

# A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE POETRY SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

SEPTEMBER 2013

## A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Guy Terrell, PSV president

Allow me to introduce myself to those who don't know me. My name is Guy Terrell, and I live in Richmond. Over the past twenty years, I've been a member of the PSV and have served as treasurer twice, for a total of six years in that office. For nine years, I served on the Adult Contest Committee. I look forward to serving you as president.

The Executive Committee desires to maintain and extend the sense of **community** within the PSV.

Imagine you were to buy an unrestored family

home built in 1923. It would likely need some renovation and expansion to make it more useful in today's world. The same is true with the PSV, so we are drawing plans and going to work. This is a do-it-yourself organization.

We are currently working on several new initiatives and have included a survey sheet in this newsletter that will allow you to share ideas and concerns of your own. Please take time to respond to the survey. I want to hear from you.

We have to execute well both fiscally and imaginatively to be a successful organization. With your help and encouragement, we will move the needle on this organization.

The Executive Committee and all our new volunteers are excited about the programs and improvements ahead. I want you to be excited with us!

Guy Terrell



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## BOOK REVIEW: *ITS GHOSTLY WORKSHOP*

By Guy Terrell

You will find in Ron Smith's latest collection, *Its Ghostly Workshop*, a number of poems that will dazzle you with eeriness, humor, sadness, or sheer pleasure. There are ghosts within almost every poem—literary, historical, and cultural. Some poems struck me one way on first reading and another on second reading because these poems all have layered characteristics. Each poem relates Ron Smith's senses and

experiences in a masterful way. He is a poet writing at the peak of his considerable gifts and facility with words. For example, "Perfect Hit" ends with "they disappeared / into a small sky of unmoored stars / drifting softly down." Lines like that show why Paul Engle said, "Poetry is boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words."

When reading many of these poems, you feel as if you are in a transponder from a *Star Trek* episode, receiving messages and images from places far-away in both time and space. In "Via Appia, Beyond Ciampino," the paving is "older than Spartacus" and it "felt the feet of apostles," and today, a trucker stands where the Roman road ends and the asphalt begins,

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## 2ND ANNUAL HARLEM RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL TO BE HELD SEPTEMBER 7

The Anne Spencer House Museum in Lynchburg, VA, will present its 2nd Annual Harlem Renaissance Festival on Saturday, Sept. 7, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Tickets are \$5 general admission, \$3 for college students with ID, and free for children under 12

The festival features craft vendors, live music, artists, soul food, and children's games. The Museum grate-

fully acknowledges the generosity of the PSV, whose support contributes to programming.

Anne Spencer was a poet, a civil rights activist, and a gardener. More than thirty of her poems were published in her lifetime, and she was the second African American poet to be included in the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry (1973).

Noted for nature poetry and verse with biblical and mythological themes, Spencer shared intellectual respect and repartee with such literary notables as Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Countee Cullen, Sterling A. Brown, Zora Neal Hurston, H.L. Menck-en, Gwendolyn Brooks, and James Weldon Johnson, who discovered her poetic talents in 1919.



Anne Spencer House

## CAROLYN KRIETER-FORONDA TO LEAD WORKSHOP



Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda

Poet and painter Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda will lead a workshop, "Ekphrastic Poetry in the Museum Setting" at the Maier Museum of Art at Randolph College in Lynchburg, VA on September 20 from 2p.m. to 5 p.m. Participants will write poetry inspired by art in the museum's collection. Kreiter-Foronda will use reproduc-

tions from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to introduce ekphrastic poetry, a traditional approach to writing about art. The workshop is free, but space is limited.

Contact the museum at (434) 947-8136 to reserve your seat. Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda will return to the Maier Museum of Art on

Saturday, October 19 as the featured reader for the Poetry Society of Virginia's fall meeting. Poetry chosen for the Maier's Ekphrastic Poetry Webpage will also be read at this event.

This program is supported, in part, by the Paul Mellon Endowment and the Jean Stafford Camp Memorial Fund.

## Central Region Poets Hold Annual Meeting & Follow-up Excursion

The Central Region held its annual meeting on June 22 at *On the Rox*, a funky bar in the historic Shockoe Bottom area of Richmond. About twenty poets attended. Our guest poet, Ron Smith, spoke about the heard poem and the shape of the poem on the page and touched on ekphrastic poetry. He also gave a reading from his own work. After our pub lunch, we shared poems in progress, working in groups of four or five, and gave feedback. The day opened and concluded with open mic sessions, the first to present the poems we wished to workshop, the second just for fun.

As a follow-up, on Bastille Day, July 14, we offered an ekphrastic outing to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. We spent the afternoon in front of artworks of our choice and drafted poems about of them, which we subsequently shared, first at the museum cafeteria at

subsequently shared, first at the museum cafeteria at the end of our visit, and later on a google docs site. Two of these poems were later posted to the VMFA blog at: <http://viriniamuseum.blogspot.com/2013/07/wesselmanns-pop-art-inspires-poets.html>.

## Publication Credits

**Diana Woodcock's** chapbook, *Tamed by the Desert*, was selected for fall publication by Finishing Line Press. It will come out in mid-October.

**Joan Mazza's** poem, "Congregation," appears in *The Quotable*, <http://issue10.thequotablelit.com/poetry/congregation/>. **Mazza's** poem, "Stringed Instruments," appears in the current issue of *The MacGuffin*.

## A Thin Thread of Water

by Sharron Singleton

After the war was over, after  
the factory closed,  
my father took any odd job he could find—  
swung an axe on a trestle  
of the Grand Trunk line,  
once nearly severing his thumb.  
I used to trace the red raised scar,  
crooked like a train derailed—  
it seemed a wound from some kind of war.

After that he cut and baled hay  
on McKenzie's farm, brought home eggs  
and corn, payment we didn't despise.  
I sometimes saw him through a haze  
of tawny dust, smaller in the distance,  
bent under the heavy arm of the sun.

Years later, in the parking lot of Montgomery Ward's,  
I look west where streets slope  
to a shallow valley then rise again  
and think of the summer  
he pried boulders  
from the river that ran here—  
so they could bury it, so commerce  
could sink its concrete  
in the riverbed, and wonder if,

now bereft of sun, air,  
stick boats of children, if  
deep under my feet  
a thin thread of water  
still bends around rocks,  
relentless.

### Book Review from page 1

pointing the way to Bovillae. The Italian poems have a sense of "innocents abroad." Smith finds himself on a street "no wider than our hallway in Virginia." He is awed by the ruins, but at the same time, "the stones speak only clichés." This viewpoint provides a rich stew filled with Poe, Pound, Rome, and Paducah, KY, all equally important in the end.

This is a book that will stretch you—your intellect and quest for understanding and learning. You will find yourself "googling" a number of characters and words.

The first poem will require you to look up Edward Teller—affectionately known as the father of the hydrogen bomb—who had a prosthetic foot due to a streetcar accident when he was a boy. The poem uses the device of a prosthetic leg, which proves that poems only need to sound as if they are true. I had to read the poems in Sections II and IV more than one time. The arrangement of the book is like a layer cake. Each odd numbered section contains a single poem like sweet icing between the thicker even numbered sections. It is the same arrangement used in his first book *Running Again in Hollywood Cemetery*.

There are too many references to list. He references other poets by name or example. The poem "Anecdote of the Half-Rubber" is a parody of Wallace Stevens' famous poem "Anecdote of the Jar." You will find many forms you will recognize and other imitations of other poems you will find astonishing. Every poem is well-crafted and filled with the unusual. My favorite is a four-page poem "Little Gidding" after Eliot's poem of the same name. It even has five parts after the original. It contains an astonishing phrase, "I lugged the strongbox / of my grief out..." It is in section V of this poem where the poet throws open the doors of inner doubt, bares his breast to the reader, but also asks the reader to ask themselves the same questions. Or it could just be me! But I think it's the best page in the book.

Section VI – "A Different World" contains poems that do not require a dictionary at the ready! After the challenging poems of the first two-thirds of the book, reading the rest of the poems is like cruising down the road in a convertible. Some reviewers try to prove how smart they are, not me. I love accessible poems that I can understand on first reading, but I find the best poems often are the ones I have to work for.

The book's title poem, "Its Ghostly Workshop," at the back of the book is eminently understandable. It was written as advice for his grandson. Its first line: "Remember the memorable and let the rest go." In fact, after I read this poem, I found I could use it as the key or treasure map to all the other poems in the book. "Savor the detail and the barbarous language / it insists on speaking." Each poem in the book ties back to the world-view espoused in this single poem. So read the last poem and then start or re-start reading the book! It's worth reading to discover what a Negroni is; that the U.S. Capitol is a kind of ideogram; and Smith's own struggle for a double major. He stands the sublime and the ordinary side-by-side and asks the reader to choose which one she prefers.

**T H E P O E T R Y S O C I E T Y O F V I R G I N I A**

**P.O. Box 6706  
Virginia Beach, VA, 23456-0706**

**[www.poetrysocietyofvirginia.org](http://www.poetrysocietyofvirginia.org)**

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[ggterr@infionline.net](mailto:ggterr@infionline.net)

[christywillette@hotmail.com](mailto:christywillette@hotmail.com)

[cgeller@post.harvard.edu](mailto:cgeller@post.harvard.edu)

[dkannemeyer@st.catherines.org](mailto:dkannemeyer@st.catherines.org)

[jspanich@verizon.net](mailto:jspanich@verizon.net)

[knuckleheadpoet@yahoo.com](mailto:knuckleheadpoet@yahoo.com)

[zen.correa@gmail.com](mailto:zen.correa@gmail.com)

[wmharris@embarqmail.com](mailto:wmharris@embarqmail.com)

[nellnick@aol.com](mailto:nellnick@aol.com)

[claudiagary611@gmail.com](mailto:claudiagary611@gmail.com)

[charles.wilson4.ctr@navy.mil](mailto:charles.wilson4.ctr@navy.mil)

[beaches01@sprynet.com](mailto:beaches01@sprynet.com)

[mwkstarr@hotmail.com](mailto:mwkstarr@hotmail.com)

[michaliH@aol.com](mailto:michaliH@aol.com)

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