

# The Kumquat Challenge



40 poems by WCC faculty, staff, and students  
(current and former) celebrating  
National Poetry Month

**April 2009**

Whatcom Community College Library

© Whatcom Community College

Megan Hemple



Julia Moroz





Carole Lince



### Introduction

*Acquaint, blue, crossing, dusting, fashion, flame, ken, perplex, thread, wane.*

“Kumquat” was a word from our first poetry challenge, and it lives on as the title of what is now an annual event. The challenge is to write a poem using the ten words that the library marketing committee chooses.

I’ll let you in on a secret—we’re not the only ones using the above ten words for a poetry challenge. On April 9th, *The Montclair Times* in New Jersey ran several pages of poetry under the heading “Wrestling with Ken.” How did that happen? It might be useful to know that a *Montclair Times* feature writer, Elizabeth Oguss, is the sister of one of our librarians, Sally Sheedy.

So why do people write poetry? Here are reasons from some of our contributors: Guy Smith said he relished the opportunity to use some of the writing skills he gained while he earned his bachelors in English at WSU in 1989. Jimmy Kelsey, making conversation and in a whimsical mood, originally sent his poems to Ara Taylor for a lark. She encouraged him to submit them for publication. Nancy McAbee said that “the moment I set eyes on *The Kumquat Challenge* words, I just knew I wanted to write ‘Y Gen Barbie.’ It was easy and so much fun to write.”

Kate Miller wrote that she “looks forward to *The Kumquat Challenge* every year.” I agree with Kate. I look forward to the writing, to reading the submissions, and to celebrating National Poetry Month.

This year, as usual, there are many who have helped with *The Kumquat Challenge*. We offer our thanks to:

- Sue Lonac, Ron Leatherbarrow, and Bob Winters, our judges
- Pam Richardson who again asked her students to contribute illustrations
- Sally Sheedy for producing the final publication
- Rosemary Sterling and her quick-turn-around team at the Copy Center

Linda Lambert,  
for the Library Marketing Committee  
Ara Taylor, chair; Sally Sheedy; Heather Williams

Comic Box.....	5
Crop Dusting Goddess.....	6
Winter Bay .....	7
The Night Sky .....	7
After the Equinox .....	8
So Perplexed by Fashion .....	8
I Give Up .....	8
The Wings of Space .....	9
Midnight Blue .....	9
At the Malibu High Thirty-year Reunion.....	10
Kumquat Limerick .....	10
The End .....	11
Spirit Call.....	11
Charting Harrow's Strait.....	12
There and Back Again .....	12
Unspoken.....	13
Untitled.....	14
Entering the Garden of Eden .....	14
Blue Summer Rain.....	15
Lost .....	16
Mystery .....	16
Threading Kumquat Dilemma .....	17
Beyond My Ken.....	18
Dusting Blue.....	19
Designed to Perplex.....	20
The Astronaut Poem .....	21
She Speaks Dictionary.....	22
The Challenge.....	23
The Project Runway Dream .....	24
Age-old Worry .....	25
Holy Secret Knock-Up.....	26
Kumquat Poetry Challenge '09.....	27
Apathy? Eh, Whatever .....	27
As Seen On TV .....	28
Y Gen Barbie .....	29
In Question of Summer .....	30
Dust.....	31
A Winter Passing .....	32
Untitled .....	33
Fantastical.....	33

**DONNA RUSHING** is an adjunct faculty member in the English department.

**SALLY SHEEDY** is the systems librarian at WCC and a founding member of The Librettos. She is fond of words, music, and dance. She has twin daughters.

**LEON L SCOTT JR**, a transplant from the East Coast, has worked in many of the local high-end restaurants in Bellingham. A full time student at WCC, he is majoring in Computer Information Systems, and is a member of the student council.

**GUY SMITH**, an instructor of Communication Studies at WCC, calls his poem a “vain misplaced attempt to express (through a typically compulsive attention to detail) the author’s hypocritical contempt for the (mis)information garnered through the Internet.”

**JUDE SODERLUND** is a Bellingham resident for 30 years and claims the title of local poet because “WCC publishes an anthology of student work.” She is also the mother of “one incredibly wondrous daughter.”

**KASSANDRA SPURLING** is a mother, former student at Whatcom, and an employee in the IT department.

**ARA TAYLOR** works at the WCC Library, teaches Community Education, and formerly reviewed books for *The Bellingham Herald*.

**HEATHER WILLIAMS** works in the WCC Library. Her poem, Comic Box, was inspired by her childhood collection of DC Comics and her enduring love for the superhero genre. She also loves sensible shoes, books, and her husband.

**GREG MARSHALL**, director of Communication Education at WCC, was among the first students to receive a bachelor's degree from Western Governors University, and has had two important firsts in the last year: publication of a book, *Using Windows Vista*, and giving a keynote speech entitled "Managing your Program in a Down Economic Climate."

**LORI MARTINDALE** is a teacher, a student, and a sailor of the San Juans.

**NANCY MCABEE** has worked in faculty support for ten of the 28 years she has lived in Bellingham. She was born and raised on San Juan Island and has a fondness for walking the beaches and looking for beach glass and agates. She loves gardening and reading in the sunshine.

**MEMBERS OF PAM RICHARDSON'S ART 115 CLASS** contributed black-and-white illustrations. They include Courtney Ad- dler, Mara Dougal, Elena Girenko, Megan Hemple, Brandie Jones, Tess Klemke, Carole Lince, Alla Lysikov, Julia Moroz, Jeff Ott, Sally Rogers, Kakeru Tanaka, Alicia Troha, Emily White, and Wendelin Wohlgemuth.

**KATE MILLER** is a poet and creative nonfiction writer who teaches English composition and creative writing at WCC and Women's Studies and American Cultural Studies at WWU. She looks forward to the *Kumquat Challenge* every year.

**JESSICA PERINO** is a student at WCC.

**SEAN RADWANSKI** is, at 15, an early admittance student who lives in Lynden. He plans to go into Astronomy and Astro- physics which is why he chose to write a poem about space.

**PETE RUBLE** is a student at Whatcom, a residen- tial/commercial painter by trade, and an avid guitar player.

## Comic Box

by Heather Williams

You acquainted yourself with these colorful  
Leotarded champions, oblivious to fashion.  
Clothed in wacky threads, they had names  
Like Ken Kadabra, stage magician turned  
Vigilante, blue flame spouting from his fists,  
Or Dr. Perplexity, his arch enemy, raining  
Down gallons of his confusion solution on the  
Helpless law enforcement as he sped by  
On his gravity-defying giant rubber chicken.  
You discover them still fighting in the dim  
Attic, and dusting off their stories with sad  
Smiles, you remember your interest in them  
Waning as you made the crossing into the  
Profound seriousness of adulthood—  
Yet here they are, still waiting for a time  
When you are ready to love them again.



## **Crop Dusting Goddess**

*by John Gonzales*

Crop Dusting Goddess, aviatrices' patron  
Swath-cutting through blue expanses of sky,  
In methodical rows streaking billows of doom  
No crossing of lines, nor no zagging of zigs.  
Traversing the boundary twixt heaven and earth  
Beyond reach  
Beyond eye-sight  
Beyond ken.

In your death-streaking carriage, riding on air  
You grow, sweeping toward me, trailing vaporous  
doom;  
Modestly veiled by a whirl of propeller.  
And in glorious arc you recede and you wane,  
Filming chemical flame to unmade moths  
Enflaming my terrestrial heart.

I pinch at your poisonous thread and think to  
hold you by it.  
But I cannot hold you; I cannot have you.  
I drink in your vapor (and cough only slightly).  
You perplex gravity in your bi-winged wind rider,  
And defy fashion: a study in leather and scarf.  
Ground-bound, I'm agog at your begoggled beauty  
You have barnstormed my heart.

If I hold you I lose you  
Your acquaintance is fatal.  
Goddess of Air  
Goddess of Distance  
Goddess of Death

**TRACI HARPINE**, is an adjunct instruction/reference librarian at WCC who also graduated from WCC. She had so much fun trying to use all the Kumquat Challenge words in one sentence that she's now taking a community education poetry class.

**SARAH HODGE**, for whom "writing has been a passion since I was young," expects to graduate from Whatcom at the end of the quarter and will continue her education toward a BA in Communications.

**JULIE HORST**, adjunct instruction/reference librarian, describes her poetic process this way: "I don't write poems very often but a limerick started tickling the back of my throat so I had to submit it."

**LINDA HOWSON**, program coordinator in Community Education, has been at WCC for nearly 20 years. She writes "I love the challenge of fitting unrelated words into a captivating image."

**LAUREL JOHNSON** is a freshman Running Start student at WCC who's "always been interested in various artistic pursuits" and enjoyed taking the Kumquat Challenge.

**SUE JOHNSON** has lived in Bellingham for three years. She works in an office by day and attends Creative Writing and Poetry classes in the evenings. She dreams of being a published writer."

**JIMMY KELSEY** says that he was an adjunct "at nearly every college from Des Moines to Everett" before he landed as "the lone economist" among WCC tenured faculty.

**LINDA LAMBERT**, WCC library director, enjoys the printed proximity to the diversity of writers represented on this page.

## Contributors

*Some contributors were unable to respond to our request for biographical information before we went to press, so we provide minimal information.*

**ASHLEY ALLISON** is a student at WCC.

**MICHELLE BENNETT** works in the science lab at WCC.

**DENNIS BARNES**, a graduate of Western Washington University, “discovered the joy of writing while attending WCC.”

**JENNIFER BULLIS** has taught English at WCC since 1995. All her life, she has been a little freaked out by Barbie. She successfully translated that freakiness into a poem.

**CONNIE DAUGHERTY** is an art history and English as a Second Language instructor. “So perplexed by fashion” is the first poem she has written in 30 years and, she says, “it reveals one of my many daily challenges.”

**NATHAN DODGE** is a student at WCC. He is also a musician and playwright.

**WAYNE GERNER** is a former WCC business office employee whose poems reflect his personal experiences.

**JOHN GONZALES** is an instructor at WCC. He is also an actor and playwright.

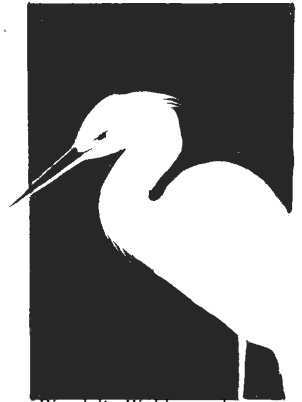
**KIMBAR HALVORSEN**, James Tomlinson, and Brandon Muncy are students in a creative writing class at WCC. They alternated adding lines to their poem.

**JOHN HANSEN**, a member of the WCC Custodial staff, is most known on campus for his flair for floral arrangements, seen at almost all important campus events.

## Winter Bay by Wayne Gerner

*Kumquat Challenge Winner!*

The moon wanes, crossing the night.  
On a thread it seemed to travel.  
A flame of dawn breaks by the water.  
A dusting of snow lies about me.  
I acquaint myself with the blue heron.  
Perplexed, we watch each other  
in our fashion.  
So many boundaries beyond our ken,  
our compassion.



*Wendelin Wohlgemuth*

## The Night Sky by Sean Radwanski

The ball of flame moved past the horizon,  
While sky of blue turned into black.  
The waning moon rose in an arcing fashion,  
As I watched a comet leave its long track.

I watched the meteors crossing the night sky,  
Mixing in with the dusting of stars.  
The perplexing Haumea, the one beyond our ken,  
Got acquainted with Pluto, Eris, Ceres, and Mars.

The threads of space went zooming past,  
And soon the night gave way to day.  
And all that greatness, wonder, and splendor,  
Simply... went away.

**After the Equinox***by Kate Miller*

As winter nights wane I am perplexed  
 by this budding desire to re-acquaint  
 myself with blue; as in the blue that  
 washes an early spring sky after hard  
 rain, or the sizzling blue flame of your  
 passion re-kindled, or the blue corn pollen  
 dusting my hands as I fashion threads  
 of ancient ken to protect my crossing.

**So Perplexed by Fashion***by Connie Daugherty*

So perplexed by fashion.  
 How should colors interweave?  
 Blue beside blue with a dusting of mauve?  
 Or threads of violent violet crossing olive?  
 Or flames of scarlet burning through black?  
 Or waning stripes of dirt brown tracks?  
 I ken not...  
 my colors meet in the dark morning closet,  
 shadowy acquaintances.

**I Give Up***by Jimmy Kelsey*

Dusting that blue vase with its colors sealed in flame  
 The word acquaint etched on its side in a package it  
     came,  
 I wondered what fashion would be moving against the  
     tide  
 I watch that tide twice daily through its wax and its  
     wane,  
 Crossing the mean water mark [I'm losing the thread]  
 I am so perplexed, I ken not finish. I give up.

**Untitled***by Sarah Hodge*

Acquaint my sorrow  
 With blue droplets  
 Crossing streams,  
 In a dusting of dirt covered rocks.  
 Fashion logs around the flame,  
 Smoke reaching up to the trees.  
 Ken is perplexed at how alive,  
 The night sky appears.  
 Silky, sticky thread,  
 Of a spider's web brushes my face.  
 Moon slyly wanes behind the clouds,  
 To return another night.

**Fantastical***by Sally Sheedy*

It's perplexing perhaps,  
 But my amusement  
 At this never wanes.  
 I read my daughter a story—  
 I wanted to acquaint her with the  
 DC comics of my youth.  
 It was about the usual  
 perp, Lex Luthor, and Superman.  
 She played with her dolls.  
 They were actors  
 following the story's thread.  
 Ken suddenly flew,  
 crossing past the threshold  
 and smashing into the wainscoting.  
 She had fashioned for him a blue suit  
 And had found a flame red Barbie cape.  
 These did not protect him.  
 She picked him up  
 and, dusting him off, asked  
 Can a person live if they have no head?



**The Wings of Space**  
*by Michelle Bennett*

My summers were once blue, following wandering  
along the crossing.  
But now my time seems as sweet at the late sunset  
dusting the ocean flame.  
The ever-ending meanings are propelling from the  
perplex skies and have fallen loudly.  
All that remains are the empty threads of existence.  
But wait, the wane of everything has succumbed.  
The fashion of ken is becoming so numb, only  
blisters are felt.  
I now see the acquaint time this confound  
my reasoning.  
Sleep now, hush.



*Courtney Addler*

It was midnight blue.  
Mrs. was dusting  
as Asian students were flaming,  
a mixture and crossing  
of Spanish, Filipino, and Chinese.  
At the reference desk was Ken,  
the very eye of the thread  
of knowledge.  
As I acquaint myself  
with the library, it is full of  
social fashions,  
the waning of silence  
driving me mad.  
I am perplexed,  
And leave at 4:20.

**A Winter Passing**  
*by Linda Howson*

The day returns as it does every year,  
Vivid memories etched in her heart—will these images  
ever wane?  
Grandfather Ken, dressed in the height of fashion for  
his day,  
Rocking gently in his creaking chair next to the open  
hearth fire—  
Blue and purple flames dance up the chimney.  
A light dusting of snow begins to cover the skylight of  
the parlour.  
His favorite little girl sits cross-legged on a thread-bare  
carpet,  
Gazing up at him, holding on to every word he  
whispers  
As they re-acquaint during his weaving of the classic  
story—  
Every detail of their family crossing to America so  
many years ago...  
Lavishly embellished, not unlike fish tales told around  
a campfire.  
Then, on cue, she repeats her exclamation he has  
heard so many times before:  
“Grandpapa, you perplex me! How could that be?”  
His answer fades as his breath leaves the room.  
The twinkling of his loving eyes extinguish,  
The rocking chair grows still,  
Snow quietly falls.

*Kumquat Challenge Winner!*

**At the Malibu High Thirty-year Reunion  
Barbie Apologizes to an Old Flame**

*by Jennifer Bullis*

Believe me, you were cool, but I was vain.  
The reasons that I dumped you weren't complex:  
it was your socks that caused my love to wane.

How was it you were otherwise urbane?  
We bathed in fashion up to our tan necks.  
I tried to make you toss them, but in vain;

Your blue and gold-thread argyles were the main  
offense (though your mauve loafers did perplex  
me, too). Can you believe for that, love waned?

I cared too much what P.J., Midge, acquaintances  
might think. But oh, the wondrous sex!  
Your crossing those taboos was hot, and vain  
was my resistance—how could I abstain?  
Clothes off, a dusting of sugar...let's just forget  
about those socks and shoes. Why should love wane?

We're forty-eight, we're single once again,  
you still are tan and cool and most delectable.  
Dear Ken, forgive me; I was vain.  
Let's fall in love before my beauty wanes.

**Kumquat Limerick**

*by Julie Horst*

He was dusting the fashion rug of blue thread  
when a thought was crossing Ken Wane's head.  
It was very complex  
so as to perplex:  
How to re-acquaint with his old flame on the bed?

**The End**

*by Greg Marshall*

Squinted eyes scanning her in grotesque fashions  
Looking for ghosts in the masterpiece paintings  
Of the shadows belonging to bricks and trees  
The ugliness is perplexing  
And yet  
Loveliness consumes their bodies  
Astounding me like only true humanity can

I watch as my lover falls beneath the lines of the earth  
His ever warm rays being eaten  
Sunlight as it begins to wane and then so quickly dies

August blue skies becoming saturated  
As the fires disperse into specks of white  
If only my ken could wrap itself around such days  
The link between these stars and the life below  
Perhaps then I could relish as the rest of the world sleeps  
Waiting for the light to return

**Dust**

*by Dennis Barnes*

blue dancing flamed  
an acquaintance  
before love waned  
as crossed threads  
held us together  
perplexity of fashion  
no longer kept  
the ken of friendship  
from turning  
to spider-web dusting.

## **In Question of Summer**

*by Ashley Allison*

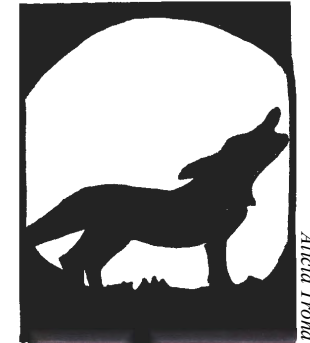
Sometimes I feel so swallowed  
As I'm left to deteriorate inside these summer days  
Eaten away by the small flame of sun  
Inching ever closer to burn my globe  
Almost as if to say that he wants to push me off my axis  
Until I tilt down  
Falling backwards into his warming pool of glow

And the trees roll their shoulders  
Imitating the wind as it blows across the heads of hundreds  
Hair pushed back from their faces  
Revealing the squinted surprise of the newness of sunshine  
Dusting their cheeks in a soft coat of red  
Each one so beautifully individual  
Yet threaded together by nothing more than weather  
Nothing more than natural satisfaction  
Seeping into their bones

I hear children sounds  
Laughter and indignation  
The effect of play—  
The cause  
And yet order seems irrelevant  
What does it matter if it is the bare feet crossing the grass  
Or the ground moving tiny bodies along itself  
Small arms and legs joining together  
Into something communal and larger  
Than the self-satisfied education grown inside  
These walls of education

A woman strides across my view  
Short legs wobbling across the pavement  
As if newly acquainted with the walk  
An infant to the world of strut  
And the billows of her flowing shirt get caught by the wind  
Revealing small white stretch marks lined above her shorts  
But she is defiant and presses on  
Falling through clouds of smoke  
Blooming from the fingers of a sad cigarette man

Perplexed, Ken closed his eyes against the blue thread  
of thought dusting his mind with crossing thoughts of  
romantic closures and fashionable curtain calls.  
Acquainting himself once again with the waning flame of  
a poem at an end.



## **Spirit Call**

*by Nancy McAbee*

Old crow whom I call Ken  
    for I see you now and then.  
Blue-black shade of your fringe  
    acquaints you with your kindred twin.  
Grackle, raven, jack jaw, rook  
    call commanding me to look.  
Waning moonlight, threads of rain,  
    scavenging with no shame.  
I am perplexed with what you do,  
    in what fashion you pursue.  
Wings cross through flaming sun,  
    it seems as though your day is done.  
Ice crystals, dusting of snow,  
    perpetually on the go.  
Swoop, dive, swiftly you flee  
    into my life, my totem you'll be.

### **There and Back Again**

*by Wayne Gerner*

Motorcycling one day under a sky of blue.  
Crashed in flames and wondered am I through?  
I was taken to a place beyond my ken.  
I floated, perplexed, would I live again?  
Felt myself crossing on black fingers of thread.  
Knew my life had waned and I was dead.  
I became acquainted with another place.  
Like my spirit was dusting and I was in space.  
I was there for some time, didn't know how long.  
When things are timeless, nothing seems wrong.  
But I was sent back, not done I was told.  
There were things to share, I needed to be bold.  
So I took the challenge, as is my fashion.  
Now I'm riding again, it was always my passion.

### **Charting Harrow's Strait**

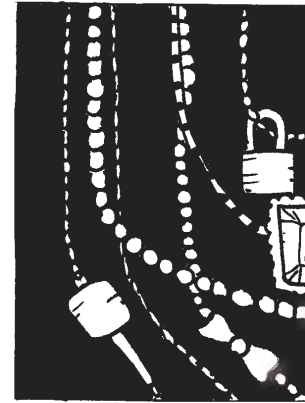
*by Lori Martindale*

After crossing the waters of Rosario,  
flecks of Moonlight dust the dark deep.  
We acquaint with - and fear - the fathoms  
in marveling ken: "what great forms lie beneath?"

The cold sea moans, while we keel to her drone  
blue tides wax and wane, illuminating mystery.  
In a complicated fashion, we wait - while  
night holds her candle flame to dark sail tides.

Our minds perplex with wonder,  
on times of old and years of new.  
Our faces, shrouded in dim, cold reflection;  
threads of sails bow in Neptune's shadow.

The sea groans and yawns and swells and sighs  
while stars emerge and disappear into dark night.



*Sally Rogers*



*Megan Hemple*

### **Y Gen Barbie**

*by Nancy McAbee*

\*\*ringtone...♪ Jay-z Jockin' jay-z ♪\*\*

Ken: Waz up Barb?  
Barbie: Hey Ken.  
Ken: What's the skinny? Why the no-show last night?  
Barbie: I'm flat out, Ken.  
Ken: I'm totally perplexed.  
Barbie: I hooked up with a flaming new fashion designer. He's a fanboy of America's Next Top Model and personally acquainted with Tyra.  
Ken: We missed the premiere of Crossing Over. I'm blue.  
Barbie: The threads in this show are tight. You can't expect me to chill with you and give up this opportunity.  
Ken: That's bogus. My love for you is waning.  
Barbie: Gotta go. Make-up is requesting me for a dusting. We'll tweetup tonight.

**As Seen on TV***by Sally Sheedy*

(incorporating real-life, actual ad copy)

Larger than life television  
Casts its blue light on you.  
World famous. Deliciously gourmet.  
It was created by a doctor,  
Four out of five recommend it.  
Get the newest fashion, this year's model.  
Diminish the appearance of  
Fine lines  
Threading and crossing  
Their way - your dewy complexion.  
Open a world of sensory delight.  
Accentuate the positive and  
Watch your worries wane.  
Perplex your neighbors,  
Keep them guessing – we'll never tell.  
Smooth, firm, youthful contours return.  
Taste. It's organic to everything we do.  
The next big thing? Big, bold, look-at-me lashes.  
The moment when life simply tastes perfect.  
Kicking back – why not a cruise?  
Acquaint yourself with our  
Exclusive European salon technique.  
Rekindle romance - your old flame!  
Now with remote-control.  
Powder, perfume, lotions, enticement.  
Sunbeams, Moonglow, Stardust.  
Sparkles - your radiant eyes.  
The world is your oyster.  
Specially formulated scope  
And the ken of all  
You deserve – it all!  
Treat yourself to  
Small luxuries.  
Now you have a choice.  
Hurry while supplies last.

**Unspoken***by Donna Rushing**Kumquat Challenge Winner!*

How can I  
acquaint myself  
with my mother,  
gone beyond death ten years now--  
before that, gone with a mind  
that could not even ken herself?

I can still see her, standing  
at the ironing board  
Was she, like Tillie, lamenting  
the one continuous mistake  
of raising me, her youngest daughter?

As she pressed  
the dress she'd expertly sewn me  
(sliding the thread  
through the treadle machine needle,  
later attending to smocking or pleating),  
did she guess, gazing into the blue  
flowered fabric, that my love  
for such tedious fashion might wane?

Ironing board put away,  
she is dusting, dusting,  
but stops her thin pale hand, midstroke  
perplexed at the pain  
of the endless, thankless  
task.

As I, the errant one,  
keep crossing, crossing  
the unspoken rules of her world,  
burning, as I was,  
in the bright, dangerous  
flame of my own.

**Untitled**

by Leon L. Scott Jr.

At a blue fashion crossing Ken had to acquaint the flame  
dusting so as not to perplex the wane of his thread.

**Entering the Garden of Eden**

by Traci Harpine

Perplexed by  
A blue mist that dusted the bridge  
Ken crossed with  
Caution and eagerness  
To get acquainted with  
A new flame wearing only  
A thread of fashion—  
Suddenly, He waned.



Emily White

It was blue outside.  
She was dusting.  
It was perplexing  
to see the look on her face,  
the flame that was once inside her  
waned from the loss of ken and emotion.  
She put down the rag,  
picked up the needle and thread  
to reacquaint herself with the  
monotonous work  
that inspires the crossing  
of fashion and life.  
She sighed.

**Apathy? Eh, Whatever....**

by Guy Smith

Whilst the binary flickering of a  
thread-blue flame  
Decades yon produced a righteous source of spectral claim,  
Those acquainted with the vastness of this medium  
(A virtual panoply of copious tedium)  
Might be perplexed by this unfashionable dusting—  
But its quixotic conventions are soundly stunting...  
A slew of gormless subjects quite verily rusting...  
Upon whose lips perch the wasted wishes of its waning:  
“This artifice—ken to all, but to none edifying.”  
However, crossing through this immense conflagration,  
As the tiny, thread-blue flame’s doggedly grown to be,  
Incapacitates the sputtering, smoke-filled zillion  
Who in resignation remain behind—here with me....



### **Holy Secret Knock-up**

*by Jessica Perino*

They'd pull loose teeth by tying them to the door handle  
with carpet thread. Slam.  
My heart was illuminated from within, a faithful but  
beleaguered flame.

I would, were I golden and true, fashion myself a  
suit of armor that could transcend blue.  
Thomas said "articulate immolation" but  
a melting Ken doll is mute.

Like a bucket-drowning child  
In that still, mote-punctuated space between  
alive and dead.

I'd acquaint some with a slap,  
An erotic book across the face of some violently moldering  
patriarch—a sweet atticstale hex.

I'll save two coins for my crossing but for now rage  
blesses and keeps me  
Tending my nest of hope.

Lies about lies perplex me. It isn't enough to lie once but  
must needs lie about the lying?  
Defame those that attempt to unravel and  
smother them out?

Roll up some blankets and let's ride off.  
We could secretly and roughly fuck in a tent  
on the big screen.

How can something so leathersage warm and  
tobaccoreal die?  
Alas, eventually, even the toughest cowboys wane.

A dusting of powdered honey on hair.  
Rowing a hummingbirdfeather boat, with a  
lover's eyelash, across a Parrish sea.

### **Kumquat Poetry Challenge '09**

*by Kimbar Halvorsen, James Tomlinson, and Brandon Muncy*

### **Blue Summer Rain**

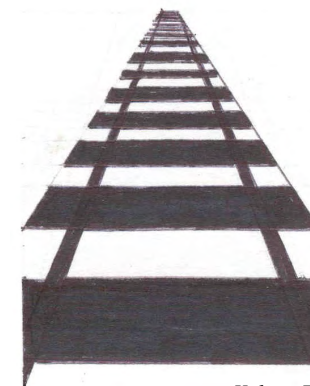
*by Dennis Barnes*

Blue summer rain  
Kens the seasons  
Fresh spring bulbs  
Peek from sleep

Blue summer rain christens  
Trees don eloquent fashions  
Perplexed by  
Welcoming equinox

Blue summer rain  
Wanes the moon with  
Autumn of dust  
Flaming yellows and reds

Blue summer rain  
Thread acquainted clouds  
Crossing Sky  
As again the world sleeps  
While summer rains blue.



*Kakeru Tanaka*

## Lost

by *Kassandra Spurling*

I was perplexed  
by the fashion in which I was greeted...  
We were well-acquainted,  
she & I,  
but on this crossing of our paths,  
I perceived a coldness about her,  
an aura of blue,  
with a dusting of white.

A frost had extinguished our flame...  
I had not even felt it wane...

I followed the thread of the past to find answers,  
but what I found was beyond my ken.  
Hello became good-bye in a moment,  
I did not ask her to let me in...

All was lost.

## Mystery

by *Laurel Johnson*

A glance, a glimpse, a supernatural hint,  
In the thread of life we see a mighty glint.  
Who fashioned it to come here, and can we know,  
Why this secret ken perplexes us below?

We think we might catch it afore it wanes,  
But there is no way to grasp it with chains.

How can we define what we merely acquaint?  
We wonder a moment, and then it grows faint.  
It is solid as blue, and flows as does flame,  
If only one someone could give it a name.

That we can perceive it crossing our space  
Signals a wonder, a dusting of grace.

## Age-old Worry

by *Sally Sheedy*

Are you acquainted with  
The age of "itis?"  
Tinnitus  
Costochondritis  
Plantar fasciatus  
Detritus.

Disoriented and perplexed.  
Look forward to  
Less than I've forgotten,  
Which is plenty.  
I tell you nothing  
Is beyond your ken.

I know what lies before you.  
Crossing into adulthood  
(Well off the fashion bandwagon)  
Fire may wane to a flame  
To a spark to a mote merely reflecting  
A myriad fails.

Blue eyes gone rheumy  
Wrinkles thread their way,  
A dusting of gray advances every day.  
Yet fun remains fun so do  
Acquit yourself with aplomb.  
(Even dare to eat a peach!)

It is as it should be  
And can be more.  
Ok fine.



Tess Klemke



## The Project Runway Dream

by Nathan Dodge

I was dreaming I was watching Project Runway  
If you're not acquainted with it, it's like this:  
A bunch of people run around  
Trying to create the latest fashions  
Under the watchful eye of famous judges  
Who vote one person off a week in  
the traditional reality show motif

In my dream some male model á la a bronzed  
and toned Ken doll  
Was lambasting a contestant for their so-called  
"Perplexing Style"  
And it's hard to take critique from a gorgeous six foot  
blond model with sky blue eyes  
Who probably has never sewn a single thread in his life  
Never dusted  
Well...  
Anything  
And if you ask him about waxing and waning  
He'll tell you what merlot he drinks at the spa

I dream the contestant pulls out a squirt gun filled with  
gasoline  
Douses Ken and lights him up with a match  
As the flames grow higher and the screaming fades  
The contestant turns to the other judges  
Who are crossing themselves in expectations of  
meeting their maker  
The contestant asks, "ANYONE ELSE?"

pause

"I didn't think so."

## Threading Kumquat Dilemma

by Dennis Barnes

I know the meaning of ken  
Flame  
Wane  
Fashion's trend

But I am perplexed  
And not well read  
Wondering how to use  
Thread

Crossing, blue and dusting  
I find  
More to my liking  
And the word acquaint  
Becomes ain't faint

Ken is to know  
By range of sight  
Waning moon  
Less bright

Candle's flame  
Radiates light,  
Fashion, shape and form

Confused about acquaint,  
Blue dust or thread?  
It must be crossing time  
To sleep and dream of  
Words unsaid



Elena Girenko

## **Beyond My Ken**

*by Ara Taylor*

(for Ken Engel, who died December 11, 2007)

When I was young it was the fashion  
To comprehend all things in metaphor.  
My brother and I, on the summer docks  
At night, talked of auras and the  
Borealis.

Above our heads, embedded  
In blue, white stars and galaxies sparkled.  
Our silent lake was black,  
Not much deeper than thought,  
But we were perplexed by its vastness.

How could there be  
Time without end, death  
And infinity together?

My brother moved on, to a philosophy  
degree, to logic and a higher  
world order. But I stayed behind, dusting  
the world, in search of a place  
for crossing over.

At what point did sorrow saturate  
My heart, so that I could no longer even  
Breathe well? Everything hurt,  
Even touching a leaf that had turned  
From verdant to autumn.

It was you who taught me  
to love the minor keys, accept  
the terror of beauty. The day you died,  
I understood, at last, the thread between  
waning and ecstasy.

You once told me death was  
A flow of exchanges, like photons

tapping out an abbreviated  
verbal dusting: "C-U-L8r?Never!"

Your nimble thumbs  
are ugly castanets.  
I see that brevity  
Is the soul of a shit.

## **The Challenge**

*by Jude Soderlund*

As a mute, Ken, naturally  
was a man of few words.  
And yet – often  
his thoughts flamed with  
a dusting of ingenuity  
and a large dose of insanity.

Waning and waxing,  
crossing perplex paths,  
he often fashioned new words  
of his own device.

Sometimes "blue,"  
Sometimes "clean,"  
But always with the passion  
of a voice he never heard.

Ken longed to acquaint himself  
with the easy banter of others,  
He yearned to speak - to shout - to sing  
But, as always, a thread of doubt  
held him back.  
That, and he was still a mute.



**She Speaks Dictionary**

by Linda Lambert

When we are walking  
some April evening,  
avoid perplexities like  
“The illuminated portion  
of the full moon is decreasing.”  
Say “The moon is waning,”  
and let me take your hand.

If you tell a bar room story,  
don't call it cerulean naughtiness,  
or even blue. Dub it dirty.  
In this case, spare no tawdry details.  
Make you and me the subject.

Now, go ahead,  
employ a simple noun,  
an unaffected modifier,  
an undemanding verb.  
Then, acquaint me with your silence.  
Stillness spawns a crossing  
where you and I can intersect.

My advice, fashioned  
for your improvement,  
may be beyond your ken,  
(See I am talking like you now).  
I remind us both to be direct,  
to find our own fine thread of love,  
weaving apt circumlocution and  
truncated plot with peaceful hushes.

Hey! Why did you flame me  
with iPhone emoticons

turning cells into Mozart.

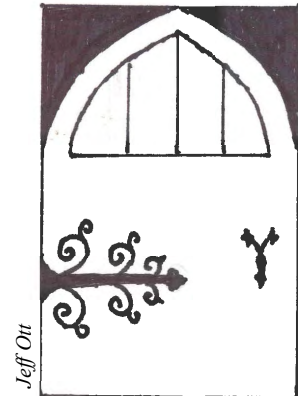
You've gone to flame, but you  
Acquainted me with faith, the knowing  
We are matter, merely passing.

What may come to pass does not frighten me now.  
Beyond here there are parliaments of kennings.

**Dusting Blue**

by Pete Ruble

At intersections I'm perplexed,  
Orange is crossing,  
Who is next?  
Blue is next!  
And with its flame,  
Dusting thread  
In fashion's name,  
A drip of glue,  
A drop of paint,  
When shaken well  
They will acquaint.  
So if your feelings  
Start to wane,  
And Ken forgot you  
On the train,  
Mix a kumquat  
With some blue,  
And you'll be flame thread dusting too!



### **Designed to Perplex**

*by Sue Johnson*

Designed to Perplex,"  
That's what he called it.  
Ken, acquaintance of Barbie,  
They never did prove he was her boyfriend.  
And he's certainly no fashion designer.  
It could have been so classy—  
That deep midnight blue silk  
Calf-length and molded to her body.  
Tiny white sequins scattered delicately  
Down from the shoulders.  
Like a dusting of snow  
Petering out as it reaches her breasts.  
And an appliquéd silver moon  
Waning softly behind her right hip.  
It would have been so perfect!  
What possessed him to draw it in  
Beneath the breasts with that hideous cord?  
Flame-red and psychedelic orange  
Thread their way back and forth.  
Crossing and re-crossing the serene blue silk  
All the way to the waist.  
T.S. Elliott invading Emily Dickinson  
And no commentary to explain why!

Surely it's a joke!  
A way of getting back at them  
For all the outfits they made him wear.  
But I see his face,  
And sadly— it isn't.

### **The Astronaut Poem**

*by Nathan Dodge*

Are you acquainted to  
The little blue  
Astronaut?

Crossing black pockets  
On his flaming rocket  
Called Matilda?

Sails through the sky  
Enjoying apple pie  
With the moon

But he likes to profile  
All the latest thread styles  
Of spacesuits

Don't make fun of his fashion  
His greatest passion  
Big blue monkey

On visits he perplexes  
Maybe even vexes  
The hosts

For he must wipe his shoes  
Or leave a dusting to  
The linoleum

So where does he go?  
Does anyone know?  
It is beyond my ken

As this poem wanes  
I must make plain  
This is just a gimmicky poem written in order to win  
librarians' cookies.