

**MICHAEL T.
YOUNG**

NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention

SURVIVING A FAILED STRATEGY

“Something about war, translated by the sea and
wind into a song” – “Tahola,” by Richard Hugo

Study the horizon’s taut string, how it never
slackens. Follow the mast of a passing boat across
that line cutting a crosshair, searching for its target.

Mark waves enveloping swimmers in the break,
rolling them into marble shards and green flak
where muscles sort through discards of the retreat.

Quarrel with mountains momentary in the surge,
these orders shoving fleets of sandpipers into burl,
the purge of shale, the flecks quarried by air.

The surf will chisel runes into scrolls, hand off to wind
their interpretations and lock them in the folds of sails.
Cryptographers in the sand throw notes to the gulls

strafing the scattered decoders in a bleach of cries.
The white brush hisses gunfire. Flowers burst
and flake where waters explode the deep.

Shrapnel sleets the dunes and sea oats. Gather
this waste of insights that need telling not because
they’re fixed but because they’re fleeting.

Be last to leave the beach, packing scorched causes,
and ready to crawl the streets among other survivors
rebuilding the sun porches in the burnt grasses.

**SHARON
VENEZIO**

NEURONS

If I were a child, I'd be eating olives in my mother's kitchen,
stealing them from the antipasto platter before the guests arrive.

She doesn't remember my name when the nurse asks her.
Little olive thief, she says, while her hands rub the textured pattern
on the bedspread. *Is this a bed or a raft?*

Blockage in the carotid artery deprives my mother's brain of oxygen.
Now she spends long hours strapped down to a hospital bed,
the dopamine pathway stuck in overdrive.

Why is it raining in here? Dendrites branch outward
from each neuron like a leafless tree. *Close the curtain*
before we get swept away.

If my mother were a child, she'd be helping her grandmother sew
in the tiny shop where they worked and slept. A lifetime of sewing
machines & dinner plates,

her whole universe inside a house, even now
she washes and washes, cleaning dishes in the kitchen of her mind.
Spatial neglect and psychosis can be permanent, the nurse tells me.

My mother gathers the bedspread in her arms,
swaddles and rocks her imaginary child

SRIYA
TALLAPRAGADA

TRAILBLAZER

“There is no denying the wild horse in us”
- Virginia Woolf

Double knotted sneakers aren't good enough to run away in,
you need something stronger.
She ground her teeth on the metal chain just to find her voice,
trading her tongue to the old merchant for a rusty, red bicycle.
Her legs, sore and bruised from apologies and explanations,
pumped down the autumn air.
When there's no place to call home, you can do anything.
She picked graveyard flowers
and peeled off the petals until they were damp herbs.
She dipped her pen in the blood of the migrating butterflies,
scrawled sonnets on the back of her sandal and smeared it
over the land,
her words bleeding secrets into the dirt.

She stops at the motel with neon lights reflected by rainy
puddles.
After throwing up stanzas into the shower floor, she traces
her reflection in the cracker mirror
folding pages of Jane Austen into moldy origami.
Here, she chops off her hair and rolls up her sleeves like
in a french film,
smearing cheap lip gloss and blue eyeshadow over her face
to feel brave.
Every stray star is braided into a fairy crown, the split ends
of her bangs pocketed,
chemical perfume sprayed between wrists to capture euphoria.
All of her scars rhyme, each crisis turned into a lyric for
some sad country song.
There's a tattoo on her wrist, wrapping art in like the scratches
around her finger. Did she trick you?
Did she tangle your fingers in silent adjectives,
the ink from her poems branding forgiveness into your palm?
Could you match the words to a familiar voice,
or only from the bloody fingerprints next to them?

The tracks of her tires print patterns into soil,
trampling the dandelion seeds next to them,
Giving room for the fruit to grow upon.

Everyone knows that you can't bite the hand that feeds you.
She did something different; she scorned that hand,
scattered embers around her own house,
and set the library on fire
She rode out of the building, the ashes erasing her steps,
The decades choking on her story,
Her words are hidden under piles of dandelion seeds and
bicycle tracks.
Men have the alphabet and the stories to retell, to mutilate,
to bury,
but if all the women in the world yelled out at the same time,
Would that make a Trailblazer?

**RICHARD
KROHN**

**TO THE STUDENT WHO WROTE
ABOUT FROST'S "BIRCHES"**

Yes, r and t are neighboring keys,
or perhaps your inadvertent search
began because they're easy to misread,
a path that led to woman as a birch,
the graceful bend, the soft and pliant skin
when played upon by wanton, idle boys,
the ballet in the swaying of their limbs,
a tree or doll, though much more like a toy.

But look again at what you claim to love,
your wanderings in woods where urges grew,
designs you had on root and branch and leaf,
the living things you've managed to subdue,
then try to make your play a bit less vicious
than seeing yourself as a swinger of birches.

KIT
KARLSSON

NEW BRUNSWICK

We are at ease with each other, this city and I
like an old married couple.

He knows I do not care for
the frippery of summer

that I am quite content
with dead flowers and damp brown leaves

and empty streets
garlanded with grease and fog

and sad little buildings that smile at me
with jagged brick teeth, through grey freckles of rain

and little streams of rust and sand
seeking the chilly embrace of their mother the river.

As for my old friend
he asks nothing of me in return

for only he knows how intensely I desire
to be alone in the rain.

MADCAP

Come, let us mock them, my dear! They gave us a year
to die and to moulder, and yet still we meet here.

Six-hundred ages of angels and men
could not put us asunder; could not bury us then
nor swallow us under.

Let us laugh them to scorn.

We have found grottos and canyons

where immortals were born

found a mine of candescence

where the proud spirits fell—

ha!—they supposed it was hell;

but we have broken bread there

and inspired their air.

We have found Proserpine's body.

We opened her bones

drank the sugar inside, drank the milk of those bones
(and yet they thought we had died!)

Ah no, my fair darling; we have lived, we have cried
defiance to them. Let it be always so.

Let us bathe ourselves in that sweet columbine snow
that grows like the poppy on ice crags below.

I shall lay us out, dearest
in the cold temple fair
so that we may lay nearest
to each other there.

A bed of ice down in the netherworld where

I will light pillars as candles.
(Imagine the world full of that fire, dear!)

I feel them approaching. I know they are here.

Come, join hands with me.

Can you not smell the lilies that border the sea?

Can you not feel the flames creeping up on the tide

a river of flames with hell's honey inside?

White flames, and white nectar! And the moon's luminous cusp

dropping white molten tears. Come, they beckon to us

the seas will digest us. 'Come, rise with us,'

the waters are saying.

Enough of delaying.

Let us down to that temple I spoke of before

let us lay in the shrines I built up to our love

and adore.

**ELIZABETH
SMITH**

Winner of the 2022 NJ Poets Prize

CALLINECTES SAPIDUS

Through a tintured prism of brackish sun-slit haze
the epiphany of form: armorial bearings
of olive and blue, blue like a tropical sea deepening
to purple as it ran the length of claws to tips
dipped in flaming red. You could see it was different
by its silhouette, undulating with the gentle lap
of tide. Anchored to a barnacle-studded plank,
eelgrass billowing with the inflow then drawing
rhythmically back out to expose its persistence.
Each time it surfaced clinging to the bulkhead wall
seemed a miracle. In the quiet pulse of a summer day
sweet tang of brine wafting into freckle-spattered
noses from where the Sea N Ski had worn off
as their towheads bent over the dock...faint whiff
of tar, hot splintered planks, pilings, and
a single net. The taller one grabbed it, new kid
from up North. Not quite a teenager, but close. Before
they knew it he'd snatched it up, raising the pole
of the net like banner, its tensile legs enmeshed
in string as it struggled, underbelly dark and swollen
like a bruise, betraying the cargo she carried. "She's
going to have babies" one of them cried. By then,
the boy had just about shaken her out, roughly
and in open combat—determined to get all
four inches of her onto the dock at his feet—
all but one claw, so she hung dangling
at an awkward angle until slowly the claw gave
way at the joint. Scrambling she hit the deck,
the remaining claw every bit the banner the net
was. Two eye stocks, tiny periscopes black
as the abyss she evolved in: it was impossible

not to say she was looking straight at him.
The claw was up, her whole body cantilevered
by paddle fins so delicate as to be translucent
until a quick shift of the littlest foot
in the group, she couldn't have been
more than five, plunked her off the dock.
Then did the towheads swivel just in time
to glimpse her gliding majestically outward
to the farthest reaches of the bay, where fresh
and saltwater meet. One battle down
and a brood to release.

**LAURIE
BYRO**

HOBO STONES

Hobo stones began to appear around Granny's Farm in South Jersey. They had memories of the men who laid them down to rest, one on top of each other. Each one carried an intention. Property owners, fearful of bad luck were not obliged to move them, to scare away their magic. There were hobo stones.

One, had been bitten by a terrible black dog. For weeks, the stone bled crimson, for days the stone burned yellow. In cold weather, the stone ached all over, wishing for a milder winter. The stone beneath and the stone above worried, wary the dog would again break its tether. There were hobo stones.

There were stones the wild grasses that surrounded them hissed at. There were hobo stones that hissed back. There were stones that tumbled to the ground; there were stones that lost their direction. There were hobo stones that parted their skirts and danced at the full moon. There were hobo stones that ran to the next farm and never once looked back. There were stones that returned home, regretting their frivolous nature. There were hobo stones.

There were stones that sneaked into the barn and slept in the hay. There were stones that loved to hear the lowing of the cows. There were stones that tumbled to the gulley, then found comradeship on the next wall. There were hobo stones that guarded the children in the farm house. There were stones that begged the beaten children to run away. There were stones that begged the children to stay. There were hobo stones.

There were stones that asked the other stones to play. There were stones that begged the other stones to work. There were stones that danced in a circle in the moonlight. There were stones that clung to each other in the steamy summer grass. There were stones that married and moved to the next town. There were stones that never, ever left the wall. There were hobo stones.

Granny listened to the stones and their stories. Often, the stones didn't listen back, turned a deaf ear to her. As long as she lived in the old farm house her husband had built for her, stick by stick, there were these hobo stones. When her children grew up and moved away, after her husband died, the hobo stones kept her company. She listened to them while she grew old and died herself. Then they stopped talking. Out of respect for her, they hurled their voices into the earth. But in 1915, there may have been a million hobos and they needed to keep moving. There were hobo stones.

**GEORGE
MARANO**

ART AS A PALIMPSEST

The bearded facade we know so well
a facsimile, a remnant of bygone days
of carrara raised in the eastern dawn,
the bronze's patina of bluish gray
streaked and stained in the ambience
of perched denizens and acid rain
on plinth of granite for eternity's stay,
the preoccupied pass with no nod to craft
of opposable tools that chipped a godly vision
that formed in dreams and flowing tears
beyond its creator's doubts and fears
of his master's motives and strangling pouch
held breathless till the emery sheens.

A rebalancing refracts a revelatory light,
toppling rage decapitates the possession of delight
in casting on the forlorn heap the artist's ruin,
the pain of the past becomes a palimpsest
of muted traces that can never be erased.

INTERREGNUM

A breath, a sigh, a pause, a bit of relief while
we wait for blackness to dissipate,
till the clearness of the day is replete with
the mundane and minor trivia we crave,
when there's no need for a face to feign bravery,
when hero worship stands only for the depraved,
when the chaos sewn busts its seam
flittering away in the morning's forgotten dream
and the dream of a king and his kingdom is just a dream
and the nightmare ends with a superfluous scream of
off with his head when he was always dead,
when the fiction of his existence is only in one's head.

**WANDA
PRAISNER**

IN SEARCH OF

*...all that is necessary is to accept
the impossible...and bear the intolerable.*

Kathleen Norris

On Dateline, a suspect's attic—
an area caged in with chicken wire,
a bed inside, outside, a lock.
Where he held someone? Pirandello
kept a crazy wife upstairs.

It's October. Trees become skeletal.
Soon jack-o-lanterns, black cats,
ghosts and witches put up
for youngsters who'll come
costumed, for candy,

when I'll open the door—now bolted
to keep my husband
from trying to “go home.”
Rochester locked up his insane wife
in the attic of Thornfield Hall.

The suspect's found innocent—
the cage used to keep his grandfather,
lost in dementia, from leaving,
roaming the neighborhood
in search of what can never be found.

**REBECCA
REYNOLDS**

FRONTAL BONE

The forehead levers me around a groove—
a cockleshell dimmed by mini canaries
who swell across the rimpled land

when the furrows are so thorough here
it is most beautiful in winter a turf
scarred by threads of change by open rivulets as

barrenness gropes November and we long
for snow though few of us know how we bear
the Great Wing of Sphenoid

the lachrymal fossa, falx cerebri, foramen
or Lear's most stunning lines, Jerry taught us—
nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . what we give then

take away
if nothing comes from nothing
if you always love them from behind your

bones and you're afar.

SPHENOID

From *sp̄hēn* or wedge
little wings pinned so far in
you could never
pull them

a tired barfly
quits drinking for a life of work
and half-red months, of staid ravines
and treaties with the eyes and lingual

everything from a distance looks like a bat
hovering between
complex articulations with the
not-me

until such is my purchase
a mammalian stiff who
keeps me circular inside colludes with orbit

with the greater and lesser wings
a Turkish chair (sella turcica) foraman rotunda fossa
or the hollow sea.

PARIETAL

If I get up inside your head
I riff the same cobbled flanks

the mouth of meningeal rivers, ossification,
a path along the sagittal suture that stitches

half to half as mind and body cross
the leftness of night

pretend you want to sleep *here* pretend you want to burrow
in the grooves of anterior division

on twigs of evergreen, between fossils
and the white stones

with etchings in the roof, though my lanterns of orange have all
withered in the sunless overhead

up here
you would despair of touch all night

with the moon unseen and
exit impossible.

ETHMOID

to Sarah

So thin a trick we tried as kids
to sew two moccasins at night with a careless bow so the sleeper
dreams of tripping through space between the bones
in her air-lit skull and if I fall
I shall do so gracefully on the Crista Galli between plates
that no one threw though once
a former lover stabbed the wall with a knife
and I thought *I'm outta here* though suffering was imperative
and as for you
your father fractured your ethmoid bone
undetected so many years and later you'll undergo the operations
I went to the hospital and all I got was this lousy craniotomy
though few things come more graven than skulls a vestigial
magnetism inumed globes
hegiras patterns of dislocation
holes and rivets imperfect symmetries
the dark further visible
and in.

OCCIPITAL

The occipital bone frames a hollow the hollow or *foramen magnum*
converses through telephone wires with the cranial canal which is
the astronaut's rehearsal the occluded galaxy within
the crests and condyles below the trapezoid bone
much curved and lined with routes and shallows
in the snuff-white view this too is our nature tread
along my crease of named and nameless furrows the ruck
that ferries knowledge through the body disclosing everything and nothing
for the buzz is medium now no snow/no fog
inside the spinal nerves and arteries
as gossip swells or flags constant
as the ghosts who dog those sutured paths
and centuries of slopes, galvanic mysteries no ownership here
while fusing piece to piece
into intelligence above the atlas vertebrae because
the atlas shoulders us
though we are neither quietness nor light.

LACRIMAL

These are tiny countries pressed on us like lives
I cannot cry out or whimper
even if I were limping on the snow-white crests if I had flopped
on the vertical ridge and propped my purse of feathers
and thought so hard against the ice bitten
fingernails on the wall of a globe as the lacrimal sac
wells with its freezing tears
when below us stiffen the zippered packs hung
from firs where we have stitched our histories “if found”
so a single thread connects us home with prayers and a bone
that leans its ragged cradle in the orbit
where we come to rest
like migrants who had hid their money, rolled and flattened it in the linings
of their woollen coats, so thin
for the winter crossing we would learn how much salvation
there really was.

**SUSAN
PERENY**

BIRDS

I remember that day in February
we stood in the pet shop escaping the cold
the wallpapered walls
mimicked a tropical jungle

And in the biggest cage was a blue parrot
who swayed artfully on his feet,
kept his mouth closed
to all those who wished him to speak

And on that night in March
when our conversation hit a lull
I worked my lips against yours
like an assembly line

I would make a better parrot
because on that day the next May when we were married
and you wanted those white birds to fly into the sky
and our cake had those pretty hummingbirds
and the guests all cooed with pleasure
I was reminded of my aunt's parakeet whose wings were
clipped so it couldn't fly
still, in the house it cavorted happily from shoulder to shoulder
while I looked out windows
measuring the distance between tree and sky

**LORRAINE
HENRIE
LINS**

WHY POUNDCAKE

Because when we were small, my mother
would make it to fill our hungry bellies,

accessorize five skimpy brown lunch sacks—
while our classmates had butterscotch Tastykakes

and airy blue bags of potato chips layering
their personalized lunchboxes,

we had fat, blunt wedges wrapped in wax paper,
butcher-folded in neat creases, laid atop

an apple and a crust-on peanut butter sandwich.
And because, like her, it was never not there;

every church potluck and Sunday sit-down,
there, waiting for us after school on that bubble-glass

cake plate by the stove; sweet dense moist.
And because it takes some focus on the steps,

to blend the batter creamy, but not too far:
sugar-butter-sugar, three eggs' shiny yolks,

milk-flour-milk, and then just a spill more
extract than you think is called for.

And because it bakes in a low, slow oven
for well over an hour, it anchors me home,

uninterrupted, with time to be still while it steeps
the air carnival-sweet with vanilla and almond.

And because whenever I need to find my mother,
I pull out the grease-spotted recipe card that I already

know by heart, tack it to the cabinet door and begin
a conversation.

AKRAM
ALKATREB

Translated by **JONAS ELBOUSTY**

THE STATUES OF THE AFTERNOON

My friends are the night's brothers,
Statues of the afternoon,
Nothing left from their features
Beside the smell of the hand extended to the waiter
Behind the coffeeshop's window.

A harsh hand, frozen out of cold
Flaunting,
Or blinking like an eye full of tears.

AN ANGEL MADE OF BRONZE

Without being lonely
The Hudson looks like a secret manuscript
Weeping from the weight of the drowned.

A black and blind man is turning around himself,
As if he were at the edge of an abyss,
Alone on the edge of his leaning body by his musical
Instrument,
Eyes closed,
Floating like an angel made of bronze.

THE SCREAMS OF WAR

Her mouth that resembles the screams of war
Those who fall, the dawn in their head
A bird with two wings...

**MAREK
KULIG**

FLINTY

Enough weaponized,
first with blunt stones and a hand catapult,
then with what we'll call a chopper,
was ages ago nothing more than a sling-rock
narrowed by another rock's bashing it
into something that began to look like a triangle,
but not until we grunted a vowel
with the angles to form the shape.

Fortunately — and depending on how
you're looking at it — fortunately for all of us,
one day such unobtusing was done
over a patch of dry grass
that the friction at the edges
smote an irrepressible temperature,
erupting a spark in the direction of the tuft,
and striking it precisely at the same time
the day's hunching mason puffed
a stethoscopic sigh of lugubrious monotony.

Science — and this is where it gets complicated — Science
has since ascribed to the parasympathetic nervous system
this flinty discovery, withholding from Homo erectus
any and all credit, the anthropology suggesting
those knuckle draggers couldn't've had a flicker of an idea
as to the implications of their barbaric, repeated
smashing together of two pieces of fist-sized schist,
like cymbal-banging monkeys, no less.

Now whether that's a story of man
or a detail of our desire to domesticate
splendor, it is, no matter how you cut it,
close in harmony with what
we might have ourselves escaped,
had we not instead the sharper thoughts
to turn cornerstones one against the other.

NARCISSUS

To be the sky
over the Aegean,
the Pacific,
Erie, the Dead, by day
blushing blue
then come night
tall, dark and handsome
across the universe
striking matches
to light your own cigarette.

**MEGAN
GIESKE**

MARASIYĀ (ELEGY)

I see you still alive,
tasting champagne apples,
and spooning raspberry jam onto cheesecake,
tastes you have no words for.
You learn how to name what is in me,
what is in us.
The shapes of the English words are clumsy, puppy
in your mouth.

I heard somewhere, maybe Iraq, is a woman
with my same eyes,
she covers her flock of hair
and hides lapis rings in the sands.

I see *you* everywhere
in every hand
sticky with dough
and in every pair of eyes soft as leather.
For me you live again,
scrape knees on summer asphalt,
press palmfuls of berries to your mouth,
and let the juice trickle down your shirt—
things I know you have never done.

I see it all, the hesitation in my smile,
the need in my touch, the sorrow even
in my laughter, the you in my everything,
and you find it sweet,
and you find me,

and it is sweet.

--For Umesh, Still Age Ten

**JONATHAN
GREENHAUSE**

Goodbye, Patricioville!!!

Today's an absolutely totally fucking normal day, so of course
I'm part of a massive entourage following

the late great Abraham Lincoln, who's being portrayed by
an utterly unconvincing but all-in Jeremy Irons

adorned with a 10-gallon phosphorescent lime-green hat
& an American twang bordering on Texan

as he announces *Goodbye, Patricioville!!!* while sashaying
out of Philadelphia. This actually happened

during the somber days of Covid's 3rd wave: He cold-called me
to inquire about New Jersey, drawled

Why New Jersey?, emphasizing the unadulterated crappiness
most people refer to it with. & *why*

*the profusion of dangling participles & self-referential references
to dangling participles in your poetry?*

he deftly ended his question with. I didn't know how to reply
to movie stars, left it like a last slice of Jersey pizza,

accepted his invite to join that rip-rousing grand finale
of his showstopping world-renown

crowd-pleasing apocryphal film about Abe Lincoln entitled
Goodbye Patricioville!!! in this random dream

my wife warned me no one could possibly understand because
life's a dream & – when we wake up – it stops.

**JACALYN
SHELLEY**

FIRST APARTMENT

You stop at the white lacquered dresser
 stenciled with buttercups entwined around
 acanthus drawer pulls. Over the objects

you want me to see, your fingers point
 to the Angel Wings and Baby's Ear
 shells I sent from Florida and the teak comb

your grandfather engraved with your name.
 Your hand skitters past a pack of Marlboros
 and a pair of brass bullets I prefer to think

are lipstick cartridges. Are they sexy because
 they're new to you? Slipped inside the mirror's
 edges are photographs of people I don't recognize,

except the snapshot of your parents – your mother
 before she died and my son. I catch a glimpse
 of you. More beautiful than I have ever been,

your arms tattooed with flowers running down
 the trellis of your body ending in a pair of bouquets
 at each knee. Before you move away

toward the baritone call for more coffee,
 the Queen Anne looking-glass captures
 your curly hair brushing against mine.

You may not know this: In the roots of your hair,
 no matter the dye you color the shafts,
 there are centuries of grandparents

cheering for you in different languages
 from the one you speak, in a dialect
 I grope to understand. Remember:

I'm listening for the two-syllable word – Granny!
 Meaning the person who will fly to you
 when you cry out in the dark.

**TINA
KELLEY**

FLIRT WITH THE FUTURE

Neela, Kate, Ruth and Babs all hate being photographed. They hide at Thanksgiving, stand behind the tall, ask me to zoom out. They volunteer to disappear, wear sunglasses.

Did some relative say your nose was too big, your skin too dark, your eyes too close together? Did that sentence sentence you to loathing the lens, to recede? Was each wrong? Yes. Yes. Yes.

I can't photograph fire, wind, or the moon's rising hugeness, or all that I love about stones -- opals, cat's eyes, abalone. Go ahead, let your eyes smile a bit, own your shine.

I want to be as creative and generous as you, friends, daughter, mother-in-law. I'll give you a portrait as the world really sees you, make my love for you contagious, irrepressible. I'll take that photo

that shows you clear as an October night, when the sky is so pure and present, you'll think oaks had fallen down to show your grace.

STICKS AND STRINGS

One casts over water, casts under wind, uses thread
the right gauge for nymph socks, the other casts on.
One bounces line through uniform, plentiful wavelets

that puddlekick platinum beads in the sun. One
searches for something by feeling, using the hand
to conjure a mitten from the future, using the palm

to wait for the long expected belly to tickle.
The other reads stitches of light, the river glints
that we blur our eyes over, searching for shape.

We found each other, heading
upstream. The perfect presentation,
the hook set like slip knot.

The arc of the line drapes soft and right, a shawl
collar, strands of graceful ink, a sea god autograph.
The string's slung, twisting through currents and loops.

Our purposes: to catch, to hold,
to feed, to warm. Our catch: to heat,
to feed. Our warmth holds and enfolds.

Fingerlings can be elusive -- tiny shards of shell
in the egg whites. They surface in ruffles and ruffles,
need fingering weight, eight stitches per inch.

The reel spins, spun yarn dervishes around the needle
over and under, a throw, monofilament glistening,
shot out, pulled in with dew.

Rub hands first with lavender glycerin,
or cashmere sticks as it passes through the fingers.
Rub hands in bank mud to mask your scent.

Om of two feet in the spring-fed brook, restful rhythm
of something shiny for the fingers, cotton, nylon, scales.
With the marionette bounce of a ball pulled to vanishing,

the fry stay young as long as mayflies, rise
along the seam water, unravel, travel. Together
we try to feed them, knit them close, tuck them in.

YUAN
CHANGMING

LOVE LOST & REGAINED:
2 ONE-SENTENCE POEMS FOR QI HONG

1/ Love Lost: a Rambling Sentence

How I sometimes wonder
Whether it is because you wear
Your years so well or because the years
Wear you so well that I fell in mad love with
You after as long as 42 years of separation without
Knowing each other's whereabouts, again at first sight
With the whole Pacific Ocean between our shortening arms

2/ Love Regained: a Periodic Sentence

At a fairyfly-like moment
On a bushy corner of nature
Preferably under a tall pine tree
In Mayuehe, our mecca or the hilly village
Adjacent closely to the bank of the Yangtze River
With myriad tongues from my hungry innermost being
Each eager to reach deep into your heart, where my soul's
Fingers could caress every single synapse of your feminine feel
Between the warmth & tenderness of love, across the Pacific & the Pandemic
I'll join you

CASEY
MURPHY

AUTUMN'S BULLETS

The docks were pulled
Back onto the sand
Yesterday at the lake;
I wish I could say
I've written enough
Poems to cover them
Like blankets out of sight
From Autumn's bullets
Or that I miss anything other
Than what I'll never have again:
You touching me at the lake
For the first time —
That freedom I had in June
Of believing I didn't love you yet,
But in September,
I can do nothing but wait
To be dragged out like the docks
Towards piles of the dead
Leaves, empty mussel shells,
Lost shorts, and dozens of fish
Caught that weren't put back
Into the water in time.

**JOHN
WOJTOWICZ**

HANDING OVER THE KEYS

My stepfather tells a story, a frequent rerun
about how his parents
brought a monkey home from Florida
laughing as he describes
how it learned to unscrew
lightbulbs and throw them
at the cat as we crack snow crabs
and cans of Budweiser
on the screen porch of a seafood
dive near the Delaware Bay.
His parents were depression era
immigrant kids who traded
some American Dream for an exotic pet
and later a boat that ended up
a lawn ornament. The monkey died
of pneumonia; New Jersey
has seasons. We leave 20%
more American Dream than the bill
and get back in the pick-up.
One time, we ate sandwiches
at the Hoover Dam. Mustard and oil
spilling from my hoagie
onto the tailgate like optimism
across the Southwest
after the Colorado's current
was tamed. Maybe America
is a stepparent or maybe it needs a stepparent.
Sigmund Freud said America
was a mistake which might be true
but it survived ships gone astray
and pneumonia. Learned to square

and liquid dance. Somebody
had to raise it up. My high school
drama teacher preached
mistakes were gifts from the acting gods,
a chance to enrich the script.
My stepfather shifts the truck into park,
puts his hand on my shoulder,
and passes me a USA Gold.
We watch the bay erode the sun,
shards of sea glass glistening
in the surf. The monkey
still unscrewing light bulbs
in the afterlife. My stepfather's hands
start to tremor, sleeve slipping up
revealing a faded 1%er tattoo.
He asks me to take the wheel. Drive us home

**LAVINIA
KUMAR**

TIME WATCHES

First line is quote from Russian poet Osip Mandelstam

“Then under the sky-swarm of stars, Bedouins come,”
and from each back men climb into curled cirrus clouds.

Tendrils help men climb away from the cirrus clouds.
Watch their color morph from sage to purple to grey.

Yes, watch colors transform to almond-beige from grey,
and cloud water-drops grow into granules of sand.

Time watches hill-songs nurtured from granules of sand
guided slowly past peregrine beaks each cold night,

falcons who rest on rocks near sand-hills each cold night,
and drop feather wings for winds to send into clouds

where pennas hope wind rays will find stars in the clouds,
see all tendrils gather feathers into those stars,

see, too, Bedouins ride from feathers, to dust, to stars.
Time watches for dust sent to light a sky-swarm of stars.

**ERIK
ROTH**

NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention

ADJUSTING

Descending from gray clouds
onto a drizzly runway in Newark,
the plane taxis to Terminal C,
an Uber waiting on its third level

to drive me north up the Turnpike,
a length of factories and shadows
on the Meadowlands blackening
the Hackensack River. I arrive

home late, my children waiting for me
in the lamp glow of our living
room, the first place we entered
less than two years ago after returning

from the hospital without you. We
stood there, strangers to the presence
of your absence, hugging tight
in this new space, its weight forcing

our bodies together in the flame
of that moment, the icy center
burning with loss in the frozen
sconce of our embrace. Here,

we sit, talk a bit, before heading up
for sleep, our son still willing to be
tucked in, our now teenage daughter's
“g’night” muted by her closed door.

Alone in the silence of our bedrooms,
we stare at the void of the ceilings,
our eyes slowly getting used to the dark
on an unknown road made of memory.

The same one that rises early to meet
us at the beginning of a new day,
when we cover our eyes from brightness
in the struggle to let in light.

**DIMITRI
REYES**

THE NOT-YET POET

Not yet does the poet know the value of the written word spoken, already registered as sugar water. Where one day poet will compare our speech to hummingbirds which is beautiful because poet has never seen one and could still use the flapping, no—fluttering of its arms as an egress to discuss beauty itself as a poem. Which in turn, is the definition of the poet. Not known yet because at this moment, poet is still alone.

The pastorals not-yet-poet knows can be framed by church offerings. An arm around a young person's shoulder connected to a mouth that tells them *lo que necesitas está aquí*. There's a thick finger tap to a chest. A church organ plays 2 chords and a procession sits down but the not-yet-poet hears the creaking of pews bouncing behind their sternum and the not-yet-poet feels there's just heat inside. And the only thing holding it back is the cage of our torsos the not-yet-poet has seen in a science textbook. And it's the same layer of heat insulated between the pastor's wet button up and Italian suit jacket.

In finding the poet, not-yet poet would like to use the phrase 'field mice' to get at the squeeze of struggle or perhaps to describe money as 'cheddar.' And runs into a dilemma when poet doesn't know the word semantics. By now, a not-yet poet's appreciation of metaphor is itself a meme, a guy intensely explaining string theories in a sitcom where the title is always sunny. It's funny how these two words rhyme, not-yet and poet in a similar way a poem flows through the mind for years before the poet's fingers exhibit ink.

And it's comical how the not-yet poet finds themselves valid when expressed through sitcom memes. This will one day change but not before not-yet poet exhibits that the poet is in fact the gallery. That memes and mimesis aren't mutually exclusive. Not lovers, but are one another in their own reflection. That in actuality memory is ekphrasis, conversations are sonnets, and two coughs can be not-yet-poet's next couplet.

Do you see the connections before the not-yet-poet does?

**JOHN
BARGOWSKI**

TWO TOURS

During last night's downpour,
another round of leaves

dropped from our Crimson King
maples, but the ridge along County 519,
still mostly green.

And on damp, warmish mornings
like this, the resident cardinal

belts out its loud metallic chip
from a perch near the vacant nest

constructed in a forked branch
of the blackhaw.

A friend's come home
from the condo she retired to
in the Deep South.

Twelve straight hours on the road.

Her boy's taken his life.
And she's busy making arrangements.

We offer WIFI, a bed, hot food,
but drenched in today's light our hands
look empty.

Kuwait. Somalia.

Two tours. Twenty years and the uniform
still fit him.

She's looking for the name of a service
to clean up his place before she sells.

Flattened by rain, the leaves bleed
color on the concrete blocks.

After they dry out, blow away,
veined, washed-out-red semblances,
petiole to blade tip,
stain the walk.

**PRISON POET,
PRISONER #BJ-0177**

A ROSE OF DUST

It's dawn once more.
After fresh repetitions of splendor,
two girls
intent as jackals,
answer their dolls' demands.

The blonde girl
looks for baubles
in a pile of hats,
another finger:
in a pile of teeth
—gold teeth.

Blondie also piles the dresses,
ripping the unworthy apart.
Lipstick keeps her lips read,
melted gold yellows her hair.
She is filled
with cotton, plastic,
and void.

Her eyes are blanks.
And, of course, the breasts are
plump & milkless,
free of honesty.
Her long thin legs
are the gaudiest part
of her architecture.

Privileged little hands
strip silk from the excess
she has. Silk

from new skirts
clothes her doll.

While the blonde searches
the mansion for more,
the “other” girl
jumps into a dumpster.
She finally emerges
happy from trash, smiling
that at last she found
what her doll needed:
a head.

 The eyes are sad,
but all her elements
are noble:
forgiveness, kindness,
wool, wood
each radiates at the apartment.
The money is gone.
All the chickens
are recently dead,
beheaded for chicken soup.
The grayblack chill
taints each room.
The roof may not hold
nor the chronic tempers
of a rose of dust.

Now at dusk
just one girl smiles:
the head-hunting child.

CONTRIBUTORS

AKRAM ALKATREB is a Syrian poet residing in New Jersey. He graduated from the University of Damascus with a degree in law. Alkatreb has worked as a literary critic and journalist for over two decades, with numerous contributions appearing in major Arabic literary magazines and newspapers. He has participated in many poetry festivals both in the U.S. and internationally and has published six poetry collections in Arabic and one in Spanish.

JOHN BARGOWSKI's new book *American Chestnut* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press) was published in 2022. His first book *Driving West on the Pulaski Skyway*, selected by Paul Mariani for the Bordighera Prize, appeared in 2012. His poems have appeared on Poetry Daily and in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Poetry*, and *Ploughshares*, among others.

In January 2011, **LAURIE BYRO** was named “Poet of the Decade” by the IBPC competition for her 2000-2010 work. She stopped competing in 2021 after 60 awards, including having been named "Official Poet Laureate of Allendale NJ." Her children’s poem "A Captain's Cat" has appeared in *Cricket Magazine* and a textbook *Measuring up to the Illinois Learning Standards*. She has 6 full length books published, one chapbook, most recently: *Hopeless Romance* via Cholla Needles Arts and Literary Library-- all available on Amazon. Her work draws on myth and fairytale and her experiences of foreign places in the years she worked as a travel agent. Laurie has facilitated “Circle of Voices” at libraries in New Jersey for over 25 years, currently at the The Albert Wisner Public Library and Poet in Residence at Pacem in Terris, Warwick, NY.

YUAN CHANGMING edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver. Credits include twelve Pushcart nominations and chapbooks (most recently LIMERENCE) in addition to appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), *BestNewPoemsOnline* and *Poetry Daily*, among 1,939 others across 48 countries. Yuan was nominated and served on the jury for Canada’s National Magazine Award in poetry.

JONAS ELBOUSTY holds an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in English Studies from Columbia University. He is a writer, literary translator, and academic. He is the (co)author of three books, and his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *ArabLit*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Banipal*, *Prospectus*, *Sekka*, *Journal of North African Studies*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Comparative Literature*, among other venues. His translation of Mohamed Choukri's two short story collections, *Flower Crazy* and *The Tent*, is forthcoming from Yale University Press.

MEGAN GIESKE is a traveling writer and poet living in Cape Town, South Africa, where she is finishing her Master's in Creative Writing. So far, she has traveled to and written poetry in twenty-eight countries. Follow her work on meganthetravelingwriter.com

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE's first poetry collection, *Cupping Our Palms*, won the 2022 Birdy Poetry Prize and will be published by Meadowlark Books in the fall. His poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Bayou*, *The Fish Anthology*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Permafrost*, *RHINO*, and *The Rialto*. This is his 5th appearance in *Journal of New Jersey Poets*.

KIT KARLSSON (24F) currently lives in Pittsgrove and masquerades as a writer by night while working a 'real job' by day. Her other hobbies include painting, playing the harp, eating brownies, drinking beer, and snuggling with her dog. Her one motto when writing is to drink lots of coffee (and sometimes vodka.) Her favorite poet is Edgar Allan Poe.

TINA KELLEY's *Rise Wildly*, her fourth poetry collection, appeared in 2020 from CavanKerry Press, joining *Abloom and Awry*, *Precise*, and *The Gospel of Galore*, which won the Washington State Book Award. Her second chapbook, *The Opposite of Babel*, is out this spring from Jacar Press. She is the senior education reporter for NJ.com/The Star-Ledger. She shared in a Pulitzer covering 9/11 at *The New York Times*. She and her husband have two children and live in Maplewood, NJ.

RICHARD KROHN grew up in Verona, NJ, and has spent most of his life in nearby states, especially PA, but also in Central America. He currently teaches economics and Spanish at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA. In addition to *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, his work has appeared most frequently in recent years in *Tar River*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

MAREK KULIG immigrated to the USA from Poland in 1992. A former high school English teacher, he is currently a sales representative for a molecular diagnostics laboratory. His poems and translations were published or are forthcoming in *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Spire Light*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Under Review*, *Fish Publishing*, *Seneca Review*, *Cagibi*, *National Translation Month* and others.

LAVINIA KUMAR is author of 3 books (most recent, *No Longer Silent: the Silk and Iron of Women Scientists*) and 4 chapbooks (most recent, *Beauty. Salon. Art.*; Desert Willow Press); and an editor of the recent *A Certain Kind of Smagger: Poems from Christopher Bursk's Poetry Master Class*. Her latest poems appear or are upcoming in *River Heron Review*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *Decolonial Passage*, *Minerva Rising*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Superpresent*, & *Tiny Seed*. Her website is laviniakumar.org

LORRAINE HENRIE LINS serves as the Director of New and Emerging Poets with Tekpoet and is a founding member of the "No River Twice" poetry performance troupe. A Pennsylvania county poet laureate, Lins is the author of five books of poetry. Her work appears in a wide variety of familiar publications and collections, as well as a small graffiti poster in New Zealand. Born and raised in the suburbs of Central New Jersey, the self-professed Jersey Girl now resides along the coast of North Carolina. For more information, please visit: www.LorraineHenrieLins.com

GEORGE MARANO was born in Hoboken in 1954 and has been a lifelong resident of New Jersey. He is a graduate of St. Peter's College, having earned a B.S. in biology in 1976 and then an MBA from Pace University in 1980. His early career spanned pharmaceutical research and sales and marketing. Recently retired, he spent 31 years as a career counselor and academic advisor at New Jersey City University. Several of his

poems were published in the 2022 edition of *The Pavan*, St. Peter's University's literary magazine, in celebration of the University's sesquicentennial founding.

CASEY MURPHY grew up in New Jersey and attended William Paterson University. She received her MFA in Creative and Professional Writing in 2021. Casey primarily writes poetry and short fiction. This is her first publication.

SUSAN PERENY is (allegedly) a person from Pompton Lakes, NJ. A life-long New Jersey resident, she attended The College of New Jersey and earned an M.A. from Montclair State University. Susan is an emerging writer and currently works as a speech pathologist at a hospital in Newark. She lives in Bergen County with her distinguished cat, Leo.

WANDA S. PRAISNER is the recipient of 19 Pushcart Prize nominations, the Egan Award, Kudzu Award, Princemere Prize, First Prize in Poetry at the College of NJ Writers' Conference, and the 2017 New Jersey Poets Prize. She appears in *Atlanta Review* and *Lullwater Review*.

PRISON POET, Prisoner #BJ-0177 at one time resided in Middletown, NJ and worked as a fishmonger in Atlantic Highlands. "A Rose of Dust" was written in an abandoned lighthouse on the eroding beach of Leonardo, NJ in 2005. His current work has been featured in *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Poem*, *The American Dissident*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *California Quarterly*.

DIMITRI REYES is a Boricua multidisciplinary artist, YouTuber, and educator from Newark, New Jersey. Dimitri's book, *Every First and Fifteenth* (2021) is the winner of the Digging Press 2020 Chapbook Award and some of his work has been nominated for a Pushcart and Best of the Net. You can find more of his writing in places like Poem-a-Day, Big Other, A Dozen Nothing, Duende, & Acentos. His poetry journal, *Shadow Work for Poets* is now available on Amazon. He is the Marketing & Communications Director at CavanKerry Press and you can learn more about Dimitri by visiting his website at www.dimitrireyespoet.com.

REBECCA REYNOLDS has published two books of poetry, *Daughter of the Hangnail*, and *The Bovine Two Step*; her first book, *Daughter of the Hangnail* (New Issues Press) received the 1998 Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America. Her poems have appeared in a number of magazines and online journals, and she teaches creative writing at Rutgers University. She lives with her wife and cats.

ERIK ROTH grew up in Randolph, New Jersey, and received a B.A. in English from Colgate University and a M.Ed. from Rutgers. He lives in Bergen County, where he has served the Cresskill Public Schools for 21 years as an English teacher, elementary principal, and curriculum director. A former recipient of a scholarship from the Dodge Foundation, his writing has appeared in *Educational Viewpoints: The Journal of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association*.

JACALYN SHELLEY has been published in several journals including *Shot Glass Journal*, *Sugar House Review*, *Dunes Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *DASH*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Barely South*, and several anthologies including *Welcome to the Resistance Poetry as Protest*. In the last few years, she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. To read more of her poems go to JacalynShelley.com.

ELIZABETH SMITH grew up in Mantoloking, all year round, which was like being raised in a National Park. She attended the University of Dayton for both college and law school and stayed in southwest Ohio for 30 years. She is proud to say that although she now lives in Colorado, she has never quite gotten the sand out from between her toes! She has written poetry since she was eight and has been published most recently in *Tiger's Eye Journal*, where she was a featured poet, *Bellowing Ark*, *Poems from the Pandemic/Cincinnati*, and *Pudding Magazine*. She has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

SRIYA TALLAPRAGADA is an avid writer and a freshman at the Pingry School in Basking Ridge, New Jersey.

JOHN WOJTOWICZ grew up working on his family's azalea and rhododendron nursery in the backwoods of what Ginsberg dubbed "nowhere Zen New Jersey." Currently, he pays the

bills as a licensed clinical social worker and adjunct professor. He has been featured on Rowan University's Writer's Roundtable on 89.7 WGLS-FM and several of his poems were chosen to be exhibited in Princeton University's 2021 Unique Minds: Creative Voices art show at the Lewis Center for the Arts. His debut coffee-table-style chapbook *Roadside Attractions: A Poetic Guide to American Oddities* was published in 2022. John serves as the Local Lyrics contributor for The Mad Poets Society Blog. He lives with his wife and two children in Upper Deerfield, NJ. Check him out at www.johnwojtowicz.com

SHARON VENEZIO is the author of *The Silence of Doorways* (March 2013, Moon Tide Press). Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Spillway*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Grew Sparrow*, *Night Heron Barks* and elsewhere. Sharon was born and raised in Union County, New Jersey. She works as a behavior analyst specializing in autism treatment, and she is currently working on a poetry manuscript about dementia.

MICHAEL T. YOUNG's third full-length collection, *The Infinite Doctrine of Water*, was longlisted for the Julie Suk Award. His previous collections are *The Beautiful Moment of Being Lost* and *Transcriptions of Daylight*. He received a Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and his chapbook, *Living in the Counterpoint*, received the Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. His poems have been featured on Verse Daily and The Writer's Almanac, as well as *Cimarron Review*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *One*, *Rattle*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*.

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