

# A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

APRIL 2016

## A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT \_\_\_\_\_

Here's a shout out for the POETRY OUT LOUD: THE VIRGINIA FINALS competition at the studios of WCVE PBS Richmond last March 18th. 12 talented high schoolers competed for the title of state champion and the honor of representing Virginia at the national competition in Washington in May.

And the winners were: Ahkei Togun, Charisma Henry, and Elizabeth Lilly (in that order). Yes, of course, we were involved, which speaks well for our Executive Committee. Poet Laureate and committee member Ron Smith was in attendance, and so were committee persons Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Joshua Poteat, Guy Terrell, and myself, as judges. We were almost unanimous.

Some things are getting more elaborate all the time. On April 23rd, There will be a **Southern Regional meeting called Southeastern Regional Meeting: PoetCon at the Venue on 35th** (Norfolk, VA). "Oh, and we're doing poetry cosplay," says organizer Jeff Hewitt. Come dressed as your favorite poet and get entered into a drawing for some free poetry books." Godchild, as Northern Regional VP, will be there to oversee and perform. Everyone, of course, will come dressed as Poe, except me. I'll be dressed as either Godchild or Hewitt, depending on what hat I can find. Here's the schedule:

- 1:00 to 2:00 Hampton Roads Youth Poets
- 2:30 to 3:30 PSoV Reading (Ann Shalaski, Bill Glose, Jeff Hewitt, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda)
- 3:30 to 4:00 Free Time / Open Floor
- 4:00 to 4:30 Concurrent Workshops. Publishing / Performance
- 4:30 to 5:00 Free Time / Open Floor
- 5:00 to 6:00 Venue Readers
- 6:00 to 6:30 Free Time / Open Floor
- 7:00 to 8:00 Keynote Reader with Q&A: Tim Seibles (maybe)
- 8:00 to 10:00 Open Mic

Best,  
Bob



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## POEMS

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### FAMADIHANA

By Patsy Bickerstaff

(in memory of Grace Pow Simpson, Poet Laureate of Virginia, 2000-2002)

This teacher could have had no other name but Grace;  
and that defined her life: voice, movement, form and face.

Gently, she sang her songs; her knowing breath  
gave names to things a woman feels: joy, fear, love, death;

adopting other women's secrets in her heart,  
her alchemy turned sharp-edged memories to art,

made even pain, or loss, or old age, folded treasure  
laid bravely, richly, in the soul, filling its measure.

A world "made of recycled stardust" taught her mind  
to recognize and honor the wonders she would find.

Her words, like butterflies on petals and cold stones,  
sang wisdom, dream and triumph, skin and blood and bones;

she praised the Malagasy's ritual tradition  
that loved and danced past flesh, past death, past recognition.

Now, at this end of winter, she returns to earth,  
fire, water, wind, or sun, or stars, or some new birth.

Come now, old friends, to some secluded place,  
for this Famadihana: read, remember Grace;

here at the brink of Spring, the tongues and hearts of crones  
will dance the poems that have been her spirit's bones.

### Coyotes Invade Small Towns in the South

By Nancy Allen

What I dream as a skunk rooting in the garden  
is only the smell of coffee beginning to brew.

I wake to its predictable and bitter warmth,  
sit at the front windows and watch in the dark

for coyotes to cross the lawn - hunched and leggy  
shadows cast large by the cloud-cloaked moon.

Their voices at night climb my spine. Yelping, they snatch  
rodents, rend them to bits. By day, I've seen their trails

of downy scat, paw prints in the mud. Their wildness  
touches everything. Even the long, straight rows

of railroad beds are pocked with their dens. On nights  
they hunt, moonlight creates of the least poplar branch

bony fingers that wave and grasp and reach  
along the ground - so unlike precise images

the sun sears on the sidewalk, dutifully welded  
to feet and following along like obedient dogs.

## REVIEWS

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### SHORT REVIEWS OF THREE RECENT RELEASES

By Bill Glose

#### *The Blackbirds Tell Stories*, by Nancy Powell (San Francisco Bay Press)

This second collection by the past President of the Poetry Society of Virginia is as rich and luminous as her first. Her poems revel in imagistic impressions before swimming on to the next one in a dreamlike, connect-the-dot procession. In "Black Lung," she begins with a coal miner being examined in a medical office; from there, she moves on to the lamentations of a preacher—"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" — and then on to the titular birds: "Blackbirds sit heavy with hurt high / in the branches of the oaks." Each poem is an evocative journey for reader, one that will leave them in a state of pleasant awe.

#### *Echoes of Tattered Tongues: Memory Unfolded*, by John Z. Guzowski (Aquila Polonica)

In vivid detail, Guzowski recounts his parents' experiences in Nazi concentration camps and life after the war as Polish immigrants in America. These plain-spoken, narrative poems are spare, appropriate for the hardscrabble lives his parents had endured. In one he describes through his mother's eyes the "box cars / bleached gray / by Baltic winters"; in another, his father, starving in the concentration camps: "He is a bony mule with the hard eyes / one encounters in nightmares or in hell, / and he dreams of cabbage and potatoes / the way a boy dreams of women's breasts." This is an astonishing collection.

#### *Small Mothers of Fright*, by Tara Bray (LSU Press)

With great insight toward her place in a sometimes scary world, Tara Bray's poems explore life as a young mother, innocent but difficult questions her young daughter raises, and the plights of those around them. Bray always seeks the details that tell the most, such as "dusty shoes cut open at the top" on an impoverished student in one of her classes and "a bone look she'd mastered young." This compact collection of complex poems is one that bears second (and third) reading to study the rich twists of Bray's language.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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**SAVE THE DATE!** Poetry Society of Virginia 2016 Spring Festival May 20–21. Place: Richmond Public Library, Richmond, VA.

**Friday:** A day of workshops and readings; a coffeehouse evening reading with an open mic.

**Saturday:** Elections, workshops, readings, a panel discussion on publication, and more.

**Presenters:** Gabriele Glang, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Greg Donovan, and more!

**Come mingle with fellow Poetry Society members, meet new poets, and make new friends.**

**WATCH THIS SPACE for details and registration information.**

The Festival Committee is planning a Friday evening reading and open mic session for the first day of this year's annual festival, May 20, in Richmond. We have the location, but there's no equipment; and if possible we'd like to avoid the expense of renting a good microphone, mike stand, and amp. If you can help, please let Derek Kannemeyer know: [derekkannemeyer@gmail.com](mailto:derekkannemeyer@gmail.com).

**Hey, Creative Writing teachers!** Some of us have been talking about the need to beef up the Teacher Resources pages on the Web site by contributing articles about actually writing poetry. (At the moment all the articles are about helping students to read poetry; and those too could be beefed up!) If you have a lesson plan you could share, please send it to [derekkannemeyer@gmail.com](mailto:derekkannemeyer@gmail.com), who's curating this venture, and who already has received a couple of contributions. Help us to make this a substantial, useful, and lively section of the site!

**Bill Glose's** third book of poetry, *Personal Geography*, was published in January by David Robert Books. He has also had poems recently published in *Big Muddy* ("Inside the Selection Committee"), *The Chiron Review* ("When Glass Was Liquid"), *Red River Review* ("Why We Go to Horror Movies"), *Tiny Moments* ("Love Like a Tree"), and *Verse-Virtual* ("Bird Strike").

**Andrew Jarvis'** poetry collection, *The Strait*, has been selected as a Finalist for Two INDIEFAB Book of the Year Awards! *The Strait* received honors in the Nature and Regional categories. *The Strait* is available online at Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and at your local independent bookstore.

**M. J. Kledzik's** book, *As if Wine Could Pour from Her Nipple*, published by San Francisco Bay Press, will be available in April. Also, she has four poems in the current Winter issue of *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*. You may contact her for readings or to buy the book at [kledzikm@cox.net](mailto:kledzikm@cox.net).

**Joan Mazza's** poem "Return to Old Ways" is published in the current issue of *Verse-Virtual*:

<http://www.verse-virtual.com/joan-mazza-2016-march.html> Her poem "We Love Images of Tiny Houses" is published in *Blue Heron Review*: <http://blueheronreview.com/blue-heron-review-issue-5-winter2016/>

**Pia Taavila-Borsheim** has new poems published or forthcoming from *Tamsen* ("Thirst"), *Bear River Review* ("Cemetery"), *Border Crossing* ("Beacon Beach"), *Soundings Review* ("From Car to Schwinn and Back Again"), *Gargoyle #64* ("Peaches," "Towards Death"), and *Blue Lyra Review* ("Winter Colony," "March Morning") as well as in the 30th Anniversary Issue of *The Northern Virginia Review* ("Fashion Forward," "Union Square").

**Newsletter Deadline:** The deadline for our next newsletter is April 23, 2016.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Nancy Allen** is a criminal defense attorney and yoga teacher in Lynchburg, VA. She has been published in the *Piedmont Virginian*, *Sow's Ear Review*, and *JMWW*, and has won awards in the Poetry Society of Virginia's annual contest.

**Patsy Anne Bickerstaff**, BA, JD, author of *Mrs. Noah's Journal*, is a Life Member and former president of The Poetry Society of Virginia. Her work has won numerous awards, and appeared in approximately 200 print and electronic publications.

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