

# Metaphors & Horses

—for James Baker Hall,  
Kentucky Writers' Day 2001

by Frank X Walker

If metaphors were horses  
if alliteration was as wondrous  
as a touchdown pass  
or a three point shot  
we could sell season tickets  
to open mic sessions

young people would stand in line  
all night  
or camp out in the snow  
for front row seats  
to hear george ella lyon  
read “where I come from”

a mint condition  
gurney norman rookie card  
would be worth an acre of tobacco  
and a james still  
or robert penn warren first edition  
a mountain of coal

if metaphors were horses  
if alliteration was as wondrous  
as a touchdown pass  
poets would have their own streets  
we would auction off  
autographed books  
at bourbon balls  
toy stores would sell  
nikky finney  
action figures  
and frank x  
would have a shoe contract

the whole world  
would stop  
every spring  
get all dressed up  
place bets  
draft office pools  
and hold their breath  
for at least two televised  
minutes

we would all stand on our feet  
 and cheer  
 praising the rhythm  
 celebrating  
 the majestic beauty  
 of pat day  
 in the final stanza  
 aboard *corregidora* nosing out  
 Kentucky bred  
*blackberries blackberries*  
 and *ahab's wife*

If reading  
 and writers  
 were really important  
 we would all gather at the state  
 capital  
 to crown one king  
 and the governor  
 would come  
 to hear him  
 sing

*As a former student of Jim Hall's, one of many in the audience, it was with great pride that I accepted an opportunity to write an occasional poem (a rarity for me). I wrote "Metaphors & Horses" especially for Jim and read it in the Rotunda in Frankfort at his installation as Poet Laureate on April 24, 2001. I enjoyed watching him, surrounded by dear friends, waffle between immense pride and slight embarrassment at all the attention he received.*

*Robert Penn Warren's birthday, also known in the bluegrass as Kentucky Writers Day (thanks to the Kentucky Arts Council), has become a significant event in the literary community and an opportunity to honor our great treasures while they are living and active. It has also become an incredible opportunity for our treasures to in turn serve the commonwealth by traveling to every nook and corner to share their work with eager audiences. I believe it's one of the many things that makes being a Kentucky writer truly special. I imagine that at least for one day, Jim felt like a king.*