

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

FEBRUARY 2016

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT _____

“When in doubt make a fool of yourself
~Cynthia Heimel”

Happy New Year (a little late), and what a way for Poetry Society members to celebrate the dregs of cold then to nestle up to The Poetry Society of Virginia's refashioned Web site (by Jeff Hewitt), which thematically celebrates the Society's status as one of the nation's oldest arts organizations (founded in May of 1923). Here's what's new—*Facebook* and *Twitter* are active on the Web site, thanks to Hewitt and the comments and continuing efforts of our new Social Media Coordinator, Kim Drew Wright.

Twitter allows us to tweet anything; and *Facebook*, well, it hooks us up with other poetry writers and/or lovers, as well as *The Good Word: Your one-stop shop for writing events in area codes 757 and 804*. Now we have easy access to things, such as *The Muse Writing Center*, *SCPublishing*, *Virginia Poetry Online*, open mics, shows, classes, poetry spots in Hampton Roads and Richmond, photos of members and others, publishers, and *The Academy of American Poets*.

Thank you Jeff Hewitt, one of the best performance poets in the state, and Kim Drew Wright, a fount of energy and talent.

As Social Media Coordinator, Kim ensures the members of the Poetry Society a gathering place for members to share successes, discuss poetry, and peruse articles on craft, as well as find official event announcements from PSV. Members will connect not only with other members, but also with the larger writing community. Visitors are invited to post their own newsletters listing poetry events for their areas.

A sad note from Ed Lull: “Our wonderful friend, extraordinary poet, and generous mentor, Joanne Scott Kennedy passed away yesterday. Her funeral was held Wednesday, January 6th, at 11:00 a.m. in St. Olaf Catholic Church.

Best,
Bob

“Life's too short for blandness... Be a badass
~Kim Drew Wright”



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JUST ACROSS THE SOUND



Poet and author Shirley Sellers recently read at Norfolk's Five Points Community Farm Market from her newly published novel, *Just Across the Sound*, a romance set against the backdrop of the Civil War. Based on facts from her family's history, the novel is set in Norfolk, New York, and Roanoke Island, and is told movingly as a personal love story during turbulent times. Shirley's grandmother made a fateful trip with her father and brother to Roanoke Island on the eve of the Civil War, where she met a most interesting man.

Shirley, a past president of PSV who is known for her prize-winning poetry, shows a gift for dialogue and character development that invites the reader into a large and endearing family. Always present is Shirley's love of nature and her home. We were honored to hear her read sections of her novel and then hurried to obtain our own copy so we could read this beguiling story in its entirety.

~Jack Callan and Judith Stevens

NORGE LIBRARY POETRY
SERIES CONCLUDES 2015

On Saturday, December 19, readers and friends who participated in the monthly poetry reading organized by Ed Lull met in Williamsburg for the year's final presentation, lunch, and an open mic. Ed and Evelyn Lull have been managing these monthly poetry readings at the James City County Library at Norge for 12 or 13 years. Ed invites poets from all over the state to do readings. Over the course of a year, regular attendees get to enjoy and appreciate the work of 50 different poets. You most likely know how difficult it is to "manage" poets! The event began with a joint reading of a poem written by Bob Young titled "The Road More Traveled" addressing some of the moral and political questions of our time. The poem was read not only by Bob but also by Eileen Ridge, Doris Baker, Trib Mason, plus Xavier and Josh Young (Bob's grandson and son respectively). At the conclusion of the joint reading, we enjoyed separate readings by Doris Baker (a venerable and much-loved member of PSV), Eileen Ridge, Trib Mason, Mary J. Kledzik, and James McNally (another venerable and much-loved member of PSV.) You acquire monikers after you have been around a sufficiently long enough period! M.J. had a wonderful line that ended her poem "Dinner." She said, "god of abundant food reminds me that I am still happy." Jim ended his poem on the World Series with "the satisfaction of the moment is still a satisfaction." As a tribute to Elizabeth Urquhart who passed away this year, Sofia Starnes presented Elizabeth's poem, "The Death of the Beekeeper." Following that, Judith Stevens read her moving elegy to Elizabeth. The last time I heard Elizabeth read she had a poem with a memorable phrase: "Dance in the pueblos to wish good luck and a happy life." She will be long missed. After the buffet luncheon, there were open microphone readings by 25 poets! It was a wonderful holiday event.

~Guy Terrell





POEMS

**In-law**

By Tara Bray

The cries of the killdeer agitate
 like demons delicate and ruthless,
 the bird ten steps ahead in harsh light,
 the wheat soft and green,
 thoughtless heads at the mercy of the wind.
 A pheasant hunkers down in dust,
 its splendor tucked tight, muted
 by land squared off and measured.
 The family is almighty, the yellow day cold.
 I am outside, tended by wind I hate.
 What world is this?
 The sun so strange and everywhere.

~From *Small Mothers of Fright*. Reprinted by permission of
 Louisiana State University Press

Hubcaps

By Leslie Shiel

One rolls off the front left tire of the police car,
 wobbles towards me, clicking on the cobblestone,
 throwing light, then leaping a curb into shadow.
 I bend, then pick it up, thinking of my artist
 friend in Chicago who chanced on an abandoned
 hubcap she carried back to her studio, stopping first to
 take in a matinee, the hubcap under her arm in
 line before she propped it upright in the seat beside her.
 I don't remember in what sculpture or gallery
 it ended up, but as the policewoman emerges from the car—
 a little clumsy, yet scrubbed clean like the Sisters I met with
 once,
 hoping to join—how much I still
 love the word “consecrate.” And now, walking
 towards me, stiffly, the red-haired cop, acne-scarred,
 her pants too big and wrong, as if she'd pulled her drunk
 husband's uniform from the hanger while he slept.
 I want to slide her glasses up her nose, but instead, as her
 nun-soft hands shake, I try to hold out what she reaches for.

~From *Self-Portrait as a New Name* (Finishing Line Press)

The Visit: Clouds in Trousers

By Gregory Donovan

Power saw ringing the end of its cut, hammer
 Drumming its blunt obsession, driving it
 Through heavy summer damp and murmur
 Of voices snowing the globe of afternoon, and so
 It begins. We approach as shadows in a ghostly fog—
 Old Virginia clapboard farmhouse and fruit trees
 Materializing in the yard, explosions of fat blue hydrangeas,
 Magnolias towering over the stone path we follow
 Into the menace & allure of slick dark leaves. We want
 Simply to live here, perhaps once we did. Let's open
 The screen door, step inside, yet no one is
 Here, the house feels us enter & we feel it too, the absence
 Of those who make this *home*, the children for whom
 It will always be magic, the couple for whom
 It will always be magic and trouble and now we must
 Wonder, is this a dream? Such things don't matter
 Anymore. The voices come again, we can't tell what
 They're saying, and what they're saying doesn't
 Matter, we don't want to understand, hold that
 Off. We want to be here wavering with these tones
 Hanging bells in the air. All we have wanted
 And could not say, all we have lost without knowing,
 Now belongs here to the strong young couple
 Who hold within, tucked inside, that other couple
 We once dreamt but could not keep alive. The scent
 Of fresh-cut flowers and cooking and the warmth
 Of late afternoon sun slips over us. Our puzzled expressions
 Linger in the shadows, our dim proposals hang back
 In the shadows and it seems they will never *come out*
Come out wherever you are into this pale hovering, yet now
 Here they come, our friends & their children, arms
 Open, mouths open, ready to shout and to kiss.

~From *Torn from the Sun* (Red Hen Press, 2015)



Special Problems in Vocabulary

By Tony Hoagland

There is no single particular noun
for the way a friendship,
stretched over time, grows thin,
then one day snaps with a popping sound.

No verb for accidentally
breaking a thing
while trying to get it open
—a marriage, for example.

No particular phrase for
losing a book
in the middle of reading it,
and therefore never learning the end.

There is no expression, in English, at least,
for avoiding the sight
of your own body in the mirror,
for disliking the touch

of the afternoon sun,
for walking into the flatlands and dust
that stretch out before you
after your adventures are done.

No adjective for gradually speaking less and less,
because you have stopped being able
to say the one thing that would
break your life loose from its grip.

Certainly no name that one can imagine
for the aspen tree outside the kitchen window,
in spade-shaped leaves

spinning on their stems,
working themselves into
a pale-green, vegetable blur.

No word for waking up one morning
and looking around,
because the mysterious spirit

that drives all things
seems to have returned,
and is on your side again.

~From *Application for Release from the Dream*.
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Pollination

By Andrew Jarvis

A colony of bees
has captured our garden,
yellow and black, the grass
no longer painted green.

They move pollen in plants,
disarranging arranged
blossoms of sunflowers,
a golden formation

waving this way, that way,
bumbling their juicy buds
while they buzz around rows,
not caring much for mulch.

Mother warned us of this,
nature's careful design
pollinating the world,
our pests withdrawing pulp.

And if we erase them,
leaving their bumbles parched,
life would stop coloring
the whites of our winters.

~First appeared in *James Dickey Review*



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Like the Poetry Society of Virginia's Facebook page at [facebook.com/PoetryVA](https://www.facebook.com/PoetryVA). There you can share poetry, articles, or anything you think our community would be interested in. If you have a question about craft or publishing - ask and hopefully start a discussion that will help yourself and others. Plus, if you are a PSV member, please share your accomplishments and events! We want to hear your success stories.

Nancy Allen's poem, "Coyotes Invade Small Towns in the South," recently appeared in *Tar River Poetry Review*.

David Black has two poems in *Skyline 2016* ("For Plato and My Mother" and "Spring Plowing:"). He also has two poems in the *Virginia Literary Journal 2015* ("Uncle Harvey's Deer" and "For an Unknown Ancestor").

Joan Mazza had five winter poems published in the December 2015 issue of Verse-Virtual.
<http://www.verse-virtual.com/joan-mazza-2015-december.html>

Sara Robinson's poem, "Louisiana Swampwater," has been awarded an Honorable Mention for Poetry in the University/Adult category in the Fralin Museum of Art's 29th Writer's Eye competition. The 2015 adult poetry contest was judged by the esteemed Nikki Giovanni! Her entry was inspired by Sally Mann's photograph, "Untitled from the Deep South." She also has two poems published in the recently-released 2015 edition of the *Virginia Literary Journal*. These poems are "Sometimes the Little Town" and "A Condensed History of Words." Her poetry collection, *Sometimes the Little Town*, was published by Cedar Creek Publishing in February 2016.

Pia Taavila-Borsheim has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize by Anna Leahy, AWP board member and editor of *TAB: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, Chapman University. Pia's poem, "Two Birds" was published in *TAB's* July 2015 issue. Another poem, "From Car to Schwinn and Back Again" was accepted by *The Lake*, an e-zine published in the UK by editor Professor John Murphy. Pia also enjoyed reading five poems at the recent *In the Company of Laureates* event at the Hylton Center for the Performing Arts in Manassas.

Kim Drew Wright's debut collection of short stories and prose poetry, *The Strangeness of Men*, recently won finalist in USA Best Book Awards. Congratulations!

Newsletter Deadline: The deadline for our next newsletter is February 20, 2016.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tara Bray has published poems in *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *AGNI*, *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere. She is also the author of *Mistaken for Song*. She is a recipient of a State of Nevada Individual Artist Fellowship and resides in Richmond, Virginia, with her husband and daughter.

Gregory Donovan's recently published poetry collection is *Torn from the Sun* (Red Hen Press, 2015), and he's the author of poems, essays, and fiction published in *American Poetry Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Copper Nickel*, *Crazyhorse*, and many other journals, as well as in several anthologies, including *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets of Virginia* (UVA Press, 2003). With the poet and filmmaker Michele Poulos, he produced *A Late Style of Fire*, a feature-length documentary on the life and work of Larry Levis. He teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University and is Senior Editor of the online journal *Blackbird*.

Tony Hoagland's books of poetry include *Sweet Ruin* (1992), which was chosen for the Brittingham Prize in Poetry and won the Zacharis Award from Emerson College; *Donkey Gospel* (1998), winner of the James Laughlin Award; *What Narcissism Means to Me* (2003), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Rain* (2005); and *Unincorporated Persons in the Late Honda Dynasty* (2010) and *Application for Release from the Dream* (2015).

Andrew Jarvis is the author of *Sound Points* (Red Bird Press), *Ascent* (Finishing Line Press), and *The Strait* (Homebound Publications). His poems have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Evansville Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Tulane Review*, and many other magazines. He was a Finalist for the 2014 Homebound Publications Poetry Prize. He also judges poetry contests and edits anthologies for Red Dashboard LLC. Andrew holds an M.A. in Writing (Poetry) from Johns Hopkins University.

Leslie Shiel teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Visual Arts Center of Richmond. "Hubcaps" is published in her chapbook, *Self-Portrait as a New Name*, from Finishing Line Press.

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