

PATHOS · HUMOR · HISTORY · CREATIVE NON-FICTION



# CALLAHAN COUNTY STAR SPOTLIGHT

## WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

### American Life In Poetry

Column 227

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Jane Hirshfield, a Californian and one of my favorite poets, writes beautiful image-centered poems of clarity and concision, which sometimes conclude with a sudden and surprising deepening. Here's just one example.

#### Green-Striped Melons

They lie  
under stars in a field.  
They lie under rain in a field.  
Under sun.

Some people  
are like this as well--  
like a painting  
hidden beneath another painting.

An unexpected weight  
the sign of their ripeness.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Poem copyright (c)2008 by Jane Hirshfield, whose most recent book of poems is "After," Harper Collins, 2006. Poem reprinted from "Alaska Quarterly," Vol. 25, nos. 3 & 4, Fall & Winter, 2008, by permission of Jane Hirshfield and the publisher. Introduction copyright (c)2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.



**Need: Poems, Short Stories, Poetry Related Items**



*The pen is mightier than the sword*

### Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will

be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.

3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

**Literary Editor  
Eastland/Callahan County  
Newspapers  
P. O. Box 29  
Eastland, TX 76448  
email: [thebairdspotlight@att.net](mailto:thebairdspotlight@att.net)**

Submissions sought to:

**Star  
P.O. Box 29  
Eastland, TX 76448**

email: [thebairdspotlight@att.net](mailto:thebairdspotlight@att.net)

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

**Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or liable material.**

#### Sign Language

The girl set her poem on the podium  
moved her hands in a bird-like motion  
gestures pulled out of the air  
in the miracle of communication -  
a pioneer in this new dimension  
of the human heart.

Our eyes listened to the structure  
and deliverance of her thought.  
we marveled at her ingenuity-using  
the loss of her voice to lead us in silence,  
through a language which forges poetry  
without a word.

- Marjorie Bruhmuller  
Quebec City, Canada

#### A Time To Learn

See now those dead, who once were people  
Whose thoughts were fun and worldly gain  
See how they turn, no longer gleeful  
With writhing tongues of fiery pain.

Where are they now, who walked beside me  
And turned their backs at time to learn  
Submerged so deep eternally  
In fiery lakes that ever burn.

- Weldon L. Smith  
Eastland, Texas

### Rhymes To Use:

Symbolist

Vocalist

Liturgist

Egoist

Pragmatist

Balloonist

Persist

Dentist

Schist

### Words To Use:

**Pyknic:** This refers to something that is muscular, perhaps broad and short, like one of those great football running backs.

**Remise:** This is a rental concern, specifically relating to car rental agencies.

**Sagatiate:** Supposedly this word stands for nothing. It is said to have no meaning. You knew there had to be a word like that for you to use in a letter to your aunt.

**Taliped:** Something that is awkward or disoriented can be described with this word.

### UNLOCKING THE CITY

Anne Winters acts as a poet-detective in her collection, *The Key to the City*.

By Emily Warn  
Poetry Media Services

Anne Winters works Manhattan's streets in *The Key to the City*, her first book and a National Book Critics Circle finalist for poetry in 1986, using methods similar to New York City homicide cops. Her poems condense the dizzying complexity of Manhattan into miniature scale models in order to detect the unfair social conditions that can lead to crimped lives and calamitous events. In her poem-laboratories, Winters studies points in time that in complexity theory are defined as "strange attractors." The science writer James Gleick explains that these are single instants in time when the "complete state of knowledge about a dynamical system . . . collapses to a point" and so serve as a means to understand the system.

Fathoming New York is possible if she can register its forces, the energy of economic and social exchange that, though invisible, is contained within the city's physical lineaments—that which is unfixed and flowing moves through the "walledup canals." A poem's prosodic and syntactic arrangements create its structure just as differences of class and race create a social structure. The patterns that emerge over time cannot be perfectly predicted or controlled. Difference functions within poem and system as that which motivates change. When there is little external pressure and stable, long-term relationships are present, there will be little change to patterns within the system. When difference is introduced, movement becomes possible and necessary.

A coming-of-age poem, "The Street," opens with the speaker watching her sister watching herself in a "tilting compact mirror."

A round eclipse, a pool-like dot of light  
on my little sister's glasses, bangs, her dome-cheeked,  
solemn face  
play-powdered in a tilting compact mirror.

Her sister is making herself up, inventing an adult self. The poet, on the other hand, is inventing herself as documentarian, mirroring events to understand what she sees. The playful freedom and predictable order and perspective of their childhood will soon be eclipsed by forces unleashed in the street. Out the window, where the two sisters knew "every crevice and lip of our stoopball, stickball street," the unexpected happens: they witness the aftermath of a horrific murder of a "girl" from "the one brownstone, catty cornered across: / a 'house,'" which is different than the other brownstones.

Winters records the crime with the accuracy of a crime lab technician's high-powered lenses. The violence casts a harsh light and amplifies the fixed pattern out of which it emerged, indelibly altering the speaker's perception of self and system of which she is a part. Time collapses to a point. The precipitating event in this and many other poems is often the result of crossing a class line. What had been human and orderly becomes bestial and Kafkaesque.

On the sidewalk across / a girl from the house, in  
stockingfeet, dark silk suit  
slit and ribboned by knife thrusts, was pulling herself  
through the arcs and dribbles and splashes of her blood.

Her fingertips' carmine meshed on the concrete, her elbows  
strained  
over the wet, working shoulder blades (one still hooked  
through her purse strap) and somehow her bluish felt

hat and hatpin, rolled to the curb, made me think she was  
pinned  
to the street—pinned and moving.

The bleeding victim becomes an insect in an exhibit; the severing of her connection from the human gives the poem its disturbing urgency, mirroring its lack in the scene itself:

And last thing  
before we were hauled from the window seat, we saw her  
raise one terrible red-nailed arm  
and wave to them, sign them to come down to her.

Winters could have ended the poem here, setting herself up as witness to a failure to respond to a desperate summons. The poem would have served as reminder and prod to change the system by helping us see its injustice. She could have signed off with this ultimate of human horror—that even murder fails to help us recognize the "other" as human. But that would not be true to the facts of New York. The unexpected emerges out of it, amplifies the system as a whole, and then settles back into its pattern. In the last two stanzas, a cop cranks closed the hydrant he'd opened to wash the blood.

Much later, and late for school, when we were sent down  
onto the stoop, my sister's face still reddish  
lost and bereft behind her round of glasses

the opposite walk was clear if we'd had to cross there,  
only a dark calligraphy beneath a sheen of water,  
one lingering cop to crank the hydrant closed.

The beauty of "The Street" is in the way its perspectives shift and collide—from the "pool-like dot of light" in her sister's glasses to the "terrible red-nailed arm" waving at the two girls. These shifts also occur among poems in the book—from an overheard conversation in an all-night laundromat to the view from a plane gliding above Manhattan skyscrapers. Winters's faceted forms are comparable to the stunning images produced when mathematicians invented fractal geometry to describe the irregular regularity of shapes such as twisting coastlines or turbulent water. Before the invention of fractal geometry, the dimensions and characteristics of these forms were unknown. Similarly, in exactly rendering events, Winters abstracts essential information about New York, fathoming its unfathomable dimensions.

Emily Warn's latest collection of poetry is *Shadow Architect*. This article first appeared on [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org). Learn more about Anne Winters, and her poetry, at [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org).

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