

THE GAP-TOOTH GIRL

The gap-tooth girl is dancing, and the man
in Wranglers holds his arms around her like
a loose hoop of rope, a snare for her tight
two-step. The band will never play better
than this town limits, and still it's sweeter
than the sounds the country makes, gumbo mud,
trains coupling, a wild Chinook, a place laced
with ice and barb-wire singing. Her hips have
land in them, are good enough for dancing
but in those jeans look ready made to sit
a horse all day; she wears the weather in
her hair. How easily the bar-light shames
our faces sallow and city-broke,
but she blooms like some wild prairie weed.

Men bled sod and themselves for whatever
it is glowing in her and never found it,
dug in worn boot-heels until their bodies
gave out in this place where nothing rots
but bones and barns dry up and blow or burn
away. This whiskey is a myth and why
I'm here. We are those men. A woman
with cat's eyes turns and turns before the dark
pedal-steel player like a fence-caught feather
in a gale. The night wheels. The gap-tooth girl
is dancing all alone, the tin band moans,
the wind outside is making blizzard songs,
and the West shakes off this game of lost or won.

— MELISSA MYLCHREEST



Judged by Oregon's Poet Laureate, Paulann Petersen, and chosen from over 500 poems submitted "The Gap-Tooth Girl" by Melissa Mylchreest is *High Desert Journal's* winner of the \$1,000 2011 Obsidian Prize in Poetry. To read the "back story" of the creation of "The Gap-Tooth Girl," judge's comments about the poem and the other finalists' poems go to www.highdesertjournal.com. The deadline for 2012 Obsidian Prize in Nonfiction to be judged by William Kittredge is March 1. For full submission details see our ad on page 49.