



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

POETRY 2022

Grand Prize Winner

Elizabeth Knapp

with Contest Judge

Steven Reigns

Fall/Winter 2022

ATLANTA REVIEW

at the Georgia Institute of Technology

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Visit our website: www.atlantareview.com

Atlanta Review appears in May and December.

Subscriptions are \$20 (\$25 Int.) a year.

Available in full text in Ebsco, ProQuest, & Cengage databases.

Subscriptions are available through Ebsco, Blackwell, and Swets.

Submission Guidelines:

Up to five unpublished poems, without identifying information on any poem. Postal submissions **must** include a SASE & cover letter with contact information and a list of poem titles submitted. For more specific info, visit our website.

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ATLANTA REVIEW
686 Cherry St. NW, Suite 333
Atlanta GA 30332-0161

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Atlanta Review is a nonprofit literary journal.

Contributions are tax-deductible.

WELCOME

This year as I begin writing my editor's note, the world continues to be a place in which poetry is more necessary than ever. One of the worst hurricanes in history has devastated Florida, just one of the many climate change outcomes the world is facing; we continue to wrestle with Covid; Ukraine continues to fight for its sovereignty; and...the list goes on. I will add to this list the extraordinary protests by Iranian women cutting their hair and burning their hijab in response to the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. Now seems a good time to remind you of our special 2010 Iranian issue edited by the formidable Sholeh Wolpé. Read poetry by Iranian poets, and Ukrainian poets, and poets from anywhere you are unfamiliar. Poetry will teach you what you should know.

As we do each fall, we are thrilled to feature the winner of the Dan Veach Prize for Younger Poets. Our managing editor, JC Reilly, selected work by Edwin Williamson. Williamson's poem, "Each Morning I Press My Ear to the Ground," is commended by JC for "the way it highlights both science and love." Certainly, the world would be a better place if we always paired science and love.

For our annual international poetry prize, we are grateful for the work of our judge: poet, educator, and first Poet Laureate of West Hollywood, Steven Reigns, whose excellent new book, *A Quilt for David* was published to rave reviews this year from *City Lights*. Reigns was given the task of selecting a winner from our twenty-six finalists—a task I never envy because we always have such a fine collection of poems in the finalist group. All the submissions are judged blind. Reign's selected Elizabeth Knapp's poem, "It's Okay to Worry about the State of Britney Spears's Mental Health" as the 2022 winner. Of Knapp's work, Reigns says: "There's a cleverness to this poem that could potentially alienate or verge into careless campiness, but it never goes there thanks to the balance of global awareness, sincere concern, and artful imagery." Reign's also commended work by P M F Johnson, Ellen Pauley Goff, Rhoni Blankenthorn, and Grant Chemidlin, saying, "Each honorable mention could have been first place."

As we continue to pray and protest for peace, may the poetry in these pages bring you some solace, or as Devon Miller-Duggan writes in

“Prayer for Protesters,”

We are archipelago. Let the sea run
between us and take no one.
Let the island of shield and bludgeon drown.
Let the island of the bleeding bloom with healers.
Let the island of Facing Inward turn its peoples toward the
seas and horizons,
the storms coming and passed, toward each others' faces.
Let the untethered island settle unbuffeted.
Let there be fruit and bandages.
Let there be breath for every creature, and balm.

Our spring/summer issue will feature poetry from Polish poets. And,
as always, if you love what we do, please tell a friend.

Sending you all much love,

Karen

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There's Always a Thought Beautiful Enough

I want to live one thousand lives
with you, my husband, before I can't.

In one life, there are no children
and we live in a van on the beach

where we have more group sex than
ever before. In another life, you're holding

our baby, my legs wide, shaking,
its soft dew & blue eyes, a fertile

glistening start. Fresh, you'll come home
to me each day without fear or guilt

that thick tension, the familiar smell
of someone else on your neck

or fingernail trails along your back, no
hard shower before you come to bed.

There's a variation of us where
I don't cry as often or need as much

attention, where we don't throw objects
or sandwiches at the walls. In another life

we travel, share a hobby, learn together
something like baking or pottery or dance.

There's a life for us I imagine with endless
bread and monogamy, particularly easy

a natural light source we don't pay for, a great
bay window facing east, effortless and warm

like vows, like whole wheat, like when you
said, early on, you weren't ready to love me.

Megan Alyse

The Marriage

On my seat-back screen a tatter-finned fish,
as if to coerce a confession, as if
to extract its secret at thirty thousand feet,
flings again and again a clam against a coral ledge,
while my husband of thirty years dreams
of tides and flight.

Why do we assume
believable what is
finite? The rabble of dove-white shells
beneath the reef-shelf like a battalion of wings
gathered against our arrogance.
We do not fly far
before the land begins to baffle:
rock stacked upon rock, red arches and cathedrals,
flash flood and dry wash.

Beside the arroyo, desert willow,
crucifixion thorn and sycamore,
the white and grey and beige of bones.
Sedona's light so hostile it halos all
it touches: doves in russet dust
bathe in the contradiction
of Oak Creek's dissipating mist.

Oceans hold almost all earth's water
but in Coconino Forest,
Oak Creek carved this canyon, this path
to the red butte's pinnacle,
switch-backed and shifting,
like years of marriage cut through rust-red rock.
I'm trying to reconcile. I'm trying to inhabit this story.

Across another river once, I hiked another hill alone
to the Basilica. Can truth be simply strict
insistence that a thing is
ssso? For my brother's aortic arch,
for my malignancy, I had imagined dragging myself

on bloodied knees across the plaza's
cobblestones among palomas with pilgrims
whispering, fingering rosaries,
feathers settling around us like petals. Some carried
red roses for her, *mother of the very true*
deity. Their Virgen, her mantel cerulean.

Yet I refused to scrape my knees. For a fistful of pesos
I pinned beside the altar for him, a nickel heart, a charm,
alongside legs and livers and arms,
for myself a breast. I dropped my penciled pleas,
strictly,
into the slotted metal box.

In the story dragged here
upon the tide of centuries, she appears
on Tepeyac Hill. I am trying to catch my husband's hand
as we climb, his eyes;
I am trying to synchronize our strides; in the story

Castilian roses bloom, desert-red, her image—
a watery mirage imprinted on the tilma. I am begging
for his hand, reaching up through a sea in Sedona
of ash and alder and salt cedar,
through junipers' blue seeds, in the heat its needles

like coral branches. Oak Creek wends, slender, below us—
a capillary beneath this story's skin.
A lone claret cup cactus
blossoms red at the summit of all these years.

Laura Isabela Amsel

Ecdysis

She slips off another snake-shed, skeleton closer
to the sun. Sips the sun out of the room
with a straw. We're sitting in the dark. I'm used to searching, following the
soft

trail of her voice. I could stitch her jackets of my leftover
skin, would dress her in these scales
if she asked. We can undress over and over, make ourselves sick

with the sight. I can't make myself into any less. I sketch
and sketch us out until I've drawn a framework, forced us

into a system. This is how we've found ourselves here,
mapped out
to scale. I know she's promised me venom. I'm waiting for the
bite.

Ellery Beck

MV Golden Ray

(June 2017—September 8, 2019)

“it might tip over...capsize”—GA Senator Johnson, about the island of Guam

Halfway between St. Simons and Jekyll
she lays on her side in the sound.
A cargo shift from Dorian, 2 fires, maybe
a seal failure or stowing or ballasting errors
but she listed and she laid down, the groan lost
to the surge. I imagine it was graceful:
the slow tilt, the heaving. Maybe she even spun
in the spindrift from the storm, the oil on the water
the satin sheen of her party dress, the smoke something
twisted into a slick hairdo. The tides buffet and stir
and suck the sand out from underneath, coating
the marsh grass with anti-freeze and floating tarballs,
knuckle boom and sieve buckets and all her scrambling attendants
to right the scrambling itself. How things can suddenly slip sideways,
no warning but the siren's klaxon thunder, the flashing light.
What to salvage from this shuffle, except the lull months in the sound
stewing in her own wreck? Spreading dark and red over the marsh
like the waves that carried her, seeping and steeping.
Her body settling deep into numbness, into oozing.
A slumber you have to be pried out of, drug away in pieces
by barge. In our dreams: the taste of corrosion, the sound
of hammers. A red island slouched in the sloughing dawn.

Jaycee Billington

The Dead Leaf Said To the Green

The dead leaf said to the green, "Forward and onward, brothers!"
Regret doesn't come at once. It always shows up later.
The land is spoiled by its own; take the weight of a stranger.
Mngwame* is here for barter, selling baskets for palm strips.

Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy
Trans. by Richard Prins

Note:

Mngwame: Dispossessed former king of Vumba

The Chickadees Are All Up in Our Feelings

We watched them grab and go,
gripping the suet with their feet, then poof—
a blur of rolling wing to perch
to chisel meat from hull—
we tried not to take their brisk appearance
personally, so proud were we to see
the fruit of all our baffling
rewarded with black caps and bibs
of birds we'd never known
lived in our trees: Carolina chickadees,
layering the forest canopy like ghosts,
caching seed or scavenged bits of dead
their memories imprint, along with space
and time, and all the lost, the stolen,
so focused were we on our own recovery,
we never sensed them scatter-hoarding
under fallen leaves, knotholes—
even our old asphalt shingles
shadow their tuck and hide, we gather
from the guidebook, glued to our seats
on the porch, where we glass
their bandit masks, as a family pokes,
prods for feed. Scientists say
a larger hippocampus serves the species well
in the season of remembering,
when stored cells grow and die,
replenishing through winter's hunger,
when the chickadees return to flit and fly
to every buried need.

Sarah Carey

Good Luck/Bad Luck

my mechanic, who's pregnant
and prone to scolding me,
tightens an unseen bolt
in the innards of my Buick
and tells me my carburetor will kill me
if I don't flush it out more often

it seems so many things
are about to kill me
or in the process of killing me, though

I don't know if I'm lucky

both my grandfathers
died on the same Fat Tuesday,
and my brother shares a birthday with Dostoyevsky
and was born with an extra toe
(I doubt anyone else can claim this)

and the first time I flew international,
lighting struck the starboard wing
and our cabin filled with the blue, sullen odor
of ozone, mingling with the stench
of someone's hairspray for hours after—
I don't think I've ever heard
that much praying
before or since

"This car's being held together with prayers," my mechanic says
she's not wrong

Lane Chasek

Pilot

One afternoon in early March
when snowmelt filigreed the trees,
we walked around the duck pond,

and Grandpa told me how in World War II
he navigated Air Force jets
through Southeast Asian skies.

He wished he could have
piloted, but at the time,
that job was mostly out of reach
for Jewish men like him.

We tossed challah crumbs to mallards.
They thrashed their wings and capsized
head to beak to snatch the bread.

Not too far away, some ducks took flight
and quickly formed into a V. He explained
this shape helped each duck save energy,
that it was the same for fighter jets.

A few years later, when he passed
away, I came back to the pond
beneath the sunset's drying fresco
and watched a flock above me.

I knew the birds could navigate
by earth's magnetic field, by starlight.
But they always needed one to fly

in front. And I hoped that
he could now, somehow,
have the chance to lead the rest,
steer through the wild sky.

Adam P. Davis

Mimosas

On the porch swing late after work,
 its drift and creak a chorus competing
 against tree frogs dotted throughout the ragged
edges of gathering darkness.

 Everything floats heavy on June air.
 Humidity tugs us like a tide; we settle
into the turgid currents of midsummer
 days, thunderstorms careening
 towards us, choking our dark sky.

When we argue, our words are out
 of sync, thunder that rolls in just
 after the flash. I rant, arms flung wide
and you curl inside yourself, your face
 like the mimosa's thousand leaves
 that close on the slightest breeze.

The pollen, on the storm-whipped air, white-and-purple
 tufts of calmer clouds gone to seed. As evening
 comes, we watch their pollen compete
with fireflies as opening acts. The next morning,
 the branches with their millions of leaves
 are open, waving their blooms, many-tentacled
and grasping. And your face, still asleep, but animated—
 and your mouth forms furious words while you sleep,
 releasing them unspoken, dry seeds.

Andrea Janelle Dickens

When Love Drifts

A Barchan is born of steady winds
caressing borders with wispy arms,
moving inside mystery, crescents
cross the desert floor—together, we

migrate apart, consider separate routes.
I summit the Dune of Pilat where storms
rage of a thousand years—and you, lured
by silver shores to the Île aux Oiseaux,

softened salt meadows, trilling calls,
further still—the Pyrenees—great massif
cutting France and Spain, and the
Basque who hold their own against

tides of change, my love drifts—
across the Atlantic washed ashore in
seas of silken windward curves, waves
soothed by time, and the empty crest of a

pallid coastline. Here—I am curled
against the slip faced dune, my veiled
grief—shape shifting in this empty bed,
a promised land you once called home.

Pamela Dillon

Stealing the Watermelons

Driving down Union Road tapered in wild blackberry
& sharp purple aster

a greenhouse mouse caught with a broom &
flower tray scurrying the circumference of
a trash bucket between Melissa's feet.

Pulling to the purslane & chickweed roadside,
we trot into the watermelon field,

a distant end gun sprinkler barraging
the backwall of oaks boxing in the rows

and pull at the thickest & greenest body we can find
scooping each up in our ovalized arms,

a set of striped suns held against the crux of our bodies
right below the heart,

& tiptoeing our illegitimate offspring full of sugar &
seeds &
pulpy flesh

into the truck, placed between our legs
to protect from asphalt & country disintegration

until, with a rusted machete
the rind split open to pale white
pink flesh juice jagged & shocked

and then we left for good.

Sara Dudo

Eidetic Missions

You always drive for me. The two-lane roads twist too much in these California hills, running south along the coast before sunrise. My mind recites, *in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me*, and, like a drum beat, we keep passing those roadside bells; I have never before been such a pilgrim.

Your eyes have their silence. You, you have that steady driver's hand. Yes, I am travelling beyond. I watch everything that isn't the road: you, the bells, the hawk that dips between streetlamps and high beams, two worlds of light.

I watch the morning glory sun budding water-colored light seeping up, up from the deep west Pacific horizon. In my mind there is a house with a tiled roof, there is the open, the close, the brief middle where the sun rises backwards as we make him. But sturdy now, I blink away miracle or delusion. The sun must rise in the east.

Lily Anna Erb

Geranium Red

The geraniums that I rescued from an early snow spent the winter in our sun room where they crowded the doors and littered the floor well into May.

This morning when I carried them to the porch, they left behind a trail of crimson petals the color of my mother's favorite nail polish—Geranium Red,

a true fashion statement in the 40's, which caused my father's friends to ask, *Is Charlie going to marry that city girl who paints her nails?* Yes, he did—

you can see the polish in their wedding photos. Although it is long before my time, red nail polish still reminds me of the photos of Eleanor Kraus,

a fashionable New York matron who flew to Berlin in 1939, clutching a handful of American visas, to rescue fifty Jewish children whose families she had never met.

I think about those families who put their children on a train with just a kiss on the cheek. *Smile*, they said, *Don't cry or wave goodbye. Don't frighten the children*

or the guards will be suspicious. Today, the families are all gone, of course, and the children aged, but red nail polish is still my mother's favorite.

As I sweep the petals, I forgive the geraniums for the mess they left behind, remembering how bravely they bloomed all winter, and how they pressed their faces to the glass.

Cathryn Essinger

Day of the Eased out

Algorithms sift lapses now, even this
hand out a window trembling.
These hands, there is ever less need for their spine
and spread. Logging hazards again, flights to
sandscapes I am never landing. How to switch off.
New rhythms pedal the cycle. This cycle, a blur.
I take to a fragment up there—
a hawk no one hunts, unwitting master
of the drain atop manors.
From the ground, its span is the sky
when done with its job.
There is ever less space for a nest
as time runs out. No matter how early I jog,
an elderly chastises
the graveyard is not a park.
I skip my horoscope for my last love's
that happens to be the weather I wish
to heed, a brilliant sail.
All a load off not to be queried are you able
to fly tomorrow, yet even the back of my mind
bends from the pressure of absence. Mindset,
often the last to know. Out there: fast.
Indoors: this face. Who counts peak moments
of imprudence? Where a brace should be,
a lamp turned back to a crystal of rum.
Where dishes should not mold,
my good white shirt. I watch
a blue stain ruin the linen uniform.
It is an old whodunit in my petite castle
between liquid and detergent, I'm leaning
toward water, a bit of river ink.

Kris Falcon

Misappreciation Under Lockdown

We are stepping out after 36 weeks of showering
at sundown. Dear March, we are walking
past barricades right or wrong.
When we don't mean for a blur, small-winged
birds head east, cross south, dart back no design.
If a rendering, accurate. I stroke
a hollow belly. In Bangkok, it's macaques
foraging a main street in gangs. Who isn't by a sill:
nature prevails. The park seems greener
as medics pass closure,
as patrol drowns the siren with its job of denial
blaring *home* to save *lives*.
When I was nine, when power was out,
it seemed the right breadth to be told my family
tree could be traced to a foray. I've heard no clocks,
no wind vane since. My planet seemed smaller
but endless. My last chance, love reveals a new
facet every time. I turn to his profile as it dims
yet stays too warm. Deep breaths. How to suck out
the source of crimson on his pillow. Genetic,
I've read. Urban tales cry nuclear.
As if blind I feel
his right ear shaped like a sign of life.
If my heart line is pressed on his chest long enough
maybe I can catch his rhythm, a center to keep
his temple cool. I am thinking of his mother
waiting on his incisors when
his spine curves. I open our bottle
with no opener. No curveball tonight.
How down can I be for this?
We doll up like we got reservations with his chain
for time, a pocket square of lobsters to match my slip.
What is out there is the air the way
miracles take shape in water. Dear first
Friday, we leave corners lit, where fire might ward off
the brains of a troop. More sleep,
his doctor's orders. I forever clutch him close to

no atonement. Grain, grape and a river from the Alps
mix in our bodies. How to swill out, where else
can this world taste of our brines.

Kris Falcon

Pipeline

some women said
there is a time to stay
and a time to leave
and now I know
what it means to pack your stuff
slide a box out of the closet
kiss the hound but give her a look
don't you bark, dog

then to the car
hope it starts
and it does
forty bucks in the cup holder
enough for Asheville
where I'll cash the last paycheck
at a bank where they won't blab
tell my business
all over the place

hey, now, what?
a line of cars
i've got to keep moving
no time for trucks
gassing up
i miss that dog
but there will be other dogs

a sign goes up
out of gas
my mind flips—
do I turn around,
pretend I drove to the store
for pads, for coffee?

i am not running
just catching up with myself
never on empty

the Blue Ridge
a banner held high
overhead

Jennifer Manske Fenske

Mud Season

Still cradled in snow, the dreaming
land puddles awake. Last summer,

she scattered her husband's ashes
in the forest just before wildfires

seared through. Now she walks it
alone—rock faces of mountains

untouched by time in the graying
decades they hiked here together.

A woman's body is birth and rebirth,
she thinks, feeling no sadness

about being gone before the forest
grows back. Already, mule deer graze

on a windfall of grass. Moving
through scorched aspen and spruce,

she finds clusters of pasqueflowers.
The earth mothers us even as we sink

into her mud. These are the holes
our bodies leave. This is how

we move forward, slogging through
loss, tracking it into our lives.

Lew Forester

Cat. Window. Bone.

You're patting the cat. You're eighty. Your husband
just turned ninety-one. You're waiting
for your son to call with results
from his latest scan.

You've just picked up the cat
from the vet, who said,
there's little point, now.

You sit in the green chair by the window
where the jade plant thrives. Your son
has cancer.

Your husband's so deaf
he can't answer the phone. When it rings,
it's only your friend, offering her ear.
But you don't want to talk. What you need
is this window, this chair, this pot of tea, this
scrawny cat on your knee.

You will make the appointment.
A few weeks. Before illness and age steal the last
of her. Before she fails to find comfort on your lap.

Your tea has gone cold.
Your son hasn't called.
Your husband comes on slippered feet,
holds his hand out to you.
In bed, you curl on your side, facing him. The cat purrs
into the warmth between you.
Your husband rests his palm on her bony spine.
You lace your fingers into his,
close your eyes.

Jennifer L. Freed

Inwood Hill

On this point it can go either way:
North to Quebec, southward to the sea;
East, tumbled cliffs and oyster middens;
West, collimated palisades and Hudson River.
Where two rivers meet,
Chalky-red rolling into surges,
And four directions part stands
A blue pivoting bridge. Turned one way,
It sends the train upstate,
Turned the other, guides boats
Down the East River. In the play
Of sky and waters,
The paging catalogue of blue on blue,
Word to word, whatever you will,
Remains the reading.

What do you see, tell me what you see:
Impassive shale cliffs and river bend in ice where
A screeching bird writes a simile of distance,
In which the beloved face returns inscrutable,
Like tracks and twigs in the mud and snow;
The gentle mistakes of the day join hands
Like ice forming chains across a puddle.

What do you see, tell me what you see:
The ancient oaks and beeches simplify the city
With sturdy silences; love's word opens
Within the feathers of the urban pheasant
Disappearing down through to where
A chalet launches stone steps into the waves.

On this point it will go any way:
The bridge overlooking childhood catches fire
Every time. I leapt north,
Where love is never far away.

John Hamel

The hammer & the dance

By the light of our television, I see the mouse. Balanced

on cables coiled against the wall. I pause on the stairs. For a while, chin-level

with floorboards, I stare, black and white light flickering

over us. The mouse never twitches. Its small, liquid eyes are still, its soft sides rise and fall, a pendulum, a swinging metronome, little heart

ticking inside a tiny chest, regular and even. A foot on the stair. When you come up, I say, there's a mouse. You are

backlit from below, shirt loose, sleeves rolled up. Just home from work.

It is a still and simple moment: you, me, mouse. Light. On your hands, my hands

and the holding. Such a small, soft thing, our wonder. It brims and brims over, spilling

downstairs with televised light and motion—it is too much, I turn and

ask, with the briskness of wonder transmuted, are there any traps? The light cuts

across your shoulders, you turn

back to the kitchen. You pause. I look down. We reason: if we put it outside, it will come back. (At least that's how the stories go.) We know this living

creature should be carried an adequate distance. To a field or farm. By us. Somewhere not too cold. Somewhere in good conscience

without much snow. But, we reason—the carrying, and the snow, and the inevitable recurrence: it's inevitable, of course, that it recurs, comes instinctively

home. As much as we dance, there's no getting around it.

Morgan Hamill

Flipping the Mattress

We gather each spring, my wife and I,
on opposite sides to flip the mattress
like the ticking of a slow clock.
I hoist my side until it stands on end,
a gray wall, then let it fall toward her,
a cotton wave, until she bobs up again.
This year we can see the label
and the tag declaring it a crime
to remove the tag. My wife declines
my invitation to test the law even though
I predict we'd still have conjugal rights.
"Good mattresses make good neighbors,"
I joke, and she laughs, I think, this woman
who struck the word "obey" from our ceremony
and regarding troth switched my "plight"
to "give," just like hers, till death do us part.
We've gotten our beauty rest for decades now,
growing ever more good-looking, I suggest,
except she says I've turned more cake than beef,
a little volley of her own. She's right, of course.
Silver hair frames her face
as she hands me half a flowery sheet.
Together we struggle with the fitted corners,
making our bed as if to last.

Hunt Hawkins

After Life

After death to come to life once more,
From ashes mixed with soil that feed the root
Of a birch that rises from the forest floor—

This transfiguration into sapwood core,
Heartwood, paper bark, or the catkin fruit
That falls to rise in woody life once more

Seems an after life that's good and right for
One who has grown from seed like a shoot
Beneath the leaves that shade the forest floor.

I would be born again a birch and soar
Toward sun and sky through years in green pursuit
Of life that springs from death, and maybe more

Than all the formulas of our pious lore,
The arguments we pose in vain dispute
With a birch that bends above the forest floor.

Fallen or cut, each tree must die before
It rots to soil or burns to ash, to suit
Life's stubborn wish to come to life once more,
Like a birch that rises from the forest floor.

Paul Johnson

The Tongues of Trees

I have stood listening between sloped shoulders
Of spruce in cold forests, a mind of winter
Marshes hatched in snowshoe patterns across
The muskeg. I've heard of them in other

Guises living under assumed identities
In ambiguous territory: Norways
In Sweden that came to the light before
Mesopotamians had pots to carry.

Millennial seeds of woody Enochs
Patiently regenerating themselves
On a windy ridge, shrugging at the
Swagger of long horizons. Like spears thrust

Into air they rise in whorled cones
Of branch and needle across this killing world:
Chinese Sargents and weeping Brewers;
Martinez, Burmese, Caucasian greens;

Mexican Chihuahuas and Morinda Afghanis;
Maximowicz, Veitch, Tiger-tail, Schrenk,
And Sitka humming at sympathetic
Frequencies the stubborn, rooted songs.

Paul Johnson

Mother Nettle

Before a being and sublime
intervention, linen lines the rich
endometrium—

Brushing on the alien tail
like fluorescent natal tongue—
I am a new blink in somebody
elses love—

Golden snye, prickled
dactyl-egg, ruby legs
of sea nettle—

I am already heartbroken and
still no pulp lunged mist covers me,
like I've heard it does, hovering
just above the hollow tree needles—

I am already deaf and no
ears to have listened—

My mother cradles me like
a cotton mouthed breathless
refraction, she holds her womb—

Contracting like it is starlight,
I am thinking now that I am the
autumn's teeth, arranged tightly—

In the same rocking jaw—
one after the other, after the other,
after the other,
and I shall bare them all—

In complete tranquility,
like a smooth hand fish I watch as she
becomes a neophyte of removal and death—

I bathe as she lays me across the easy water
like I am going home to the sea—

As the gritty pome
asks the purple mountain of its
gratitude, pearls are waiting,
and the experience of a floating
body.

Nicole Flaherty Kimball

Autumn in the crook of a hill

These constant, stretching poplars are cold comfort,
perched up on scraggly cliffs, their roots exposed—
cold comfort like the fact of God, the invert
of geological time, or of his angels,
invisible forests of them: golden, straight-backed,
still, keeping their everlasting vigils.
Sure they watch, but what is it they see?
So many things have happened, much has passed,
what is to them one more or less of me?
To them, what is one more or less of you?
Even if they were to get attached,
it's not that we will quit to be, but skew
into more elemental parts, become,
eventually (though soon enough for them),
again the clay and loamy soil, pre-Adam
stuff that holds the poplars 'clinging roots,
brings it water, offers our nitrogen
to feed its yearly cycle of leaves and fruits.
And when this tall and reaching poplar dies,
when it's damaged by a storm, or age,
or the stream it reaches out to dries—
when the weight of the earth is too much to bear—
another cliff will form right there.

Kirsten Kinnell

A true account of talking to a brown recluse spider

The one living in the dark recesses of the old rolltop desk in the garage finally agrees to meet me for a drink, provided I keep my shoes on my feet. *Shoes*, she said, *are the most frequent cause of death in my family. Death by shoe, death in shoe. Shoe is another word for death.* I want to show I trust her and so I have invited her to my kitchen table, set out shot glasses of bourbon (I know she calls Kentucky home), and provided a small box for her to sit in, shelter from the stark exposure of the dining room table. She arrives, the violin on her back silent, her steps tentative and dainty. She reaches a pedipalp towards her glass and I flinch. The recluse says, *Look how short my fangs are! It would be a lot of work to bite you, and frankly I don't want to even try.* She looks around and through her six eyes I see my habitat: stacks of papers and books, pile of pencils, tangle of computer cords, two days of dishes in the sink, a bag of boxes and cans bound for recycling blocks the back door. She nods. *I like your place*, she says. I apologize for the mess. She shrugs, all eight shoulders undulating, *people call my web messy, but it's home*, she says, people ask, *how can you catch anything in there? Not the point. The web is where I rest. When I'm hungry, I go out and hunt. But mostly I like to sit in my messy web.* What do you do there? *I listen to the stories told by the air.* I spent my childhood afraid of you, I tell her. *Same*, she says.

Merie Kirby

Operation Sail, 1976

We cheered from the Palisades,
as the tall ships sailed up the Hudson.
Tall ships, white ships, rows
of living candles by the lifelines,
sailors in dress whites at attention.

It was America's two-hundredth.
Ford was still sort of President.
I stood in the crowd
with Jen and my dad,
watching the ships.

Watching the ships,
and doing the math.

America was 200. I was eight.
Unless I lived a hundred more years
this bicentennial would be my last.

A terrible novelty:
knowing my very first last.

Could I live a hundred years more?
There was a Dannon commercial
with Russians in Soviet Georgia
who ate a lot of yogurt and lived
a long time. What if I ate nothing
but yogurt for the next century?

The ships moved faster than I expected,
flying toward us with sails strung
like laundry on the line, geometry
on the wing.

Dad would be older than even
the oldest Georgian in the ad.
Maybe Jen would still be around,
She was younger than me.

Not mom, though. Not the cat.
Not my teachers. Not even

The Fonz.

Who would be President?
Maybe no one.
I pictured Charlton Heston
kneeling in the surf
pounding his fist in the sand.

Somehow the ships found room
to turn around by the GWB,
and went sailing back down the river
past the Twin Towers, and Battery Park,
past the Statue of Liberty,
past the shrinking limits of my sight,
toward the vast grey sea bearing them
(like children)
into and out of history.

Julian Koslow

Heaven Is Empty

I broke into the church / early morning, stained / glass humming the mountain / dawn coral / as if submersed by a great burning / sea. / I was pacing the alleyways / of the chapel when god rumbled / in. We stared at each other a century. I'll be frank. I had no reason to trust him. / After a silence that spread / the length of the sea, he thundered, hands clasped : Listen. / I know what I said. / It's true. In that moment I knew he was referring to it all, / the fibs lipping from the lips of many a preacher, / as well as the softer truths like / belonging or ghosts. / Talk of angels. Happy coincidences. / He spoke of the silence too. The silence that smeared / like ice when I had cried for him. / But god was not there to apologize.

I reached and drank from
him. His size diminishing,
till he was nothing.

Tara Labovich

Back to the Source

My mother has taken up learning about her past lives again, so this Christmas I smoke my dad's weed and stay silent. She says that her father and grandfather are watching over her, and she asked the energy-healer who tells her these things to make them cross over.

If I ever return to the house where my mother first learned about her past lives, where she said I didn't ask about you, just your brother, I will see if the neighborhood pond still has a refrigerator floating in it. Each day it moved a little and remained afloat, trailing broken branches, its door vined open, the coils stuck in sucking mud. I've sat for a whole day watching but the thing never moved unless I looked away. Maybe it was also looking to return to the source, the place my mother's father and grandfather had to be banished to so she wouldn't feel them worrying over her.

I don't know what the source is for a fridge, but the frogs didn't seem to mind reclaiming what was never theirs, laying eggs in a discarded appliance, sunning their backs from its bobbing bulk.

Emily Light

North Country Pastoral

A black bear knocks at the metal trash can.
The dog wakes and barks a stilted staccato
like the sound of her old man when he shoots
pellets at squirrels in the bird feeder,
or the way he shuts the windows
with a snap of wood when the wind
lets too much of the outside in.

The bear, like the dog, knows about the house's walls.
He knows about rocks weighing down tops
and how only two claws can lift the stone
then lift the lid then lift discarded
goodness from the dark hole.
The dog leaps at the window,
her mouth a dark O of knowing
what keeps her contained and O
what longing howls free of her.

Emily Light

The Truck

I don't remember the day my dad left,
but I remember when he came back
to get his things. He took the couch I used
to build forts and the chair that matched it,
too. The U-Haul was hardly wide enough to fit
them both. Someone must have helped him
carry it all. Dad was always friendly with the neighbors.
Of course they'd want to help him. How nice!
I watched my mom watch him carry the boxes
of books he never read. He didn't have many things.
It was quick. Too quick for anyone to think
it through. He offered to put air in my bike tires
before the truck left. I stood with him
in the emptied space of our garage
while he fiddled with some tools he didn't bother
to pack. The pump wailed with each breath.
The worn tires spit back the unwanted air.
The old thing just didn't work.

Olivia McClure

Prayer for Protesters

In the beginning, there was nothing, which exploded,
thus exploding the beginning.
We were never stars, yet shone.
We were made of walking and sound, thus beginninged
from one hand blooming flesh into colors.

We came here to become a patch-quilt, piece and piece.
In beginning, there was dark and light, teaching separation and
dependence.

There was neither cold, nor heat—
then we had skin and wanted haven and decoration.
We learned stitching, the making of images,
since we were stitched of atoms and imaged of each other,
and were never meant to stop the testimony of stitches.

We are archipelago. Let the sea run
between us and take no one.
Let the island of shield and bludgeon drown.
Let the island of the bleeding bloom with healers.
Let the island of Facing Inward turn its peoples toward the seas and
horizons,
the storms coming and passed, toward each others' faces.
Let the untethered island settle unbuffeted.
Let there be fruit and bandages.
Let there be breath for every creature, and balm.

Devon Miller-Duggan

Pale Irises

They spring up out of wet grasses in the rocky ditches
and low windy meadows, and you are looking the other way,
intent on crossing a wild river, dangerous
after the days of unrelenting rain.

And you are worrying about things you will not remember,
talking to someone you cannot see. Spring up, to remind you how
something brief and fragile could have more power than stone,
especially stone. Engraved with your name, and its unknown date.
Is the mountain bluebird, in his brilliance, the question
or the answer? Passing through the pines, where bark beetles cut
great curves like an executioner's blade.

Just one wild iris right there, as you pass it on the path,
lost in your own weight, your own importance,
might change the balance. Even the curling petals, the slight bronze
on the tissue-paper lips, whispering like ghostly flowers left over
from last summer's fullness, bleached white as antelope bones,
seem as if made for a time the old ones understood.

When hunger is not in the body anymore, but out there,
in the distance. As though dying is hard at first, then easier.
The simple sleep of winter drifting over the hills, time running
its usual cadence, without any clear signs of amnesty.

Michael J. Moos

The Ochre Halo

Too warm in my arms, speckled with the chicken pox,
my son can't sleep, so I bend my knees,
like the book says, and recite his favorite,
"Three Gray Geese." Nestled against me,
he can't see our shadow looming on the wall,
silhouetted by the night-light's ochre halo,
as if standing at hell's open door, fittingly,
the way divorce can make you feel.
Spring break, and I'm his nurse, 24/7.
So much for taking him camping in the mountains.
Buddha asks, What is something about nothing?
Buddha adds, Nicely done, following
the pediatrician's guidelines to prevent scars.
After supper, his mother calls.
They talk, while my blue cup runneth over
and the cicadas' rhythm fills the trees.
Reliving everything doesn't redeem it.
Isaiah blinks slowly and drifts off.
Like his skin, his heart will heal.
Like the pilgrim who would be wise.
I turn around, and we face the light.

Greg Nelson

Santa Ana Lake Off the 91 Freeway

After reading about the fig tree
and those strangers gathered
under its branches in communion
I wonder about my own life
what is magical
as I wait for my daughter
in my car
windshield facing
a man-made lake
trucks and trash cans
a few knobby trees
shading a man slumped
over a fishing pole
stringing the line
as a little girl in a yellow jumper
spins around him
the blue-grey lake barren
around the edges
just a lip of shrubless
dirt bordering it and a dozen
or so run-down Winnebagos
crowded near green and blue
outhouses Southern California
freeway humming with cars
the sky is sliced
with telephone wires
a field of lavender
spans a freeway billboard
someone planted this concrete
lake amid the landscape
of asphalt where pelicans
glide the water
the girl in yellow chases
a pigeon up and down the dirt
shore just steps away
from the gathering

of old campers
lawn chairs arranged
in half-circles.

January Pearson

Carolina Catechism

My dear departed father
was forever fundamentalist,
as stern as his ancient namesake,
the storied no-nonsense Apostle Paul.

Indeed, he believed in the banana
as cause of Eve and Adam's fall
after they ate an apple more
aphrodisiac than allegory.

A pragmatic even if prodigal son for
loving poetry more than prophecy,
I honor the holy, believe
in both metaphorically.

Eugene Platt

The Invitation

isn't something I'd want anymore, in fact I absolutely don't, but I've got a sneaking suspicion this won't matter. You know how a cat is if you hope it will stay away from your lap. A cat thinks: you wouldn't be allergic if you recognized value when you saw value. Then the god of cats, who won the god prize twice before the pandemic and again this year, bares his needly little teeth and there you are, weighted by the richly hued, silken lump. The leap, the settling—these come over you so fast you can't help but involve your hands. Don't touch your face. Use hot water and soap. But none of this is going to happen, not to me, not while I have any say. Which I do. You better believe I do.

Marjorie Power

First Language Acquisition in Bats and Humans

Subject: Levi, age 2

“ . . .these bats are the only mammals other than humans that are known to babble like human babies.”—James Gorman, on greater sac-winged bats.

I translate you to the woman who asks
and doesn't know how to make meaning

out of your syllable-strings. The *L*
of your name glides to *y*. *Run* turns

to *won*. I show you the curve
of the retroflex and the bunched *R*.

You are learning the form of language
still, like a baby bat. The blur

between babble and words, the way
syllables become. Other bat species speak

in different terms. Out of instinct
I change the coalescence and gliding

of your sounds to something definable.
The sac-winged mother listens

as her baby practices the nature
of language, sings a similar

string, one like your own.
You and the bats are exploring

the possibilities of sound and creation.
You have discovered the rules, but cannot yet

will your muscles to follow.
I gently prod you to practice

minimal pairs, repeat to you the distinction
between voiced and unvoiced. I say these

with conviction, with promise
of something achievable. The bats babble

for hours, roosting in the acacia trees,
songs punctuated with raindrops and monkey-howls.

But you are practicing in the silence
of our backyard, hedged in mayflies

and backlit by water shining
lavender with the crowning sunset.

Frogs croak. Frustration fills you
after just minutes of repetition, spills

out in shuddering sigh. I am hoping
that your life is new enough

that soon none of this will be
left behind. Your sticky hands in mine,

I pull you with me onto the creaking
porch swing. Beneath my arm, I gather your shaking.

Rebecca Poynor

Portents

—*After Valheim*

Remember the cold water, the way fog falls
full-bodied onto ground. Blurred dawn hollows
you, carves your breath from dewy brume. You could hold

a whole spent dusk in your lungs, exhale held
traces of sweat and acid, and still fall
empty, wordless, out of sleep—that heavy hollow

like a mouth. To these mountains, you're a hollow
in the trees; to these swamps, a place to hold
roots and fester. Your dreams are all snowfall,

rainfall, hollow drifts laid drowsed as if to hold
down the land itself. Your bones will be drowned

in dirt, cracked calcite and hair buried down
below the frost line. Let the wind be drowned
by boughed timber, by ingots spun into collarbones

around the spitting hearth. Scry with split bones
when ice might smother the last fire, how far down
from light every blade of sorry grass will be drowned

in rime, in starving, wasting gray. When day drowns
inside the marsh wolf's maw, Winter will live on, bones
waiting in slick midnight for their sky to come down.

Jeremy Rock

While You Sleep

It's time. We've been crowded together
on this train forever; God, its dirty corridors
and smelly toilet, the porter ignoring our requests,
but also, sometimes, an enormous moon,
a basket of poppies thrust
through the window at a stop.

Do you remember the day the tracks flooded,
how we turned ourselves into birds
and flew into the canopies of trees,
how we invented that haunting song,
and sang it all day long, the one
whose melody now I can't recall?

At the next stop, I get off. Soon,
my beloveds, I won't matter
at all, no more than the stillness
of atoms dispersing
as the universe breathes in,
breathes out.

While you sleep, piled on each other
like coats at a party, I'll step down,
stand on the dark platform
as the car lurches and sighs,
and watch for your faces rising in the window,
your hands beating the glass.

Kelly Rowe

Cross Creek Road

This world born from a windblown branch bends
at the knuckle-bones—fingers reaching
for water they will never touch—
rooted in a small mountain, skirted in pine,

rising above the pocked mud of pasture,
vines loose on spindly persimmon trees.
Scots pine still loaded with last year's cones
rises over the creek

where black-crested titmouse
peep in emerald-green stalks of witch hazel,
and with my eyes shut, I hear winter
rustling through birch leaves, smell winter

in moss on the fence posts, see winter's broken
light zigzag across the river's green grey current, gather
improbably at the fork of the Tye and the James,
shine on the horizon where the world ends.

Katherine Smith

Imaginary Paintings

—after *Lisel Mueller*

1. How I Would Paint the Future

With a narrow brush, dipped quickly
Into the light we always use
To illuminate the past.
None of its drops will reach the ground.

2. How I Would Paint Happiness

A landscape that assures
The people living there
It will hide them when they need
To stay unseen. Hills
Steady as the madronas
Angling up. The skin
Peeling from their trunks
In scrolls thin and brittle—
Mounds of it deep enough
To cover roots.

3. How I Would Paint Death

Would yellow be appropriate?
His head as radiant as gold
Compressed from sunlight: an aura
So wide that no one can see
How many other creatures
Now lost that you will join.

4. How I Would Paint Love

Never toward the end of day
Or right at its beginning—
There needs to be some disk
Of sun to border an image
So sharply lined, it cuts
Into bone. Bring me paint blue

As bruises: my skin only
Is proper canvas.

5. How I Would Paint the Leap of Faith

No bending of the knees to press
A floor cold and hard, or to flex
The legs as if before some jump
Beneath stained glass. Instead,
A raw umber darkness straining to flood out
Of its crevasse. And at the nearer edge,
A figure small but upright, holding out
Its palm—a little boat
To carry a handful of heat across.

6. How I Would Paint the Big Lie

I know of no white pure enough.
The smile always stretches wider
Than any frame. Flowers intrude their petals
Into the foreground like rings of teeth
Surrounding mouths that appear open
Until we look more closely.
The brilliant light on the horizon
Flickers when we blink.
So we will stare.

7. How I Would Paint Nostalgia

On the canvas without borders, the red of stars
Receding—faint tint of blood
Mixed with distance ever swallowing.
On the canvas made of earth,
The lava's glow, cooling
Too slow to be seen, building
The volcano that it buries.

Michael Spence

After the death of your father

You tell me life is a chord pulled taut
and I say no, life is this mirror
here in the mall dressing room

hung to help us picture ourselves lying
low and still in our only black
suits. The drive home will overflow

with symbolism: a ribbon flailing
in wind, two cooks smoking
cigarettes by the dumpster, a tractor

parked alone in the middle of a half-
plowed field. I'll make us a supper
of modest tomatoes clipped green

from the garden and let the wine
unlock his unwilled laugh that lives
on now only in your belly

and the belly of your unborn son
who will never touch his face.
Just as we may learn to live

with the collective frailty of our soft
bodies so too must we learn to abide
a moon so bright it hurts our eyes

when the alternative is waking
child-scared in our nascent beds
without the light from his cigar

to bring us back from that deeper dark.

Garrett Stack

The Truth of the Skinny Fox

The blueness envelopes the greenness, the blackness penetrates the blueness from beyond. I will show you salmon against time and the river, against cormorant and osprey, against the crane that darkens the world upon changing to another rock. A skinny fox swam across the river to farmyards on the other side. A bee fell silent when I was in a chapel, and the silence was noisier than the humming. And a church on the river says, Come from the east and the west, everything is ready. Come away from the truth of the silence in the chapel, come away from the truth of the skinny fox, and come away from the truth of the waiting birds.

Kenneth D. Stephens

Above Lake Abant

for Raul Espinosa

The steppes disappear in their parchedness,
the mountains leave mist in their wake.
The east settles in a dusty red sun, while
the west welcomes with a coniferous embrace,
set on a table of baize, green with grass & fern.

Abant: still, cold, blue imperfect diamond
set delicately on a jeweler's lush velvet.
Rough wood ox carts rattle, rumble down
the shoreline road, felled trees in tow. The
peasants know that winter will come early.

Cold in the shallows, colder still in its depths,
the lake feeds life down along the valley floor,
up high along the ridges. On a hillside,
poet & painter share lamb sausage & egg,
eyes cast on what will happen, what will come.

Eugene Stevenson

Envy

I fill her cavity
with sprigs of rosemary,
slices of lemon, and salt.
Gently bind
her loose legs
as much for modesty
as for juices.
With softened butter
I massage her breast,
tuck her wings
between chest and
thighs. She roasts.
I baste, as moistness
is prized, so too, crisp
skin browned to amber.
Even her carving
is pageantry as the knife
glides through, resistance
overcome by surrender.
And then— with her pieces
arranged more perfectly
than in life— she is lauded,
tasted, and loved.

Ann Weil

Roberta Cleopatra Flack c. 1973

Roberta Flack touched me with her wistful songs
the ones that spoke to me when I was twelve
growing up in the suburbs, big for my age,
thinking about romance the kind I saw in movies
having no other idea what love was. It was a foreign country,
and I had no map, no suitcase, no walking shoes.
For a while there my journal was everything
until I walked into my bedroom and saw a boy
reading what was only for me. I could never finish it
though I wanted to. It would be years before
I felt like my words were sacred again.
Flack was the Songstress of my Generation.
Coming up in the 70s, her melodious voice
could express the pain of every young woman
especially one growing up on Forest Avenue,
and I'm not mad at Lauryn Hill. Twenty years later,
she rediscovered the queen and gave her song
a new interpretation, reminding us all how a stranger
can read you like a book he had no right to open,
can flip through seasons of your life like pages
under his thumb, can make you feel stripped bare
for all to see; except you're the only one who knows
how naked you are, how your life is like every other
life full of anguish, full of desire, broken and exposed.

Ellen June Wright

Rainbow Beach

post-reunion
 she wanted to drive
 in the leisurely Sunday sense
I suggested the beach by the lagoon
 with rainbow sand
 gasoline colors
but all-natural
 pulverized violet quartz
 blue crushed eggshells
grains of green mussel shells
 salts yellow orange red
 each color soft for our bare feet
to promenade upon
 we came to a nabla-shaped cabana
 with a wet bar inside
& a twin-size waterbed
 I placed a daffodil parasol
 in her blueberry rum
I stared at the azelea drapes pinned together
 wondering if we would soon relapse
 into our lantern-lit affair
she asked me *can a dewdrop capsize*
 & I said *if it's on a boat about to sink*
 her tongue licked mine
& I thought of how high the tides
 used to be when the moon
 was new

Michael Yusko

DAN VEACH PRIZE FOR YOUNGER POETS

2022 Winner

EDWIN WILLIAMSON

What I admire about Edwin Williamson's poem "Each Morning I Press My Ear to the Ground" is the way it highlights both science and love. Science and love are not mutually exclusive, of course, but I don't often think of them inhabiting the same space. In this poem, they do. Here, the speaker seems to want to discuss the scientific communication habits of fungi, but really what we see is the speaker's inability to communicate well his feelings for his *amour*. "I'm considering when to tell you" becomes "...[tonight] I'm going to tell you" becomes "Tomorrow I will tell you and/ tell you again and again..." as if the speaker is putting off the inevitable—no, not sharing the fact that fungi communicates, but rather sharing "a number of/ possibilities all of which point to *love*." Tomorrow, if the speaker's courage holds out, and he confesses his love, he imagines that his *amour* will "tell [him] never to stop." The ending, full of longing, could break one's heart. His "I want so badly to be right" has everything to do with his feelings being returned, and nothing to do with science after all... except maybe (human) chemistry. This poem both charms and surprises. I know you will enjoy it.

JC Reilly

Each Morning, I Press My Ear to the Ground

On April 6, 2022, research from Professor Andrew Adamatzky reveals a striking similarity between electrical impulses generated by fungi and human language.

I'm considering when to tell you
a scientist believes fungi might
communicate with each other. They think
that the expansive underground filaments of
fungi—which are already noted as comparable to a
nervous system, pulsing like a little heartbeat—

are like your brain sending electrical signals to your
mouth to move closer closer closer to my own.

The study detects rhythmic patterns of a
similar frequency to: a small child's
first dream, a chance encounter with someone
very spectacular, everybody else's
incredible lives across all time, or—
simply—the skeptical grumbling of some
scientist who doesn't believe in a thing's
sweetness and is not intimate with their own heart.

Investigated are: enoki, split gill, ghost and
caterpillar fungus (thank you). Findings: electrical spikes in
clusters almost identical in length to that
of English words. The universe is in slowdown—

because tonight, I'm going to tell you.
I wonder what you might
say in response and what you'll think
afterwards as you fall asleep: it's
something beautiful; I'm a
great fool; we should be kind
to nature, kiss the grass. A number of
possibilities all of which point to *love*.

Tomorrow, I will tell you and
tell you again and again, because you'd

tell me to never stop and that you want to be
with me when they talk. I want so badly to be right.

Edwin Williamson

POETRY 2022

International Poetry Competition

GRAND PRIZE \$1,000

ELIZABETH KNAPP

International Publication Prizes

Stevens Amidon * Rhoni Blankenthorn
Harley Chapman * Grant Chemidlin * Hollie Dugas
Therese Gleason * Ellen Pauley Goff * Norman Goodwin
P M F Johnson * Sarah Kersey * Hannah Lee
Corrine Wohlford Mason * karla k. morton
Mitchelle Mukeli * Veronica Patterson
Jennifer M. Phillips * Ivy Raff * vinode ramgopal
Angela Sucich * Jeri Theriault * Tanya Tuzeo
Isi Unikowski

International Merit Awards

Jessica Barksdale * William Barnes * Jude Luttrell Bradley
Taylor Byas * Chloe Cook * Alexandra Cravici-Kramer
Art Elser * Marie-Louise Eyres * Danielle Fleming
Natalie Garyet * William Greene * Donald Givans * Ken Haas
Don Hogle * Jackleen Holton * Suzanne Honda
J J Kovatch * Caroline Laganas * E R Lutken
Mark Madigan * Lucie McKee * Jed Myers * Wanda Praisner
Esther Ra * Marjorie Saiser * Susan Salgy * Joyce Schmid
Julie Taylor * Jeanne Wagner * Jamie Wendt
Richard Widerkehr * Kelly Vande Plasse * 士閔 孫

Welcome to Poetry 2022

First Place: It's Okay to Worry about the State of Britney Spears's Mental Health

This was such a strong year of submissions. These were all polished poems labored over by thoughtful and considerate poets. Each honorable mention could have been first place. However, one poem stood out with its casual title and celebrity namedrop. Not knowing what kind of poem to be encountered, the first line leads with a laidback ampersand. The second and third line move us beyond Spears and into a bigger concern about “humanity’s/mental health.” What initially appears to be a frivolous poem is anything but. We’re quickly brought beyond Britney and into the reminder of “women/enslaved, abused, & silenced/by the patriarchy” The poet addresses social concerning issues throughout the poem while continuing to bring it back to the media-loving spectacle of Britney Spears. These comparisons provide an explanation of why Spears’s situation has captured our collective attention. Her struggles are a stand-in for bigger issues. The poem grows our appreciation for the fanatical Britney fans picketing at courthouses and posting on social media. We are able to see that this just isn’t fandom fervor but “Britney being/a synecdoche here.” There’s a cleverness to this poem that could potentially alienate or verge into careless campiness, but it never goes there thanks to the balance of global awareness, sincere concern, and artful imagery. The poem’s topography skillfully serves the content. The final stanza is also the final turn of the poem. I found this to be an exciting and exceptional poem that dared to mix heady, heavy issues with pop and offered a shift in perspective. Congratulation to Elizabeth Knapp, the honorable mentions, and each poet who put their work out and submitted this year.

Honorable mentions:

P M F Johnson’s “Our House,” Ellen Pauley Goff’s “Southland Eulogy,” Rhoni Blankenthorn’s “Between The Clock And The Bed,” and Grant Chemidlin’s The Prayers of Mice

Steven Reigns

It's Okay to Worry about the State of Britney Spears's Mental Health

& by that I mean it's okay to worry
about the state of humanity's
mental health, Britney being

a synecdoche here, a part standing in
for a whole, & further, a metonym,
when she becomes the woman

who represents all women
enslaved, abused, & silenced
by the patriarchy, the patriarchy

played of course by Britney's father,
who in real life did the unthinkable—
sold his daughter to the world.

This metaphor could be stretched
even further to mean Britney
equals the earth in crisis—melting

polar caps & biblical floods—
while we burn down its forests
& poison its rivers, & then

like Jamie Spears, demand that it sing.
What would you do if you were Britney?
What would you do if you were

a dying planet? Who cares about
something as inconsequential as dying
as long as the music keeps playing?

Elizabeth Knapp

Mistranslation of a Borges Poem Found in a Book by Joseph Conrad

Shimmering lands exhale summer
winds. The day, blinded by white light,
dazzles coastal beaches. Inland,
the pampas rage with fever.

But at night, tides bring back
the dark coldness of ocean depths. The black
blood of octopi fill the inkpots
of Argentina. The poet lights a cigarette.

Smoke obscures the Milky Way. Animals return
their names. What's left but a few, meagre observations?
The Rio del Plata flows through the Land of Ur.
The poet, Adam, the first man.

Stevens Amidon

Love and the Postwar Tango

An eyebrow raised, smallest of nods. He snaps
his finger like a whip, and you collapse
like a boozy broad falling into the arms of a strongman.

His bare feet squeak
across the checkered floor. You long
to be that floor.

The staccato rhythms of the tango are, of course,
an obstacle for a man who can't dance. He leads you
like a painter—deft hands, smooth strokes.

Two lovers, hands linked by wisps of paint. Chest-to-chest,
you tremble as he sweeps
his bride across the chessboard.

A red sky scribbles its intentions
on a dirty window. Readers of the Kaballah take note.

Of all the sunsets you have seen,
this one stops your heart.

Of all the paintings you have loved,
this is the one you long to enter.

Two nations dance a languorous tango
around a river's course.

In the old city of Jerusalem
a gallery opens into a hall.

Checkered floor. Brick walls. Disapproving
faces of the local Sanhedrin.

Stevens Amidon

Between The Clock And The Bed

After Jasper Johns

People in the well-lit gallery talk about sex,
business, and chaos. I'm fighting indigestion

and a little turned on. Like everyone else I'm here
to take photos of America on top of America on top

of America, dripped and slathered in encaustic paint
and so, so good looking. America covered in cream,

America that is all body and no border, which
is a concept but not a reality in America, but

I can turn anything into a body, and art makes me weak
and speculative, like, how would that flower

in that photograph feel pressed against my sex, and,
is every tin can an allegory, and, is every seam a cleaving

both together and apart of the canvas, the image,
the object. A father says to his daughter in the gallery

looking at other people's art is good for your brain,
which is sweet, which is a memory of a feeling and

comes across that way, even as I'm reading
the label of an artwork about a memory of a feeling—

partial gift of Apollo Plastics Corporation it says.
A fork and a spoon dangle from a wire above

a grey canvas, as intimate as Apollo and Hyacinth,
though less doomed—I'm a romantic that way. It is Sunday

and not yet spring. After the gallery with its hinges,
its ghostly rivulets cutting through pigment, I'll walk

through the wet city streets admiring snow clumps
shaped like candy as if there's nothing to cry about.

Rhoni Blankenthorn

earthshine

I was born moonless
 which is to say
the night was black as a swallowed fish
& the absence of light stuck
somewhere between my small & large intestine.

A prophecy the size of a gumdrop
 sprouted behind my ear—*She will be turbulent*
drowned water, all forehead.
Or, watch for weak bones & back.

The magick first words: *dada*
 which is to say *daddy*
or a declaration of war against war.

I was barely an earthshine
 barely a tooth
or slice of light against the black goat
curbing the horizon,

less than the perimeter of day
visible from the depths of a lidded well.

From such sliverhood
the only path forward is consumption,
is taking everything by the mouth.

If the child is both child & lack—
 the house, both house & maw—

Father said *god delivered some of us empty as pews*
to show the suggestion of light
 is a spark in need of feeding.

Harley Anastasia Chapman

The Prayers of Mice

You make friends with the three palm trees standing tall
outside your window, make two peanut butter & jelly sandwiches
& save the one for later, for dinner maybe, whereafter,
you'll do the dishes & hum a sad song about love,
about what goes wrong, so when the time finally comes,
you'll feel you're ready. Before bed, you suddenly wonder
what the foxtrot is, so you google it, practice all its steps in
leather boots, which drives the mouse living in your walls
to bang a Q-tip paw against the wood. Even he
(the fear-driven mouse) feels sorry for you,
goes to sleep each night praying that tomorrow
brings you courage.

Grant Chemidlin

I regret I am not a starfish,

a wholesome quasi-creature,
hard to kill, and faceless,
without the horror of blood
and teeth. I regret I have
no limb to lose to wanting—
these arms are not for
plucking and wishing.
I use them to drive to grocery
stores and buy cartons of eggs.
I regret that I am governed
by this brain rather than
uncertainty, that I cannot shift
freely between genders, the sea's
Orlando, parading glamorously
across salty sand, with my thick-
skin bling, dominant appendages
pulling my brilliant
and androgynous body along
the ocean floor. I regret
that I am sensitive
to each turned stone,
each miniscule death. I regret
that I grieve instead of inching
across the world, simply noticing.
And by what stretch
of the imagination could I digest
oysters outside of my body—
as if to abstain from anything
macabre? How beautiful
and morose—to exist in perfect
symmetry, to have no verbal
language, to know with certainty
only the contour of water.

Hollie Dugas

How I Became A Flapper

I bought the biggest bottle of Coco Mademoiselle
I could find and set out to break some rules—
at first, just sneaking flasks of booze and drinking
in public because it was offensive. I didn't want to
take this life lying down on a bed of satin sheets
waiting for a man to return from the city.
I began to study our suffragettes on TV,
started taking off my bra at the watering holes, bare-
chested like one of the boys. Other *women* noticed.
If they didn't want to be me, they wanted to take me
down to the cliffs for a little snugglepupping
and under-the-skirt touching. In those minutes,
I ignited like a semi-automatic lighter, androgynous,
boyish even, reckless in my desires—someone who
knew how to live, curse boisterously, and wear
pantsuits. Then, at night, it was rouge lipstick
and bling. I should tell you, I'm anything but a lady.
I can rob you of soul with a single look.
Some people say, the *flap* comes from the sound
of unbuttoned galoshes in rain. I can tell you,
it's not the shoes. I'm flying baby,
wing-ed like the great night owl, immortal.

Hollie Dugas

Worst That Could Happen

When the worst that could happen came true
a trapdoor fell open inside my chest
and I fell too,
landing underground.
It reeked of peace lilies
and I heard weeping.
I remember a hearse and a church
and a neatly cut rectangle
in the earth.
Someone threw clods of dirt
but I didn't care.
It was dark and I craved sleep.
The dead visited me in dreams,
faces flashing behind my eyelids.
Some I knew, others I didn't
recognize. The one I wanted to see,
with blue-black hair and horn-rimmed glasses
framing kind brown eyes,
only came back for half an instant
and always stayed just out of reach—
dimples glinting as he turned to go,
a glimpse of his face in the window
of a bus I ran after
that was already pulling away.
On the seventh day, I heard bells
tolling a panicky ring. I gasped—
it was my own hand
yanking the string.
I smelled metal and tasted blood,
spitting a coin from under my tongue.
The sound of water
lured me from the grave.
I followed the burbling to a spring,
where a buck drank from silver ripples.
He came to me,
bowing his head to shed
his antlers at my feet.
I asked if antlers are skull bones

and he just said *they'll grow back*.
Then I fashioned the velvety racks
into a cradle and put my heart inside,
rocking and humming
a ruminant tune,
part elegy, part lullaby.

Therese Gleason

Southland Eulogy

It rains for five days
the morning we tried to
plant your bones
perhaps a day for each of the seeds
you left behind
The first thing I do is save
your voicemails
so I know how to practice
the vowels that never made it out
of the holler
I remember your details in past tense,
I realized too late you were giving
me my inheritance
in present tense,
a eulogy in the making,
in your pats to the arm and
the imprints in the biscuit dough
under your fingertips,
kept soft and protected
until it met heat

You sung advice,
a lullaby I needed less and less
but one I wanted more
and more as I got older
You spat gems like
pretty is as pretty does
for years I thought you meant
my shell
treat your hair kind, you'd say
let it grow long and wild—
you'd've killed me if I cut it—
stay pretty, look nice
You keep yours short, why me,
I thought
why do I carry the burden of pretty
I wanted to argue until I grasped
you cared more about my hair

the more I found yours in your hair brush
or caught in the front porch mulch
pretty is as pretty does
For a few more years
I thought I understood
pretty wasn't how you treated the outside,
the dying cells of your body,
but how you adorned others,
your verbs the glossiest part of you
pretty is as pretty does
a healthy soul starts at the roots

The roots of you claw deep
and that's where I dig
for the birth of your memory,
the flowers you never allowed to wilt
whether bouquets tressed to survive days
or trees nursed to survive decades
forgiveness ferns
so huge they wrapped around you
like a royal cape
a Queen among small lives of the earth,
the sprouts in the dew,
the seeds in the soil,
where my own roots carve
the womb for their foundation stone
Every morning you gave to the world
you sang no declaration of spotlight wishes,
no ribbons for loudest petals,
but whispered a quiet promise as small
and as inevitable as you

Your kitchen cabinets are stocked with food
you couldn't eat anymore
so I hunt through the treasures
you left behind,
search for the comfort you stashed
behind sugar-coated cures for
your sweet tooth;
behind mismatched family silverware;
behind lonely trinkets

only you preserved the story for
(did you pluck them
from a different cabinet,
a different time,
after a different funeral?)
and I finally rescue the half-sipped bourbon bottle
just how you left it
the last time you kissed it
Medicine, you'd say,
for the cough
and I'd wonder what the remedy is
for the feeling I push down when I think
about whether I'll finish what you started
or if I'll let the honey liquid finally,
a spirit preserved in amber,
rest.

Ellen Goff

Crepe Myrtle Pantoum

Outside this city café window streaked
with late September rain I watch
red petals fall and bleed to the sidewalk—
these crepe myrtle trees seem intent,

despite September rain, to still hold court
on their one block of Madison Street.
Crepe myrtle trees lag late into summer
then explode into pom-poms of blossom.

For one long block on Madison Street,
in the middle of urban Seattle, modest
crepe myrtles explode to pomposity,
a show I value more each year to see.

Modestly, in the middle of urban Seattle,
someone has taken the trouble to plant
a vision, a value, year by year more lovely,
this pageant of rouge combustion in trees.

Someone has taken the trouble to make
slabs of blank concrete blaze into flame
with trees that erupt into pageants
of petals drifting down like glowing ash.

Slabs of bleak concrete blaze into flame,
a vivid display of summer's last flaring
out a wet window where I'm lucky to watch
these rained down petals bleed to the walk.

This vivid display of summer's last flaring,
as sidewalk tables get pulled into shelter,
these rained down petals bleed to the walk
for one whole block on Madison Street.

Norman Goodwin

Our House

Now inside the door, coats and scarves
hanging in the closet like memories
of a great attempt, the accoutrements
of victory on leave until tomorrow,
I hurry into the dimness to find you
through the scarred experiences
any long-time home displays: spots
where the finish has worn off the chairs,
where repairs had to be made
around the windows, even the warmth
of our furnace guaranteed only after
replacing the zone valve and hoses
in our search for solutions to the cold.
What we laugh about now. Nothing
comes simply: all has its history,
even those places we wiped down the walls
where the more flagrant mosquitoes died.
Sunlight irradiates the windows
like some flickering outside promise
that we have time for peace, that
what slow change happens every day
leaves space for rest, for gathering
like children to hear the next story.
Not a dark place, these shadows reveal
a hint of sensual violet, or that rich brown
that marks the subtle start of evening
with its shift to intimacy. And here
I find you, in the kitchen of course,
a kiss, a lick of the spoon, joy
rising like a birthday cake
into its moment of splendor.

P M F Johnson

Ode to the Natal Plum Bonsai

At the Pacific Bonsai Museum in Federal Way, WA

Glossy evergreen, no one wants to be alone.
White stars bloom yet your sweet, red fruit
are late. This absence is a tragedy underlined
by a leaf and its lover, positioned like pairs
of duck feet repeating down your forked
and freckled spine. Most of life we do alone,
but the rest is reaching for a love that holds
us in the descent, when a surge of plum
juice drips down our chin.

Sarah Kersey

Five Haikus from the Start of Spring

Snow in March

The sky is paper—
I am caught between it and
the next page, white field.

Early spring

Pale blooms on black trees
draped in solemn bone-white fog:
spring's dirge to winter

Rural drive

Narrow broken road
hedged, hidden and hushed by trees;
lone car, nascent green

Magnolias again

The sky, placid lake:
magnolia dips three pink
toes in its waters

Forsythia

A forsythia
knocks softly on the barn's door:
“Look at my new gold.”

Hannah Lee

White Wife

You have a stake in something not yours.
You worry in ways you didn't before.
Your mother-in-law believes his love
for you a reflection of his
low self-esteem. Your daydreams
about a cottage somewhere, on a lake,
in the mountains, now feel like
treachery. You commit him
to loneliness. You make strangers
proud of you. You make people apologize
for what they say before you before
they remember. When you tell your students,
if you do, they say, *so that explains it*.
You see your old self. You startle.
You say more than you used to,
and you are less kind. You are the one
who knocks on the neighbor's door at midnight
to tell her she left her headlights on.
When you are alone, you can feel the way
the gas attendant's, the waitress', the clerk's
reception of you crackles differently,
like they are tuning in to a familiar station.
You can sing that old song.
But you cannot be true.

Corinne Wohlford Mason

Chow Chow

Relishes originated from the need to preserve vegetables for winter. This notion is consistent with the word "relish," which first appeared in English in 1798 and comes from the word "reles" meaning "something remaining" in Old French.

It could be a religion, this relish—
what's leftover;

Fall's last stand
before the death-breath of frost.

Three days spent in the kitchen,
chopping, salting, cooking;

ladling into hot Mason jars,
one half-inch of space left at the top,

easing the glass into boiling water.
Gummed seals preserving

a Season's bounty;
mother and daughter hand to sticky hand

before the dark months.
We believe we know

what becomes of us in Winter,
but think chow-chow,

deep-shelved in the back of the pantry
to pull out one bitter day

when Sun cannot hoist his head;
barely opening his mouth

spoon by spoon
to the Summer of '16.

Think vitae and mellow mornings;
the ripe heat of sunset.

Think heads of cabbage,
hearts of green tomatoes,

crisp hollows of bell peppers;
enough onion to make you cry.

karla k. morton

It's hard to admit God lives in California

11,000 feet up White Mountain,
lightning's silver staff struck the valley floor;
instant thunder shook the ground, charged the air.
We stepped forth anyway.

It makes sense God lingers
among the oldest trees on earth.
But it was California,
and down the road, an impatient caldera.

His house is eclectic.
People either look up or down
when they call His name,

but we came to listen
as the moon tangled in 5,000 year old
Bristlecone pines—

every hundred years, an inch
in their tree rings.
Twenty inches in, I touched the year
Jesus was born.

It's all there—all of it,
every miracle, every mishap—
the great flood, the reign of Rome,
the Trail of Tears, the last buffalo,
hot running water, the internet...

I hear God breathing—
His slow exhale of oxygen
here in the aura of all things;
all time existing at once;

understanding *death* is just a foreign word
that means:

*And now I rise like a fern
from the forest floor.*

karla k. morton

Mwanamke ni Kuvimilia (*A woman is to endure*)

I'm on the phone

with my cousin

I can hear

fear grasping her throat

mwanamke ni kuvimilia

I know she wants to leave

she has every voice

but her own

shoved down her throat

mwanamke ni kuvimilia

The echoes

of our mothers

are so loud

I whisper

mwanamke ni kuvimilia

They wore abuse

as love

faithfully and loyally

around their necks

mwanamke ni kuvimilia

Love shouldn't slowly

strangle the breath

from your lungs.

We watched

their eyes dim.

mwanamke ni kuvimilia

"I can hear

all the women in my bones

crying to be set free

mourning their

unlived lives"

She's leaving.

Mitchelle Mukeli

Cloud Forest

*"This hour I tell things in confidence
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you."
—Walt Whitman*

I think that the manatee, pale gray, curved, floating beneath the water's
surface, is an ocean cloud

And that a wedding dress is a billowing cloud with a veil of rain

And fungus white in the damp woods is an earth cloud and I do not care
if it is edible or poisonous

And white dog-tooth violets make tiny clouds that ruffle the garden

And brain coral is a veiny cloud

And each white swan, gliding, each pelican spiraling, each white egret
doubled on water is a feathered cloud

Cotton bursting soft from its boll and pillows stuffed plump with down
are clouds from which the mist of dreams rises

And the full moon is the bright sister of clouds and they sing together
and I join them

And when the moon is new, I walk the cloud-trail of the Milky Way and
spirits are with me

A cocoon is a cloud to hold and empty life, unraveled to weave a shroud

And milkweed seeds—cumulus clouds in a satin canoe

Consider how bones hold clouds of flesh, and the soul a lenticular cloud
shimmering above the body

And sheep a herd of woolly altocumulus, and lambs skinny clouds
gamboling

And the great white whale is alive in pages

Walt Whitman's beard and Albert Einstein's hair are cirrus clouds
full of lightning

For every poem and every book is a cloud of knowing and unknowing

And love a cloud that passeth misunderstanding and life is great as
death

Veronica Patterson

The Horse-Car Terminal, New York 1893; photo by
A. Steiglitz

Gaslamps longing for light.
Late snow turning into rain.
Ice ellipses over the blind-eyed windows
in the granite, topping the porches.
The muck and slush squishing from under your boots
slithering at the curb
where the Harlem tram releases its last passenger
clanking into the turn-around.
Quarter-horses blowing gently,
steam clouding up from their backs and nostrils,
mythic and pedestrian,
their driver too familiar for conversation
tending to their leathers
in his macintosh and cloche.
The wet wind catches you on your left cheek,
lifts your own hat-brim.
The street-sweeper bends over his pail,
you can't make out his face,
just the broom waiting.
Such patience in discomforts,
in the indemnity of daily labor,
keener in its temporary standstill,
in the resigned hooves of the horses,
following the grooves the wheels made.

Jennifer M. Phillips

Haibun for a Stud

The Demerara-plank gate girding his brawn-corded flank emboldens me, and I advance on his stable, my sandaled feet tentative on hay-carpet. We regard one another, this prehistoric creature and I, this modern remnant of megafauna. Beyond expressive velvet lips and nostrils broader than my palm, musculature shifts under shimmering mahogany skin. I think the fillies must be mad for him, his thickly rounded hamstrings encasing a dark, uncompromising phallus. Nothing of the mocking indecency that accompanies some mammals' genital displays; no. He stands in dignity.

Lilac-skied evening

Dust clouds cling to stable floors

Sweat-slicked stallion coat

Ivy Raff

Triveni Sangam and the Ancient Goodbye

I shall say goodbye, father,
Where three rivers meet.

When the morning sun is still soft
On Akbar's proud fort and night's
pneuma has not yet lifted,
I will climb aboard a river boat,
Sanskrit chants will begin,
Siberian gulls will circle and dive,
quarreling at breakfast,
and as we go pass the banks
bustling with preparations
for mendicants and travelers
of the famed Kumbh Mela,
I will lower my hand to clean,
cold waters, green and silvery,
spreading fingers to part the stream
for sight of the wise goddess below,
until the boatman calls out
the white ripple at the rivers meld,
where I shall sit upon the edge,
to pour the last of you,
your grey burnt essence, your fine ash,
releasing that dissolving trail of dust

This is an age of second chances.
Geography is kinder.
The oceans are shrunk.
Longitudes fit to our pockets,
We live by digital hearths.
Love does not look its fragile last
to ships crossing seas. Return
is a promise of our times.
I know some still say goodbye
carrying necessities in a sack.
A child still looks back to parents,
standing beside a ruined home,

with another child in hand.
There are yet such farewells.
But this is the ancient goodbye.
There were never second chances.
So, holding upright on the overhead bar,
I will look out to the most distant point,
The rim of sky and earth that stays
As we return when the last rites are done.

vinode ramgopal

Note:

Triveni Sangam is the holiest of places for scattering ashes in Hinduism; it is the confluence of the Ganges, the Jaumna and Sarasvati rivers, the latter named after the goddess of knowledge.

Salamander

That it is possible for some living organisms to exist in the fire without being burnt, the case of the salamander clearly shows, for this creature, they say, extinguishes the fire as it walks through it.

—Aristotle, *History of Animals*

For too many years I was
putting out the fires he made,
taking the heat as women
have done for generations
before me, long since an
ancient physician—Galen
or maybe Hippocrates—
first described us as cold and
damp, imbalanced by nature.
A learned history, passed down
through and adhering to our
bodies. It's why we burn for
men, those old men said, being
both lustful and too frigid.
And dead tongues warned of poison
in a creature so fierce that
no flame could do it harm, but
they missed its truer feat: when torn
apart, it regrows a limb
or vital organ, one it
was always ready to lose.
A myth is a danger, too,
kept warm and intact by the
telling. Let us walk our damp
cold bodies through it again.

Angela Sucich

Self-Portrait as Homestead

You take a good look something
you've been avoiding all these years
your skin a kind of peach stucco
the hallway blurred now

with clutter. What's good?
What needs a make-over? You glue
and staple each shingle each summer
add magenta cerise apple your mother's

anger your father's storm
drains and floorboards his tongue
and groove. His silence. You patch Catholic
guilt and gilt wallpaper candles

beach sand and every bit of earth
you've ever walked add undressed
windows your hysterectomy
scar. A good house is a used place

turned over and passed on a place of winter
noons layered like the cemetery
with strange names. Admit it—
you're still trying to hold

everything—skin cells and your grandmother's
cookbook broken outlets and not enough
income. You always wanted a light-filled
high-ceilinged house

with wood floors and unexpected
rooms. A possible place the way *womb*
hums the sound of home.
What you got were familiar bones

for building this museum amused
at everything you thought you wanted

all of it catalogued in this edifice
of doors and stories and wings.

Jeri Theriault

daughterless

when little girls are near caught unaware
in outbreath of panting, i hunger for hearts

holographic against black leggings
hands swiping sequin shirts, silver blushes to pink

what did these mothers do differently? said *no* more often
until follicles gobbled all the male cells right up?

i want to see grandma again, resurrected
waiting for pancakes busy with her coloring pages

eyes blackened cast iron bottoms
she looks at me, *venetian lashes* grandma would call them

dense ferns growing in the shade of her peasant face
i am sure they would look alike, spinning

purple georgette dress
wearing my great-grandmother's hair

cut before she died
given to all the women in the family, kin keepers

who call daily with updates, grieve over bad men
hold onto dishes, the shawl with gold tassels

who will wear my hair when i am gone?
who will look for me in a face?

Tanya Tuzeo

“There’s some mighty good water in Tennessee”*

Tonight, America, the stars above you have been blotted out
by flitting shapes, like huge moths attracted
to haloes of darkness that form around pools
of doubt, smutches of innuendo, whispered
confidences in bars; the more implausible, the deeper
the ravines cut by these rivers of pitch,
the more enticing their deltas, glossy as onyx.
So they have come from afar to look at you, America,
and now their gauzy drift settles
over the islands of Puget and Penobscot,
scrimlight of your ordinary evenings dimmed
beneath their feathered jostling.

And why not? Haven’t you earned some portent
to mark these times? Shouldn’t huge storm-clouds be rushing
to pound like breakers on the reef of your cities, Joshua trees
uncannily bursting into flame beside littered highways,
flattened corn like notes in a Sousa requiem for an empire?

(—here, where the purple light of Canberra’s dusk
fills this room at the back of the house
my regrets won’t stir a blade of your prairie grass
even as they form around your name—)

America where Hart Crane came ashore,
where I linger on a corner while Stevens pauses to write
something on an envelope; I wave at Berryman drinking
alone in Hopper’s bar. *America* was an intricate
machine, a timing light shone
into the engine well of neighbourhoods and precincts,
an inscribed disk sent into the future.
America from where my brother and I would emerge
to walk home from the little cinema we’d been to for the matinee.
You turned the real world into plywood,
a papier-mâché bricolage plastered over
the cold late afternoon. *America*
was technicolour, a soundtrack that bore a fidelity

to another reality, not ours, out of sync
with the words we spoke.

America, your pure products address you.
They declaim from the commerce on your riverbanks,
from your deserted promontories,
from your heartland constructed like a filmset
in a language
scattered and capacious, its talismans stashed
in mangroves and malls,
beacons off the bluff, the cape, your resonant shores;
no hamlet so mean, so forgotten
off a byway, it will not have its place
in your poems of highways and lakes.

(—not you, not here, say the cockatoos
their call like straps of darkness tightening.
The reticence of our drawl
stretches like an ill-fitted sheet to its continent until
we too are located by names
that move like windlight through the casuarinas—)

Tonight, I'm thinking of how America meant
the story my Dad told of how the camp inmates
crowded around a window, April 1945,
and asked the one who could look out
'can you see them, the Americans? Can you see them yet?' and when
they arrived, the Sixth Armored Division, when they entered
the camp, how amazed he was, my Dad, still a teenager,
who had never seen an American.

Tonight, America, I'm thinking about that accused woman.
How perhaps, in her last years, she found deep wells of that fine water
in Tennessee. About the angels that she found there.

Isi Unikowski

Note

* Abraham Lincoln's advice as defence attorney to an abused woman on trial for murdering her husband, whereupon she absconded and was not pursued further.

Contributors

Megan Alyse (She/Her), holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College and is a 2021 Pushcart Prize nominee. You can find some of her work appearing in *Angel City Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Juked*, *Rattle*, *The Rumpus*, and *TIMBER Journal*. Megan lives and writes in Savannah, GA. Connect with her at www.meganalyse.com or on Instagram @megsalyse.

Stevens Amidon is the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Mid Michigan College, a 20 year veteran of submarines, and a Graduate of the Goddard College MFA-in-Writing Program. I am particularly fascinated with the poetry of Borges, Neruda, and other Latin-American writers.

Laura Isabela Amsel was born in the Mississippi Delta and currently lives in Madison, Mississippi. She holds an MA in Spanish from Middlebury College. She has poems in recent issues of *The Gordon Square Review*, *Arlington Literary Journal*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Mikrokosmos*, and *Viewless Wings*.

Ellery Beck has a BA in Creative Writing from Salisbury University. They are the Founding Interview Editor for *The Shore Poetry* and a Poetry Reader for *Poet Lore*. They have poems published or forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Colorado Review*, *Zone3*, *Sugar House Review*, *Fugue*, and elsewhere.

Jaycee Billington grew up in Folkston, Georgia, in the shade of the Okefenokee Swamp. She studied poetry at GCSU before going on to earn her MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work can be found in *Hotel Amerika*, *Plain China*, *Napkin Review Poetry*, and *West Trade Review*.

Muyaka bin Haji al-Ghassaniy (1776–1840) was the earliest secular Swahili poet whose identity is known. He has been credited with bringing Swahili verse “out of the mosque and into the marketplace” and popularizing the mashairi quatrain form. **Richard Prins** is a New Yorker who has lived, worked, studied and recorded music in Dar es Salaam. His original work and translations from Swahili have appeared in publications like *Gulf Coast*, *jubilat*, and *Ploughshares*, and received “Notable” mentions in *Best American Essays* and *Best American Travel Writing*.

Rhoni Blankenhorn is a Filipino-American writer based in NYC. A Best of the Net nominee, her words can be found in *Pigeon Pages*, *Hyperallergic*, *Girl Blood Info*, *92Y's Podium*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, and *Some Kind of Opening*, among others.

Sarah Carey is the author of two poetry chapbooks, including *Accommodations*, winner of the Concrete Wolf Poetry Chapbook Award (2019.) Her work has appeared recently in *Five Points*, *Sweet*, *Split Rock Review*, *E Zone 3*, *Pacifica*, and elsewhere. This is her second appearance in *Atlanta Review*. Visit her at SarahKCarey.com or on Twitter @SayCarey1.

Harley Anastasia Chapman holds an MFA in poetry from Columbia College Chicago & a BA in English with a focus on women & gender studies from Illinois State University. In 2019 she was awarded the Allen & Lynn Turner commencement poetry prize. *Smiling with Teeth*, her first chapbook, is available through Finishing Line Press.

Lane Chasek's work has appeared in *Hobart Pulp*, *Narrative Northeast*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *perhappened*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and other publications. He is the author of a biography of Hugo Ball, a poetry collection, two chapbooks, and a forthcoming novel, *She Calls Me Cinnamon* (Pski's Porch).

Grant Chemidlin is a queer poet and currently, an MFA candidate at Antioch University-Los Angeles. Recent work has been published or is forthcoming in *Quarterly West*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *River Heron Review*, among others.

Adam P. Davis grew up in Maryland, majored in French at Wesleyan University, and received his Masters degrees in both political science at Columbia University and supply chain management at Purdue University. He has been published in *Poets Reading the News*, *Meniscus*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Free State Review*, *East by Northeast Literary Magazine*, and *Silver Rose Magazine*.

Andrea Janelle Dickens is originally from the Blue Ridge Mountains and now lives in the Sonoran Desert, where she resides among the sunshine and saguaro cacti. Her work has appeared in *New South*, *Ruminate*, and *The Wayfarer*, among others. When not writing poems, she's making pottery in her ceramics studio or tending hives of bees.

Pamela Dillon is a writer, poet, and graduate of creative writing from the University of Toronto. Pamela's most recent publications can be found in the *Globe and Mail*, *The New Quarterly*, and in *The Humber Literary Review*. Pamela is currently working on a collection of short stories.

Hollie Dugas lives in New Mexico. Her work has been selected to be included in *Barrow Street*, *Reed Magazine*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Redivider*, *Porter House Review*, *Pembroke*, *Salamander*, *Poet Lore*, *Chiron Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *CALYX*, and others. She is currently a member on the editorial board for *Off the Coast*.

Sara Dudo is an MFA student and graduate assistant at University of Nevada Las Vegas. She's very excited to have just married her best friend in June of 2021 and enjoys writing and reading poetry and creative nonfiction, running, and surfing. Her work has recently been published or forthcoming in *Tiny Journal*, *Southwest Review*, *Portland Review*, *Red Rock Review*, and others.

Lily Anna Erb studied poetry at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. In 2019, she was awarded the Michener Scholarship for Creative Writing. Her work can be found in *Poet's Choice*, *The New York Quarterly*, and *North of Oxford*, among other places.

Kris Falcon's poems are forthcoming or have appeared in *Filling Station*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Red Rock Review*, *Plainsongs*, and elsewhere. She is the author of *Alunsina's Wrist*. She holds an MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Jennifer Manske Fenske published a poem in the *Emrys Journal* last year. She is the recipient of a 2022 Artist Project Support Grant in poetry from the Metropolitan Arts Council (Greenville, S.C.). She is also the author of two novels published by Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press.

Lew Forester is a retired social worker and a Multiple Myeloma survivor. He lives with his wife in Arvada, Colorado and is often found hiking in the nearby mountains. The author of *Dialogues with Light* (Orchard Street Press, 2019), Lew's poems have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Plainsongs*, and others. www.lewforester.com

Jennifer L. Freed lives in Massachusetts. Her poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Rust + Moth*, and other journals, and has been nominated multiple times for a Pushcart. She is the author of a chapbook, *These Hands Still Holding*, and of a full-length collection, *When Light Shifts*, to be published in 2022.

Therese Gleason is author of two chapbooks: *Libation* and *Matrilineal* (Honorable Mention, 2022 Jean Pedrick Chapbook Prize). Her work appears in *32 Poems*, *Indiana Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. A literacy teacher, she lives in Worcester, MA with her family. Find her at theresegleason.com.

Ellen Pauley Goff (she/hers) is a graduate from The University of Chicago with a B.A. in English Language and Literature, Film Studies, and Creative Writing. Her short fiction has been published with the *Indiana Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, as well as chosen as a finalist in Glimmer Train's Fiction Open contest.

Norman Goodwin resides in Seattle and Port Townsend, WA.

John Hamel a public school teacher in Minnesota and has published several poems and translations of poems in the past (*Arion*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Forum Italicum*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Wandering Hermit Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*).

Morgan Hamill is a disabled poet and graduate fellow at Penn State-University Park. Her poems have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Georgia Review*, *The Journal*, and *The Southern Review*.

Hunt Hawkins has published poems in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and many other journals. His book, *The Domestic Life*, won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize and appeared from the University of Pittsburgh Press.

As well as his poems in *The Atlanta Review*, **P M F Johnson** has placed poems with *The Threepenny Review*, *The North American Review*, *Nimrod*, *The Evansville Review*, *Measure*, and others. He has won The Gerald Brady Senryu Award from The Haiku Society of America, as well as a Plainsongs Award.

Paul Johnson lives in Missouri.

Sarah Kersey earned her MFA in poetry from Eastern Washington University in 2022. Her work has been published or is upcoming in *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Write About Now*, *The Awakenings Foundation*, and publications by Gonzaga University. She was a finalist in *Sunspot Literary Journal's* 2022 "Gemming" contest.

Nicole Flaherty Kimball is a Jewish bisexual poet from SLC, UT. She is a submissions reader for *Seaglass Lit*, and is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree at Utah Valley University. Nicole's work is published in *Radar Poetry*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Sunspot Literary Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, as well as several others.

Kirsten Kinnell lives in Columbus, Ohio where she works as a freelance writer and editor. Her work has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Quarterly West*, *The Raintown Review*, and *Presence*, among others.

Merie Kirby grew up in California and now lives in North Dakota. She teaches at the University of North Dakota. She is the author of two chapbooks, *The Dog Runs On* and *The Thumbelina Poems*. Her poems have been published in *Mom Egg Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *Orange Blossom Review*, *FERAL*, *Strange Horizons*, and other journals. You can find her online at www.meriekirby.com.

Elizabeth Knapp is the author of *The Spite House*, winner of the 2010 De Novo Poetry Prize, and *Requiem with an Amulet in Its Beak*, winner of the 2019 Jean Feldman Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *North American Review*, and *Quarterly West*, among others.

Julian Koslow has worked as a professor of English Renaissance Literature, publishing on Milton and Jonson. His poems have appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and *The Broadkill Review*. He lives with his spouse and two boys in Fair Lawn, New Jersey.

Tara Labovich currently resides in Ames, IA while pursuing their MFA. Tara was awarded the first place prize in the Adelaide Bender Reville Prize, was a semi-finalist in Black Lawrence's chapbook competition, and their work has been published in journals such as *Salt Hill*, *After the Pause*, *Ink in Thirds*, and others.

Hannah Lee is a high schooler in Maryland. Besides writing, she loves reading, art, Romantic era piano music, and contemplating pundigrions.

Emily Light's poetry can be found in such journals as *Inch*, *Lake Effect*, *Cherry Tree*, *Cumberland River Review*, and *RHINO*, among others. She teaches English and lives in New Jersey with her husband and son.

Corinne Wohlford Mason teaches US history, culture studies, and writing at Fontbonne University in St. Louis, where she chairs the department of humanities. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Phoebe*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Harvard Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and the *Grolier Poetry Prize Annual*.

Devon Miller-Duggan has published poems in *Margie*, *The Antioch Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Spillway*. She teaches at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall* (Tres Chicas Books, 2008), *Alphabet Year*, (Wipf & Stock, 2017), *The Slow Salute* (Lithic Press Chapbook Competition Winner, 2018).

Olivia McClure is studying English Creative Writing at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Georgia. This is her first publication.

Michael S. Moos has published four poetry books, most recently, *The Idea of the Garden* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2018). He's been a poet-in-residence for The Academy of American Poets and O'Neill Theater Center. His poems have appeared in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Cottonwood*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *A 21st Century Plague*. He lives in St. Paul, MN.

2010 Texas Poet Laureate **karla k. morton** has fifteen collections. *Her The National Parks: A Century of Grace* is most historic—there's no other poetry book written in-situ from all 62 National Parks to help culturally protect them. A percentage of royalties go back to the parks.

Mitchelle Mukeli was born in Kenya and immigrated to the United States at the age of 9. This largely shapes how she perceives and interacts with the world. Currently, she is a 2nd year educator located in Houston, TX. She has a passion for writing and inspiring the next generation.

Greg Nelson is a depression survivor and an advocate for social justice and Mother Earth. His wilderness adventures include hiking through the Grand Canyon. He lives near the Nansemond River in Suffolk, VA. Recent publications include poems in *Snapdragon*, *Penultimate Peanut*, *BEATIFIC Magazine*, and *Gyroscope Review*.

Veronica Patterson's most recent poetry collections include *Thresh & Hold* (Gell Poetry Prize, 2009), *& it had rained* (CW Books, 2013), and *Sudden White Fan* (Cherry Grove, 2018), as well as two chapbooks: *This Is the Strange Part* (2002) and *Maneuvers: Battle of the Little Bighorn Poems* (2013).

January Pearson's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Los Angeles Review*, *Poetry South*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *2River*, *Rust + Moth*, *Notre Dame Review*, and other publications. She was named a finalist in The Best of the Net 2020 Anthology.

Jennifer Phillips has published poetry in over fifty little poetry journals, including Poetry Pacific, Poem, Onionhead, Penine Platform, DASH Literary Review, America, Pensive, and The Spoon River Poetry Review. She has published a chapbook, *Sitting Safe In the Theatre of Electricity*. Her forthcoming chapbook *A Song of Ascents* will be published later this year by Orchard Street Press.

Eugene Platt, an octogenarian, was born in Charleston, South Carolina. He earned a Diploma in Anglo-Irish Literature at Trinity College Dublin. His 2020 collection *Nuda Veritas* was published by Revival Press (Ireland). He lives in Charleston with his Montreal-born wife Judith, corgi Bess, and cats Finnegan and Maeve.

Marjorie Power's newest full length collection is *Sufficient Emptiness* (Deerbrook Editions, 2021). A chapbook, *Refuses to Suffocate*, appeared from Blue Lyra Press in 2019. *Southern Poetry Review*, *Commonweal*, and *Barrow Street* have taken her work recently. She can be found at www.marjoriepowerpoet.com.

Rebecca Poynor is a current MFA candidate in poetry at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her work has appeared in *Nashville Review*, *Chestnut Review*, and *Rogue Agent*. She is the current managing editor for *Blackbird*.

Ivy Raff's poetry appears in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Bangalore Review*, *Stone Canoe*, and elsewhere. A member of The Room Project's community for women writers, Ivy is the Alaska State Parks writer-in-residence and a finalist in the 2021 sweettooth//HONEY Micropoetry Contest. Read more at wordsbyivy.com/publications.

Jeremy Rock is pursuing an MFA at the University of Alabama. He has work published in *Poet Lore*, *The Shore*, *Ninth Letter*, *Sugar House Review*, *Cider Press Review*, and elsewhere.

vinode ramgopal is a man, somewhat older, global in his loves and interests, a father of two daughters, a philosopher, Platonic and Hegelian, who believes we must stick with reason even though it is not sufficient.

Steven Reigns is a Los Angeles poet and educator and was appointed the first Poet Laureate of West Hollywood. Alongside over a dozen chapbooks, he has published the collections *Inheritance* and *Your Dead Body is My Welcome Mat*. Reigns holds a BA in Creative Writing and a Master of Clinical Psychology. He edited *My Life is Poetry*, showcasing his students' work from the first-ever autobiographical poetry workshop for LGBT seniors. Reigns has lectured and taught writing workshops around the country to LGBT youth and people living with HIV. His newest collection *A Quilt for David* was published by City Lights and is the product of ten years of research. www.stevenreigns.com

Kelly Rowe's collection, *Rise Above the River*, won the 2021 Able Muse Book Award, and will be published in 2022. She is also the author of two chapbooks and has recently published poems in journals including *32 Poems*, *North American Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and others. She works in Flagstaff, AZ as a volunteer attorney, representing undocumented women.

Katherine Smith's recent poetry publications include appearances in *Boulevard*, *North American Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Southern Review*, and many other journals. Her most recent book, *Secret City*, appears with Madville Press in August 2022. She works at Montgomery College in Maryland.

Garrett Stack's first book is *Yeoman's Work* (Bottom Dog Press, 2020). His poems were most recently published in *Third Wednesday*, *Lindenwood Review*, and *Lucky Jefferson*. He edits the *Lakeshore Review* and teaches at Ferris State University in West Michigan.

Kenneth D. Stephens is originally from India. He came to the US to go to seminary and ended up getting a Ph.D. in philosophy. He has authored a novel, *Blaze Pascal and the Courage of Being*, and a memoir, *The Meaning of These Days*.

Eugene Stevenson, son of immigrants, father of expatriates, lives in the Smoky Mountains. Pushcart Prize nominee, author of *The Population of Dreams* (Finishing Line Press 2022), his poems have appeared in *Galway Review*, *Hudson Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, & *Washington Square Review* among others.

Until recently, **SM Stubbs** co-owned a bar in Brooklyn. He was nominated for the Pushcart and Best New Poets; winner of the 2019 Rose Warner Poetry Prize from *The Freshwater Review*. His work has appeared in numerous magazines, including *Poetry Northwest*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *New Ohio Review*, and *The Rumpus*.

Angela Sucich holds a Ph.D. in Medieval Literature from the University of Washington. Her poems have recently appeared in *Nimrod International Journal*, *Cave Wall* and *3Elements Review*. She was honorably mentioned for the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry in 2021 and was a finalist for the Saguaro Prize in 2022.

Jeri Theriault's poetry collections include *Radost, My Red*, and the award-winning *In the Museum of Surrender*. She edited *Wait: Poems from the Pandemic*, and her poems and reviews have appeared in many publications. Jeri won the 2019 Maine Literary Award for poetry and the NORward Prize in 2022. She lives in South Portland, Maine.

Tanya Tuzeo is a librarian; a mother to two children and two unpublished collections. Publication in this issue belongs to *We Live in Paradise*, a merciless observation of our most treasured relationships, motherhood and romance, in a time of environmental and civic decay. Her poems are forthcoming in *Wrath-Bearing Tree*, *The Valiant Scribe*, and *Angel Rust*.

Isi Unikowski is a Canberran poet, who has been widely published in Australia and overseas. His published poetry can be viewed at <https://www.isiunikowski.net/>. His first collection, *Kintsugi*, was published in August 2022 by Puncher & Wattman, New South Wales.

Ann Weil writes at the corner of Stratford and Avon in Ann Arbor, Michigan and at Snipe's Point Sandbar off Key West, Florida. Her poems appear in *Crab Creek Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *Shooter Literary Magazine*, *Indianapolis Review*, and elsewhere. See more of her work at www.annweilpoetry.com.

Edwin Williamson (he/they) is a writer and artist living in Michigan. His poems have appeared in *The Blue Route*, *Furrow*, and *Arthropod Journal*. He most recently completed the Nature in Words Fellowship at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute and is currently completing his master's in creative writing at Central Michigan University.

Ellen June Wright was born in England and currently lives in New Jersey. She has consulted on guides for three PBS poetry series. Her work was selected as *The Missouri Review*'s Poem of the Week in June 2021, and she received five 2021 Pushcart Prize nominations.

Michael Yusko is a violinist in several small-town orchestras in the southeastern USA. Joy Katz (New School) and Carol Light (Iowa's How Writers Write Poetry MOOC) were his most helpful poetry teachers. He organizes the Birmingham Writing Workshop on Meetup.com. "Rainbow Beach" is his first publication.



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