



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

POETRY 2024

Grand Prize Winner

Carol O'Brien

with Contest Judge

Jeannine Hall Gailey

Fall/Winter 2024

ATLANTA REVIEW

at the Georgia Institute of Technology

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WELCOME

Dear Friends—

Michael S. Moos writes in his poem “The Tundra Swans” that “the swan will fly with the wind, with no thought of falling.” That’s how I’m approaching my new position at *Atlanta Review* as I take over the editorship from Karen Head. I’m flying with no thoughts about falling.

It’s daunting—but exciting!—to be writing my first letter to you as Editor. I’ve been a part of the *Atlanta Review* “family” since 2016, when *AR* came to be housed at Georgia Tech. Serving as Managing Editor under Karen’s brilliant and generous tutelage, I learned a lot about running a journal. (Thanks, Karen!) It’s *really hard*. Not only is there the day-to-day work of managing our website, social media, and correspondence, and wrangling Submittable, I get to find guest editors for the Spring international issues and judges for the Fall issue, keep up with our senior readers, and proofread, typeset, and send each issue to the printer.

But all of that is worth it because it gives me the amazing opportunity to choose poems from among the thousands that are sent our way each year. (In 2023 alone, we received over 3600 poems, and for 2024, we’re over 4300 poems and counting, and we still have three months of the year to go!) Being exposed to this much poetry by so many talented poets is a true privilege—so much good work is being produced in the world—and *AR* is committed to bringing you the very best poetry we can.

This year’s contest issue is no exception. We are so happy to feature Elina Kumra as the winner of the Dan Veach Prize for Younger Poets. Her poem “God Is My Love” moved us greatly. And our Grand Prize winner for the Poetry International Prize, Carol O’ Brien, brings us a sensitive and stunning portrayal of *Jane Eyre*’s “madwoman” in “The Woman in the Attic.” We are so grateful for our judge (and past *AR* contributor), Jeannine Hall Gailey, for choosing among the 26 exceptional finalists. I think you’ll see when you read the finalists’ work that Ms. Gailey had a difficult choice to make.

And of course, our regular submissions will delight you with their variety and scope. Gregory Emilio's "Regarding Sappho's Fragments," for instance, reminds us about how the words of one of our greatest poets from the ancient world have been repurposed into mummy wrappings (!). Dion O'Reilly's "Ringo Starr" offers a paean to the most unloved Beatle. And Michelle Matz's poem "Storm" is particularly timely, on the heels of Hurricane Helene and the devastation it's wrought throughout the Southeast.

I will say that there seems to be a theme with the poems this time around—quite a number of them feature animals. It was not a deliberate choice but it's funny and interesting how the poems resonate with each other in this "poetry zoo." It makes me wonder if we might try offering themed sections in the future. I'd love to hear your thoughts about that.

I hope you enjoy reading the issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Feel free to send me comments or suggestions to my email, jc.reilly@lmc.gatech.edu. I'm always happy to connect!

Yours in poetry,

JC

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Yellow Study

With thanks to Shira Erlichman

some claim god said "let there be light." god tells me
that's just a nasty rumor. god hints they had a hand
in yellow though, in the dulled burning of a star,
its dilution. yellow's descent is more serious
than I thought it would be. I took yellow
for a fool. I am at least a little self-obsessed
so I want to say I know her, but yellow
is more important than me. yellow transcends.
I witness it. I watch it go sour. a lemon is a soprano
(obviously). I scrape a fingernail against
yellow's rind and a high g splits the sky.
my lips pucker despite myself. my mouth wets.
I know again desire. yellow came to be the color
of cowardice. there are lots of theories
how. a popular one involves the yellow-
bellied-sapsucker, an easily startled bird
who sups the life out of trees. this is the part
where my beak breaks the skin
of the living. I am 10 and sallow faced. I am
afraid. today it is a house fire. tomorrow it is
the question of who I would save first. always
it is the rush of heat brought on by a pretty girl's
hands. my lips pucker despite myself. america is
america so here yellow means to yield. at a stoplight
I feel the body of every driver push against
the container of the hue. yellow fits
and starts. it screams its way out of a baby
blanket. I am at its mercy. you have to be
a particular type of person
to place yellow in your wedding palate
and I am a particular type of person. my vows
go like this: I yolk you. I honeycomb you. I
Waffle House receipt you. yellow humors

me. when placed on a record player
yellow goes to the tune of La Vie en Rose
(ironic). in the center of it all, yellow
unrelents. sunflower. banana skin. piss.
my love is the color of a threat.

Shay Alexi

Poética

For Tita and all my Mothers

Jalapeños, cilantro, and lime—
aguacate to soften the zing.
I add salt, garlic, and rhyme,

marrying spice & verve 'til they sing
all the stories my madres bled.
I blend, birth green like a stanza in spring.

Craving grain, I lay tortillas in the bed
of my comal, red fingertips flipping hot
maíz, no sweat, every burn unsaid

but loud as la cocina where you taught
me with kneading hands & gliding feet
what *mezclar* meant: massage what we've got

into a mess of belleza. I repeat
your process, Suzy Q across the floor
to las sazónes of a salsa beat.

I find Nayarit by building sabor,
its music a guide, meeting new ritmo
in molcajete, mashing out dolor.

Here, vibrant salsa spills green & spells home.
Every recipe emits a romance
simmered in your cocina. Our palates grow

with cayenne-kick, the dips of our dance—
my veins traced with tradition, I twirl
aromatic herbs, pepper & prance

with kitchen-flair, like poetry unfurls
itself from gloom, antique hunger attuned.
I feed now like águila, maternal—

appetite coalescing in full spoons
& brimmed chips—like botanas, guitar's
agave as live soundtrack, the croon

of mariachis we find in pan-scars,
habanero's revenge, salt of sea,
champurrado's thick heat. Even afar,

I pick fruits & chiles from a tree
firm in its tierra—never rebel
against my innate potpourri.

Yo escucho mi nombre, unquelled,
waltzing within whispers of thyme.
I hear verse—en tu voz—its sure spell.

Alfredo Antonio Arevalo

The Dog Considers Solitude

Outside my door, the dog exhales,
a long, wet sigh. She longs
to be this side of the closed door,

to lick my bare shins in the strange,
repetitive ritual that soothes her in a way
I will never fathom, while it distracts me

from my own obsession with words and paper
and pens. She listens to my murmuring
as I chase swirls of ink over the lifeless page.

Longing for scents of crotch and armpit,
flavors of dirt and peppermint soap,
morning coffee and last night's garlic sweat,

she grieves her solitude,
sniffs at the *No* I impose between us,
then licks the wood, which she can smell

once lived, as we do now—and, like us,
not forever.

Rebecca Baggett

Pigeons

in particular,
this green-gilded gammy one
on Platform 4, these heart-shaped
and holdable bodies that break into bitter
airborne freight, also posing as the ring
of my sister's phone, the clack of her
wedding band picking it up: a flap
announces the silence that follows
the holding of the line, I watch the bird stagger through the sky
(the drain between
ground and cloud); my sister
and I are not speaking, but
sometimes, I call her on
the phone, I weigh
that in my
hand

Jessa Brown

Owl Mother

When the magnolia trees grow laden
with blooms that hang on branches
like glops of pink snow,

when the snow on the ground has melted
and allowed the purple crocuses
to unfurl their faces,

when the face of the earth grows warm
with the light of the March sun but the moon
remains a cold white ovum,

it is time for my eggs to arrive and I
line my nest with feathers plucked
from my very own breast.

Rachel Aviva Burns

At the theme park, I think about dying.

I watch a man scatter ashes
by a slow-winking hippo, broken
animatronic on a lily pad. Quick
he tips them from a film canister,
wrist flick into murky water.

Perhaps it once held photos, two lovers
smiling in sepia, walking hand-in-hand
with matching hats and sensible shoes.
Family Vacation 1989—his hands tremble
fumbling with the pocket zipper, hiding
evidence. Finished. One spirit laid to rest.

Once I tried to scatter you, but my feet
grew cold by hydrangeas outside the stadium,
under that waterfall, on the lapping Atlantic shore.
Still you wait, bored in my glove compartment
under the palm trees of a boiling parking lot.
A velvet drawstring bag I fear someone will find.

I guess I could leave you here with the pirates or
beneath the castle spires. But I want to keep you
a little longer. Can you hear the man's soft laugh
as he debarks? Dear—the world is just so small.

Adrienne Burris

The Death of the Parrotlet

*For Heather. With homage to Gerard Manley Hopkins
and John Updike.*

Not big enough to throw his weight around,
you barely felt him perch upon your hand,
but packing personality by pound,
his presence put the day at his command.
He'd streak from open cage across the room
like a bright and tiny comet to be where
you sat, then peep to drive away your gloom,
hiding his fern-green feathers in your hair.
Here, living obligates a thing to die.
His mortal moment passed, desires dispersed,
no future mundane hour will see him fly.
In this end, we perceive our ends rehearsed.
But he who quickened beauty in this bird
will never let death be the final word.

Duane Caylor

Nor'easter

Our roof the storm ladens
with rain & the sour barrage
of crabapples. Young
in my bed, the joists of me
rattled & prophesying
a tree collapsing the attic,
my legs homewrecked
& shriveling like the wicked
ruby-shoed witch.
Between my shutters,
lightning glimpses: the world
outside white-hot & new.
I try not to imagine
the windows fragile & breaking,
my parents sucked out
of their bedsheets;
how, even full of love
& uncrushed, I will not venture
down the dark hallway
to their bedroom to check—
too great my fear
of finding them whole
& twisting ruminantly
in the storm beyond
my reach.

Jackie Chicalese

wishlist

I want friends, but not just any kind. I want the hippie-clothed, crystal-collecting, constantly-changing-their-hair-color kind. The *I once had an emo phase* but *still somewhat do*, the went-vegetarian-at-a-young-age-because-they-felt-bad-for-animals, laughs at suicidal Gen Z jokes, dreams of Marxism or anarchy or fine I'll even settle for socialism kind.

I write all of this down in the hopes of the universe hearing, of whispering back to me “Hey, so I know this isn’t what you wanted but I’m afraid you’ll have to settle for a spiritually-skeptic agnostic who cooks you plant-based dinners, and sure I’ll throw in the free-spirited girl too. But don’t worry, to make up for it, you’ll have the same music taste.” And there will be nothing about how all of that will be all that I wanted—to feel like the world isn’t so lonely, like all these billions of people are here for more than they know.

Amanda Conover

Jilted

too cold that January to wander desolate paths
between exhibits at the National Zoo
my friend and I sought comfort
in the primate house, where she sat
raptly listening to a speaker
discuss mating behaviors of marmosets

broken hearted, a romance having ended
just days before, I detached myself
stood apart with my oversized black wool coat
hanging loosely off my shoulders
as I leaned against the glass of an empty enclosure
feeling sorry for myself & alone in the world
yet again unnoticed and wretched

a tap at the glass disturbed my misery
I looked right and left, and right and left again
saw only people watching marmoset antics
hearing the tap once more, I swiveled to look behind me
and fell in love afresh

the most handsome of males
muscular physique and massive shoulders
body a shimmering black with silver mantle
stood close with only a pane of glass between us
face inches from mine

our eyes met, our gaze held, my heart thumped
every nerve tingled with the electricity
promised in love stories
but he shook his head in disbelief—
or in disgust—he broke the gaze
turned his back to me and (once again)
knuckle-walked into the darkness

Daun Daemon

Regarding Sappho's Fragments

*Papyrus scrolls upon which the poems had been copied
had been torn into strips, lengthwise, and used in mummy
wrappings. Others had been used to stuff mummified
crocodiles.*

—Literature of the Western World, Vol. I

Here she lies, lyre-limbed, in pieces, she who first
hitched sweetness to a bitter edge, saw that love
often sucked, and told it like it was, so-called
tenth muse—archaic

diva. Bittersweet, she ogled trim-ankled
Aphrodite from afar, who seemed always
jogging off in the opposite direction,
mascara smeared, last

night's robes silvering the dust, hot mess ready
to make nations war for the sake of some epic
sex. Sappho plucked on, in tune to the sea's
unslakable salt

tombs. A palimpsest of blues, now she only
speaks in scraps, snatched from Egypt's boneyards,
ghosting—never deigning to return our texts.
Bittersweet to think

none of her music survives, and just one whole
poem among the funeral rags. To think she
sang for centuries, buried in some embalmed
croc's forgotten jaws.

Gregory Emilio

Some Days You Are

an endless string of knots. Some days I am
a dog with a tight collar. Some days life
is like labored breathing. Labors of love
should not be classified as labors.
I would knit you a scarf just to unravel

it. Are you trying to make me feel bad?
I don't feel bad for knitting a scarf, and
I don't feel bad for pulling it apart.
We should be allowed to destroy whatever
we create. From my tight dog collar hangs

a brass locket. There is a young girl
inside. She is as thoughtful and fragile
as a prosthetic eye, and she kneads my
angry veins for threads. She is knitting
our scarf. Unraveled or not, what I mean is,

I belong around your throat. What I mean is,
one day I will be a soft paradox
and you will love me better for it. But
most days I am a dog with teeth.
Let me hate you for a moment.
Let me let the moment pass.

Lily Anna Erb

Favoritism By Default

One door over, on our little street,
lives a severely disabled child, about ten.
Each morning, at exactly eight fifteen
the school bus arrives to pick him up.
Literally. A special lift at the back
pulls his wheelchair in, while his mother waits.

Across the street, the friendly president
of the civic association has just added
onto the brick home he shares with his family.
We went to a presentation once
that he hosted, about speed-bump placement
and rodent problems in the neighborhood.

Whenever it snows, the plows hit our street first
and sometimes come around a second time
while other places nearby remain untouched.
Is that because of the boy next door,
or the minor politician in our midst?
Maybe both, but certainly not neither.

John S. Eustis

Day 2: The Jog to Faro Al Gianicolo

Uphill cobblestones, a priest leans against the old
Vatican wall watching a man sleep in a patch of grass.

He's wrapped in plastic bags against the morning's cold
as distant hymns are heard from early morning's mass.

Along this hill of heads, the dead stare back blank-eyed
gazing inward but facing an expanse of terra cotta tile

roofs below the domes of Rome that are tightly crammed.
Below the eyeline, a subtle mosaic of sorts that dichotomize

the sacred from the profane even as morning bells chime.
As I run uphill, I watch my watch to keep an eye on time.

What circles here is metaphor, both seagull and crow above
the maze of streets with cobblestones worn from centuries

of pilgrims' feet. Some poor who came for food worthy of
salvation but others with weapons came for conquest, a memory

of wind that blew through these streets from different times
layered here as emperors became Visigoths then finally popes.

Once the Pantheon was the heart of Rome but now stripped
of marble that adorns the Vatican's floors for glory and for God.

I turn and crossing Farco Al Gianicolo begin my descent
and see below St. Peter's copula with its bronze façade

conscripted from the Pantheon's roof by Pope Urban VIII
to make both canons and craft the papal baldachin in leaves

but nothing stolen is ever lost but simply transformed like
the Greek Apollo who became the Roman god of prophecy.

Now, I hear the caw of crow and watch the sliding of the light
revealing new shadows as I pass. A few stragglers from Sunday

service wander by and a lover strokes his lover's hair beside
an umbrella tree as I jog my way down to cross the one way

street to San Pietro. Sunlight illuminates a pigeon in the causeway.

Chapman Hood Frazier

Chosen

For Ahavah

I.

You were composed in a Petri dish
from your mother's egg and my sperm
beside cultures of your possible siblings.
In a climate-controlled room,
a physician studied you, a particle
beneath his powerful microscope.
He chose you. I asked why
not the fourth embryo? He warned,
"too much living material."
You then were implanted in your mother
and your potential siblings were frozen for years
before she and I gave them to science,
feeling a strangely tangible grief.
I tell you this so that you might know yourself:
you are the most natural of unnatural selections.

II.

The day you were born, I unwrapped you
from your pink-striped blanket
and lay on the hospital couch.
On my bare chest, I rested you,
your faint breaths on my nipple,
your cheek so soft against my ribs,
your warm body like a heating pad.
In one hand, I cupped your head
that you couldn't yet support
and felt fuzz that soon would fall away.
In the other, I squeezed your little feet.
There, in fluorescent light,

you opened your eyes, revealing
their blue-gray pigment. In your swirl,
I saw myself, so I swam.

Daniel Ginsburg

When I Think About There Ever Being Someone Else

after Vievee Francis

When someone you love dies
a part of you dies with them.
I read that in a grief support group pamphlet.
Really? I mean, really?
The truth is a huge chunk of you goes.
A Texas-sized piece
of you as Greenland breaks off, sizzles
all at once, flooding the seas
with everything you'll never hold again.
Put that in the pamphlet.

If I said, I will never love
again, would it be
because I couldn't, or
because I wouldn't allow myself
to let the wolves
gaze with hunger and lust
at the sight of my chest, with its still
beating heart?

They're out there, waiting.
Aching for scarlet against the snow.

Phil Goldstein

Parallel Connection

I take in the dusty lavender glow
that surrounds fig trees at the edge of the yard,
Celeste and Brown Turkey stretch
their necks to see which will grow
to high heaven's door first.

In a few weeks, I will harvest
the bruised looking pear-shaped globes
to garnish my granola, or yogurt, to devour
with crumbly stilton cheese.

I understand the fig is really a flower
inverted, one that turns on itself and blooms
inside the fig shell.

Did I plant these fig trees
because I relish
the taste as it crosses my tongue,
or because I sought a symbol.
After all, I believe in multiple meanings.

Take this agate that I wear on a necklace
next to my heart. The one I keep close
for grounding, for the balancing of energies.

I feel like the fig curling ever inward
on these sweet amethyst afternoons.

Peggy Heitmann

I Am Cephalopod

More strange to you than any demon god,
eight limbs covered in pucker-up suckers
that can touch, taste, and smother,
each arm with its own agenda.
Venomed beak, sharp as a harpy,
I pour myself through your keyhole,
fold like a balled up sock.
I'm a shape-shifting hickey-giver,
kaleidoscopic supernova of liquid ripple.
My colors flash like a jumbotron.
Jet-powered, I mystify—watch me disappear
in a puff of smoke!

You wonder what meteor I rode on in
but don't I sleep, eat, pee just like you?
I take pride in *my* garden too.

And if you could see how I tend my young
you would call me the soul of devotion—
cave ceiling, thick with eggs like tiny light bulbs
glowing with eight-legged filaments.
For as long as it takes, til the end of my days,
I'll fast for them, never leaving my post,
bathe them in my gentle siphon-flow,
groom them with my tentacles tips,
protect them until they drift away
like so many wriggling milkweed seeds.

And doesn't my cobalt blood
run in veins just like yours?
Don't my three hearts ache when they go?

Angie Hexum

Offering

In Guatemala, in Chichicastenango,
flower sellers lined the steps rising
to the doors of the *Iglesia de Santo Tomás*.
The Maya who had come to market
left offerings of incense, maize, and bottles
of rum wrapped in corn husks on the stairs.

In a smokey, perfumed haze, a young girl
stood cloaked, looking into the distance, perhaps
imagining her future, as your son may have,
Abraham, gathering kindling in the morning mist,
unaware he was your intended sacrifice.

May the shame of all the ages stain your name,
may it fall forever upon you, you who should have
cried, *I will not, will not do this thing you ask,*
not even for you, Lord.

Don Hogle

Bottle Tree

There's thirteen cobalt-blues, upside down and sipping on the jagged ends of dead branches—included are Phillip's Milk of Magnesia, Sanford's/Radical Cure, and a latticed Diamond Poison bottle. Our sun-catcher citizenry counts, among its crystal numbers, a fair few of humanity's vintage metal-colorations: kind-brown Nickel glass, purpled Manganese, green Uranium, pinkish Erbium, bright red Selenium, golden Cadmium. Anything—mined out of leaden earth—that made for pretty might have been piped and paddled into hand-blown shape. Hard to imagine what happened to the multitudinous mouths faithfully drinking from translucent advertisements of health.

There are containers with skulls & crossbones bubbled up on their glassy skin, wells of tree-bole magic ink and elixir, chemists' dreams of brighter days embossed and promising pain panaceas; creosote cordials emboldened with testimony and crushed pepper. Others were once proven antidotes for coal & tar-lungs, spoiled liver complaints, for the grippe, and the joint-rage of rheumatism. There was a time when simple trusting people imbibed lightning bolts, heavenly rewards.

In the bright light of day, the antique vessels still shimmer, dryly pouring their promises of purity: emulsions, liniments, vitamins, animal organs; salts blended with syrups, tonics beholding to astringents of juniper. At night—the bottles stir, rattle with the Old Ways, continuously capturing tiny evil spirits flying in, drinking up. The tree's centerpiece bottle is the only one stobbed straight toward God's broad sky: ancient amber, bound with iron, carbon & sulfur. Nobody touches that one—we know, too well, the poisonous contagions fuming there. Safer to stand away

and admire the ones you can name aloud: peppermint emollient,
tincture of iodine, Our Good Doctor Daystar's Liquid Wizardry,
“guaranteed to oil the snake and gears and years that ail ya.”

Scott T. Hutchison

What Lands Unbidden

Unlike a mole, a kiss
is concerned with where

it lands. Still freckled
shoulders know

a wild little known
to grasshoppers

dispatched to their green
luck. Only like trespassers

startle so sincerely.
And whatever was eased of

the photon bounding
the sun, too, I am eased of.

This wild the world rounds
up in a year, and calls

a year. This wild dies soon as
it flecks your neck, and calls it

a life.

Letitia Jiju

If this is the Last Day

My cardinal calls for a full feeder
 perched on top of the arbor.
He knows the special seeds
 I pour and hang
in the first rays of sun that glide along
 new-leafed branches.

Honeysuckle goldens my breath,
 a yellow warbler's buzzy song,
a rattler curling under yew.
 The quarter moon fades
in the blues of the morning
 as shadows pool on the knoll.

Blackberry brambles leap
 over the railing impatient
to bloom right after dogwood winter
 as if notching the last days.

I pull Virginia creeper clawing iris,
 those saber-shaped leaves
next to the tridents of poison ivy.

Trucks rush the highway's promises.
 The neighbor's mutt pads
past the driveway on her daily routine.

Today's conductor announces
 the arrival of a soul train,
its separate compartments.
 I will wait at the rusted rails,
shuffle feet,
 listen for the horn's blow.

Helga Kidder

Wind

The small room is suddenly alive with a moan
whistling through the old panes—
a groan and a rattle, fierce and low

when the wind blows frigid from the river—
more Arctic than we would think
in the hot glitter of the city—

wailing, menacing, and heard by the many
huddled in apartments by their loose windows
and overworked radiators.

The wind speaks an otherworldly tongue
to anyone with ears, not just to little ones
or to old ones prone to nervous fright.

Is there only fragile glass between us and this—
which is howling our name
and the names of eight million more?

Kathryn Kimball

The First Time

a man touched me, I grew light-headed: to think he possessed a power that I held myself all along. The male finch on that dark green pine makes me dizzy, as do the grasses waving to the sky, leaning toward the hills then away, back and forth. Such seduction. I have always been in love with the word *desire* but embarrassed by desire itself. The taut string between them—signifier, signified—quickens my breath as does what I can see of your hips above mustard-colored pants, yellow like that finch, mustard like muscle, *mustard muscle* *mustard muscle*, bear with me now, it makes some sense, where the muscle bends and you are slightly ticklish, and I move my hands there, slender grasses on the brown hills, you are the hills, I am the grasses, the wind is desire, no, no, that's wrong, I'm the wind, I am the wind—

Ashley Seitz Kramer

Deer Time

It's 4 p.m. and they are
nibbling on grass and leaves
ears pricked, scanning
for dangers that lurk
on the other side of the creek.
My brain says it's too early
in the day for them to be out,
the sun is still too bright
and warm in the sky, it's still
too many hours until the safety
of dusk. I wonder where
I got that idea, who told me
that rule that the deer don't
seem to know or even care
about. I wonder what I'm too
early for, and if that, too,
is someone else's story I took
on as truth, and if the idea of early
or late is a fiction that's easier
to believe than to be fully
in the present. The deer meander
through the thin woods, their bodies
weaving between the leaves
and bare branches, and late-season
ferns, waving their short white tails
at my notions of permanence.

StarShield Lortie

Storm

*There is a marginal risk of severe and potentially
life-threatening storms between noon and 3:00 pm
—National Weather Service*

I have never understood how to rearrange
my life appropriately in life-threatening

uncertainty. Do I stay put? Is it ok to stop
at Walgreens and buy toothpaste even though

if I squeeze the tube and fold it like an accordion
I probably have enough until next Tuesday?

Yesterday, I sat on the back deck and watched
a tiny, ruby-throated hummingbird build a nest

beneath the oak's canopy. Aren't birds supposed to
sense impending storms through low frequency sound

waves and skip town? The problem is I learned to swim
inland, the small lake deep enough to hold my breath

underwater and count to three but too shallow to lose
the bottom, and now I don't understand the scale

of things properly. The storm will turn violent,
wash away roads, tear roofs off houses, drown the living,

and I will spend hours watching out my back window,
grieving the wrong thing.

Michelle Matz

Old Agnostic's Praise Song

Why choose me, knowing I don't believe?

Your long arm casting half a heart, setting free this day
in pricks of light and miracles

:
that I awoke again this morning
that my feet can find the floor
that I can find my feet at all—

and when I find them, free of tangled dreamsheets
and the sleeping dog, do you see

:
how prayerfully I lower them
(though I refuse to pray)
toward worn black leather slippers—

:
how carefully I pour my coffee
how I honor the law of gravity
not a drop allowed to spill?

:
how reverently I line up and count
my many modern-science pills
and wash them down—

:
a tart and tingling glass of sparkling
Thou Shalt Nots

If I leave my house, stroll out onto the world
will I find another day of random blessings
not to believe in?

:
accordionist on the corner
squeezing out Beer Barrel Polka

little kids cartwheeling
past Tamales Celestiales
open before noon to feed us all

I can't be bribed, you know that. Still

:
no drive-by shot has killed me yet
bank robbers and bolt lightning wait
until I leave to strike

Do I believe in luck, in accident?
I say, why not? Still

I believe

:
in long walks by the water, bare toes
in gritty sand, a tide-washed log to sit on

the tennis ball my dog
drops at my feet

Always I believe in evening's long
and glittering arc

Am I your penance? If so, what is mine?

:
brown pelican, blue heron, snowy egret fishing
skyline, bridge, and mountains
always and never changing

:
o blessed circling planet o blessed watchful
sun o blessed late-day shadows

pine and cypress
moon riding shotgun
at my shoulder

Sara McAulay

Negative Space

When a grandmother tree
falls she
tears a hole through

the web of forest,
a web thick
with branch

and ghost,
overlapping
radiations rippling

through the centuries
of each
split seed.

As she softens,
saplings
grow

in her body.
Peel damp fibers
and sloughing skin.

Their heart roots will reach
soil before she
finishes decaying and

at the end of my life
the young trees
will float

tall and sturdy,
anchored,
bowed.

Empty of
wholly shaped of
their birth.

Laura McCoy

Redtail

The first surprise that he was there
at all. We had glimpsed them in treetops,
perched on wires above the roads,
circling among clouds, watching
for any movement on the ground
that might be breakfast. Never before
this close, just yards from our front door,
next to the Chinese cherry so lately leafless.
The second surprise his size, so hard
to comprehend from a distance. Yet nothing
majestic here. This is a reality show,
earthy as excretion. Whatever
that creature was, it's now a meal,
pulled apart with such total absorption
that my approach, camera and binoculars
in hand, hardly registers. I squint to identify
the long thing dangling from his mouth,
wonder aloud if it's a rodent's tail.
You think it's an intestine. We watch, riveted,
this transubstantiation from dead flesh
to sinew, beak, and wing.

Joyce Meyers

As if they have been waiting for me,

these stones, piled into a wall by
a nineteenth-century farmer,
reach out with lichen-covered hands
eager to shake mine, extend a welcome
to a lone hiker in their woods—
so long has it been since they felt anything
warm-blooded, living, anything
that could remind them of that farmer,
of his callused, roughened fingers
that coaxed them out of the mud, cradled them
into crevices, graced them with purpose—
only to abandon all, fields, farm—
even this wall,
not understanding that the land remembers,
shares secrets, confides
in vowels of stone.

Carol Milkuhn

The Morning Light (after Cavafy)

That loft near the Flatiron, how well I knew it.

Once a millinery factory with its lopsided floors
and tin ceilings, touch-and-go plumbing.
You were one of the last to take a payout
so it could be converted it into a posh condo
for young families, though most units remain
dark when I walk by at night, undoubtedly
second or third homes for wealthy foreigners.

That loft, so strange, with its ghostly creaks,
damp from leaks—all spruced up in leftovers
from your set design gigs: worn velvet wallpapers,
patinaed mirrors, even a taxidermized peacock
once featured in a Bloomingdales' holiday window.

I wonder if you took it with you when you left, if
its feathers still gleam like your eyes in the morning light.

I never asked if you named it. Or what kind of hats
the factory had made. This is what I think about
whenever I stroll by those new unlit apartments.

All that morning light wasted. How I watched it paint
your face as you slept. Wishing you could see what I saw.

Michael Montlack

bobby and billy and buddy and ben

after e. e. cummings

bobby and billy and buddy and ben
ferried to fire island for another season

and bobby swore he would find a new man
but came home only with an enviable tan,

and billy swam daily alone in the sea,
attempting to drown his love for bobby,

and buddy forgot to gaze at the stars
those nights he went cruising the beach in the dark

while the guys at the bar kept circling ben
who declared this summer he was done with men

and still they'll decide to return next year,
to this bizarre little island, so cozy and queer.

Michael Montlack

Tundra Swans

See their white wings flashing in the sunlight and cold air
high above the winter fields, with a grace beyond fear.
One day when they are far from this place,
one of them will also continue, as if not alone.
In a dance with gravity and the delicate dangerous thermals,
thirsty for the distance between continents,
the swan will fly with the wind, with no thought of falling.
A voice in the dark of my skull, some wild part of me
follows.

Michael S. Moos

Ringo Starr

You weren't the one I loved. I must confess:
I didn't have the depth yet. It was Paul, of course—
his droopy eyes and putty lips,
babylike, unthreatening, despite the then-
brutal sexiness of the songs. When
I thought I'd grown up, I loved
John, genius rebel, loved
how dismissive he was, naked
with his thick-haired wife for weeks,
legs and arms wrapped 'round her,
or posed for Leibovitz like a suckling pig.
I loved how he'd make a scene, but when
I'd busted through my anger, thought I'd found
something like a third eye, it was George
the soulful one, I adored,
the one whose guitar gently wept...
Oh, the many faces of a false god, fragments
of a false self, everything I craved:
Paul, pretty. John, smart. George, the Seeker.
Ovid said, *The cause is hidden. The effect is visible...*
So now, Ringo, you're lookin' better—
sticks as quick as a sylph's flickering wings, invisible,
till we wake up to the impossible
source of it all, not you, of course, but you were closest—
off-beat mystery I barely noticed, inverse glamor,
southpaw of darkness in a right-hand world,
alive with a trick rhythm—you did your best
with the kit you were given.
So now, when I hear your lacy pattern
bring "Come Together" together,
those other sweet boys—
they're waves—
and you're the ocean under.

Dion O'Reilly

In the Sequoias

If you venture deep, you hear only
whispers of lace-needed branches
 of the giant trees.
Nothing fills your eyes but this green canopy
you stare up into, dazzled.
You cannot even see their crowns.
They are so tall, fog lives in them.

You sit on a thick-furred log
but never say the words
 you could belong here
you with shallow roots who covet this Eden
where time's bedded in bark and burl,
marked by murrelet and owlet, by moss,
 by mushrooms after rain.

Sunlight sinks low. Shadows lengthen.
You linger at the edge of one
blackened, hollowed out by fire,
measure its breadth and strength,
see new shoots sprung from that taken for dead,
feel with your hands the smoothness
 of healed scars.

All the way back a fern-lined path,
you keep turning back around.
You never imagined you would be the one found.

Beth Paulson

Rescues

Some people said I was kind
to rescue the little white dog.
It never felt that way. Soft
tawny ears, smart eyes, I was
hers from the start.

Eva did have issues. Dumped
on a city street, her small body
stuffed with pups, her milky teats
dragging across the pavement,
she was marked.

For months, she tracked my every
move, shaking and screaming
like a creature on fire.
She needed special care
but then, so did we.

Knowing nothing of the virus
shutting us in, she danced about
on hind legs, raced through
the house, making us laugh.

The days grew longer. Fewer
people were dying on machines
with masked strangers by their side.
My husband sat in his chair,
headed toward his own end.

I tucked quilts around him.
Eva sat on his lap, hour after hour,
keeping him company,
keeping him warm.

Tonight, like every night now,
Eva will curl up against my belly,
her eyelids twitching as she
follows her dreams.

I'll stroke the hollow space
where my husband once lay,
tell him of the happenings
of this day that has passed.

Kathryn Ridall

Squid Jigging

Say those words out loud—squishy, soft,
two accents, like two eyes a boat's lights.
Get the scene: a boat's lights shine at night
on sea, where squids rise, soft, squishy, light-
drawn, skin camouflaging as they surface,
pulsing dots of color, from dark to sparkling.
Jig lures tempt them to latch on, pulled up
to become starters for your next meal.
Sometimes, what lies deep shouldn't surface
when bright lights lure. Hold to the dark,
the depths, memories of the one who got
away, the one who didn't.

Susan Shaw Sailer

Chihuahua in Prati

How that ant of a dog can yowl!
I'm afraid she'll give me away.
She ravels her leash around the wicker
chair, hurls her penny-weight
at passersby while her owner tightly
sips cappuccino. The angels watch
tetchily from their lintels.
Once these streets were Nero's
fields. Now they're the fields
of the red-heeled.
The grapefruit and pistachio palazzos
match the smug cakes in the café window.
A street lamp hovers, oneiric,
between two rooftop gardens.
A diamond perched on the dog owner's
knuckle juggles sunbeams.
I've peered into the windows of jewelry shops
with high-carat names,
wondered if I should turn myself in.
"He's offering you everything," say baffled friends.
Because who doesn't want a man
who drives to New Jersey before dawn
for your favorite strawberry tart—
so sweet it would make you sick
if it weren't the real thing.
The chihuahua howls with a sound like spades
striking metal. She doesn't give a shit
that she's swaddled in pink and her harness
is studded with rhinestones. All she wants is
a taste of that man's ankle—or that one's thigh.
And she'll rend her lungs to get it.

Julia Salem

Trauma Bonds

We grew together, tucked
our hair behind our ears, tucked
our father's anger in our minds
next to our mother's fear
without ever realizing their voices
braided within our own.
We had the same wavy locks,
the same strands to untangle.

Sometimes I'm jealous my sister
doesn't feel this pain anymore, the work
of ripping shame at the seams,
the tedium of re-stitching
your own narrative. She chose
illicit chemicals instead and I
thought a lot about the absolute
slowness of her last breath
and how, in that moment,
her brilliant pink dyed hair
became the embers of her life.

These days are too busy
for me to sit around
in my head but when I rake
my fingers through my hair
I'm touching her. Her ghost
is my own face.

Melissa Holm Shoemake

A Guard at the Golden Gate Bridge Contemplates the Installation of Netting

The drop takes four seconds, time enough to reconsider before the shattered bones, the smashed organs. One in fifty survive. Typically they say they did rethink things on the way down—"I saw the water, cold and heaving, dark as oblivion, and I knew any problem I'd had, I could have solved, except this one." They accelerate at thirty-two feet per second per second past all possibility of revision.

As they've stood on the rail, fingers wrapped loosely around a cable, or sat, legs dangling into the void, I've spoken to them and sometimes found the saving words, but others, where one moment there was a man or woman or kid, the next there were only the railing and the horizon. And I was talking to myself.

The netting is taut stainless steel, built to resist wind and rain, salt and fog, and the weight of plummeting bodies. Landing on it would hurt, enough perhaps to deter even the most despondent from crawling to its edge and plunging from speech and choice.

Jumpers' most common occupation is student, next, teacher. What can't they grasp or explicate? Perhaps the same things

my words fail so often to fathom, on duty
or off. As far as I'm concerned, the netting
can't be finished soon enough.

Allen Stein

In a November Garden

Moss-covered stones
circle the wind
blowing through broomsedge
somewhere in time.
Cold stars
remember moonlight
falling on the grass—
the sound of jazz
in bare-branched trees
and drumbeats along the river—
but it was our garden
we were thinking of,
a November garden
once full of purple iris
and summer roses,
feathery birds
and honeysuckle.
Now a snowy owl
stares hard at the relentless farm
and scenic garden
almost ready to hold down
hard ruts for a speeding sleigh
almost ready
to chase night away

Jane Stuart

A man holding a rope tied to a boy underneath the ice

Even today I recognize my father's face in the mirror, desperate, determined. In the whirling snow of our backyard when I was ten. His mouth broken open, eyes wide, measuring out a thick rope in arm lengths against his chest, he stares past me. The Bay we lived on had frozen over. Three feet thick of salt ice. He had just asked if I wanted to cross the Bay with him. I agreed but now find a sorrow not just for him, but for that ten-year-old boy and how much he longed like his father to be accepted. Neither of us granting it to the other. Stricken with fear and excitement, we were going to cross the unimaginable in a snow squall: a half mile of frozen ocean that looked like so many white refrigerators on their sides with 10 yards of rope tied between us. I tried to cinch the knot tighter around my waist. Tried to look tough. The screaming sound of the wind sawing at the corner of our house was unearthly. And what I thought was a black garbage bag shooting past us was a Merganser cartwheeling head over tail, as though an invisible string pulled it so fast, its wings looked broken, twisting in all directions, before vanishing in the white. Both of us stopped at the same time in the middle - doom descending; that under my boots was over 200 feet of freezing black water as we watched huge curtains of snow cover and uncover the far shore. The summer houses blanched in deep grainy grey, their windows like dark sockets looking back at us, and my father far to my right, solitary, sometimes disappearing too, and knowing without knowing completely

he was a little in love with death. I would not know how little he knew of himself and that for so long I was no different. As we leaned into that freezing wind, I wondered what we could do if an ice cake should yawn open where one of us stood. I kept repeating two sentences A man holding a rope tied to a boy underneath the ice, a boy holding a rope tied to a man underneath the ice. My father bellowed over the screaming wind, "Let's go back, this is crazy!" The ice would flip and seal us from the other, and our rash need for praise. I walked like that for years, proving nothing.

Sean Sutherland

How the Love Story Ends

Dear Husband: You have cut out your face and inserted a fishbowl. Two birds fly above your head, but I am not forgiving you. Yes, I see the gasping goldfish inside the bowl. Please take your birds, the fish, the water, and your unshaven chin out of the blue living room and leave, let happen whatever happens to men who expect their women to wear their interests, to hold the man's needs in the crown on her head. Leave. Close the door behind you.

Perhaps we could work out a deal if you had ocean waves instead of graying hair, or if you had ice cream that I could scoop out of your face instead of that pathetic fishbowl. Also, if your ears weren't dying to be cleaned, I might reconsider. If you had a water fountain on top of your head, spewing crisp droplets—maybe.

You have no waves, no ice cream, no fountain. You are a desperate man with unclean ears, unshaven chin, and now you have no fucking face at all. I can't even unzip my mouth to spray out my disgust. Remember when butterflies flew from my skull? I still kept my face. I kept my eyeballs. I knew the sun was over my left shoulder. But you? Do you have any fingers left, any brain? Our story was simple: we met, we married, we had kids, they grew up and left, we sat across from each other at dinner. You became bored with my hair filled with empty shells and driftwood, so you left each evening to float down the swamp on top of old doors with the other faceless men. Yes, I opened the front door for you each morning and let you back in.

I'll buy you a paddle and a canoe but take your fishbowl and your goldfish and even the birds with you. See if you can find a woman with unopened eyes who will shave your head. When you find the right woman, you'll know because you'll see a black cat trying to climb the red wall of her face.

Terry Ann Thaxton

Coyote's Howl

A coyote lopes
across the snow covered cornfield,
his sideways glance searching
for a pheasant or rabbit.
He stops, sniffs,
and talks to the rising full moon.
Is his howl haunting?
Or is it the sound of sheer exuberance,
the thrill of freedom
to explore night's offerings?

Tammy Trusheim-Rahmiller

Housewife as an Eclipse

Under the nest of stars, thick cosmology hangs low
like piping in the basement. We're sluggish, we orbit
stillness, try to lay so quiet we blend in
with purpling sky. We are waiting for the fullest moon,
the one everyone told us to wait for. Watch the street,
it empties, too. We forget moons.

I forget you. Still it comes up, first on your phone, mapped
on the star chart, it blooms from the horizon, behind
the man who's planting daffodils. It's not pink, gold light
pops out like a penny, copper. I am awake
and I want to see it close, leave you to follow,
like the bear in the book who stands on a mountain peak.
Moon, what can I give you today when you are so round
you make me want to be something else, too. What color
will I be when I blossom, not pink, not girl, figure
in the sky, navy and still bright, lone shadow
passing by.

Sara Moore Wagner

If a Tree Falls in Israel

*after an untitled photograph by Rina Castelnuevo
published in The Forward on July 21, 2023*

Before a sickly tree is cut down
by our reluctant hands,
we pray like the movement of the sea:

toward Mecca, your forehead touches the prayer-rug
laid over sand, as my head and shoulders are draped
in a wool tallit facing Jerusalem.

There are no spoken words, just breeze and the rustle
of sand. We sway like branches of different trees,
and the biblical roots are deep within us.

Our toes curl in our lumberjack boots
as we proceed together toward the unhealthy trunk,
ill bark, peeling body, leaves deprived of growth,

no fruit bearing or budding, little shade.
No gifts, and now the tree is tipping,
its possible damage imminent.

When a tree must be cut down,
we eulogize its lifetime of sunsets,
the singular landscape this tree witnessed:

the birds and bugs who sheltered there,
lovers who lusted and smoked, rested alone,
children who climbed and swung in hammocks.

Here, tree, is where shadow absorbs the tangible,
where a hole covered by new dirt
becomes just another place to burrow, to disappear.

Jamie Wendt

Snow Carrots

in Fukaura
tastes sweet
shiwase
happiness
to the taste
in a Meguro restaurant
even the skin is eaten
and the greens
the flavor
juicy
tastes like a sweet potato
even eaten with ice cream
as a dessert
so much can be done
with carrots

Paula Yip

Second Chance

I don't know why the doublefile
viburnum has decided to lay out

a new crop of blossoms this week
on a backdrop of maroon leaves

about to fall except it's 73 degrees
and sunny today and has been

all week and maybe the woody
old bush figured *what the hell*

might as well try once more
before frost shuts me down

remembering spring buds sprayed
with sriracha to keep squirrels

from gobbling them all before
they had a chance to challenge

the chill winds and late sleet of April
and after that blooms didn't really

come on in full force so maybe now
since it's been so hot probably

from too much CO₂ the leaves
are determined to hold on

and juice still pumps up through
the cambium to give twigs one last

chance to remind fat squirrels
and November's leaf-mold breath

who really runs the show so *what*
the hell the ancient creature reckons,

branches wagging in the breathy breeze,
if this is global warming bring it on.

James K. Zimmerman

DAN VEACH PRIZE FOR YOUNGER POETS

2024 Winner

ELINA KUMRA

“God is not a noun but a verb” writes Elina Kumra in the startling and rich prose poem “God Is My Love.” Indeed, that declaration seems exactly right, for we see through the compassionate eye of the poem the actions of an enterprising South Asian woman moving through the vicissitudes of life. Hers is a spiritual existence that is full of action; the subject of the poem “evade[s],” “spills,” “comprehends,” “laments.” Yet the poem is quiet, thoughtful, taking an almost documentary approach to its subject, as Kumra layers details on details. It’s the sympathy at the heart the heart of the poem that makes it resonate so deeply for the reader, and I know you will enjoy it.

Congratulations to our finalists as well: Israel Okonji for “If I Was Superman I Could Even Weave the Eiffel Tower with My Webs When I Get Bored;” Marthaeus Perkins for “After Visiting Jasper, Texas;” and Sampurna Samanta for “Echoes of a Broken Dawn.”

JC Reilly

God Is My Love

Should she shed tears, it's because seven children have extracted the marrow from her bones, the blood of her run thin. Should she evade sleep, it's because Brahma circles her quarried womb like a vulture, bends her over like a supplication, pours her to earth as like a stream. If she spills out of herself, into herself, repeats herself like a mantra, Paramatma prem mera hai (God is my love), it's because the light of the world sits on her bed, making her aware of her wholeness before it splinters into pieces.

If mud spatters her sari, if her head blues from banging the floor, if her words stumble over her tongue, it's because she comprehends the gravity of love, of a man's hanging body dragging eternity down, suffering pressing his temples like an inverted stupa. If she roils the peace between temple aisles, it's because the pundits' tongues are incapable of silence. If she laments it's because she's received word of a girl in Bengal, set alight for hearing with sacred spirits.

Should she amass wealth in her spice-shop and brewery, it's to procure purity from her husband, maids for her children, voyages to Bengal, Banaras, Haridwar. And if her heart aches over a splinter of wood from the Bodhi tree, it's because it enlightened one man with a lotus in his hand. If her weeping falls before Amma of Kerala, it's because she feels herself believed, at last, by a woman who knows God is not a noun but a verb: the birthing, causing, doing, dying, falling, loving, moving, rising. Everything.

Elina Kumra

POETRY 2024

International Poetry Competition

GRAND PRIZE \$1,000

CAROL O'BRIEN

International Publication Prizes

Susan Nisenbaum Becker * Andrea Carter Brown
Sara Burge * Johnson Cheu * Tara Connor
Tara Das * Carol V. Davis * Linda Drattell
Tyler Dunston * Linda Flaherty Haltmaier * Judd Hess
Matt Hohner * Hollis Kurman * Jo-Ann Mort
Dorothy Neagle * Terri Niccum * Pat Owen
Diane Wilbon Parks * Margaux Paul * Wanda S. Praisner
Sonya Schneider * Matthew J. Spireng * Beth Toner
Terry Watada * Christopher Watson

International Merit Awards

Amanda Auchter * Debbie Benson * Carole Berkson
Heather Bourbeau * Meredith Cottle * Sara Dudo
Joanne Durham * Rebecca Faulkner * Danielle Fleming
Bodie Fox * Terri Glass * Alex Goodson * James Hall
P M F Johnson * Angela Kirby * Mel Konner * Amy Lerman
Michael Loderstedt * Pat McCutcheon * Rekha Mehra
Veronica Patterson * Merlin Ural Rivera * James Robinson
John Schneider * Christopher Stewart * Lee Stockdale *
Meredith Stricker * Shin Wantanabe

Welcome to Poetry 2024

Winner: Carol O' Brien's "The Woman in the Attic"

I liked this persona-based spin on Charlotte Brontë's original archetype of the "madwoman in the attic," Bertha Antoinette Mason. There was a little bit of retelling of the story to set the scene, but in an interesting way, including the way that women and particularly women of color were treated in England in Brontë's time. It had terrific fire imagery, and from the first line I was hooked. The ending really raised the stakes in the poem, highlighting the betrayal and self-destruction of her character, helping us to reframe her story from her point of view.

Runner Up: Terry Watada's "Kiyama -cho: my father's home"

The sense of loss and nostalgia in this poem stays in the background, while the imagery reminded me of a watercolor portrait of the speaker's father's Japanese village. The structure and form complemented the subject matter. The movement of the poem's scene from Japan to Canada, and the things that are lost inherent in that movement, is palpable. A gentle, beautiful poem of the diaspora.

Special Mention: Johnson Cheu's "Formal Portrait"

This is a moving account of how difficult it is to unearth parent's histories through photographs.

Jeannine Hall Gailey

The Woman in the Attic

I am a mad majestic bloom
birthed beneath a fiery tropical sun,
a lone doctor bird
with radiant feathered wings
clipped along the ends,
just the shame left to fade in the
echoes of broken chiming bells.

Married more to the stone of the walls
an able man trapped me behind,
I bear the years through the heavy
clunk of lonely, measured silences,
my tongue shackled so long
I can no longer even speak to speak,
only laugh just to know my own voice.

We've all forgotten when I was alive in Jamaica,
when I was vibrant, beautiful, myself—
the heat of my life now shuttered, aging
and turned cold within this quiet cage;
I laugh how my husband thinks me the burden
as if a madwoman has any say
over who and what she becomes.

So while this dwindling flame flickers from
behind an angry tattered veil,
my empty hands curl out in the dark
to wait for any kindness in their clutch,
until after nights and nights of seeking,
I feel so vanished
I avenge, set fire, and disappear.

Carol O'Brien

Pieta

We can't get to the quarry's
cloud jammed surface spring fed dark
rock stairs built into the steep slope
to fling ourselves into the unknown
he needs his legs to tread water and arms
to push through the sunfish flashes clustering for bread
we know now we can't take for granted
his putting one foot in front of another
the natural momentum of a body falling forward
caught by the other leg and foot
we use the pool instead the last time he would swim
how he loved to freewheel down
the Ogunquit River at high
legs unanchored then he of air and water
now we make our way across uneven slate

to sit on the pool's half moon steps
slide our bodies in rippling the water's perfect skin
he's not my son I not his mother though
in intimacy's tangles aren't we all sometimes
those shadowy selves to the other
and he's not dead but dying
and I'm alive by a thread already grieving
he's in my arms cradled at neck and knees
hair haloing his face like the photo
of him sun ball behind his head a moon eclipsing
the sunburst he floats in the broken trees broken sky
fragments arms outstretched like bird wings legs dangling
stirs the water with his fingers kicks gently his feet not
to propel but to make a slow boil of drops
that flash like mirrors like mica in the sun
to scatter light that covers us all afternoon

this is something water does
I walk the concrete floor in circles from half moon steps to
the edge of the deep he's buoyant in my arms
almost weightless in this grief embrace in this buoyant cradling
we laugh I notice white birches birdsong splashes
smell of August rubrum lilies salt the leaf chandelier
filters and exudes a fine pale green
water to my chin on tiptoes before circling back one more step
and I could drown us both I'm not his mother
he not my son but I bear him
we float then touch down bounce touch down
until he's cold the pool sorrows everything softens
because this is the last because he can't because
he still hungers for something

Susan Nisenbaum Becker

Apples of the Earth

Pommes de terre in French; in German,
Kartoffeln, from the Italian *Tartufo*
for truffles, which potatoes resemble

Once, in Dublin, stumbling on a farm stand,
basket after basket of potatoes, different shapes,
sizes, in shades from red to beige to brown
to purple. The names struck me; wish I had
written them down. Colcannon tasted better
after that. On lunch break, women from offices
lined up at small sandwich shops, eating perched
at a counter, most to go. Brown bread
with nothing between slices but coleslaw.
Cheap, satisfying, tasty: I became a fan.

In Amsterdam, lines form outside narrow
storefronts that sell only small paper plates
of *frites* (called by their French name here, too)
topped with messy things, mostly plain
or curry mayonnaise. People stand around
fishing the fries out with little forks, trying
not to drip grease on their coats. Is horse
fat still the preferred frying medium?

When we invaded Iraq after 9/11,
the French refused to join our coalition.
In a fit of pique, Congress passed a law
renaming French fries "Freedom Fries."
That didn't last, although longer than
expected. All over the world, people
love *pommes frites*, not fried apples but
fried potatoes. Lost, their connection
to the soil, the distinctive texture,
flavor and color of each variety.

In seven years between 1845 and 1852,
when potatoes rotted in the ground, prey
to a new fungus, Ireland lost over a third
of its population to starvation, death,
and emigration. It took scientists
a hundred years to develop disease-
resistant varieties. Immigrants flood
Europe these days. In rural French
farmers' markets, vendors now spoon out
couscous from wide shallow pans like suns,
the last thing you buy before hurrying home.

In my local farmers' market all summer long
Ben sells a rotating variety of carrots, turnips,
rutabagas, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes,
and potatoes. A new kind—mottled red-
and-white-skinned like paint ponies, gnarled
but round, fit-in-the-palm-of-your-hand—
their name garbled in Ben's gruff low voice.
Sliced, the nutritious under-skin is deep
blood red, the flesh vivid white. Cooked,
the colors do not fade, the flavor sweet,
earthy. A meal in itself, these potatoes.

Andrea Carter Brown

I Sit and Think About Men

After Sharon Olds

This makes them very happy.

This makes my life very small but they like to remind me my purpose is to make them very happy.

Sometimes when I speak, I must remind them that I know
not all men.

Sometimes I cannot speak because I'm exhausted from having to remind them I know *not all men.*

Only because I literally do not know all men.

I make myself breakfast and because I make it for myself my eggs are just the way I like them.

My eggs have sloshed inside my ovaries all my life and that's just the way I like them.

They actually are required to be just the way the government likes them.

My government doesn't know how a female human's reproductive organs work.

My government is mostly men which means I spend a lot of time thinking about men

and how they have no idea how a female human's reproductive organs work.

Most men don't know women are born with all our eggs.

Some men think women lay eggs.

Some men think women pee out of our vaginas.

I sit and think about that.

I doubt they sit and think about women unless it's ways to make
sure women keep having babies out of our pee holes

and stop thinking about it

and stop talking back

and keep us on our backs

and make homes nice for men.

When I think too much about it I make a home for hate.

I don't want to but it's difficult.

I wonder about the politician who said rape was like the weather.

I wonder about the politician who said if rape, like the weather,
was inevitable, just lie back and enjoy it.

Then I think of how my mother tried to teach me to shoot a gun.

I think about an old boyfriend who took me to the firing range
with his Mac-10 and really got off
on the idea of teaching me to shoot his big gun.

I wonder if he ever feared a girlfriend who really got off on
firing a big gun.

I wonder how many dead women's bodies is acceptable to men
who don't know how living women's bodies work.

I think about the politician who said women's bodies were magical and knew when they were being raped.

I think about how that politician thought women's bodies were so magical that they could *shut that whole thing down*.

I think about unicorns and Lisa Frank.

I wonder why men think women don't know what to do with women's bodies if women's bodies are so goddamned magical.

I think about all those dead women with magical unicorn bodies.

I wonder how many dead women.

I wonder how many bodies.

Sara Burge

Formal Portrait

In the one photo album that remains of her life in Taiwan,
my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother pose.
In the background, vines, a trellis. No stories of Mom
as a teenager sneaking out, climbing down the trellis

to meet a boy. Dates, Mother says, were formal, as were photos.
Portraits litter the album: her ready for a dance, another dance.
Personal cameras came later, in America. Posing for a portrait
with a boy, scandalous. That, Mother says, signaled an engagement,

marriage, inevitable. Others made that mistake; she did not.
Father exists only in their wedding photo. Both smiling, posed,
in rented suit and gown. Father's hair is sprayed, teased, slightly,
so he appears taller than her, a lifelong issue between them, height.

This portrait, like most others, shows nothing else.
My parents' youths exist in stories, not photos. Were wartime horrors
and other deprivations best left uncaptured, unspoken? History,
silent, lost, like other immigrants. That is both loss and cost.

Johnson Cheu

Proof

The sky is gunpowder gray, too dark to signify anything good,
especially now just after midday.

Ignoring as best I can a wind that chills, its icy fingertips sneaking
into my collar, up my sleeves,

I walk through the cemetery,
wishing for spring.

Leaves skirmish at my feet, reenacting battles
fought in the fall with more passion and greater numbers,

They spin in circles tight as a compass, and fly away at
unexpected angles, one by one.

Trees bow their heads before the furious wind like dishonorable
 husbands
caught in a lie, wishing they had leaves to hide their faces.

Toppled stones are broken teeth snarling from crusted,
dirty snow, when a spark of color pulls my eye away.

A tiny bird on a branch, feathers too bright for this day, is returned
from its winter home.

And so, it must be spring, for who am I to question a brave and
golden certainty perched on a limb.

Tara Connor

Splat

The jamun tree my grandfather planted
towers over the neighbours like spite.
Its plump tart fruit puckers into jam
on their windscreens, payback for their childhoods
when he shook his stick at them as they plucked and ran,
cricket balls and shuttlecocks in hand, giggling
like broken windowpanes shattering in sport,
a pain my grandfather paid to replace repeatedly,
a little more out of his meagre salary, a shaking head, a balding pate.
I told you, not to rent the ground floor,
my grandmother would say, as she made him yet another coffee,
bitter and blacker as he aged, his body rejecting the sugars of
what it was to be a boy once, carefree, and flinging sixes
into the neighbour's gardens. "I thought if we never had children,"
he replied, "at least we could watch those of others play."
My grandmother shook her head, and cast her dosa round and round
until it seared her bindi into the skillet like a point
she was trying to make. Grandfather swallowed it quietly with podi
and pooling oil and said nothing. Outside, the sound of willow
cracking, and children's feet on the hot asphalt, running,
always running away.

Tara Das

Seabirds

Here on a spit of land at the edge of the country,
where in college, friends and I would cross
the border for dinner, be waved through customs,

zip back to the dorms before midnight, a biologist
explains the evolution of seabirds:
the strutters, the pickers, how one beak narrowing

could extract crustaceans buried in the sand,
while another's beak broadening into a pouch
scoops fish out of the waves.

My husband, always with an opinion, is retreating,
beginning to wander in a labyrinth I cannot follow.
His path, not predictable as the tide pulsing in and out,

is punctuated by long silences one minute,
outbursts of anger the next. The doctors fluctuate
between a show of certainty, suggesting

medications not to cure but to slow,
and wavering, demonstrating too clearly
what they cannot predict.

I can't say I have the needed patience; spend
too much time dreaming of escape, longing
even for the subzero temperatures of Siberia.

Just now, the biologist points out a black
oystercatcher on an outcrop of rock, legs
covered in what looks like flesh stockings,

red beak, yellow eye rimmed red.
Its rat-a-tat-tat insistent, he stabs the air,
vigilant over the shoreline he claims.

Carol V. Davis

Cocoa

He's sick, my daughter's boyfriend said, when he met Cocoa for the first time.

How do you know? I asked, doubting he could be *in-the-know* about a goat he just met, the first goat he has ever met.

I can hear him wheezing.

I rely on my eyes, my ears kaput, forgot what wheezing sounds like. A sudden memory of my brother's asthma, his gasping for air, a rush to the hospital. My husband's asthma, turning blue, another hospital.

I can't see if Cocoa is turning blue. His fur, the color of coffee lightened with hazelnut creamer, a white arc stretched across his side, and the proud angle of his horns squared like a pint-sized Texas longhorn, hide any such evidence.

I slide a collar around his throat, take him for goat-dog walks, feel the vibration of his labored breath, feel it through the collar, feel it through the leash like a message through a string telephone, feel it through the tremor of my hand in sync with the leash's strum.

I believe this communication between us is private.
The vet has been by a few times.
Meds help a little.
Very little.

Cocoa was one of three babies born to a nanny who didn't want three, might only have wanted one, in any case one too many, kicked him, bit his ear,

threw him across the pen. He would slip between his two brothers,
hide his scent among theirs, and somehow survived.

One brother became his surrogate mother, the one he went to for
solace
and protection, the one with whom, over the years after joining
a neighbor's small herd, he foraged side by side,
slept rump-to-rump.

One wet winter, when he was still small, he jumped into the water
trough, didn't know
how to get back out. I grabbed him as his mother stared, cupped
his shivering self
between my two hands, held him until his body warmed, whispered
to him,
You're okay, you're fine, you have worth.

When he was a year old, his mother only had to glare—he would
retreat
to a corner of the pen, his head lowered, his spirit crushed. I
watched
as his guardian brother, Nutmeg, approached him, sniffed him,
You're okay, you're fine, you have worth.

Nutmeg, the alpha male of this makeshift herd, passed a few
months ago. The herd
attacks Cocoa regularly now, no need to hold back. He dodges
horns, teeth
on his bony back. I take him out of the pen, go for walks, give him
cookies and carrots, let him forage on weeds with yellow flowers.

Together we've watched the old field where this herd used to graze
develop
into a stately home, a long driveway covering the wild grasses
where crickets once feasted, where rains had brought floods
and the occasional mountain lion prowled.

Today he seems to know I'm sad, recognizes my struggle to fit in
with my own herd.

He leans a thin shoulder against my thigh. I feel the crushing sound
of his unstable breath, watch him gasp for air, stroke
his coarsening fur, notice the dryness of his skin.

He looks up at me, a kindness in his gaze, sniffs me with a runny
nose,
as if to convey, *You're okay, you're fine, you have worth.*

Linda Drattell

Lake of Time

The crater's softer brightness, heat
not quite reaching us. Heft
of fine gravel in my hands. Sand
and water slowed down to diamond, solid light.

To write only what we perceive without metaphor. But everything
gestures toward everything else,
and with real love. An afterthought.
The light of lamps is transporting, too,

like the moon, which has led us to imagine
another world for as long as we can remember.
A world of light and a world of shadows.
They are all gone into the world of light.

What is it like under the huge, birdlike shadows
of those craters which astronomers used to think
were seas, oceans, lakes, marshes, and bays. What was literal
to them now metaphor to us. This moon

must have looked so different
in their imagination. Was it the same moon,
or is it a different moon each night
the way we are different people every time

we open our eyes? Surely, everything in the universe
is made of water, and that is no more
metaphor than the moss which crawls along
the pavement in this lovely, rainy city.

We used to drink cheap wine under its light.
A song was playing from the speaker,
and maybe the moon really is made of paper,
a kind of paper made to catch planetshine.

Mantle, crust. Cast off and wilted in
coils of translucent, paper-thin
earthlight. Molt and rust and past lives
lying in a lactescent river behind us.

What tributaries feed into the lakes
shining dimly over our heads? Distance
by itself does not explain the yearning
the moon inspires, but it's part of it.

With you gone I rose and fell
in phases unexplained by any calendar,
waking in a sweat at 2 a.m., and there
at my window was that watery moon

which seemed to grow fiercer as it waned.
That's how it is, sometimes. Everything
is like the moon. It all comes back, even
when we think it's gone forever.

Tyler Dunston

Do they know you're gone?

The grackle and the catbird
jabber like rug sellers
at an Egyptian bazaar.

The garbage truck grinds
a path down the road,
consuming and crushing.
Things once useful scheduled
for a ride to oblivion.

And the mailman
slips cards
through the slot
that cascade into a pastel
collage of grief by the door.

The gears of everyday click
unperturbed,
this universe seems indifferent
to your leaving—
its cycle of loss and rebirth,
a mobius strip of pain and joy
embedded in all living things
just outside my window.

Sap drips,
buds wax sharper still,
and the soil shimmies
imperceptibly
as brown beetles flex
spikey legs to attention.

And the crocus,
roused from chilled stasis,

reliable and true,
stretches through
to announce news of spring.
The ground now holds many wonders—
including you.

Linda Flaherty Haltmaier

Mojave

Why have you come to the edge of my desert in winter, friend?
There is nothing holy out there in me, and I am no guide.

The washes, wet or stone-dry, are mine. You could not drink from
them.

To you, my gray-brown expanses would seem usurped by brief
greens;
nor would you remember the names I have given each scrub-bush
to mark their genealogies from abandonment to bloom.
Such psalms would puzzle you.

What truth do you hope to take from me?
And how should I conjure for you the geographies of me?
The canyon where the sands fell and carried decencies away?
The bluff that caught the sage-seeds? The summit where I slew the
gods?
Shall I say I held the lightnings myself? Or weaponized stones
into a tragic chorus? Heaven was the hero I cast
from the mountaintop.

Ah. Now I understand. You seek his grave
within me.

Set fire to my aloe-vales, you will not find him.
Shake out the pale roots of every joshua tree if you must.
Lift the oceans against me. Cast flood over all like a spell.
You will not find him.

A cacophony of jasper instead
will jut its chins against your incursions: unpolished feelings
free and new, cobbled from old creeds as my bodies are from stars.
My winds themselves will pull aslant your sorties. Friend, you will
fail,
as others have before, to weave of me a tabernacle.
Keep your dogmas. From the wide wastes within myself, I will make

myths
freer than most.

See? I breathe in from far ranges the great gift
distance. All breadth is mine: sovereign, strange, adaptive as winter.
Someday, pacing the edge of the infinite, you might spy me.

Judd Hess

Eclipse Is Another Word for Stroke

for Patti

It begins with slurred speech, drooling,
birds quieting their chatter, words not coming
to your mouth though heard in your mind,
a cool wind from nowhere, street lights
flickering on, your brain on dimmer switch.

Somewhere in the folds of your thoughts,
plaque has dislodged from a clogged artery,
lodged downstream, blocked nourishing blood
from the best part of you. Caught in time, your
doctors manage to wrestle your star from behind
a bad moon and your light returns to full strength.

Some say the moon was once part of Earth,
broken away from a molten globule in a young,
lifeless galaxy before blue and green and air,
before time and culture, before thought and love.

How we, too, cleave and crumble, our terrestrial
bodies betraying us as we age and drift into shade.
For some, totality arrives as a strange twilight,
a black that stays, dreams falling silent as death
breathes its frigid name across a stunned landscape.

For now, your luminance has reclaimed its celestial
place to warm us, your star undiminished by its brief
absence, and we happy satellites orbiting you rejoice
in your glow, such fiery heat, thankful the hum and song
of you did not hush forever while you were away.

Matt Hohner

Missing

It took her about three weeks not to hear them.
The songbirds had not followed her and her boxes
those few short miles down the mountain, not even the
oddly heavy box with her beloved in it, no longer whistling.

How much is a paved driveway worth in morning birdcalls? One
cardinal coloratura in its siren flash across low sky or the Morse coding
of mourning doves? She missed the insistence of tufted titmice as she set
the breakfast table and even the cartoon cackle and drum of the woodpeckers.

Without realizing, they had come to think of these birds as their birds, these
calls as theirs. He had his stones and she her blooms. But birdsong they
shared. As he faded, the coos and chirps made for good conversation
or distraction, American goldfinches squeaking sun into the quiet.

Only sparrows now, she said, not wanting to suggest ordinariness
or ingratitude for this perfect place with its mountain breezes.
Being this close to town is a mixed blessing, and when he
finally stopped whistling, he took the birdsong with him.

Hollis Kurman

Route 443

White vans parked by the sides, checkpoints,
and a feeble bridge reinforced
with electronic eyes across the upper rim.
This road is a river that separates
the flow of Israel from a non-Palestine.

Villages line the banks, home to what seems
like an endless supply of workers, but really full
of men (mostly) who rise at dawn to cross
to earn to feed their families. Each person
has a story, birth date and his/her
hours running down.

A very human task made less
than human. White vans, white vans
like floating sails on the asphalt delivering
day laborers to build, to cook, to clean.
In darkness, they are empty hulks asleep,
waiting for their passengers.

From there, the navigation directs me
to Atarot, where factories sit
atop the cliffed edge of the West Bank.
White apartment bloc buildings. Transport trucks parked
outside, their drivers asleep before morning haul.
No signs in Hebrew. Just servants doing tasks. *

From the back side streets,
emptying onto Nablus
Road, Beit Hanina, music
of lights and flares, signs

point to the City Center, to a Jerusalem
without a true center, many centers, too many gods.

Jo-Ann Mort

Notes

*Joshua, chapter 16, Caananites dwelling among the Hebrews, to “do taskwork.”

Route 443 is sometimes called “the apartheid road,” not only by Palestinians, but also by Jewish Israeli peace activists. It meanders through Palestinian occupied territory as well as Israel proper, with an electronic checkpoint in the middle of it and some travel restrictions for Palestinians.

The Arborist Repents

each summer for ten years he
planted one thousand trees

*blessed is our father who carried the sackcloth damp
with saplings, blessed are the branches soaked black*

he made with them a rosary
each sapling for a bead

*this tree is sorrow, this tree regret
this tree is anger for what I cannot take back*

bought from the Forest Service for pennies
he said—*they were practically given to me*

*glory be a house surrounded by trees
glory be but don't break me please*

pulling bare roots from buckets in the back of his pickup
he made holes in neat rows, packing the dirt with booted toes

*I believe they started out cold, I believe
the ground warmed them like palms filled with stones*

he told us the woods would be ours someday—only
later he explained he was trying to make up for leaving us

*our father, between heaven and hell, could never be
one or the other, our father was both and just as well*

under the branches fly ten thousand prayers of solitary
penitence, joining devotions: forestry, my brother, and me

*I believe it is written in loblolly pine, in black
walnut: our father*

*joyful, sorrowful, glorious, blessed are the shelters
he made us
glory be a thorned body: devoted, divorced,
mysterious*

Dorothy Neagle

What the wind took

If he had to name what he missed most
after the wind swept the table,
leveled much of his farm again—you might think
it would be the barn roof, the walls somehow left standing
lonely, something for the wind to pocket next time.

He'd gotten fair at sheltering his own. The larger livestock stowed,
safe in the makeshift pen of brick-weighted trucks and harvester,
while he and the missus crouched in the soddie,
hands clapped to their ears against the screech
and the scratch of pelting sand. Not so lucky the banjo
left him by his uncle, forgotten outside in the rush;
the one he was just learning to play,
something to shorten the nights that grew longer,
help fill the silence.

No, what he missed most was her smile.
that used to come quickly. He only had to look her way.
The smile that faltered after the last gale
uprooted her violets for the third year,
turned her chicken roost into a trail of feathers.
She lay in bed for days, blanket pulled over her head.
When at last she rose to cook his breakfast,
give him a quick kiss, he knew
she had accepted their lot—a life where wind was king,
took anything loved for a tithe, and reduced his subjects
to a weary sparseness, a continual letting go.

Terri Niccum

1974 Sanibel Island

I'm at the pay phone
outside our cottage
9:00 every night
the air moist and foggy
the kids finally asleep
and me standing under the glow
of a mellow light
talking to my beloved
three states away.

To get there I drove 1022 miles,
the captain of this small ship
kids in the back cheering
the turn of each Trip Tik page.
It meant we were getting closer to paradise.
What they didn't know—
this wasn't just a vacation.
I see their heads, fragile,
in the rear-view mirror.

In memory the three of us walk
the beach searching for shells,
sand buckets in our hands.
My youngest running up to me
holding up a broken sand dollar—
is this one interesting?

After hours collecting shells,
we blow the sand off each one,
wash them in a bucket of water,
place them in careful rows
on the back porch, voting
each day on our favorite.

The pool—a must every afternoon
kids in inner tubes, twirling
themselves round and round
in circles. Trips to the library,
trips to the craft shop,
sitting on the floor
of the sandy porch playing
Go Fish.

Blond heads, brown shoulders,
the scent of sunscreen,
their long limbs growing so fast.
I'd study them asleep,
trying to envision
an unknown future.
In my mind a magical glow
pervades that time.
Our little world of three.
So much hanging in the balance.

All the while, I ponder
whether I have the grit
to leave a loveless marriage
to be with the woman I love.
I fear losing my children,
as much a part of me
as my blood and bones
and fear the fissure to their world
if I follow my other heart.

All through my child-centered day,
I long for 9:00, the receiver
in my hand speaking with my love
a thousand miles away. The intimacy
of those words spoken under a black
star-speckled sky. She says she'll drive

down non-stop, an eighteen-hour trip,
to see me after the kids are in bed.

Our love was such,
the sand sparkled,
glittered in the darkness
when we first walked together
on the beach.
I know science can explain this,
but we believed we were magic.

Pat Owen

Grateful

God knows

I am grateful

for each tiny prayer circling my throat, pushing its way out,
shepherding the wild horses that gallop and graze inside my dreams,
for every deep breath that I take, a candle of hope is lit inside me,
so, I keep going even when the birds are silent in November,
like squirrels, I bury their songs for the winter, and now,
I rise like the birds of June, singing.

I am grateful for the rise of the sun, the aging of these bones that
gathers enough grace to get up, to get going, to get on with seed,
time, and harvest, these God hours,

I plant, I plow, I pray, I pen, I paint, I pour, I pluck, I pause
I praise the seconds, the minutes, the hours, the days, the weeks,
the years to just be able to smell the morning, to taste the chilled
air, to touch autumn's footprint, to see Moses staff in a tree—
as a red sea of leaves part from their branches and walk down
the tree, as obedient as the wind ushers them out, they come,
I walk through the red sea of leaves to the other side, and think of
how leaves folly a life beyond their branches,
my heart is pulled at its stem.

God knows

I am grateful

to witness this kind of beauty, rare, deep in the tissue where a million
hearts beat spinning the earth in me, the sound of my granddaughter's
voice repairs the broken wings, the torn pages, the orphaned shadows
that follow, I no longer feel the fractures, her laughter reaches in and
paints the inside of me in shades of golden golds, fluorescent oranges,
bruised reds, I am grateful. When she holds my hand, I see a blue sky
over the field of my dreams with an endless silver lining, I have al-
lowed her to disturb the silence, the whispering, the bed of leaves
that quiets the landscape here, she is my candle of hope, for every

deep breath I take, she returns with the sun, with love and peace
and joy and hope and gratitude.

God knows
I am grateful.

Diane Wilbon Parks

Coffee in March

After the photograph "Dinner in March" by Anna Marie Tender

I must confess—
three months later and I still brew coffee for two.

Half awake I scoop one, two, three, four tablespoons into my French
press,
and listen to the grounds as they softly hit the metal bottom.

I turn on the kettle with a satisfying click, but it's only once I've poured
my first cup do I remember you won't be having the second.

I try to shake it off. I tell myself I'll drink the whole thing myself this
morning.
But I rarely do.

More often than not I pour what would have been yours down the
drain.
I ask myself, or God, even you dear reader; where does the love go?

Don't answer.
I can't stand to know the answer.

I have this terrible habit of turning my loneliness into poetry.
Do you think I'll ever have coffee again, and the coffee will just be
coffee?

Is there a corner of this life that isn't haunted by your absence?

Do you think I can reteach my body to take up the whole bed,
and pour the love back into myself,
instead of letting it grow cold
in my metal French press?

Margaux Paul

In Zanzibar

*It is not worth the while to go round
the world to count the cats in Zanzibar.*

—Henri Thoreau

We stayed at a beachfront hotel owned
by the Aga Khan, dined nearby on fish curry—
countless stray cats came begging.
At a market under a banyan tree we savored
passion fruit, lemon grass, finger bananas.

In Jozani Forest you filmed the native
red colobus monkey. On a plantation tour
we were crowned king and queen
of spices—you, cloves, I, tamarind,
Their sweet scents travel far out to sea.

In a dhou we crossed the harbor's aqua waters
to Prison Island where Kasseem, our guide,
gave me greens to feed an ancient tortoise.
The small boat's arc of orange awning
did not keep us dry on the ride back.

We walked Stone Town's narrow streets—
ghost-like girls, draped in white, head to hip,
black skirts, high school—navy, elementary.
Old men pedaled pushcarts piled high
with coconut, sugarcane, cassaba.

Massive carved wooden doors, Arab
and Indian, brass knobs pointed, to keep
the elephants out—Christ Church, site
of the Arab slave market. Before our return
to Dar-es-Salaam and our journey home,

you bought me orange and aqua beads
in an artist's stall. I still wear them
and remember you, our being there—
the island lingering like a fragrance wafting
out to the Indian Ocean and beyond.

Wanda S. Praisner

Hunting Bullfrogs

Every time I pass a shallow stream,
even if it runs the side of the road, bubbling
with rubbish, I think of you.

The time you led me through a June darkness,
with a flashlight and net, on our way
to hunt bullfrogs, my girlish body

next to your muscled one, our shoes
soggy from the squelching mud,
until we heard them—a chorus

of deep crooners chanting:
Jug-o-rum, jug-o-rum!
The American male claiming

his territory from a murky perch.
We waited patiently for one to show himself.
And though you knew they could hear you,

you couldn't help yourself. You loved
teaching me animal things—
the print you hung in my bedroom

of tadpole metamorphosis—
the spark of legs stunned
me every time I looked at it—or the stories

of your brother, the Eagle Scout,
who made your mother crazy
by keeping a coyote pup as a pet.

Mostly I remember the mud in my shoes
and the damp smell of night the instant

you shone your light into the blistery

bullfrog face, his bulging green eyeshine
radiating fear. Frozen, the three of us sinking
slowly into the earth,

you whispered, *Throw the net!*
but I didn't—couldn't. When you turned
off your torch, I could finally breathe.

Sonya Schneider

Assateague, Virginia

They think they come to see the ponies, but
they don't. Oh, their cars line the road
that looks out south across the huge salt marsh

where ponies graze and hummocks of earth
and trees rise here and there, the far edge
of the marsh where it meets the bay indistinguishable,

hidden, as is the bay from there. They
watch the ponies, yes, ooing and aahing
over this one or that, usually a paint,

but, really, if they don't take photographs—
though many do—isn't it the view—the marsh,
the hummocks of trees—they see in their minds'

eyes when they recall the day? It's that way
when the photos are put away even for those
who have pointed their cameras or cell phones

and clicked. So when the ponies prove elusive,
off somewhere they cannot be seen from there,
those who gaze across the salt marsh in vain

and who think they have come to see the ponies
and are disappointed, feel, oddly, that they
are not, and instead that they are somehow

satisfied by the view of salt marsh and trees,
a backdrop of sky with clouds or clear, and,
though they might return home to express

disappointment at not seeing the ponies, will
return to Assateague to gaze from that same spot
along the road out at the salt marsh, the trees,

ponyless, for the moment at least, and settle
with themselves this contradiction they feel
about what it is they seek.

Matthew J. Spireng

Mood Ring

I wanted a mood ring

almost as much as I wanted

a wide-toothed comb with an outsized handle

to stick in the back pocket

of the Levi bell-bottoms Mom wouldn't buy me for
the longest time

almost as much as I wanted that 7-Up Bonne Bell Lip Smacker
that I saved 10 weeks of my quarter-a-week allowance
for

almost as much I wanted skinnier thighs to tuck into those
bell-bottoms

thighs that could dance any kind of rhythm at the
middle school dance

or land any kind of high kick at cheerleading tryouts
and that would never, ever be described as *thunder
thighs*.

I wanted that piece of glass set in cheap metal that turned skin green

as much as I wanted that life-sized Shaun Cassidy poster

hazel eyes and feathered hair watching benevolently

over my shag-carpet-and-paisley-patterned bedroom

as much as I wanted to be Commander Adama's daughter
Athena

or Princess Leia Organa

beautiful, yes, and powerful and smart

outwitting universes fueled by testosterone

as much as I wanted a different answer to the question

How long will Daddy live?

*A mood ring contains liquid crystals that change colors in response
to small changes in temperature*

I should have said to my mother when she told me

Don't waste your allowance on that cheap thing.

*Finger temperature is significantly determined by peripheral blood
flow,*

which is modulated by the autonomic nervous system

I would have said
as I waved my hand in her face
stone yellow as I tried to find my father
 in a nest of chest tubes and ECG wires
stone black as I sat in in my itchy wool funeral skirt
 classmates sympathetically lined up behind me
stone green stolen forever as Mom packed up
 Levis
 Lip Smacker
 Shaun Cassidy
And moved us to adulthood.

Beth Toner

Kiyama-cho: my father's home

within a mountain
of
 trees,

my father's village
in Japan.

their fragile, creaking house
looks out
onto rice fields and
skeletal wooden racks
of
 drying straw.

my father began here,
but
 I visited when it just
about ended.

I was seven,
dad was in his 50s.
uncle was in his 70s,
and auntie was 80-something.

I had no idea. no inkling,
but my father seemed sad all
the time.

looking through
the open *shoji*
to the water-rooted rice,
plants
 slightly swaying
in the hot breeze,

I wondered
about his childhood.

certainly different
from mine yet
somehow
 the same,
but in Canada.

no rice fields,
no toiling
in
 city fields,
no aging
 relatives.

Just the
aching feeling
 that everything
was disappearing

Terry Watada

Año Nuevo / New Year

Ruidos. Voces. Rumores. Canciones lejanas...

Noises. Voices. Rumors. Distant songs...

—Juan Rulfo

Asleep, a plosive ocean laps anxious dreams.
Wake to brief rain and the memory of smoke and flames:
cane dross and rubbish lit through ancient basins:
el llano en llamas: *the plain in flames*.

In the mountains, near Comala,
we ate tortillas de frijol, black fly gorging
on our ankles, mot-mot and squirrel cuckoo dip-
darting a riot of shadows, under the volcán de Colima.

And later, spectral by a tin-flashed lean-to,
an elderly mestiza—the dash of her huipil through
a torn rebozo, like the cheek of a chickadee—
worked a palm-broom over cobbles.

Here, Boca de Iguanas, it's a new year.
Sun-bronzed families spill, kelp-like,
from a campground's sprawl, to carpet
the shore, bob or embrace soft waves.

Above us, the scissored and canting tails
of frigatebirds against the bleached sky's blue.
“Kleptoparasites,” their red throat skins—
angry wounds or escaped balloons (globos

de Nochevieja)—are lodged in the crooked
bruise of their black wingspans, as they
patrol-float this silk crescent of sand,
palms, and Pacific's glare.

At nightfall, like driftwood with human voice,
retired gabachos in tie-dyed T-shirts mill about a local fair,
snatches of their nasal accents cutting through
an evening Mass, the meat-smoked air:

¡Feliz Año Nuevo!
Hay baño?
Hamburguesas? Laxantes?
Cerveza?

Mournful strains of rancheras
from a dirt parking lot, mingle with diesel plumes
from revved flatbed trucks.
And at the far end of the plaza,

dust-cloaked fairy lights blink drought-stressed trees,
where a whitewashed, rust-dappled cage enshrouds
an empty swing—cada chango en su columpio:
to each monkey its own swing.

In bed, under a motel fan's syncopated whirl,
I'm surprised at how a slither-curl of hope rises, defies, persists.
Then, wonder, while wrenching up for a piss,
what part of all of this I'll stand to miss,

until I see the beauty
of the moon within night's mist,
its soft glint on my sleeping sons,
the ocean's shadowed and ample orb.

Christopher Watson

Contributors

Shay Alexi is a multi-disciplinary writer and artist living on unceded Muskogee-Creek land in Atlanta, GA. Their full-length poetry collection, *Unbridled*, was nominated for a Georgia Author of the Year Award. Alexi's work has been featured by *The Rumpus*, *Homology Lit*, and *WUSSY Magazine* among others.

Alfredo Antonio Arevalo is a queer Chicano from Fresno, California. He received an MFA from The University of Alabama, where he won two Phipps Poetry Prizes and a poets.org University & College Poetry Prize. His poetry appears in *The Cortland Review*, *The Maine Review*, *Bilingual Review*, *Acentos Review*, and elsewhere.

Rebecca Baggett is the author of the prize-winning collection, *The Woman Who Lives Without Money* (Regal House Publishing, 2022) and four chapbooks. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Asheville Poetry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *Salt*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Sun*. She lives in Athens, GA.

Susan Nisenbaum Becker's poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. An award-winning playwright and actor, she's had residencies at the Banff Centre, Yaddo, MacDowell, VCCA and Ragdale, spots in public arts projects, and a Pushcart nomination. Her poetry book, *Little Architects of Time & Space*, was published in 2013.

Andrea Carter Brown's most recent poetry collection, *September 12*, was awarded the 2022 Silver Medal in Poetry from the Independent Publishers Association. Her previous collections include *The Disheveled Bed*, *Domestic Karma*, and *Brook & Rainbow*. A new sequence of poems, "American Fraktur," is forthcoming in *Five Points*. She lives in Los Angeles.

Jessa Brown has been an Acumen Young Poet. Her poetry has been published in *The Mays* and *Young Writers* anthologies, the *Brixton Review of Books*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, and *The London Magazine*, and has been commissioned by the Design Council. She is a recent UEA Creative Writing MA graduate.

Sara Burge is the author of *Apocalypse Ranch* (C&R Press 2010), and her poetry has appeared in *Willow Springs*, *Phoebe*, *Prairie Schooner*, *CALYX Journal*, and elsewhere. She is the Poetry Editor of *Moon City Review*, and featured work can be found at saraburge.com.

Rachel Aviva Burns is a writer and artist living and working in Dobbs Ferry, New York. Her poems have appeared previously in the *Atlanta Review*, and have also been published or are forthcoming in numerous publications including the *Bluestem Magazine*, *Sand Hills Literary Magazine*, and the *Wallace Stevens Journal*.

Adrienne Burris is a writer/teacher living in Greenville, SC. Her poetry has been nominated for Best New Poets and can be read in *Washington Square Review*, *Rogue Agent*, and *Kakalak*, among others.

Duane Caylor is a (now retired) physician in Dubuque, IA. His poems have appeared in various venues, including *Think*, *First Things*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *Atlanta Review*.

Most recently, **Johnson Cheu's** work appears in on AAP's "Poem-a-Day" and *Booth*. Work is forthcoming in *Iron Horse Literary Review*.

Jackie Chicaese is an aphantasic poet from coal country, Pennsylvania. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest*, *Gulf Coast*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *The Greensboro Review*, *the minnesota review*, and elsewhere. She is currently a PhD student in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Tara Connor is a poet and librarian from Portland, Maine. She graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in Anthropology and has been writing poetry for more than ten years. Her poem "Not Looking Out to Sea" was published in *The Ekphrastic Review* in January of 2024.

Amanda Conover frequently discusses ideas related to existentialism and spirituality. She is the poetry editor for *Carolina Muse Literary & Arts Magazine* and is an MFA alum from Arcadia University. Her poetry has appeared in places such as the *lickety-split*, *Miracle Monacle*, and the *Chaffin Journal*.

Daun Daemon has published poems and stories in numerous journals, including *Third Wednesday*, *Typehouse*, *Deep South Magazine*, *Into the Void*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, and others. Her memoir in poetry, *A Prayer for Forgiving My Parents* (Kelsay Books), was published in July 2023. She teaches scientific communication at NC State University.

Tara Das (1976) is a poet, therapist, and author. Her work plays on the nature of mind. Her poetry was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize, 2021, featured in the *Converse Anthology 2022*, & Sumana Roy's *On Eating*. Tara practices ashtanga yoga, vajrayana buddhism, & calligraphy. She lives in Mysuru, India.

Twice a Fulbright scholar in Russia, **Carol V. Davis** taught in Siberia, winter 2018 and teaches at Santa Monica College, California and Antioch Univ. Los Angeles. She was awarded a Fulbright Specialist grant for Siberia in 2020, postponed because of Covid restrictions and now cancelled.

Linda Drattell is an award-winning poet whose poetry and short fiction have appeared in several online publications and anthologies. Her poetry collection, *Remember This Day*, was awarded the 2024 Bronze Award from Reader Views. Her second poetry book, *The Lighter Side of Horse Manure* (Finishing Line Press), is now available.

Tyler Dunston is a writer, artist, and PhD student in English literature at the University of Michigan, where he also serves as the poetry editor for the *Michigan Quarterly Review*. He received his MFA in poetry from Boston University, and his recent poems have appeared in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Narrative*, *Raleigh Review*, and elsewhere.

Gregory Emilio is the author of the poetry collection *Kitchen Apocrypha* (Able Muse, 2023). His poems and essays have appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Gastronomica*, *North American Review*, *[PANK]*, *The Rumpus*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. He lives in Atlanta and teaches at Kennesaw State University.

Lily Anna Erb is from Long Island, New York. She has spent the last year working as a teacher in Madrid, Spain. Her work can be found in the *Santa Clara Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, and the *Atlanta Review*, among other places.

John S. Eustis is a retired librarian living in Virginia with his wife, after a long, quiet federal career. His poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Gargoyle Online*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *One Art*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Sheila-Na-Gig Online*, *Slipstream*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Willawaw Journal*.

Chapman Hood Frazier's poems have won awards from the Poetry Society of Virginia, ARTlines, *The Alexandria Quarterly* Chapbook Contest, and his collection *The Lost Books of the Bestiary* was runner-up for the V Press LC poetry award and published in 2023. Two of his poems have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes.

Daniel Ginsburg earned an MFA in creative writing from American University in 2019. His poem "The Carpet" received an Honorable Mention for the 2023 Rash Award in Poetry and appeared in *Broad River Review*. His poetry also was published by *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, and *Gargoyle*. He lives in Potomac, Maryland.

Phil Goldstein's debut collection, *How to Bury a Boy at Sea*, was published in 2022 by Stillhouse Press. His poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net award, and has appeared in *HAD*, *The Shore*, *West Trade Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and elsewhere.

Linda Flaherty Haltmaier is an award-winning author/Poet Laureate Emeritus of Andover, MA. She's the winner of the Robert Frost Poetry Prize—and her first collection, *Rolling up the Sky*, claimed the Homebound Publications Poetry Prize. Her latest collection, *Shadows Set to Burn*, won the 2024 International Book Award for Narrative Poetry.

Peggy Heitmann has published poems in *The Monterey Poetry Review*, *The Rockford Review*, *Deep Overstock*, among others. She considers herself both word and visual artist. Peggy lives in Raleigh, NC area with her husband and two cats.

Judd Hess holds a BA from the University of California, Irvine, and both an MFA and an MA from Chapman University. He has won the Fugue Poetry Prize, the John Fowles Creative Writing Prize for Poetry, the Ellipsis Prize, and been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Angie Hexum is a speech-language pathologist by trade. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Caesura*, and *Gyroscope Review*. She is a graduate of Swarthmore College and currently resides in Campbell, California, where she enjoys hiking, cycling, and singing in a chorus.

Don Hogle's poetry has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *BANG!*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Chautauqua*, and *Penn Review* among others. He won First Prize in the 2023 Open Poetry Competition of the National Association of Writers and Groups (U.K.) A chapbook, *Madagascar*, was published in 2020 (Sevens Kitchens Press.) He lives in Manhattan. www.donhoglepoet.com.

Matt Hohner's book *At the Edge of a Thousand Years* won the 2023 Jacar Press Book Prize. Publications include *Rattle: Poets Respond*, *New Contrast*, *Baltimore Review*, *Vox Populi*, *Broadkill Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. He is an editor with *Loch Raven Review*. Hohner's first collection is *Thresholds and Other Poems* (Apprentice House 2018).

Scott T. Hutchison's previous work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *The Southern Review*. A new book of poetry, *Moonshine Narratives*, is available with Main Street Rag Publishing. Work is forthcoming in *Naugatuck River Review*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Whiskey Tit*, *Tampa Review*, and *Slipstream*.

Letitia Jiju is interested in the poetry of wave functions, quarks and the little things. Her work appears/is forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *Poet Lore*, *Passages North*, *ANMLY*, *Prism international*, *trampset*, and elsewhere. She reads fiction for *Longleaf Review* and poetry for *Psalttery & Lyre*. Find her on Instagram/Twitter @eaturlettuce, Bluesky @letitia.bsky.social.

Helga Kidder lives in the Tennessee hills with her husband where she looks upon nature for inspiration. She was awarded an MFA from Vermont College and leads a monthly poetry group. She has five collections of poetry, *Learning Curve*, *Loving the Dead* which won the Blue Light Press Book Award, *Blackberry Winter*, *Luckier than the Stars*, and *Wild Plums*.

Kathryn Kimball grew up in Alabama, has a Ph.D. in English, and taught nineteenth-century literature. Her published work includes a 2021 chapbook, poems and French translations in journals, and a book of poetry to appear in 2025. She won Columbia Journal's 2023 translation prize and lives in New York City.

Ashley Seitz Kramer has won the Ruth Stone Prize, the Schiff Prize, and the Utah Writers' Contest. Her book, *Museum of Distance* (2015), won the Zone 3 Press First Book Award. She holds an MFA in poetry from Vermont College and a PhD in education from the University of Utah.

Elina Kumra is Reed Magazine's 2024 Emerging Writer. First Place in *Third Coast Magazine*, Marin County Poetry Award, and Polyphony. Second Place California Youth Poet Laureate. Elina is the EIC and founder of *VelvetPoets*. She is currently focusing on *A Brush on Recovery*—opiate recovery through poetry. @velvetpoets twitter: Elinakumra1

Hollis Kurman's poems, one nominated for a Pushcart Prize, have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Rattle*, *Phoebe*, *Ocean State Review*, *Intima*, *Lilith*, *Carmina Magazine*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, and *Scoundrel Time*. Her first poetry collection is anticipated in 2025. Her children's books, *Counting Kindness* and *Counting in Green*, are published in eleven countries. She lives in Amsterdam.

StarShield Lortie grew up among the beautiful mountains in Oregon and now makes her home in Tucker, GA. A student of Native American Shamanic and Toltec traditions, she explores the shifting nature of identity and how the natural world is both a teacher and reflection of that work in her poetry.

Michelle Matz's poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *Mud Season Review*, *The Berkeley Poetry Review*, *So To Speak*, and *New Delta Review*. Her chapbook, *Atilt*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Her book, *Acoustic Shadow*, was recently published by Main Street Rag.

Sara McAulay has published three novels and numerous short stories. She received NEA and NJ Arts Council fellowships for prose. Recently she has turned to poetry and flash, with work nominated for Best of the Net.

Laura McCoy lives on the Rensselaer Plateau in New York State. Her poems have been recently published or are forthcoming in *Seneca Review*, *Inkwell Journal*, and *Pembroke Magazine*, among others. She is a graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts.

Joyce Meyers won the 2014 Atlanta Review International Poetry Competition. Her poems appear in *The Comstock Review*, *Xanadu*, *Glimpse*, and *Slant*. Her collections include *Twisted Threads* (Kelsay Books, 2024), *The Way Back* (Kelsay Books, 2017), *Shapes of Love* (Finishing Line Press, 2010), and *Wild Mushrooms* (Plan B Press, 2007).

Carol Milkuhn has spent her retirement exploring her interest in creative writing. In addition to being published in several journals, she is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *In the Company of Queens* and *Modern Tapestries*, *Medieval Looms*. She lives in Upstate New York with her mini schnauzer, Atticus.

Michael Montlack is author of two poetry collections and editor of the Lambda Finalist essay anthology *My Diva: 65 Gay Men on the Women Who Inspire Them* (University of Wisconsin Press). His poems recently appeared in *Poetry Daily*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Barrelhouse*, *deceMBER*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *phoebe*. He lives in NYC, where he teaches Poetry at CUNY City College.

Michael S. Moos has published four poetry books, most recently, *The Idea of the Garden* (Ashland Poetry Press, 2018). He's been a poet-in-residence for the Academy of American Poets and has an MFA from Columbia University. Recent poems have appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Cottonwood*, *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *A 21st Century Plague: Poetry from a Pandemic*.

Jo-Ann Mort returned to poetry writing after a several decades hiatus. Her first book of poems, *A Precise Chaos*, will be published in Spring 2025 from Arrowsmith Press. She lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn, NY.

Dorothy Neagle is a Kentuckian who lives and writes in New York. A Yaddo fellow, she was recently named a semi-finalist in the 92Y Discovery Poetry Contest, and her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including *Sand Hills*, *Meridian*, and *Pedestal*. Read more from her at dorothyneagle.com or [@sentencesaremyfave](https://twitter.com/sentencesaremyfave).

Terri Niccum's full-length collection, *The Knife Thrower's Daughter*, was released in 2022 from Moon Tide Press. She is also the author of the chapbooks *Dead Letter Box* (Moon Tide Press) and *Looking Snow in the Eye* (Finishing Line Press). Niccum was a finalist for the 2020-2021 Steve Kowit Poetry Prize.

Carol O'Brien is an Irish-American writer based in Havertown, Pennsylvania. She works for a commercial construction company and writes poems that pull from her experiences with loss, addiction, relationships, and family.

Dion O'Reilly is the author of two poetry collections, *Ghost Dogs* and *Sadness of the Apex Predator*. Her work appears in *The Sun*, *Rattle*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Narrative*, and *The Slowdown*. She splits her time between a residence in Bellingham Washington and a ranch in Santa Cruz, CA.

Pat Owen is the author of *Crossing the Sky Bridge*, *Orion's Belt at the End of the Drive*, and *Bardo of Becoming*. Her work has appeared in *Hong Kong Review*, *Gulf Stream Literary Review*, *the Louisville Review* as well as in numerous anthologies.

Diane Wilbon Parks is an accomplished poet, author, literary advocate; served as an Expert Consultant to the National Trust for Historic Preservation on a National Endowment for the Arts Grant. She has published two poetry collections; her poetry has been featured nationally and internationally. Diane is a USAF Veteran.

Margaux Paul is a San Diego poet and freelance writer. Her poetry appears in *Tide-Pools*, as well as the *San Diego Poetry Annual*, *Folsom Lake College's Literary & Arts Magazine*, and *HNDL* magazine. When she isn't reading or writing she can be found in a yoga class, at an open mic, or enjoying a glass of wine with friends.

Beth Paulson lives in Ouray County, Colorado where she founded the Poetica Workshop, directed Poetry at the Tavern, and serves as Poet Laureate. Her poems have been published nationally in over 200 journals and have four times been nominated for Pushcart Prizes. *Luminous* (Kelsay Books, 2021) is her sixth collection.

Wanda S. Praisner is the recipient of fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the Dodge Foundation, PFAWC, and VCCA, and has received 26 Pushcart nominations, the Princemere Prize, Egan Award, and the 2017 New Jersey Poets Prize. She's been a featured reader at the Dodge Poetry Festival. Her 6th book: *To Illuminate the Way*.

Kathryn Ridall, an award winning poet, has published three chapbooks and two poetry anthologies. She lives in Ventura, CA, where she works as a psychotherapist and writes.

Susan Shaw Sailer has published three collections of poems—*The Distance Beyond Sight*, *The God of Roundabouts*, *Ship of Light*, and two chapbooks—*COAL* and *Bulletins from a War Zone*. Sailer lives in Morgantown, WV, and is a member of the Madwomen in the Attic program at Carlow University, Pittsburgh.

Sonya Schneider is a poet and playwright. Her poetry can be found or is forthcoming in *Catamaran*, *Moon City Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Raleigh Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. A graduate of Stanford University and Pacific University's MFA in Poetry, she lives in Seattle.

Julia Salem is a London-based writer and editor from New Jersey. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Pigeon Pages*, *The Pinch*, and elsewhere. She is currently finalizing her first poetry collection.

Melissa Holm Shoemake lives in Atlanta, GA with her husband and two sons. She holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Mississippi and her poems have appeared in *The Southern Humanities Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology*. Her chapbook, *Ab.Sin.The.* is available from Dancing Girl Press.

Matthew J. Spireng's 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize-winning book *Good Work* was published in 2020 by Evening Street Press. A 12-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of two other full-length poetry books, *What Focus Is* and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and five chapbooks.

Allen Stein's poems and stories have appeared in numerous journals, among them *The Hudson Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. His poetry collections are *Your Funeral is Very Important to Us* and *Unsettled Subjects*. He is from the Bronx and lives in North Carolina.

Jane Stuart, poet, lives now in Trinity Station Assisted Living Center after years at home in The Jesse Stuart house in the middle of a nature preserve. She writes mainly haiku and tanka and is working on a collection (*At Night's End*, probable title) for edizioni universum, Italy.

Sean Sutherland has had poems published in the literary magazines: *The Florida Review*, *The Sandhills Literary magazine*, *Hypertext*, *The Sky Island Journal*, *Gravel*, among other literary magazines, along with the 30th anniversary anthology; *The Writers Studio at 30*.

Terry Ann Thaxton has published *Mud Song*, *Getaway Girl*, and *The Terrible Wife*, and a textbook, *Creative Writing in the Community*. She's published essays and poetry in *New Letters*, *Missouri Review*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *CALYX*, *Gulf Coast*, and other journals. She teaches creative writing at the University of Central Florida.

Beth Toner is a nurse, writer, and erstwhile theatre nerd who still hasn't figured out what she wants to be when she grows up. She has spent the last 30 years writing other people's stories. Now, she's writing and telling her own.

Tammy Trusheim-Rahmiller teaches language arts in rural Iowa. She enjoys spending time on her acreage with her husband, dog, and two cats. Her work has been published in *Pasque Petals*, *Lyrical Iowa*, and *Allium*.

Sara Moore Wagner is the author of three prize winning full length books of poetry, *Lady Wing Shot*, winner of the 2023 Blue Lynx Prize (forthcoming in 2024), *Swan Wife* (Cider Press Review Editors Prize, 2022), and *Hillbilly Madonna* (Driftwood Press Manuscript Prize, 2022). Find more at www.saramoorewagner.com.

Terry Watada is a well-published writer living in Canada. He has three novels, six poetry books and a collection of short stories in print. His sixth poetry book, *The Mask*, was released in December 2023. His fourth novel, *Hiroshima Bomb Money*, will be published in the fall of 2024.

Though his roots are in Santa Fe, New Mexico, **Christopher Watson** spent his first years in Mexico City. He studied classics at graduate and post-graduate levels; and has an MFA from Middlesex University (UK). He has published in the *Malpais Review*, *Magma Poetry*, *Palette Poetry*, *Cagibi*, and *Dark Mountain*.

Jamie Wendt is the author of the poetry collection *Fruit of the Earth* (Main Street Rag, 2018). Her manuscript, *Laughing in Yiddish*, is forthcoming in 2025 from Broadstone Books and was a finalist for the 2022 Philip Levine Prize in Poetry. She lives in Chicago.

Paula Yup, a native of Arizona, currently lives in Spokane, Washington. She has poems published in *Evening Street Review*, *Exit 13*, *J Journal*, and *Trajectory*, as well as various litzines. Her first book of poetry *Making a Clean Space in the Sky* is published by Evening Street Press.

James K. Zimmerman is an award-winning, neurodivergent writer, frequently a Pushcart Prize nominee. His work appears in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Chautauqua*, *December*, *Folio*, *Lumina*, *Nimrod*, *Pleiades*, *Rattle*, *Vallum*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *Little Miracles* (Passager Books) and *Family Cookout* (Comstock), winner of the Jessie Bryce Niles Prize.



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