Sometimes I have sat with other poets
who have confessed
they spend entire writing sessions
staring into space waiting for their Muse
to finally get his pipe lit, his coffee made,
his hair brushed just right.

And then, when he does show up,
there's still no telling if he has brought anything,
or how he is planning to deliver it.

They want him to bring some soothing drink
and a plateful of biscotti.
Those poets want to just have a conversation.
They think the poem is all in the hand-off
of intimate chatter.

When this branch above me falls it is
certainly going to leave a concussive mark.
But the really good ideas always leave a bruise.
Inevitably we are caught by surprise
trying to catch ideas that fall
faster than we can dodge.
Not something served in china cups
accompanied by crumbs.

I sit here, wrapped in the thin blanket of night,
and drink my coffee I have poured myself.

I look up.
Something awkward, crushing, tearing and lumpy
is slowly falling toward me.
I can hardly wait
for the mark it will leave.

ABOUT THE POETS



Larry D. Thomas was named the 2008 Texas Poet Laureate. He started writing poetry seriously in the early 1970's, and has placed poems in numerous literary journals. His first collection of poetry, *The Lighthouse Keeper*, published by Timberline Press, was selected by the Small Press Review as a "pick-of-the-issue" (May/June 2001). He has since that time published four additional collections of poems which have received several prestigious prizes and awards, including *Amazing Grace*, (2003 Western Heritage Award, 2001 Texas Review Poetry Prize); *The Woodlanders*, (Violet Crown Book Award Special Citation); *Where Skulls Speak Wind* (2004 Texas Review Poetry Prize, 2004 Violet Crown Book Award). Mr. Thomas is married to Lisa Parker Thomas, D.D.S, and has one adult daughter, Deena.

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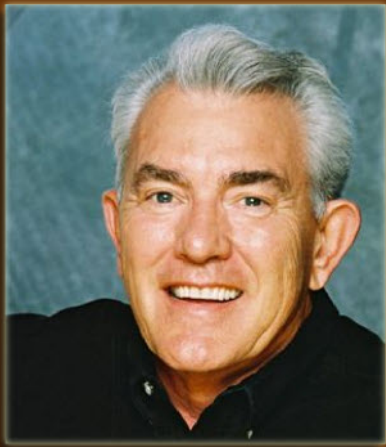


Peggy Zuleika Lynch is a poet and lecturer in her native state of Texas. She received a BS degree from UT in Austin and an MFA from SMU. She has been honored with five Pushcart Prize nominations. In 1983 she and her husband, Major General Edmund C. Lynch co-founded Poetry in the Arts promoting poetry, music, and art. In 2005 at the 18th World Congress of Poets, she was crowned Poet Laureate International and became the Permanent VP of the United Poets Laureate International. Lynch has authored 9 books of poetry, co-authored 12 additional poetry books, and co-edited 15 anthologies. Currently, Peggy serves as Director, Archivist, Program Chair, and State Councilor for the Poetry Society of Texas. In addition she serves as VP of the United Poets Laureate International and Archivist for The National Federation of State Poetry Societies.

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ABOUT THE POETS



Budd Powell Mahan served as the 16th and 19th President of the Poetry Society of Texas, and as 26th President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc. He won the 2005 Eakin Manuscript Competition in November 2005 with his book, *Falling to Earth*, and the Stevens Manuscript Competition in 2006 with *Harvest*. After a fulfilling career as a public school teacher, he retired in 2002. His poetry has received many prizes including, among others, the William Stafford Award, 2005; Hugh C. Bailey Award, 2005; American GI Award, 2004; Acadian Award, 2003; Davidson Memorial Award, 2001; Ben Lomond Poets Award, 2001; and the David Wagoner Award, 2001.

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Alan Lee Birkelbach, native of Texas, was selected as 2005 Texas Poet Laureate. An ambassador for poetry, he has spoken to conferences, colleges, and poetry groups across Texas. His volumes of poetry include *No Boundaries*, (Pat Stodghill Book Award), and *Weighed in the Balances*, (Stevens Poetry Competition Winner). His work has been included in eight anthologies, including *Texas in Poetry 2* (TCU Press, 2002). Birkelbach has served on the board of directors for the Poetry Society of Texas for over ten years. He lives and works as an engineer in Plano. Billy Bob Hill writes in his introduction to *Alan Birkelbach: New and Selected Poems*, "Birkelbach can disguise a mosaic of word music in plain sight hidden in conversational English."

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Peggy Zuleika Lynch

the artichoke, *Feeding the Crow*, Plain View Press, 1998
Beach Sand, *3 Savanna Blue*, Plain View Press, 2000
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Budd Powell Mahan

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