

# Testament/ National Poetry Month, 2013/ 25 Poems

*by Gary Hardaway*

## **01\_Flight**

To ask a writer  
why it writes  
is foolish, foolish  
as asking a sparrow  
why it flies. It flies  
because it can  
and because, by flying,  
it is most wholly itself.

## **02\_Curious**

The cats repeat themselves  
eying and sniffing the same phenomena  
day after day because their paws  
are ill-designed for holding pencils  
and notebooks and not even T-mobile  
will set them up with smart phones.

## **03\_Wave Propagation**

Small stones  
skipped across  
still water ripple  
the shore with minute  
but manifold alterations.

#### **04\_Kinesthetic Intelligence**

Dancers have it. Stick and ball  
athletes and F1 drivers, too--  
an understanding of the body  
in relationship with other bodies  
and time down to the nanosecond.  
Music can be said  
to make it audible  
and visible at the pointed tip  
of the conductor's wand  
and the flashing tip  
of the violinist's bow.  
Who do not have it  
can only watch in awe  
and applaud.

#### **05\_Pharaoh's Stool**

Egyptologists  
are mum on the matter  
but that was some  
holy crap.

#### **06\_Ghost Script**

The poems arrive  
spectral post  
whenever they like.  
Be prepared  
or they'll return to sender

(address unknown).

### **07\_Multitasking at the Cotton Patch Cafe**

We can't chew and swallow  
without the multi-hued glow  
of multiple screens  
and their flickering light.  
Food alone in the twenty-first century  
isn't interesting enough  
to spark digestion.

### **08\_Winter's End**

I see the brown one first  
the scarlet beak  
the only signal  
this is not some  
sparrow, overfed-  
and then, flitting  
off to her right,  
the consort, blazing red.

### **09\_Roper RTW4640YQ1**

The smarter the machines,  
the less predictable their noises.

With the washer before,  
you set a few dials, punched to start,

and off it went, filling and sloshing  
and spinning until it's silence said "clean."

The new one clicks and chirps  
in no known progression,

balancing stuff, conserving power,  
locking the door against dangerous

human curiosity and forgetfulness.  
I cannot read the replacement's voice

and in unsettled dreams, it chirps  
and clicks out orders to platoons

of clever new appliances  
in war against my peace mind.

## **10\_Remedial Reading**

Forget what Mrs. Walker taught  
at Reinhardt Elementary School:

move your lips as you read  
if you can't read aloud

unless it's an annual report--  
your lips should never lie

and words should never  
undermine your faith in words.

## **11\_Inconvenient Weather**

We should be grateful for the rain.  
Especially, this small, slow rain

that doesn't swirl, terrifying,  
through otherwise safe

and trim suburban streets.  
With the sudden thrust

of April green, we can forget  
our drought continues. When

cicadas cry in mid-July, we may  
recall this cold, small rain

and long for its chilling  
glaze of inconvenience.

## **12\_Night Sky, North Texas**

The contagion of shopping center lights  
and freeway lights  
and toll way lights  
erases even Polaris tonight.

Fuck you, Commerce.

I want to know which way is north.  
Your sprawl erases cardinal points  
with glaring rates of growth  
which cannot be sustained.

### **13\_Archaeology**

Robbing graves  
to resurrect the dead  
to bread and wine  
and passions unbecoming  
to demagogues and genealogists.

### **14\_A Shower of Rain**

You have at least  
an intermittent belief.  
It's otherwise impossible

to write much more than shopping lists  
and pro/con arguments with yourself.  
So, yes, there is a sprinkle of belief

that word may follow word  
in a way that seems worthwhile  
as word follows word, again.

### **15\_Social Network Lament**

Interesting people leave  
and I wonder was it

something I said or didn't say  
while they were here?

but then I realize  
in a shame of mirror light

my voice aloud or silent  
doesn't have that power.

### **16\_Vitreous**

Damn our small chameleon hearts  
that turn obsidian-black and hard  
then break to edges sharp as glass  
and must then open tender flesh  
to prove how sharply broken they are.

### **17\_Warm Sap Haiku**

Sunlight signals sap  
it's time to flow again. A  
florid world replies.

### **18\_Vortex**

What eludes provokes.  
Life inside the mirror  
  
must be better than this  
life outside the mirror,  
  
if only because reversed.  
Dissatisfaction fuels  
  
manifestoes, a painted  
stark white canvas,

Ville Radieuse, sessions  
with the Ouija Board.

What would balance look like  
if there were no stasis

and a slow heat death?  
Is contentment with the world,

enlivened by the appetite  
for new flavors, new songs,

another choreography,  
even possible with us?

## **19\_Test**

They test the siren in the park.  
It dopplers through the neighborhood  
as it turns through all the compass points.

It is only a test.  
No imminent hail or twister  
on this clear cold Saturday in March.

No incoming Stukas,  
Migs, or intercontinental  
ballistic missiles.

We're safe as houses  
and unmoved. We grow  
accustomed to the sound

so when the real



emergency emerges,  
we can shrug it off.

## **20\_Tree Yaupon**

She hates the yaupon especially  
in April when it flowers.

They drop, pale green and yellow,  
full of pollen, to cover the pool deck

and coat the surface of the pool,  
a shrunken Sargasso Sea come inland.

They clog the skimmer basket  
and fill the small Polaris bag.

They track into the house in broken  
star shaped buds across the tile and carpets.

The yaupon is my favorite  
of our trees. I like its dome

of leaves, its shading canopy  
above the grill. I hate the pool.

I want to drain it, punch big holes  
in it's peeling plaster bottom,

fill it with crushed stone, sandy  
loam and top soil and plant three

yaupons on an undulant, kidney  
shaped lawn of fescue and ivy.

## **21\_To Resurrect the Name of the Dead**

The hard shell of Linear A remains  
uncracked and we still call  
these splendid dead "Minoan"

based on Mycenaean stories  
of a king, his labyrinth,  
his Minotaur. Crude brutes

and opportunists, Mycenaean  
can't be trusted. Neither can  
sub-literate Dorians who descended,

outbruting them. Crack the shell,  
archaeo-linguists. Let the language  
breathe a little once again.

Return to Europe's great first nation  
nouns and verbs. Let it speak  
once more it's own self-given name.

## **22\_Testament** **Part 1 of 7**

I am the last to honor time before  
the scarred and angry warriors from the north  
attacked and brought their cunning, sullen gods.  
The torchlight flickers off the stone above,  
the ceiling of this ancient cave the scarred  
have not discovered yet. I write this, sure  
of nothing, in the fading letters of

a dying language. Were I practical,  
I would use the words and letters as corrupted  
by the northern simplification  
of expression we worked centuries to make  
complex enough to capture nuance  
the scarred declare unnecessary art.

Their nouns are few and stark.  
Ours are numerous and dappled  
or subtly shaded and shadowed  
by circumstance and possibility.

They first came ashore from ships  
so small and clumsy one should call them rafts.  
They wanted gold or silver, perhaps a few  
of the fine bronze weapons they had heard  
about in Troy. They offered cheeses, wine,  
young breeding goats, and crudely woven wool.  
Or, so it was remembered, by those who met them,  
before the Calamity, long before my birth,  
before our beautiful circular city,  
north across the small finger of Sea,  
vanished under Earth's dark spit;  
before the swelling of the Sea washed away  
our Seaside ports and villages; before the plague  
that follows the death of so many together  
spread among those the swelling didn't take;  
before the five dark summers, when the sun  
dimmed and the crops died, blackened in the fields.

## **23 Testament**

### **Part 2 of 6**

The cunning take the thread of fact and weave

a tapestry that lies to their advantage.  
From the faceted complexity of Canossis  
comes a labyrinth. From our ceremony of respect  
for mindless force we can't control  
but only evade with grace and knowledge,  
a monster in the labyrinth. From a king--  
chosen, not born, nor thrust upon a race  
by murderous alliances-- a cruel tyrant  
delighting in the suffering of others.  
As we, weakened-- beloved faces reduced  
by death to less than half-- were forced to hear, recounted  
by the scarred and angry Mycenaeans.

One must learn to give the Bull the things  
it needs: space, grass and grain, his mates  
and offspring, and elude the things  
its momentary fury wants- your death  
and those of your sisters and brothers.  
One must sadly learn to treat the lion  
with similar evasive regard. But our  
diplomacy, once revered along  
all shores of the Sea, collapsed and died, rebuked.

## **24\_Testament**

### **Part 3 of 6**

Our ships once teemed along the shore  
like pups at their mother's teats.  
After the swelling of the Sea, the dead  
outnumbered the living and the shipwrights  
died where they lived, along the Sea.  
We had looked at water and the things afloat  
and learned the happiest shapes and properties  
of hulls. Our ships swam shallow in the Sea,

which made them quick. Our rudders thrust themselves  
into the Sea, deep enough to make us  
nimble but not so deep as to catch the weeds  
that flourish under dazzled water.  
After the swelling of the Sea, our ships lay broken,  
far inland, ribs exposed like those  
of whales ashore, rotting in the sun.

The bodies of the dead lay broken, too,  
and bloated. Who survived could not know them.  
We piled the pieces of ships and pieces of men  
and burned them. Smoke arose to dim the sun.

Perhaps the Earth, Sea, and Sky were done  
with us and chose to tatter all we were  
and leave it to the Mycenaean swords  
and fires to obliterate. What we were  
lies ruined and mysterious-- evocation  
to the unkind imagination  
of the Brute-- alive now only  
in the children of concubines and rape.

Against that, this testament, scratched  
with misshapen styluses, made  
from memory by unskilled hands,  
with a pallid memory of ink.

## **25\_Testament**

### **Part 4 of 6**

My daughter's sons and fathers hunt for me.  
I trust she won't disclose my likely  
hiding place, although enslaved and shamed.

But time itself is after me. I slow  
with age and pains of wear and elusion.  
The jars of brined olives, wined figs,  
pickled octopus and squid, grow fewer,  
daily. I can only write against  
my end of time and hope the parchment  
and papyrus will survive the damp  
and find both kind and comprehending eyes  
before the sun itself grows weary  
and extinguishes the last of day.

We once saw giants in the clouds and in  
connected points of stars, and named  
them, gods. We placed them in their high-halled villas,  
on the mountaintop, to game and frolic  
with our lives-- eternal adolescents.  
Once we climbed the mountain, we learned that clouds  
are insubstantial vapor and the stars  
are points of light that turn as we  
through repetitious day and night.  
The Mycenaeans sweat and slash below  
the clouds, servants of capricious gods  
and narrow, brutish appetites. They smell  
of dirt, semen, ashes, blood and dung.

## **26\_ Testament**

### **Part 5 of 6**

Before the Calamity, the Sea took  
my husband, captain of a quick and agile ship.  
I say the Sea, although it may have been  
the savages that live beyond Iberia.  
Exchange holds risk and reward, fraternal  
twins that rise and fall at ends of the scale.

His ship did not return. I joined the other  
widowed or solitary women at  
the House of Memory and Teaching at Malaeis.  
My toddling son and daughter learned with me  
the memories and wisdom of the old,  
the passions and poems of the young,  
the triumphs, confusion and sorrows of those in between.  
We grew together. We knew the beauties and  
pomposities of neighbors, their frailties and strengths.  
Then, the cloud. The crack and rumble, like thunder.  
The sickening back and forth of the ground.  
And, later, the swell of the Sea, its unbroken  
wave, higher than the walls of the great  
House at Knossos, surging, with its death,  
a hundred ship lengths inland. Sudden cries.  
A crash of ships and houses. Then, the silence.

Who could stand up and looked and cursed their eyes.  
The cries and whimpers of the undead cursed their ears.  
Who lived breathed in the death and found their bodies  
broken in ways invisible. Salt and bitter the only tastes  
on the tongue. Decay the only odor in the nose.  
The astonishing silence and whimpering  
the only sounds the ears can hear. The cold  
of dead skin the only sensation on the flesh.  
The dark smoke of pyres the only sight.  
The rivers ran salty, dead fish and the unrecovered  
dead the only cargo floating toward the Sea.  
The undead sorted as they could, repaired  
and scrubbed what wasn't ruined, salvaged stone  
and timber, hinges and handles. Small boats fished  
and netted what they could. A pantomime  
of order, effort and routine. The songs,  
all dirges and laments. The dances but foot  
following foot unto exhausted sleep.

Who lived were lambs, stunned by clubs before  
the knife tip bleeds the veins before the feast.

## **27\_Testament**

### **Part 6 of 6**

Mycenaean warriors thought us priestesses  
in thrall and service to our gods. Their superstition  
saved our lives but not our rooms and lovingly  
stored and labeled tablets, scrolls, and layered  
poem-leaves. Ours, and all the Houses  
of Memory and Teaching, restored, were burned  
to ash and broken stone. No superstition  
saved our sons and brothers. Blood and bodies  
stained the roads and courtyards.

We were a people, whole and happy, once.  
We were enamored with the repetitions  
and surprises of the world. Our bodies, first,  
and spirits, after, were broken by  
the forces that hide inside the Earth, Sea  
and Sky. Our remains were scattered, then,  
by knowing choices of joyless brutes  
who stand like men but are a cunning plague.  
We were Athlanti. We were Canossis. We were  
Malaeis, Phaestos, and Thera, city of the circle.  
We were fleet and nimble ships, the leapers of Bulls.  
We were language and curiosity, exchange  
and memory. Now, we are the stories  
scarred and angry men, insecure  
in their own leadership and worth,  
will speak around a fire on ground not theirs.



## **28\_Regarding Revision**

I find this April's voice  
doesn't like last April's notes,  
or even February's,  
and mucks up all the chords  
to suit his own thin apparatus.

## **29\_A Specific Case of Hydrogen**

When specific conditions prevail,  
hydrogen finds its oxygen  
and manifests as part of a tear.

## **30\_Stomping the Big Ozarka Bottle Flat**

Recycling makes me think  
of bio-mass and critical mass  
and mass extinctions  
as my imaginary dolphin friend  
chokes on the plastic rings  
of a six pack.

I dream of benzene rings  
and polymer shrouds  
and endless coal fires  
under earth.

Periclean Greeks  
had no plastics  
just littered the world  
with tragedies.

