



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

POETRY 2023

Grand Prize Winner

Kareem Tayyar

with Contest Judge

Victoria Chang

Fall/Winter 2023

ATLANTA REVIEW

at the Georgia Institute of Technology

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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Up to five unpublished poems, without identifying information on any poem.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.

Or submit online at <https://atlantareview.submittable.com/submit>

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ATLANTA REVIEW

686 Cherry St. NW

Atlanta GA 30332-0161

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Atlanta Review is a nonprofit literary journal.

Contributions are tax-deductible.

WELCOME

As I write this fall's editor's note, I do so in a new work home—having moved back to Georgia and taken on a new role at Augusta University. Yet, my personal home is now in two places, and I find myself a new kind of nomad. So many people in the world face the difficulties of relocation—whether by choice or by necessity. As Heraclitus so wisely observed, change is the only constant, but that is often a cold reality. Sometimes, a bit of “unchanged constant” would be welcomed. Last fall, I chronicled a litany of disasters and conflicts, and I asked you to read world-poetry because “Poetry will teach you what you should know.” Or, as Dawn Angelicca Barcelona writes in “To the Trees of North Oakland,” “under the right conditions / sweetness will feed us. Open your mouth and see.” I wish I could say that the litany has grown shorter; alas, it has not. All the more reason to keep the reading (and writing) fires burning.

As we do each fall, we are filled with hope as we feature the winner of the Dan Veach Prize for Younger Poets. Our managing editor, JC Reilly, selected “Prayer for Gratitude” by Carter Rekoske. About the poem, JC noted his “youthful stream of consciousness.” Playful gratitude is something the world needs more of!

For our annual international poetry prize, we are grateful for the work of our judge: poet, educator, and new Bourne Chair in Poetry at Georgia Tech, Victoria Chang. We are delighted to have her join the university community that has so embraced Atlanta Review. Chang was given the daunting task of selecting a winner from our outstanding twenty-six finalists. Just a reminder that all the submissions are judged blind for a fair and equitable process. Chang selected Kareem Tayyar's poem, “Two Poets” as the 2023 winner. Chang admired how the poet helps readers “traver[se] the tenuous relationship between two people.”

As we continue to contemplate our world—and how we move in it, I will point you to these words by Kelly Vande Plasse, from her poem “One Snake”:

Each moment reveals another of her selves: she has lived
through slender years of youth, years of mouse and prairie

dog in plenty, years of drought—all this chafing against...
against is what propels her forward.

And forward we must all go. Let us draw warmth from each other.

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

Sending you all much love,

Karen

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The Last Ride at Magic Springs Amusement Park

The Spider was the name of the ride
at the amusement park of our senior class trip.
Its huge yellow metal arms were shaped like
a daddy long leg, with a circle of red and blue
bucket seats attached to each arm.

The whole contraption spun around
while the bucket seats spun independently,
swung us, seat-belted and barred,
around and around, tilting up and down,
our laughing stomachs inside our screaming throats.

The centrifugal force was fun until it wasn't
and for the first time ever I almost lost my lunch
inside those innocent arms of whirling betrayal.
I disembarked, disoriented and dizzy,
at the end of the ride, the end of

high school, the end of bells that would no longer
ring for us. My laughing classmates
continued on for more volatile rides and amusement,
leaving me behind as I sat on a bench
sipping water and gulping air to steady myself.

Beneath the wide blue sky
of dissipating carnival music,
I was an elder at seventeen years old,
seated on a bench bolted to gravity, thrust and thrown
from one phase of life into a new one.

Sheri Flowers Anderson

Gifts

Texas in August, heat like a burlap blanket
At 85, my mother has buried her second husband.
She walks bent forward, studying the ground.
We work the daily crossword, talk
about bean soup and peach cobbler,
how light rebounded white off the Pacific
when she was a young Navy wife
and I was studying snails in tide pools.

She sorts through folders of letters
reading from 1951 in a clear amused voice.
Heaps of black and white photos from the 40's
when she was young and beautiful in her Kate Hepburn
slacks, fall out of frayed brown envelopes.
She gives them to me. Gives me back
the letters and pictures I've sent her
down the years.

What can you return to a woman
who is giving everything away?
I've brought her a grandchild
and a square of stained glass
to comb and braid the morning sun
streaming across her kitchen table
while she marks off her calendar of days,
packs her suitcase of hours.

Pamela Annas

Ode to Little Brown and Gray Birds

Forgive me for not knowing you
as I do your brighter brethren,
cardinals and goldfinches, bluebirds
and blue jays with flowers for feathers,
while you are dried grass, pine bark,
dirt, cloud, smoke. For every flash
of scarlet, azure, I see twenty of you,
flickers of movement as you dive for seeds
on dying erigerons in the meadow,
peck for insects in the mown path.
Though I've been too lazy to learn sparrow
from wren, I've come to know mallard,
crow, even vulture, birds I can identify
without binoculars. With a name,
I could discover what you eat,
where you nest, the shape and color
of your eggs, in what month you breed,
filling my brain with particulars, setting you
beside bald eagles, great blue herons
in a lineage that extends back
to the dinosaurs.

Even without names,
I have loved the chubby roundness
of your bodies, how you gather together
to scratch at shallow winter snows
in search of autumn's abundant seed,
how your flocks lift and turn, so synchronous
it looks as if you fly solely for pleasure,
or simply for the beauty your winging makes.
Small ones, forgive my ignorance,
let me admit I will likely never learn
your names. I haven't needed them
to hold you in my prayers as the world
tilts again toward extinction—
not only yours, my species, too,

that cataclysm called humanity,
which struck the earth with its hunger
and would not be sated.

Pam Baggett

Ode to This Troubled Dazzling World at Christmas

Mid-December, a crimson maple-star
lingering long past when leaves used to fly,
but let's not sweat the future, not now,
even though it's seventy degrees
when it should be forty-five, instead let's celebrate
this leaf that could top a Christmas tree
if pressed for a week inside a thick book—
but no, it's too beautiful to pluck and hide away,
it's too fragile to last,

and aren't we all beautiful and fragile
and headed for the grave,
where my mother went three years ago,
which makes life sadder and harder
and, yes, more precious, especially at Christmas.
She was in the world for ninety-five years,
troubled, dazzling; she taught me
how to make beauty in times of darkness
every year when we'd decorate our Christmas tree
on a day my father was out drinking,
which was every day.

The decorations beautiful, especially
the angel made of soft white chicken feathers
that we hung from the tip of the fir,
angel who looks a little tired now, a little
world-weary as I sometimes am, tired and tattered
but still here to knee-bless what's beautiful:
this little leaf-star, or Venus shining
at sundown in the southwestern sky,
or my mother's face when she smiled
the smile Alzheimer's gave her,
free of worry, of all the old ragged griefs,

her face a light so bright that when she died
she almost took Christmas with her,
but no, there's still the beauty of sisters,
of nieces, nephews, a husband and brother-in-law.

They shine, we shine, with all our ragged
mother-missing joys, our polished griefs,
and together we go forward toward Christmas,
touching with bruised fingertips
the ornaments of the past as I touch
this blood-red leaf, remembering.

Pam Baggett

Portrait in Sepia

Cuttlefish make smokescreens
then spend hours in hiding.

They hunt with beaks sharp enough
to pierce a crab at its core.

Their blood—not quite red—
and ink—not quite black—

are the same color to them,
no matter where their eyes turn.

Their hypnotic stripes teach
their babies inside how to hide.

Like us, they dream in REM sleep,
jerk awake through their tentacles.

Like me, they are active at night,
stepping through mud and mildew.

And they are also like you,
with three exploding hearts

each beating in a different timezone.

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona

To the Trees in North Oakland

We know that falling fruit will make a mess
so we walk along Dover Street with our necks
craned upwards, our mouths looking for loquats.

The loquat tree takes up to ten years to bear fruit
so we are lucky this year. We are lucky that the Oakland
Parks and Rec planted loquat trees on city sidewalks
so everyone can pluck and taste freely.

My friend says we're doing pedestrians a favor
by not letting citrus skins burst open on their white
sneakers and the paws of their dogs.

I didn't think Oakland would be the place to harvest fruit,
to be the location of bounty, but under the right conditions
sweetness will feed us. Open your mouth and see.

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona

When We Were All There

My father conducted various experiments in the garage and basement, some involving fermenting cheese and beer and growing mushrooms on a rotted stump. His rock polishing machine rumbled day and night for weeks or months, the sound crawling up the floorboards into the house reminding us of the possibility of smooth perfection. He used a jigsaw to create a 3D map of the Superstition Mountains before a backpacking trip to find the Lost Dutchman Mines, which remain unfound. He built odd patio furniture and a meat smoker from leftover construction materials. Later, up in the house, he crocheted hats and macraméd plant and pot holders. He designed plastic book covers called Book Shells (turtle as logo) that my mother sewed together on her machine, a man before his time. He drew maps of the United States and pinned them up in the dining room, quizzing us nightly on state capitals. He listened to baseball games while removing old plaster from the walls or framing an extra bedroom. At night, he fell asleep while watching black-and-white movies from the 30s, the sound of the actors' tinny voices sliding into the bedrooms. He loved the color red, bold wallpaper, and success. What he did when things failed is for another poem. But I see him at the table on his last birthday, eating the apple pie he wanted instead of cake. His black hair is curly and wild, his eyes squinted behind his thick glasses. We are all there. No one has left, not yet.

Jessica Barksdale

My Dead Father and I Talk in the Bathroom

I was tweezing chin hairs when my dead father popped into the bathroom holding a can of Colgate shaving cream and a straight razor. *Never taught you to shave*, he laughs, his gap-toothed smile pounding out of my memory. *You shouldn't have had to*, I say, staring at a long hair before yanking it to kingdom come. *I was a girl. But you were always doing everything*, he says, sitting on the toilet. *I should have known you'd need more information. I needed you*, I say, wishing my dead father had done more than teach me to ride a bike, write Js the correct way, and listen for story in every conversation. Now he needed to explain how to grow old, but he didn't make it past forty-three, denied the twenty years I've lived past his shelf life. He left a hole in the family fabric, breaking us apart, one of us dying, one of us moving across the world, one of us tweezing chin hair and trying to understand how a death forty-five years before can make me weep, me a woman with graying hair in one place and too much hair in another, me still and always a fifteen-year-old girl, looking into a mirror and seeing only herself. I put down the tweezers. My father looks up at me, nods.

Jessica Barksdale

Being Chased

I.

I remember when my uncle brought
home a stuffed donkey.
He put it in the dining room, and everyone
ate dinner and had polite conversation.

II.

Once when I was four, there was a
knock on the door, and when I went to
answer it there was a full tuxedo—tails,
black trousers, a top hat, black shoes and
white gloves—standing there
with no one inside.

III.

One Sunday in the park,
the pond was crowded with miniature sailboats
being sailed by miniature sailors.
It was a regatta.
The first-place prize was a return to
full size for the crew.

IV.

I woke one night and
found myself all alone on the moon,
and wondering how I got there.
No spaceship to be seen among the
gray boulders and craters,
and a black, starless sky.

V.

One afternoon I found myself surfing
down the steep slope of an
immense wave that got taller and taller.

Halfway down fell to one third of
the way down, then one quarter.
The wave kept growing, and it became
increasingly unlikely that I would ever reach the bottom.

John Randolph Carter

Self-Portrait as James Baldwin

James was 6 ft tall. I am, too.
Let's disregard my light-skin
for his supple ebony which
is an affidavit from God that
everything black is beautiful,
& everything beautiful is black.
Like him, I'm a charm of five
letters. Our eyes jinx white &
our dances startle countries.
We are together in a culture war
where our colors outrun our Persons
& our names scare history. History,
that silent point in his mouth &
my mouth, where it spins & spins &
spins into a dirge. Sometimes,
silence is love, sometimes death.
When it is love, It's an elegy waiting
for a paper to climb. But first, a thing
has to die. This is where death
becomes *silence*. Either ways there's
a night I have not died & there's a
noon I have not burned. Time Asks
me for a ritual in return; this
space is a five minutes silence for
James & this too for
when I'm gone.

Paul Chuks

Late summer linger

Look up at the sunflower
towering, thin petals
bonding into strength—
singular mane, corona
head nodding toward
tangled tomato vines,
morning glories creeping
up metal fences, wild
mint spreads surreptitious.

Never mind the shadow
of withered stalks looming,
the weight of unused seeds
gravity commanding that
beauty toward earth.

The crown dissembles—
petals fall faint as eyelashes
crack open the dark heart,
peel back pseudanthium,
reveal the seeds, arranged
in their own geometry,
hiding a whole summer.

Slip them into waiting pockets.
Imagine a future spring.

Patricia Davis-Muffett

Sentinel

A hard tumble against hard stone—your tall frame,
regal and gaunt, not up to the tangle of tall grasses
where you were planting red bee balm and now
the scrape on your head goes dark red and
deep purple as you sit in your bloodied shirt—
we don't know that these are your last days.

When summer comes again and the bee balm
spikes bright blooms at the edge of the woods—
tall and spare, scarlet, sentinel—scapes purple,
sharp leaves veined mauve, the bloom coronal
and spiced with the sharp consoling fragrance
of hot meadow and loss.

A quick show of red through the trees—*Not you*,
I tell myself—not a glimpse of your red jacket.
The orb of a bee balm seed head is as rough
to the touch as an unshaven cheek—
Don't think that I say to myself and bend
my own cheek to its coarse bristling.

Come autumn, I push away the grasses and find
the round field stone that cracked your head—what if I
said that in that moment—for a moment is all you get—
stone became bone and I cupped your dear head—
as if stone needed consolation. On it, fallen petals,
the spill of old red fading on an Oxford shirt.

What would I be saying—except that grief
rifts time and I am its traveler, the
recipient of its gifts. The last stalk
of bee balm is backlit and translucent
and our backlit times together
have gone translucent as well—
one rough seed head, a few tattered petals,
a last tall and regal stalk of bee balm—
my breath catches when I see it is still there.

Stephanie Coyne DeGhett

Pilgrimage

You don't need much faith.
One packet of morning glory seeds
and you can see young vines, pencil-lead thin,
scribble the air by early June. By mid-June
they will have grabbed hold of the porch rail
to wander at their own pace, aiming for the sun.

When they first emerge from the darkness
of seed and soil, they clown around
on red stems with gawky leaves that have
two tails and no head. But their true leaves
are perfect hearts, paper thin
to gather only what is needed from the sun,
to let the softest light shine through.
And so, in mid-June, it is the leaves
who are blossoming. They do not know
their reach will soon pull forth
ripples of cloudless sky,
each anchored by its own bright sun.
Every new world will shine
among the glowing hearts.

And once it has made its presence known,
each sky will enfold its star,
leaving behind tears: tiny, black,
and hard enough to survive
the neglect of the sun.
Until its eventual return
when it breaks them open with rain,
just rain.

Becky DeVito

Rain

It's one thing we're given
or not
when we pray.

Breath is another,
the drying of tears
one more

in this world
where a kiss
can be treason

and there's so much at stake;
the Harvest for one thing,
the way we shape our gods
for another.

How our prayers
are like buckets
in which we carry
our drought.

David Dixon

Bogwoman on the Earth Being Found to Be Round

Not flat
and definitely not level
like the way the ocean meets
the sky,
but round as a whortleberry
rolling in the palm of my hand.

Which I understand makes
the earth more like the sun
and the moon,
despite appearing flat
as pancakes,
rolling around the firmament
like beads of fat sizzling
and skittering across a hot griddle.

Too abstract. I can't feel that.
I've been made numb
by boggy ground,
a field so soft,
it yields to my touch.

That we are all tumbling
around in infinite space,
now that is something
I can believe in,
being as I am in the thick of it.

Deborah H. Doolittle

First Gardener

Dorothy Shaw kept wildflower seeds
in brown envelopes, cosmos and beebalm,
in the shed, next to a jar of plant stakes,
her writing still plain on metal labels:
zucchini in all caps, *swiss chard* in script.

The yard I now tend yields up her work—
big-leafed hostas with purple flags
in every border and lilies of the valley,
sentinel leaves I find in the shade,
ready to dangle white bells in spring.

The shed, with its barn red doors,
is stocked with clasps and hinges,
shelves of dried-out paint and stain,
old mops with tangled rope ends,
hand trowels, and a folded American flag.

In one corner is a canvas bag of clothespins,
and when I press the wood legs together,
the mouth springs open enough to grasp
the cord strung between two pines.
I harvest the clothespins from the shed,

skip the new dryer we installed
and walk our wet clothes outside.
I stand barefoot on pine needles,
imagine Mrs. Shaw at my side
as I submit fabric to sunshine.

I hang towels and my garden gloves,
rinsed of soil, after pushing seeds.
How did you cook the swiss chard,
Mrs. Shaw, tell me about summer,
and how you made zucchini bread.

Jennifer Gennari

Spring Laggards

By the huge entrance doors
a freak draft
a minor whirlwind
swirls bronze live-oak leaves
 that had been left
 for March to seize
 from their twiggy moorings
in a helix of burnished clutter,
a scud of clatter
over pebbles embedded
in concrete, a chitter
as of whole decks
of cards escaped their dealer—
on the loose, on the prow—
and scattered face-up face-down,
stirred and scraped and folded there
by a huge golden spoon
in the glass bowl of air.

Lynn D. Gilbert

Silence

after R. Arnold

Writing is a great deal like murder
my hand tends to cramp up
in between
stabs, I have to take a break.

When Mercury's in switchblade or some
such crap, I tire of banging
my issues on the big washing rocks of life

my thought pattern so convoluted it
would make Escher cry
it's time
to walk away.

Spending the equivalent
of the national debt
in a bookstore, long walks in graveyards
practicing with flaming arrows
to renew the spirit.

I'm only telling you this
because no one believes
poetry's truth.

If you are too tired
to speak,
come unto me
for I too am fluent in Silence.

Michelle Hartman

Intermezzo

It's a weekday afternoon
on a quiet street, precious little
moving but for the breeze
when, all at once, a garbage truck
lurches onto the scene, roaring
up the block, two sanitation workers
hanging off the back. As it turns
down an alley, there's a sharp whiff
of music, a pop tune blasting
from the rig and, just like that,
the trash men are transformed
into song-and-dance men, singing,
along with Lorde, about how they too
will "never be royals," before vanishing,
first from sight and then from earshot,
into the rest of the day, almost
like nothing ever happened.

Michael P. Hill

In the North

A doe comes to the woodpile
at evening. She stands staring
in through the cabin window
as if she wanted to see me
a last time. Then she vanishes
into the faint snowfall,
my mother's ghost.

Patricia Hooper

Willamette August, Mission State Park

If you liked me we would touch.

Down at Mission State Park, close to where the ferry charges back and forth across the Willamette, under the oak canopy, among the smell of grass and bark and limbs and water, out of the withering sun it is cool and patient; bright startling black, purple black, call out from behind twisted thorned vines; they call and I answer snaking my arm around the green light and dark green, caressing the berry from its blossom, coaxing, willing it into my hand, while fingers are painted red.

If you liked me we would kiss.

In the river's cool cool water the juice slowly runs away from my fingers, but not the stains, not the damning evidence: my leg striped red from where one long vine ensnared it, the broken thorns lost in fingers and the red lines marking forearms and the back of my hands, but still the river is soothing, inviting, slipping from shadow to shadow carrying with it a shadows heat.

If you liked me we would make love.

Abandoning the clear plastic bag on the bank, I slip into the green water, shorts soak then shirt until I am above my head; then slowly drifting down below the water and past the ferry, and past the trees, and everything.

Marc Janssen

doing nothing
without you
for a living

Dani Johnson

Iguana Watch; Or, a Divine Flow for Polar Fronts

Charcoaled with cold, the green iguanas immobilize, comatose.
Lacking muscle control, they tumble like mangoes from tree
canopies onto the crowns of cars. Slates of sidewalks. Swales. In
various postures, as if doing yoga.

On arctic nights, governors send migrants who cross their states'
borders north. They leave them like underdressed décor on their
rivals' snow-drifted lawns.

After cardiac arrest, therapeutic hypothermia sustains organs.

Insentience is a eulogy for the living.

Invasive species who have no

foes are hauled by tails;

locked-in

lizards

see

sea.

*

Chill

chills

with snug

sedation,

dripped into the veins.

Cold is both cudgel and scalpel.

We cutting-edge animals decide who recovers.

Cataleptic people can hear. Iguanas' eardrums, external, pulse less
when wintered.

Lizard or politician—who is more cold-blooded? When faced with
so-called incursions, too many of us machete our humanity.

Meteorologists issue “falling lizard” reports when temperatures
drop in South Florida. We fire up propane, forcing open the eyelids
that freeze shut in blizzards, or even just this slight change in the
weather.

Jen Karetnick

Vasilopita

Greek traditions gather
around my grandmother's
kitchen table at midnight.

A New Year's worth of
three hundred sixty-five sunsets
hidden inside warm bread loaf.

A dime wrapped in tinfoil decides
our destiny. Without peeping,
we take turns picking slices.

Toasted sesame seeds drift to tabletop
like a smattering of snowflakes—
eager fingers seeking treasure.

In a dense cloud of dough
dappled light peeks through.
Prosperity's promise shimmers.

Someone will savor delight
while the rest taste bitter
orange zest sweetness.

Caroline Laganas

Yard

Underneath the pile of leaves, bronze and brown,
I sweep then scoop, I find
a ball of earth, a large burr
breathing, its prickles moving as it swells
around itself. A ball, a bell, of filthy
thorns, and some cream ones in there to give it its
scruffiness. What is it?—doing nothing but sleeping
until I disturbed it?

Small hog, I've seen you in the shadows sometimes,
at least, I think I have, and met you once
by lamplight. We both stopped, surprised.

You survive, close to earth and leaves, their smells,
the rain that runs along the ground.
Over the wide world
of alleys, yards, fences,
little gardens, you nurdle, needing
nothing very much I suppose,
discarded, unnoticed as the rubbish
the binmen spill as they go,
that is, hardly noticed at all. How you curl,
this cold autumn morning as I heap
leaves. I accidentally lift you.
You weigh nothing at all.

Richard Lambert

Heart Wood

my father cut down trees for a living
not just the dead ones leaning like doom
waiting to fall on a house
but also healthy trees
red pine for someone's luxury log cabin
oak and ash to be milled into floorboards
furniture and fancy trim work

every day he killed the thing he loved
that was the job that kept him
in the place he was happiest
kept his family in milk and bread
a timber-framed roof over our heads

when I was small he taught me
the difference between fir and pine
Eastern red and Northern white cedar
he gave me names for the trees in our yard
poplar willow beech
this knowledge germinated within me
became our lingua franca

but it wasn't enough
to keep us firmly rooted in the same soil
to keep us talking across distance and time
I knew from him that once the rot sets in
attacks the vulnerable pithy center
there's no stopping it

sometimes I imagine I am made of wood
rough whorl of hemlock
papery white husk of birch
a heart with rings tight as rock maple
birdseyed with sickness and grief
tilting lethally earthward

Nylah Lyman

I Was a Geode

A smooth gray face, inoffensive, blank,
a round blandness, sharp and hollow
underneath my pleasant body.
At parties, I would stand to the side,
listen politely, offer no opinion.
My teeth seemed to overflow my mouth.
I kept my hands to myself. My questions
grew vivid and internal, all my weapons
pointed inward. The piercing of my gut, the glint
of my gemstone stomach. I was stormproof,
rain and lightning landing
on my indifferent skin. The lake I walked beside
on my way home, the wind
rippling the water, left my body
unchanged. Ducks laid eggs
in the tall marsh grass. Thin shells
meant to be broken. In the field
beside the community gardens, workers
burned back dry grasses, and resin-sealed fir cones
melted open, flinging the little keys of new trees
onto razed, black earth. The only thing to break me open
was my daughter's metal body,
how the miners split me in two to bring her
to the light. Such nakedness,
the raw edge of my skin, my red and pink knives,
the infant's carbide mouth honing
my new wounds. I learned to live in halves,
the jewels of my anger reflecting light.
I learned citrine, thunderhead, reckless sparrow.
There is no knitting stone to stone, the sharpness
bitter and honest. And stone
is not always cruel, metal not always cold.

Hannah Marshall

Tiny Houses

Perfect for retirement, they tell us, easy
on the planet. Affordable, no fuss. As we grow
older, slower, they want to squeeze us into single
beds, in cells smaller than dormitory rooms for college
kids, who only sleep there if they sleep at all.
Unlike us, they're out in all weather, skiing, running,
throwing snowballs, too young to have collected
treasures or giant cook pots for home canning.

Photographs show tiny log cabins in the woods
in spring, no snow in drifts halfway up the door,
with ice below. You'd think older folks didn't
have hobbies they've looked forward to indulging
in retirement, cash saved for canvases and paint,
a stash of fabric, wool, buttons, fancy papers,
embroidery hoops and floss for their own designs.
They've looked forward to a studio, space

for art. You'd think we were expected to sit all day
in a rocking chair, a blanket in our lap, to look out
a window, like quiet children (another fiction)
who won't find innovative uses for their crayons.
At most, an older person might want to read a book,
an eBook! Forget shelves of favorites, the pleasure
of a heavy dictionary. No personal library.
Finally, there's time to bake, chop vegetables,

money to buy shrimp and crab, pay someone
to clean, free us to seize precious hours, fill them
with postponed pleasures, not idleness and memory.
Don't show me tiny houses, with a bed in a loft without
a toilet, and a ladder I can't climb. I'd like to live
at Manderley, one room each for yoga, art, space
to make music, write, where someone brings me tea.
The scent of roses wafts through an open window.

Joan Mazza

My Brother's Last Days Before Hospice

We pieced together afterwards that he must
have checked himself out of the hospital
halfway through treatment for the fist
clenching his lungs because he'd already gone
too long without a drink—four days later
and progressively larger hospitals were trying
to puzzle out his weakness, the bright spots
that wouldn't vanish off the scans. I wasn't there
but I can hear him crunching on empty
beer cans as he returns from the corner store,
sweating and pale, setting that last case down
on the only open strip of counter space.
Drinking the first one warm. That feeling
in the guts—half kiss, half slap—as silence
replaces the doctors' warnings. No television,
no phone or worried neighbors, just tin
rounded like a breast full of bitterness
he still had half the strength to squeeze.

Michael Meyerhofer

Forecast on Retrospect

On Monday, bees kept flickering out
like lightbulbs in Russian winter
and you awoke feeling sorry
for your marrow, cellmates
with the heart's incessant thumping.
Tuesday, you practiced a speech
for your brother but by Wednesday
he didn't recognize you, only wanted
another spoonful of gelatin
to ease the world's evaporation.
Thursday's men garroted the thistles
softening your woodshed,
lined up missiles like popsicles
but forgot to reconcile spilled pepper
with the gaps between stars.
Friday, a new kind of telescope
confirmed that we are the closest
cattle ever get to an afterlife.
Now, scientists predict an orchard
between wildfires. But the weatherman
says by tomorrow, all this rain
will form puddles of skyscrapers
shushed by a passing taxi.

Michael Meyerhofer

Iowa Winters

For three days, I wore plastic armor
that the nurses helped me don
and spoon-fed my brother crushed ice
as football fields roiled overhead
and inch by inch he receded—
gaunt, broom-chinned, no longer trying
to pull his tubes out, just lying there
miming a window to a wall
and though I was hoping to look
and spot angels or glints of some higher
dimension, really, death is nothing
but wreckage and now
I can't even call my brother
to tell him what I did, wasting time
without enjoying how it unfolds,
how it unravels like a yo-yo
that will one day kiss its own shadow,
to which my brother might say
go hug a tree you pussy but for real,
come back whenever you want
and sit on this couch and talk
about nothing as winter thickens
and our tiny unnamed furnace
does its best to keep the cold out.

Michael Meyerhofer

Through the Telescope

Stars unfurl in glittering ribbons
while we mortals keep our place, pulled
towards the core of this molten rock we live on.
Would-be suns braid like the chords of Bach
shape themselves as gods, challenge our dominion.
Their vastness frightens still, as it did in Galileo's time.
Today, through Webb's new eyes, we gaze
into the firmament, transfixed.
Watch stars swallowed, sucked down
the great black throat of our own galaxy
stretched to miles-long glowing strands.
From planet to universe, how mammoth is this dying?

Ruth Mota

Of Whales and Love

Out past the bay she waits in deep water
for her child showing off his turns and plumes
his pearly barnacles
his purple Southern Right bod, and eye
that winks at us, so close we could touch him
but squeeze each other's hand instead.

Her rumbling moans from horizon
old hymns on cobalt lines melting
under hallowed sky, he flicks his tail
showers us in blessed brine.

Some bird of wonder rises from my heart
dew-laden, wild, devout.
This is how I love you:
in awed silence and shining gaze
in fathomless trust.

Saraswati Nagpal

January Hymn

Another year of thirteen moons. Hawks skim
foam on leaves of dawn, a surfer dives, carmine
board flung up by wave, then swallowed. All is
drowned in ocean roar.

I have shadows where your voice nestled
in me. Long, like ancient kelp leaves
lingering in troubled tides.

Time rolls on, washes up iterations of me:
driftwood, seaweed, unborn dreams
wrack line of what could have been
strewn in nameless knots.

Yet some pearl of who I was to you
endures unravaged by living debris
lucid in dappled silence, love-washed grief.

A migration of crabs hails sunrise with wide
arms and slanted crawl. Seagulls ascend. Far, far
the glint of dolphins reverent upon lapis sea.

Saraswati Nagpal

Origin story: *Mary, kabònn-la vyéparon*

I was born from acorns & the rust of three
coffin nails. I stuffed my hands with Spanish
moss, ground teeth from broken glass,
& filled the vines of my veins with creolin.

I was born in the Gulf of Mexico, a siren
drawn from the first offshore rig. My face is
a bubble. My legs are a mystery. I speak
every stick & stone into existence.

I was born of the fiercest wheels, of stripped
screws, of *Sanmdi's* silent O. My garden can tame
the sky. My conjure can bring anyone to heel.
My successor will build a sanctum in the dark.

T.A. Noonan

Lines and Erasures

- i. Overexplaining can be a trauma response to not being listened to or having your truth heard.

Casuarinas swaying in the breeze
on the sand embankment near
our home are only nodding
to miscellaneous beliefs that
the sea churns to avenge himself.

Our mother gathers shells, explains they
will save us. I tell stories to my baby brother,
about monsters in wind-blown waters. They're
in guise of pelicans, waiting to devour us.

- ii. Roads never lead to anywhere. They stay.
Travelers are carriers of destinies.

Carnivals are the only times we see
the other people, migratory birds.
They buy our conch shells, our cowries,
Our mirrors, delicate chains. Our bags
burp after the one good yearly feed.

Our mother is a line on the cot
Yesterday she was hauling a catamaran
against the residual waves. Wasn't a pelican,
just exhaustion that swallowed her.

- iii. Forever disowned is a coping mechanism,
when you are in the midst of the wrong people.

The shore etches and eases,
Mocking momentary journeys.
Little waves nibble at our footprints,
tiny reminders of our unbelonging
to this place where the ocean lords.

Our home totters like a pole in a gale.
or maybe our mother's rocking us to sleep.
We know we'll have lasting rest,
If the waters embrace us one of these days.

Mandira Pattnaik

Heat

New Yorkers are sleeping on fire escapes,
Londoners bake in their brick-oven houses
and the French lie in parks overnight,
gasping for air like fish with accordion-gills,
their insides simmering.

My nephew in Madrid doesn't know
that, here in America, sequoias are becoming ash
and Miami is sinking. Babies like him
starve in Somalia, tracing their short lives
on the cracked earth. Glaciers melt, swallow ships.

Alessandro, though flushed with heat,
gums his words now, a mysterious language
of gurgles and sighs, knowing on some level
that he is alive and safe, cradled in the arms
of his expat mama and Madrilenos papa,
contemplating a hostile universe
from the shelter of his crib.

Eons away, the tundra dissolves.
Nomads cross an African desert to the sea,
tent nightly on the sand, the horizon
becoming mirage, the camels no longer able
to store the water where an oasis runs dry.

We are all searching for water
and the star that will lead us to salvation
before it burns itself out, falling to earth
in a catastrophic blaze, while Alessandro sleeps
and thousands die dreaming of ice.

Donna Pucciani

Number 38

What's out there anyway? Swells of the sea,
sleet whips and bitter pains, cries and breakings
of gulls upon the wind, the squalls of storm.

Here there's an open fire, the TV's glow—
A Place in the Sun. You sip your rosé.
I break off more Bournville. Later perhaps

you will read or I will read from online
snippets showing the world's tomfoolery;
stream Dylan, the Rolling Stones, Mahalia ...

Just the two of us, pottering away
another night till those bedtime rituals:
last pills; water; plugs; stove; chargers; mobiles;

and, finally, checking the locks—bolts, snibs—
those offices of keeping the world at bay.

Patrick Ramsey

Landscape

“I know the landscapes were in my arms”

—Helen Frankenthaler

There were no stars
to be seen, and he said if
there were no stars to be
seen there would be no comet.

So, landscape—field
and slough and bluffs to the north with a sunset setting westward.

Familiar was the gravel. The barn in near collapse, corn waist high.
A barbed fence leaning in, bending down for communion.
It was about as wide as. Here, I'll stretch my arms out as far as. Just about as
big as.

No mountain/mountains.
No sea. The only blue above, and what was wished for.

Kelly R. Samuels

Like Sisters

for Mina and Anela

My baby nieces, born three months apart,
link arms with one another
when their mamas place them on the floor
side by side for a photo.
I've seen this behavior from twins before,
tiny infants holding hands in a double bassinet,
but these two cousins already know:
you don't have to have shared a womb
in order to know you should reach out
for a certain blessed someone,
grabbing on any way you know how,
when you feel the familiar warmth
of her heartbeat
calling out beside you.

Elizabeth Dingmann Schneider

History

Of course I remember the fieldtrip to Quebec.
We were thirteen, there was snow everywhere,
it was *frois* as fuck. They herded our class

onto a hulking bus and a sea of bubbly bodies
stuffed in puffer jackets caught me in its swell,
depositing me into the seat next to yours.

You held one end of my scarf, braiding and unbraiding
the tassels, and I made you laugh by wrapping
the other end around my head and peering up at you

like a pleading babushka. Our bus was headed
to a historical site that none of us now remember.
The future seemed more relevant than the past.

Perhaps that's why we played so many breathless
rounds of MASH (you said I'd live in a mansion
by the ocean, I said you'd live in a shack with a hot

husband and sixty-nine kids). Frost crept over
the windows. The driver turned up the heat,
thawing the festive-patterned seats and releasing

their stale sweaty smell. My scarf was draped
around both our backs like a wedding tallit.
Sweet maple candy melted in our mouths.

Samantha Schnell

When Day Is The Metaphor for Loneliness and Night for Company

We only do one thing, and that is
to try not to die; the rest is done to us.

The man you're in love with
invites you into his room, tells you

he is free to love you as long as
the moon floats in the sky.

With ten different fears you house
inside your body, you cultivate

a new one—the fear of sunrise.
Since you stopped praying

when you were 17, you wonder
if starting it again will do any good.

While he sleeps, you stay awake
and regret the choices you've made

in life. You think, What purpose
do the words you learned

in college serve now? Instead,
you wish you'd studied the language

of pins and hammers, then
you might have nailed the moon

forever in the sky.

Ashish Kumar Singh

Chestnut

At camp, I looped the leather strap
through the ring. Three times.
Tight enough.

Buckskin, pinto, piebald, roan, chestnut.

From the time I could talk, I wanted to move
to where horses lived.

In fall, I gathered horse chestnuts,
polished to a shiny bay.

Anything horse—horseshoes, horsing around,
horsehair chairs in novels,
my violin bow.

Tail and mane and mane and mane.

The time I tried to swing myself up bareback,
until I could. The horse,
a chestnut, waited.

Pastern, fetlock, withers, flank.

Swaybacked barns slumping, gray, to the ground,
weathered into dirt,

another way to see aging
under summer blue.

Blue as in sky as in moon as in mood—
a way to see blue as a day
I graze through.

Horse as agreement—
I feed you for this.

What does it mean now, to saddle, to ride?

Horse as wind for the dream
I've tried to bridle.

The horses stay beautiful—
the blue, wild, and yonder.

Joannie Stangeland

To My Buddhist Friends

I insist on having baggage
so I can't be one of you,
and some things you've accepted
I won't.

I admire quiet, but I don't love it.
I need some bustle, the bustle of a city,
even if it's
merely a pizzeria by a busy bus station.

But I know you haven't given up on me
so let me be charitable
and wind down with a koan of my own:
Why is this

beautiful day not enough
while a tiny white spider crawls
the kitchen wall?
Okay, dear friends, it's enough.

Tim Suermondt

One Proletariat

I'm barricaded behind a sob.

—Valzhyna Mort

But I break free quickly,
a single bound and I'm over
to the other side, heading toward
the orchard where I gather hardened
apples and throw them at the windows
of the rich houses, a statement
that does no damage but lifts the spirit.
I pivot onto the road leading
to the city, my feet clearing thin shards
of snow dying on the cusp of spring,
the fish called moon-eyes watching
me begin the long journey, the sky
the color of Paris showering its good luck.

Tim Suermondt

Repointing

My back to the sun this morning,
the brick wall I'm working on in shade,
my mother a thousand miles away
and floating further with each day's
passing, I alternate between vacuum
and a raking bar, scraping course
on course of crumbling, powdered mortar,
the glue or grammar of the wall, thinking,
This morning's words, class, are *linear*;
obdurate, and *permeable*—all adjectives.
The wall's well over a hundred, my mother
just eighty-five, but both have borne
their share of weather. She's forgotten
the words we need day in and out, and now,
even the zenith visit of a hummingbird,
its long beak dipping like a sewing needle,
draws only a wordless gesture, crooked
finger toward the bird beyond the glass.
We count her meds and make her meals,
teach her words she once remembered:
sun, table, coffee, toast, hummingbird.
I brush out the joints, spray the bricks
with clean water, then push fresh mortar in,
bed joints first. The head joints give me
trouble, but I do my best, thinking of time's
effect on lime, cement, and sand. I trowel
the excess, let it set a spell, then whisk
the brick with a dampened horsehair brush.

David Thoreen

Painting

He kept up his long walks by the river into autumn, wild asters on the bank thriving in the cold, nearby tall spikes of hollyhocks well past, except a few lingering blooms. The milkweed hung on stubbornly, refused to yield their seeds. Years ago, he and his mother would gather stalks after the pods had opened and the fluff had blown away. He painted the pods' insides mostly silver or gold, sometimes poppy red, her favorite fall color, arranged the dried plants in vases for sale at the church bazaar. Years ago. He still paints them. Now, nothing but red.

Jim Tilley

Gazing Into an Ukiyo-e Print

After: "Shōno: driving rain," Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō, by Utagawa Hiroshige

In *hakama* bound by frayed edges and careless darning, three porters sprinted into the rain. Their hands warmed from worn teacups and warmer holding the feminine handles of the *kago*. How the groom carried from *Edo* had lingered

with me by the fire, joked with house boys, delayed travel toward the family arrangement. Up *Shōno's* mountain path, his porters ran with *kago*. Its canopy waved, bamboo grasping. Rain beat, goaded every step into the gloom.

In that village, the elders told tales of summer squalls stumping travelers. They called it: *Kitsune no yomeiri*—"a fox's wedding," warning that magic lured many away, lightning glinting like fangs on bone.

Porter's feet pressed and turned delicate tumblers on the switchbacks, bolts of soil sliding like a sanctuary's doors and the mud from straw sandals squeezed out a gentle calligraphy, a scroll of years since the touch

of wives. How these pale men hurried on light animal feet, hurried to bring more hands to carry this *kago*—me following to claim passage through a foreign door, hoping for brilliant tails shaking beneath rain-soaked robes.

Rob Vance

Christmas Eve with Ham and Kibbeh

All evening, Aunt Sadie walking back and forth, exhorting us to eat more, when we were already stuffed. *Did you try the green bean casserole? The jello salad? Have another serving of scalloped potatoes, another cookie, you can't leave yet—wait—I'll pack you a bag to take home—what do want? How about some spinach pie, or kibbeh—raw or cooked? Ma—can't you just please cook it all?!* exclaimed my cousin. The entire Taylor clan gathered at Aunt Sadie's and Uncle Tom's—the tree lit, the gifts settled beneath. Penny bets on black jack and gin rummy in the basement—all the sisters-in-law. Aunt Sadie, her sister and sister's husband too, with their dark eyes, their freckled olive-colored skin. Breast your cards, reminded Grandma. The men talking sports on the other side of the room. Lebanese or Syrian—we never knew for sure. Each year it changed, depending on what direction the political winds blew. Whatever famine or fighting drove them here was not discussed. But every year, beside the ham and mashed potatoes, Aunt Sadie served the goose-sized eggs of spiced beef, onions, pine nuts and bulgur wheat we learned were kibbeh, triangles of beef and spinach wrapped in pinched pizza pie dough—and baklava, made with rose water—not honey. The kitchen warm with cumin and allspice. Now no one is left who could answer—Lebanese or Syrian? But each Christmas Eve, my cousins serve baked kibbeh and spinach pie beside the ham, the green beans, the potatoes, and we talk of the joys of the old days, and of the days to come and we eat until we are stuffed—and then some. Laughter like the clatter of bright copper pennies.

Kelly Vande Plasse

One Snake

When my son texts me a photo of himself
alone in the Pine Ridge Natural Area
in Colorado with a six-foot-long snake draped

over his shoulders and looped several times
around his left arm, I am not alarmed. I know
that he knows the snake is not venomous.

And the snake knows he is not its prey.
He would not so endanger himself or the snake.
I text him back to say, *She is gorgeous! What*

kind is she? She is ochre of prairie sand with drops
of darkest night seeping in—eyes with pupils as
black and round as September-ripe chokecherries.

I say *she*, because among snakes, the females
are the larger of their species. *Bull snake*,
my son replies. I forward the photo on to my

mother, with the caption, *bull snake, non-venomous*.
Is that really just one snake? she wants to know.
Yes, I tell her, *just one snake*. Though perhaps

she makes a point, for the front end of the
snake is more a Harris Island tweed, cream
of pasture-fed cows, with black corona edging

umber suns—the contrast between figure and
ground becoming more distinct only toward
the tail, where the eye arrives at contours of yellow

cone flower, feral black-eyed Susan. She wears
the patterns of growth upon her scales, staggered
rows of keratin, the same substance as human

finger and toe nails, and though she appears still
in this photo, in the video, her muscles alternate
contract and relax, so that she glides forward, a

rasping of scales upon scales as she rubs against her
own muscled body and along my son's sun-warmed
skin, drawing in some of his warmth as she goes.

Each moment reveals another of her selves: she has lived
through slender years of youth, years of mouse and prairie
dog in plenty, years of drought—all this chafing against...

against is what propels her forward. What happens after—
my son lays the snake back upon hard ground, the whole
keeled map of her visible in a single glance. Rake of low

afternoon sun. She swivels back into cover of green
needle grass, lanceleaf sage, purple milkvetch. Ripple
of muscle like water touched by wind. Time tapers

toward tail—leaves only a shallow trough to trace.
How long and sinuous this life, but still
only one snake.

Kelly Vande Plasse

Daylight Moon in Shreds Against a Gradient of Blues

Daylight moon in shreds against a gradient of blues ... The panning man seeks gold in wrong directions ... What the boats could learn of sailing from the ground effect of gulls... I cut my tongue on salt ... Torn by hurricane, the town gave up its ghost... We wrote the Bible to explain the point of teeth ... A paucity of solace for the rapture-anxious ... Like mantises, our kills resemble prayer ... Grief, refracted, lands in unintended hollows ... I've already had a child ... Inside my mind, a desert that I keep on trying to paint ... Dreams decrease in size like nesting dolls ...

Is every portrait yourself, and every elegy?

Christopher Watkins

Holing Up

Mole holes and dandelions
erupt in the lawn
where the small cabin rests by the sea,
as if to say it's not yours.
The yard, a rectangle of weeds
even after the mower has flattened
small patches of dirt
where moles pop up to breathe.
What about a deck to delineate things?
Build an addition
for the growing heap
towed from state to state.
If only I could shove the pile outside,
discover knowing beyond the faces
that would cling to these walls.
Yet one stays my hand,
nudges me to finish his manuscript,
the novel that might be good enough.
He's left behind some poetry, too,
in the pile of photos I would discard
to find simplicity.
This mess calls for organizing,
like atoms bumping into place,
in fulfillment of the dharma
that belongs to me,
as bright yellow heads bow
over a sea of green
where moles have already dug
a smattering of new homes—
or fresh graves.

Kari Wergeland

What Did the Soul Do Today?

The soul had nothing to confess in extravagant detail.

No view from the balcony you must not miss.

Nothing in its grasp you might regard

as worthy of contempt or praise.

Instead, the soul sat down with a bowl of chowder

and a chunk of seeded black bread,

and watched a pelican lit on the high branch of a sea grape.

Sometimes, the soul would see the plunge

and the gulp swallow of a fish.

Other times, just this:

The soul travelled to the farthest point back

in the human story and to the most distant point in the future

and found the pelican still there waiting on the catch.

J.P. White

The Walk is On

Just above the red bougainvillea leaning out of a stone wall,
you will find the broken mud road
where four billy goats like to make it known who is boss.
You will need to made peace
with a rub of their horns or a smattering of food.
If not, they will trouble your footfall with a head butt feint.
After them, the island road turns even more steep
and your lungs will remind you
how dangerous it is to divide heaven from earth
with any stray thought about anything.
This is another way of saying
you will soon be walking in the clouds
far from the contest that has failed you.
From way up, you will see the long way down
to a calabash tree in the guinea grass,
part flowering limb you now are, part goat,
part cloud, part road, part of every clash and quiet
since the first bright rain fell
into a great hollow and became an ocean, the walk is on.

J.P. White

Vertigo

I tip back my head
to unclasp
the wooden pins
to take the laundry in.

Looking up,
I'm partially sun-blind.

Then the
saints of Massey
cut in,
thrust, then still
their wings,
as they ride
the wind.

Saint Augustine says,
"If you understand it, it isn't God."

I understand
that I do not understand
this immense joy
called pigeon.

Erin Wilson

Does Top Surgery Pass the Bechdel Test?

i tell my therapist an old version of me
would be so ashamed of who i've become—
which, we've decided is something i cannot name;
this is not an origin story or trial of faith; for what
knows not who they are, has no traceable beginning;
i tell her forget love, forget faith, forget religion or forgiveness—
i have no genesis, and i can't tell my mother i'm having
my breasts removed—what will she say about me
being splayed open on a silver table, my white skin
swollen scarlet, double incision, four parts of my body
in biohazard bags, and no one understands
there is nothing like being a woman
and abandoning it to discover what is not
woman or man, but to make my body
my body; to become anything i can recognize,
to love when the sun pinks my skin hot,
when my hair is curly and thrown back, wild
with the window down in the car, how to hold a woman's hand
and feel holy;
i ask her how to tell my mother
there is nothing like being a woman,
and i cannot leave where i never was;
o', my lips are so full of all the words they cannot say
—what am i if i cannot learn
how to hold my body like an angel
eclipsing the light from the sun?

Caitie L. Young

Year Zero

Year minus one. Dandelions out through the rotting leaves, Indian corn resprouting in the dusted fields. Women being killed, migrants braving the Mediterranean. Midas turning bread and water into gold, Dolos telling lies upon lies, bigger and bigger lies, without shame. Young grass being trampled more than ever all around the world. They have found a way to show Korolev crater full of ice. Leaving home remains our blind obsession: we are tearing it down so that we incur the need to build another one, as if such a trip were really in the cards. What foolish brags mouth-filled with empty talk, pathetic self-absolving augurs. Bigheaded, wicked, dull. The course is drawn within these precincts. Geese and cranes appear to lose theirs too, but we are the only ones insane enough to think we can keep control over ours. We curse the heaping leaves and fail to notice the peeping blowballs. Never once we curse ourselves, even less realize year zero is just around the corner. It will spare none. Not one. Blight, plague, scum.

Alessio Zanelli

DAN VEACH PRIZE FOR YOUNGER POETS

2023 Winner

CARTER REKOSKE

I love poems with a strong sense of voice, particularly when that voice is playful. And what stands out to me most of all about Carter Rekoske’s “Prayer for Gratitude” is its voice—here is a poem that combines sincerity with insecurity, misdirection, and a touch of comedy in the way all of our best free-form prayers often do. His work reflects a kind of youthful stream of consciousness, jumbling images as diverse as “Taylor Swift and pumpkin spice lattes” and “gas station...mtn dew” at the same time that it clearly moves from acknowledging to the Divine where he is emotionally, to making his petitions, to promising to do a (small) good in the world. The voice is conversational and “authentic and tender” and when we reach the end of the poem, we feel that God must be listening because who could turn their back on someone who wants to “float in an aura of hope”?

JC Reilly

Prayer for Gratitude

My favorite premonition
is the one where I'm curling up
to hide away in an unmarked grave,

and it's not that I want to die—
it's that I can't think of another way
to get some good rest.

I'm tired of caffeine consumption.
I mean, you could put a straw
in a cloud, and I'd still go

to a gas station and grab a mtn dew.
I mean, I want to be rejuvenated,
reincarnated even, into someone

who can't get enough of
Taylor Swift and pumpkin spice lattes,
or vintage Harleys and Aerosmith,

or fresh hikes and Walt Whitman,
or MF DOOM and Ja Morant's jams.
I'm trying to practice gratitude—

write it wildly as Hirsch
or unabashedly as Gay—
but I can't remember

if I've ever cried tears of joy.
Dear God, if you're listening,
sprinkle such gratitude

into my tear ducts,
and let me float in an aura of hope
so that I can spill something

authentic and tender like snowflakes
onto the hats and tongues
of other people.

Carter Rekoske

POETRY 2023

International Poetry Competition

GRAND PRIZE \$1,000

KAREEM TAYYAR

International Publication Prizes

Sarah Carey * Michelle Bonczek Evory
Debra Devins * Page Getz Ellinger * Stacey Forbes
Anyély Gómez-Dickerson
Shellie Harwood * Ben Hellerstein * Brian Heston
Joann Hinz * Maxima Kahn * Margaret Lee
Katharyn Machan * Meryl Natchez
Christopher Nolan * John Schneider
Jacquelyn Shah * Carole Stasiowski
Donald Wildman

International Merit Awards

Jessica Barksdale * John Peter Beck * V.A. Bettencourt
Jonah Bornstein * Patrick Dixon * Michael Fleming * J.V. Foerster
Christina Frei * Numertha Geisinger * Catherine Hamrick
Suzanne Honda * Emma Jacques * Karen Kilcup
Zachary Kluckman * Mel Konnor * Margaret Lee
StarShield Lortie * Jordan Lull * Elisabeth Murawski * Jed Myers
R.A. Pavoldi * Wanda Praisner * Bradley Samore * Will Simescu
Maddie Spera * Kristina Van Sant * Beth Williams
Maggie Yang * Jarrett Ziemer

Welcome to Poetry 2023

“Two Poets” has a beautiful dream-like quality. I admire the images in this poem where “there is white snow on a blue minaret” or the wings of wild birds are like “elongated water lilies.” The poem navigates the murky estranged relationship between a father and an adult speaker, alternating irregularly between singlets and couplets, as if to say that the speaker is alone, but then is not—`coupled with the father in uncomfortable new ways.

Throughout the poem, we are traversing the tenuous relationship between two people, but the ending of the poem avoids resolution. The ending of the poem is mysterious and strange in the way only a poem can be. The father stops writing poems, but the speaker does not. The father turns away from “where you are not standing,” a mysterious and strangely beautiful image. And finally, the father moves in the negative “neither/north or south, east or west,” meaning the father is both everywhere and nowhere.

Victoria Chang

Two Poets

there is white snow on a blue minaret.

your father,

whom you have not seen in twenty years,
stands in the road below,

writing a poem in a small notebook.

from this great distance you look over his shoulder
& see his usual symbols:

warm bread,

one god,
more artist than lawmaker,

wild birds of various colors,
all of them singing.

how you know this is beyond you,
given that you cannot speak Farsi,

yet as you read the river finds its way
into your poem as well,

along with his god,

& a large flock of those birds,
their wings like elongated water lilies.

noticing what is happening,
your father populates his poem with more items:

handmade teacups,
his mother's green scarf,

a book of poems by Hafez,

an old bus pass from the years
he lived in San Francisco,

a soccer ball,
a journal full of his favorite physics equations,

a deer fashioned from the rocks of Mount Damavand.

When, finally, he stops writing,
you do not,

even as he turns away from where
you are not standing,

& moves in a direction that is neither
north or south, east or west.

Kareem Tayyar

Proof

“The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of non-being, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself.” — Paul Tillich

You have to come to faith on your own, I'd said,
that you could believe anything as long as you commit to witness.
When a white-tailed doe strolled into our enclave
before the rains, drawn where roots send sugars up,
into a sweep of green in spring, to what remains
of old growth in a region recently clear cut, I imagined
anthropomorphically, that we were its curiosities.
As if something in us were capable of saving.
I told you, the past is more than a remembering,
a resurrection of guilt, or an endless mourning
for all the answers never given, or come too late
to believe. For what we never asked.
I said, *trust me*. I am one who lies at times, it's true,
but not about what matters. Lies like, no, I didn't see you
when I really did, or yes it's fine with me
if the only chapels you'll set foot in anymore are woods.
When we saw the doe together, saw it see us watching,
freeze, we sensed its fear of being seen. Of being/
non-being. Out of place, of time. Then we saw it beeline
for the asphalt curling around our cul-de-sac,
the devil it didn't know, and bolt, leap hedges,
trample landscaping to escape, until a pathway opened
to a clearing somehow I knew it would find.
All that's left now is its imprint on my mind.
Then, I said, *now do you believe me?*

Sarah Carey

Stone by Stone

Rocks spill and tumble
from the stone wall
in front of my neighbor's house,
exiled from positions of honor
like old lovers from the heart.
Weeds tangle around
moss-covered granite and schist,
trying to make sense of things.

Would anyone mind
if on some moonlit starlit night
I lift and carry the wayward stones
and, with the sweat of forgiveness,
restore them to their duty?

Can you see the drifts of roses
longing to grow there?

Debra Devins

when san francisco ran out of roses

north of indigo road
there's a nomad-shaped hole in kansas
where we escaped, waiting
to be mended, holy as the untended tombs
that couldn't keep me and jesus

from splitting town in a texas two-step
down gravel roads, singing, I *got friends*
in low places, saluting pluto, gilbert's immortal flag
and all the other drag queens, forgotten
strings and un-haloed strays, we kept

waltzing barefoot through graveyards and ragweed
until some stranger offered us a ride and we chased the west
until we found a sky that could turn our grief into glitter
and we carried it into the desert like a cross
made of disco and we didn't stop

until we got to the ocean, where the cross
told kansas, *hate to break it to ya, but that wayward girl stole jesus*
and run off to hollywood, don't expect a postcard
the rebel shepherd confessed it was his idea
but nobody believed it

and the waitress straightened
her apron saying, *at least she got outta kansas*
and we reached sunset just in time
for a violet riot of confetti, the genesis
of a new california goldrush,

we were a dream-shaped hole
in a bulletproof sky that turned out to be on our side
and we carried signs to save things that couldn't be saved
but we left a fist-shaped door
in the stonewall night that dreamed us

storming west when the last closet cracked
open and we all fell out like silver lake wands

black cats finally kissed on new years
castro saints raining from a tarot deck
and san francisco ran out of roses

we gathered on sunset's grief-shaped street
where the locked out picket line of baggers from local 770 crossed
the vigil for baghdad over starless gutters of gold
star mothers who wept names into stolen air
while we carried signs to stop wars that couldn't stop wars

but somewhere on the courthouse steps of beverly
hills
there's a fire-singed hole in a bible's sky
where we stood as strangers bearing
witness to illegal marriages
that would become legal marriages

we stood between queens, preachers, stars and
rabbis
holding candles and souvenir rainbows saved
for better windows, followed the birmingham brides
who drove all night to find us
to carry and be carried across the threshold

we chased their glitter
voices, caught them softly,
scattered them into radios,
found the holes already mapped
by harvey and gilbert, stonewall and the lost shepards

we walked through those holes
in the sky until they were ours
until they were doors
painted glitter over scars
until our stains became stars, singing

and the stains still sing, we were here
and something changed because
we were here

a postcard lands in a kansas gutter
that radio tower can't reach

where a california-shaped girl
crying under a cypress cross
stops crying when she hears the story

that a window where the view is no
said yes

Paige Getz Ellinger

Fairy Dust

When I was a kid someone
I thought it was a family member maybe
my grandmother told me that if I catch
a moth be careful not to shake
the powder from its wings or it won't
be able to fly. She was always considering the smaller
things on this planet like sparrows and me
feeding us seeds feeding us light.

All my life this thinking of this dust as
some sort of magic substance that gave you flight
as if had I harvested the dust from the wings
of 10,000 moths and shook it over my body
I would float free from gravity that I'd too
be able to fly.

I know now this dust is not dust but scales
conversing with wind adjusting maneuvering
like some fancy air machine the people with power
build for war and model after the beautiful
bodies of smaller things susceptible to death
by pesticide and deforestation like dragonflies,
butterflies, bats, sparrows and me and instead
of gathering dust to free myself from Earth I sought
to free myself from them I crawled
to the edge of the sea and called for help help
us we creatures trapped in the cup, in the cupped
hands of the monster let us go let us go, and they did.

Michelle Bonczek Evory

And did we love

Wasn't it rutted?
Weren't there thorns?
We envied the desert's
indefinite light—
mesquite trees flickering
like movies in the darkness.
Aren't we fallen?
My marrow, thick
with ravens. Your wet
hair. I nearly went blind
photographing the sun
through your creosote
blooms, their resin smelling
of fresh rain, roots killing
all that grew close.
Can a life be rewilded?
Strangers to grace,
we built our house
on a fox den.
Pulled packrat nests
from our engines.
Fed the birds at first
but soon forgot. And
did we love? God
asks again. His eye
is on the sparrow.
We are little thistles
in his heart.

Stacey Forbes

How To Kill a Mango Tree

take a mango sapling and scoop carefully around it with your spade, then use your trowel in a wide radius to avoid damaging the young roots while you talk to it and sing to it your excuses, your reasons for this rude awakening, this forced transplant

you uproot it, like a kidnapper in the night, stealing it, tearing it from its rightful place under the warm, wet earth of its Caribbean island where it shares the communal shade of a flamboyán tree with a neighboring Dwarf Jamaican

you will place it gently in a flowerpot, the dirt and fertilizer around it perfectly irrigated, ready for the long journey north where the youngster will be replanted out back in a small yard in Brooklyn where your Tía Juliana lets you borrow her couch

until you find an apartment, but she lets you mess with her shrubs so you can find just the right place for your little tree but years pass without you getting a place, turns out the two jobs you have are not enough so you watch your friend shiver out back with fleeting hope

you pray the last few winters in this harsh, cold terrain have not damaged or killed your sapling because come spring he is to bear fruit on his fifth birthday—except that deep inside, in the places of you you don't want to listen to something speaks to you

something more than a feeling whispers as you cry into your coffee because you know your tropical baby will not bear fruit, it cannot, or it will not in defiance as its barren branches point the finger of blame at you for killing it when you first plucked it

from its home

Anyély Gómez-Dickerson

The Old Man Teaches Me the Beauty of the Thing

The beauty of the thing,
the old man told me long ago, when we were on our knees

in the dirt for the planting,
is how very low the rent we pay

for the borrowed planet, for the brief eye-blinking
occupation, for the breathing of one air.

While we planted, built my unborn daughter's forest,
the old man taught my hands just how

to press the loam, to tamp it tenderly down and in
to cradle the baby saplings

in rows for the break of future gales.
He spoke of coral as a living animal

unable to cling onto algae, bleaching away
alone in toxic seas. He watered with salt-tears

the seeds and seedlings, told of Adélie penguins lost,
all krill, cold currents gone. Named every glacier pooled,

each ocean boiling, every bee too weak to map its way
to Argentina to the withering blooms of the jacaranda,

every Sequoia aflame. We laid down, felt the vibration
of the colonies of creatures shuddering beneath us

in the city of arthropods, gasping for air,
salamanders slithering against us. And we wondered

if the Seven Wonders wobbled from the weight of us.
But, still, the beauty of the thing, the old man said,

is the perpetual motion, how she spins on
under our fingers, if we care to spin.

And with that, he plunged his hand and mine deep into earth
we loved, but did not own. Together we tucked the last seed in

and buried it with borrowed soil,
carefully, as I would one day do for him;

as one will do when trusting earth to forgive,
to cradle our most beloved bones.

Shellie Harwood

October

This morning sits upon us clear and cold,
Like dew on the rough grass, July distilled,
Condensed. Your summer's labors were unyielding:
That cow will never love you back, the corn
Knows nothing of the weeds you pulled for it.
You've learned the greater world's insensible:
What of it? Out there the leaves have all changed;
Up on the hill, some are already fallen.
But there is still time. To fall is a process.
A moment yet before becoming mulch.
You haven't worked for this, but if you come
On the right day and at the precise hour,
 Now, you'll see the sun catch the falling leaves,
 Above, below, and all around us gold.

Ben Hellerstein

gray since twenty). She keeps glancing
at the open door as if
she expects someone. The sixties were only
yesterday, she says. I pull
her hand to my heart, brittle as chipped
limestone brought into
the light. I tell myself this is Mom:
she loves huskies. Her favorite
singer is Elvis. She once worked nights
and reads Stephen King
even though his books give her bad dreams.
On walks through Philly streets,
she rarely slows her pace. And if you lag
behind, she gripes, hurry up,
you're wasting time.

Brian Patrick Heston

Snow Light

Like a poem left on dawn's doorstep
Or a winter sparrow's tune
Chipping chinks of dark away,
This weird light wakens the bones.

Stirring, we turn in bed.
"It snowed last night," we murmur,
Cheerful as kids when winter meant sleds and skates.
Even through double-paned glass we hear the plow
Bludgeoning drifts, shovels rasping,
A snowblower's blurry whine.
No need to look outside, but we open the door,
Pulses quickening in absurd delight,
Slipping back to ancestral rhythms

As if an aurora over the glacier shines
Or at Newgrange the solstice rays illuminate
Ashes of the dead in their burnished bowl,
Kindling another year,

As if we, in pajamas and bare feet,
Ice squeezing between our toes,
Somehow stand reborn at our own thresholds
Smiling and letting in the snowy day.

Joann Hinz

To Say the Least

Summer Solstice, 2020

Music from a cheap radio. Morning songs of birds
concealed among the holly. The garden lies
opulent and unabashed. The image splays
naked and forlorn, while the imagination
hides in the underbrush and pecks at spent seeds.
Veined leaves of dogwood
dangle in silver light. White and dark gravel, a sea
beneath my feet.

Human bodies fall, bloodied by human
bodies. And peaceful protests turn as the law
plies violence strapped to their hips, armored in chests,
white with rage.
To make something of these. How?

My truest hunger has always been erasure. To disappear
inside of things, beyond
the veil.
To call their names is not enough.

I pry with fingers at the edges, feeling
for the breach. For what opens.
What glitters. Neither metaphor nor negation
of beauty or its harder twin.
But source. Root.
Nourishment. A place where I cannot be wrong.

Sunlight lays a hot hand on the back of my neck,
inscribes its dazzle inside the curvature of eye
and blinds.

I'm no closer to salvation than I've ever been.

I can't divine what lies beneath those fronds
among the crushed decay and new growth.
Car horn, bird tweet – both ask to be heard and sung.
But the arguments with myself lie down in dust
while day spends its gold, profligate.

Maxima Kahn

Iokolpos

...violets tucked in hidden folds...

—From Sappho, fragments 21, 30, 58-59, 103

Hunger
sustains me.

I want what I
almost see—

a hue
this side of dark

not having but wanting—
honey, pistachios

the ripe fig
on too high a branch.

Margaret Lee

Note:

Iokolpos is a compound ancient Greek word that combines *ion* (violet) and *kolpos* (multiple meanings). Translations vary according to the translator's construal of *kolpos*, whose semantic field encompasses various kinds of folds or cleavage. It can mean the cleavage between the breasts, the folds of a garment, a cave, a valley, a winding coastline, any depression or cavity, or the vagina. Authoritative lexica of classical Greek list Sappho's uses of this word as the only examples.

Empty Cabin

She went there Thursdays, to mourn.
No reason for that day, really,
except she liked the sound in her mouth,
tongue pressed against her upper teeth,
lips tightening to push her breath
through a small half-broken *O*.
Or maybe it was because of thunder,
the thought of a dark ancient god
splitting sky apart with a hammer
and sparking it with his lust.
Really, the cabin didn't matter, either;
it was only one of the many places
they'd met to talk and kiss and couple,
that year before her parents knew,
those months she was finally happy.
She liked to recall how they'd talked of snow,
how for sure they would both go north
and get to see it one day, feel
its flutter on their cheeks. *Like*
butterflies they'd said together, then laughed.
Maybe that's why the cabin, on Thursdays.
It *could* have been the day he died,
back in the woods, where no one lived.
When they found his beaten body
his brothers stood and stared awhile.
They told her, after, knowing she'd care:
white butterflies—a dozen, twenty—
had settled on his face and hands
and didn't fly away but stayed
as though protecting what the world
would do well to remember.

Katharyn Howd Machan

Sexing the Pea

Mendel in his monk's robes strolled
among hermaphroditic peas, tweezed open
each slim flower keel, snipped filament and anther,
then shoved the pollen deep into the womb
of his pocket. Bending to the female
flower parts—not yet sticky—
he twisted over stigma, style, and ovary
a calico cap, to protect each pea's virginity.

Stooped above his flowery flock,
he touched each fragile,
trembling pistil
with his tiny brush.
At harvest, he divided up
and tracked three hundred thousand peas.
Then did it all again.

Not even Darwin
read his book.
But Mendel spent his life deep
in the unembarrassed sex of flower and pea,
where he puzzled out genetics,
before we had the word for gene.

Meryl Natchez

Without You, Darker Still

I've been falling in love with everything since you
feathered away—kissing all the insects I come across,
making sure not to take them
piece by piece—imagining your face washed with pride.

See how far I've come, gluing dropped leaves back to their branches
and going to bed with the door open;
beckoning any and all to take a load off
—with pillows on the floor, a space heater in the corner,
the fuzzed-out speaker you adored
humming atop the dresser.

Night drags itself across the sky, and the pit ponies trod in,
seep through the frame, mistake my sheets for carrots.

They cry for it to be darker still—the light beaming in: stiff and unkind.
And I do all that I know how to,
to keep what I can:

I smear the sun's reflection and
black-out the windows,
eat the prayers bubbling on their lips.
And I do all that I know how to,

to make this honey in my veins visible:
I splay myself, and one by one,
let them lick the sweetness from the salt of my hands.
And they're out
like that.

But now,
how to sleep in these conditions?—
with holes chewed in the blankets, and me

underneath, a mouth full of others' devotions,
shaking with a terror so grand—it must be joy.

Christopher Nolan

Thrive

On the thin lip of the lodge-pole-pine forest
just moments before thaw, scarlet snow plants

briefly flare-up the Tahoe Sierra like lipstick
rings still brightening a lost lover's collar.

This fleshy flower born, it turns out,
of an underground marriage between conifer

and fungi sustains itself on the excess
sweetness of sturdier roots. Nourished deep within

another's long shadow—an echo awaiting
a voice to fill it. Not everything requires

light to endure the world. And not everything
vigorous greens each spring.

John Schneider

New Cat

To Zadie Quinn

Her eyes are duchess-green, she's lithe
and loves my under-bed when all alone.
If I lie down she's by me in a second,
nuzzling and licking. If she beckons,
I will come; the inverse isn't true,
for she decides the if and when and where
we'll have another little rendezvous
and how much time she wants to spare.
The colors Zadie has: a folio
of coal-black, ash-white, and a blur
of embers brown, golden. A calico,
it correlates with human skins, her fur.
I esteem my Zadie's coloration—
she purrsonifies my devotion
to variation, deviation, all-inclusion.

Jacquelyn Shah

First Intimation

I would have broken
through the web
stretched from the concrete step

to the backyard gate
but for sun-glistened dew beads
stopping me long enough

to gasp at the four-foot span
and find the weaver,
herself stopped near the center

by a puff of breath
where I knelt to watch
at kingdom's edge.

Bigger than the dull others
that scurried in our house,
drab as dustpan dust,

she was agate plump,
black belly yellow streaked,
fuzzy legs banded black and gold

and spread eight ways
across the compass of her web—
all the tiny industry

urgent outside our house
that passed without notice
under our blind busy feet.

Inside I searched the volumes
of *The Book of Knowledge*
to find her kind, Golden Orb Weaver,

that every day
spooled taut threads
from fairy spinnerets,

threads she herself consumed
only to begin anew, the prized silk
the stuff of her spun out

over hours, over the nothing
that gapes between haphazard things—
and always the endless waiting

for a tremble in the web.
I hadn't left her for long
but now the gossamer flapped, torn,

and she was gone. That's when
I began to sense
what time would take from me.

Carole Stasiowski

Coming into Winter

Birds cross overhead carrying
off strands of light,
making a thick gray nest
from the ends of days.

And under the tree,
apples lie
like time in the grass
melting into the ground.

Our days roll off like
pumpkins. How we want to
keep the gold shell
on the cloth of blue mountains.

Donald Wildman

Contributors

Sheri Flowers Anderson is a poet enamored with poetry about everyday life. She is based in San Antonio, Texas, and her poetry has been published in *Sixfold Poetry*, *Inkwell Echoes*, and *Voices International*. She's the author of a poetry collection entitled *House and Home*, winner of the Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Award 2023.

Pamela Annas is Professor Emerita of English at UMass/Boston, where she taught writing and modern lit and directed the English MA Program. She has written books and on poetry, pedagogy, and working-class literature and is poetry editor of *Radical Teacher*. Her chapbook, *Mud Season*, was published by Cervena Barva Press.

Pam Baggett is author of *Wild Horses* (Main Street Rag, 2018), a finalist for the Cathy Smith Bowers chapbook contest. Awards include a 2019-20 Fellowship in Literature from the North Carolina Arts Council. Recent poems appear in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Daily*, *Poetry East*, and *Spillway*.

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona is a Filipina-American poet originally from New Jersey. She's a winner of the San Francisco Foundation/Nomadic Press Literary Award (2022) and is currently *Epiphany Magazine's* 2023 Fresh Voices Fellow. She is an alumna of The Fulbright Program, Community of Writers, and Kearny Street Workshop's Interdisciplinary Writers Lab.

Jessica Barksdale's sixteenth novel *What the Moon Did* and short story collection *Trick of the Porch Light* are forthcoming in 2023. She's published two poetry collections: *When We Almost Drowned* (2019) and *Grim Honey* (2021). She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband.

Sarah Carey is a graduate of the Florida State University creative writing program. Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Orison Anthology. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, including *Accommodations* (2019), winner of the Concrete Wolf Chapbook Award. Visit her at SarahKCarey.com or on Twitter @SayCarey1.

John Randolph Carter. Poet and Artist. Finalist: National Poetry Series. Journals include *Barrow Street*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *LIT*, *New American Writing*, *North American Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *Verse Daily*. Recipient of NEA, New York State Council and Fulbright grants. Art in thirty-two museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Gallery of Art. johnrandolphcarter.blogspot.com

Paul Chuks is a songwriter, poet, and storyteller. He is of Igbo descent and resides in Nigeria. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Brittle Paper*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Trampset*, *Ginosko*, and elsewhere. He is a reader at *Palette Poetry*, *Mud Season Review*, and *The Forge*.

Patricia Davis-Muffett (she/her) holds an MFA from the University of Minnesota and was a 2020 Julia Darling Poetry Prize finalist, won an honorable mention in the 2021 Muriel Craft Bailey Memorial Award, and won first honorable mention in the 2021 Outermost poetry contest, judged by Marge Piercy. She lives in Rockville, Maryland, and makes her living in technology marketing.

Stephanie Coyne DeGhett is a writer of poetry, fiction and essays—her work has appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Missouri Review* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, among other places. She teaches in the BFA creative writing program in a small liberal and performing arts college.

Debra Devins lives in Connecticut where she has taught creative writing in adult education programs, library workshops, and writing groups. Her poems and essays have appeared in *The Connecticut Writer*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Compass*, *The Litchfield County Times*, and is forthcoming in *The Comstock Review*.

Becky DeVito is a psychology professor at the Capital campus of Connecticut State Community College. Her doctoral dissertation investigated how poets come to new insights as they write. Her poems appear in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *The New Verse News*, and others.

David Dixon is a physician, poet, and musician who lives and practices in the foothills of North Carolina. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rock & Sling*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *The Greensboro Review*. He is the author of *The Scattering of Saints* (Hermit Feathers Press, 2022).

Deborah H. Doolittle's recent publications include *Floribunda* and *Bogbound*, with some of her recent poems appearing in *Ibbetson Street*, *Iconoclast*, *Rattle*, *Slant*, and *The Stand*. An avid bird-watcher, she shares a home with her husband, four housecats, and a backyard full of birds.

Eleven of **Page Getz Ellinger's** stories, essays, and poems have been published in literary magazines and her novel, *After the Revolution We'll All Wear Tiaras*, was a finalist for the (now PEN) Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction. She is currently adapting that book into a TV series for her MFA thesis at UBC, where she'll graduate in November.

Michelle Bonczek Evory is the author of *The Ghosts of Lost Animals* (Gunpowder Press) and *Naming the Unnamable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* (Open SUNY Textbooks) currently being translated into Gujarati. She mentors poets and writers at *The Poet's Billow* and can be found at www.michellebonczekevery.com.

Stacey Forbes won first place in the 2021 Plough Poetry Prize, and was shortlisted for the 2023 Fish Publishing Poetry Prize. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Terrain*, among others. Born in the Pennsylvania countryside, Stacey now lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Jennifer Gennari holds a MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poems have appeared in *Typishly*, *The Lascaux Review*, and many issues of the *Marin Poetry Center Anthology*. She is the author of *Muffled* (Simon & Schuster) and *My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer* (Clarion). Learn more at www.jengennari.com.

Lynn D. Gilbert has had poems in *Blue Unicorn*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Light*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. An associate editor at *Third Wednesday* journal, she has been a finalist in the Gerald Cable Book Award (2021) and Off the Grid Press book contests.

As a first-generation immigrant, **Anyély Gómez-Dickerson** knows firsthand the pain of assimilation in a home not her own. Therefore, being a Latina writer means creating art with “teeth” to shed light on issues and injustices plaguing our communities to foster the tough conversations needed to catapult real social change. She aims to empower those too often misrepresented or ignored by the mainstream.

Michelle Hartman is the author of 4 books available on Amazon, along with 3 chapbooks. Hartman’s work can be found online, in multiple journals in America and various countries overseas. She is the former editor of *Red River Review*, and Co-Owner of The Hungry Buzzard Press.

Shellie Harwood is a Connecticut poet. Her poetry appears in *Connecticut River Review*, *TulipTree Review*, *Oberon*, *Mudfish22*, *Sixfold*, and *Connecticut Literary Anthology*. Shellie’s chapbook, *With My Sister, in a Tornado Warning*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Her chapbook, *Sleepwalker’s Guide to Grieving*, was released in May, 2023.

Ben Hellerstein is a PhD student in public affairs at Indiana University, studying the policy and politics of the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Prior to moving to Indiana, Ben worked for ten years for an environmental nonprofit in Boston, and attended Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota.

Brian Patrick Heston grew up in a lower working-class section of Philadelphia. His full-length collection, *If You Find Yourself*, won the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Prize. Poems from this manuscript have appeared in such publications as *Southern Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, and *Prairie Schooner*. He currently teaches creative writing and literature at Truman State University in Missouri.

Michael P. Hill is the author of the chapbooks *Not Just Passing Through* (Main Street Rag Publishing, 2022) and *Junk Drawer* (Kelsay Books, 2021). His poems have also appeared in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Spillway*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Soundings East*, and *Gray’s Sporting Journal*, among others. He lives in Colorado.

Joann Hinz loves her life and celebrates it in poetry. Ordinary as it is, she finds profound joy, grief, and radiance in it. She fears pain, but looks it squarely in the eye and walks forward. Some people call her old. In her soul, she feels ageless, connected, grounded, and whole.

Patricia Hooper's fifth book of poetry, *Wild Persistence*, was published by the University of Tampa Press in 2019 and awarded the Brockman-Campbell Book Award for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Atlantic*, *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, and other magazines.

Marc Janssen has been writing poems since around 1980. Some people would say that was a long time but not a dinosaur. His verse can be found in *Pinyon*, *Slant*, *Cirque Journal*, and *Poetry Salzburg*; also in his book *November Reconsidered*. Janssen coordinates the Salem Poetry Project, and was a nominee for Oregon Poet Laureate. For more information visit, marcjanssenpoet.com.

Dani Johnson is a poet based in Phoenix, Arizona. Dani teaches poetry workshops with Themis, a queer collaborative in Phoenix, and makes coffee with Strawberry Coffee. She holds a BA in Writing and an MFA in Poetry. You can find what she's up to at danijohnsonphx.com.

Maxima Kahn is the author of the full-length collection of poems, *Fierce Aria* (Finishing Line Press). Her poetry has been featured in *The Louisville Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Sweet*, and many other journals, and she has been nominated twice for Best of the Net. She teaches and blogs at MaximaKahn.com

The winner of the 2022 Cider Press Review Book Award for *Inheritance with a High Error Rate* (January 2024), **Jen Karetnick** is the author of 10 additional poetry collections. The co-founder/managing editor of *SWWIM Every Day*, she has forthcoming work in *Cimarron Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Plume*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere. See jkaretnick.com.

Caroline Laganas earned an MFA in Creative Writing from California Institute of the Arts and a BA in Journalism from Pepperdine University. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Mississippi Review*, *Five Points*, *New Orleans Review*, *Poetry East*, *Mantis*, and others. She is writing and illustrating her first book.

Richard Lambert has had poems published in Ireland in *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Moth*, and in the UK in *Poetry Review*, *Poetry Wales*, the *TLS*, and *The Rialto*. His second collection came out in 2017 from an independent poetry publisher in the UK, Arc. He lives in Norfolk, UK.

Margaret Lee is a poet, scholar, fiber artist, watercolor sketcher, and aspiring naturalist. Her chapbooks include *Someone Else's Earth* (Finishing Line 2021) inspired by Sappho's lyrics, *Sagebrush Songs* (Finishing Line 2022) from northern New Mexico, and *Oklahoma Summer* (Finishing Line 2023) reflecting recent ecological and demographic challenges in Oklahoma.

Nylah Lyman's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Atticus Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, the *South Carolina Review*, and other journals. Her debut collection of poetry, *Frail Union* (Encircle Publications, 2021), draws on her experience of living with a chronic, invisible illness.

Hannah Marshall lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she works at the public library. Marshall's poems have been published in *The Best American Poetry*, *New Ohio Review*, *Poetry Daily*, and elsewhere. Her manuscript *The Shape That Good Can Take* was a finalist for the 2021 St. Lawrence Book Award.

Katharyn Howd Machan has been writing and publishing for half a century. She lives and teaches in Ithaca, New York with her beloved spouse and fellow poet Eric Machan Howd. She directed the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc., and served as Tompkins County's first poet laureate. She belly dances.

Joan Mazza worked as a microbiologist and psychotherapist, and taught workshops on dreams and nightmares. She's the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self* (Penguin). Her poetry has appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Slant*, *Poet Lore*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural Virginia.

Michael Meyerhofer's fifth poetry book, *Ragged Eden*, was published by Glass Lyre Press. He is also the author of a fantasy series and the Poetry Editor of *Atticus Review*. For more information and an embarrassing childhood photo, visit www.troublewithhammers.com.

Ruth Mota lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California after spending many years in Brazil and traveling the world as an international health trainer. Her poems have been published in many online and print journals including: Terrapin Books, *Gyroscope Review*, *Hare's Paw*, *Canary*, *Reservoir Road*, *Cathexis Northwest*, and others.

Saraswati Nagpal is an Indian writer and poet, a lover of fantasy and sci-fi, a classical dancer. Her graphic novels are feminist retellings of Indian epic myths. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Acropolis Journal*, *The Journal of Radical Wonder*, and elsewhere. Find her @saraswatinagpal on Twitter/Instagram.

Meryl Natchez's fourth book, *Catwalk*, received an Indie Best Book 2020 Award from Kirkus Reviews. Natchez's work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *LA Review of Books*, *Hudson Review*, *Terrain*, *Comstock Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Literary Matters*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *ZYZZYVA*, and others. More at www.merylnatchez.com

Christopher Nolan is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Vermont College of Fine Arts. He lives in Michigan and primarily focuses on short fiction. "Without You, Darker Still" is his first publication.

T.A. Noonan (they/them) is a queer disabled witch & the author of several books & chapbooks. A Kréyòl Lalwizyàn turned accidental Floridian, their current hyperfixations include enamel pins, tarot, Zelda speedrunning, Genshin Impact, & *Final Fantasy XV*.

Mandira Pattnaik is the author of the poetry collection *Anatomy of a Storm-Weathered Quaint Townspeople* (2022, Fahmidan Publishing). Mandira's poems have appeared in *Prime Number Magazine*, *The Shore*, *West Trestle Review*, *Opia Mag*, *Thimble*, *Variant Lit*, *Feral Poetry*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *Eclectica Magazine*. Visit her at mandirapattnaik.com

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based writer, has published poetry worldwide in *Poetry Salzburg*, *ParisLitUp*, *Meniscus*, *Shi Chao Poetry*, *Journal of Italian Translation*, *Agenda*, *The Pedestal*, and others. Her work has been translated into Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and German. Her seventh and most recent book of poems is *Edges*.

Patrick Ramsey was born in 1962 in New Jersey but was raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He worked mainly in publishing and bookselling. He ran a literary publishing house, Lagan Press. As a younger poet, his work featured in important anthologies. He is returning to writing after a thirty-year silence.

Carter Rekoske is a 21-year-old creative writing student at Bryan College in Tennessee. He won the poetry award in his school's 2022 and 2023 annual literary contests and will be published in forthcoming issues of *Listening* and *Black Fox Literary Magazine*.

Kelly R. Samuels is the author of the collection *All the Time in the World* (Kelsay Books) and three chapbooks. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee with work appearing in *The Massachusetts Review*, *RHINO*, *Court Green*, and *Vassar Review*.

Elizabeth Dingmann Schneider lives and writes in Minneapolis. Her collection *Blood* is available from Red Bird Chapbooks, where she formerly served as a poetry editor. Elizabeth's work has also been published in *Sleet*, the *What Light Poetry Contest*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Mosaic*, the *Saint Paul Almanac*, *Streetlight Magazine*, *Motherscope Magazine*, and *Coal Hill Review*.

John Schneider's poetry collection, *Swallowing the Light*, winner of the Pinnacle Book Achievement Award in Poetry, a finalist for the International Book Award and nominated for the Hoffer Award, was published in 2022. His non-fiction book, *Dreaming and Being Dreamt*, was published by Routledge in 2023. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he resides in Berkeley, California.

Samantha Schnell is a writer and teacher living in New York City. Her poetry has been published in *Witness Magazine* and *Eclectica Magazine* and is forthcoming in *Sonora Review*.

Jacquelyn Shah holds: A.B. English; M.A. English; M.F.A., Ph.D. English literature/creative writing—poetry. Publications: chapbook, *small fry*; full-length book, *What to Do with Red*; poems in various journals. *Literal Latté's* 2018 Food Verse Contest winner, she is a 2023 non-fiction book winner of the memoir *Limited Engagement: A Way of Living*, which has just been published.

Ashish Kumar Singh (he/him) is a queer Indian poet whose work has appeared in *Passages North*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *Grain*, *Chestnut Review*, *Fourteen Poems*, *Foglifter*, *Banshee*, and elsewhere. Currently, he serves as an editorial assistant at *Visual Verse* and a poetry reader at *ANMLY*.

Joannie Stangeland is the author of several poetry collections, most recently *The Scene You See*. Her poems have also appeared in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The MacGuffin*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *SWWIM*, *New England Review*, and other journals. Joannie holds an MFA from the Rainier Writing Workshop.

Throughout **Carole Stasiowski's** personal and professional life changes (she's worked as a stitcher, trade publication editor, and healthcare marketer), poetry has remained the one, glorious constant. Previous publishing credits include *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Northeast Magazine*, and *Zone 3*. She is grateful to live and work on Cape Cod.

Tim Suermondt's sixth full-length book of poems *A Doughnut And The Great Beauty Of The World* came out early in 2023 from MadHat Press. He has published in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Georgia Review*, *Smartish Pace*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Plume*, among many others. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

Kareem Tayyar's book *Keats in San Francisco & Other Poems* was published by Lily Poetry Review Books in 2022.

David Thoreen's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Verses Daily*, *Kestrel*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *New Letters*, *New Ohio Review*, *Presence*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Seneca Review*, and elsewhere. He is a recipient of *Minnesota Monthly's* Tamarack Award and a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference.

Jim Tilley has published three full-length collections of poetry and a novel with Red Hen Press. His short memoir, *The Elegant Solution*, was published as a *Ploughshares* Solo. He has won *Sycamore Review's* Wabash Prize for Poetry. Four of his poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Rob Vance is the author of many emails but no books yet. His poetry has appeared in: *Chiron Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA in Poetry from Queens University of Charlotte.

Kelly Vande Plasse is an architect and wordsmith, currently engaged in relocating from Brooklyn, NY, to Fort Collins, Colorado, to be closer to nature. Her poems have appeared previously in the *Atlanta Review*, as well as the *Paterson Literary Review*, *the Naugatuck River Review*, *the New York Quarterly*, and *Crosswinds*.

Connemara Wadsworth's chapbook, *The Possibility of Scorpions* won the White Eagle Coffee Store Press 2009 Chapbook Contest. She's been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Valparaiso*, and elsewhere. "Mediation on a Photo" was a winner of The Griffin Museum's *Once Upon a Time: Photos That Inspire Tall Tales*.

Christopher Watkins' poems can be found in the *Atlanta Review*, the *Massachusetts Review*, *Harpur Palate*, and more. His debut collection, *Short Houses With Wide Porches*, was published by Shady Lane Press (a program of The Jack Kerouac Writer-in-Residence Project). Pine Row Press will publish his second collection in December 2023.

Kari Wergeland, who hails from Davis, California, is a librarian and writer. Her work has appeared in many journals, including *New Millennium Writings*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Chariton Review*. Her chapbook, *Breast Cancer: A Poem in Five Acts*, has been named an Eric Hoffer Book Award Finalist.

J.P. White has published essays, articles, fiction, reviews, interviews and poetry in many places including *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Agni Review*, *Catamaran*, *APR*, *Salamander*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Georgia Review*, *Southern Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Water-Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Willow Springs*, *Crazyhorse*, *Peripheries*, and *Poetry* (Chicago).

Donald Wildman is a retired English Instructor, having worked most of his career at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Erin Wilson's poems have recently appeared in *deceMBER magazine*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Shore*, *Verse Daily*, and *Valparaiso*. Her first collection is *At Home with Disquiet*; her second, *Blue*, is about depression, grief and the transformative power of art. She lives on Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory in Northern Ontario, Canada.

Caitie L. Young (they/them) is a poet and writer from Kent, Ohio. Caitie is currently studying creative writing in the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts program and teaching workshops as the Wick Poetry Center Graduate Fellow.

Alessio Zanelli is an Italian poet who writes in English. His work has appeared in over 200 literary journals from 17 countries. His sixth collection, titled *The Invisible*, will be published in 2023 by Greenwich Exchange (London). For more information please visit www.alessiozanelli.it.



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