

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

MARCH 2016

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT _____

“ *The apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough.* ”

In the McLean, Va. Metro station, on the Silver line, quickly appearing and vanishing faces turn toward the colorful ceiling-high glass panels of artist Martin Donlin that are decorated by collages of images of people and trains and, gloriously, poems by Virginia Poet Laureates.

The boldness of the work first catches the eye, then the observer is drawn to the intricate details and text that are best seen close up: poetic works of Claudia Emerson, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Rita Dove, Grace Simpson, George Garrett, Joe Awad, Margaret Ward Morland, and Kelly Cherry.

I remember Grace Simpson, an elegant, attractive woman of talent and humility, a long-time member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, who wondered what all the fuss was about her poems as she toured the state—“uses poetry the way a surgeon uses a scalpel: to cut, to lay bare, to heal” (*Style Weekly*). I asked her in recent years if she was going to keep reading to the public. “Heavens no,” she said. “I’m through with all that.” She didn’t need attention. She tended to write about her family (read *Dancing the Bones*.)

“Speech Lessons”: A stroke struck my father / dumb and lame before I learned / to talk. For a year we jabbered / the same wild tongue / That was before memory, / before dreams. Soon / I couldn’t understand his speech, / though he would repeat / until his patience shredded, / his tongue thick as cold butter. / I never brought anyone / home to play. / I wanted him/to disappear...

Grace died February 11th in Farmville. She was 84. Her funeral is set for 2 p.m. on March 12th at College Church on the campus at Hampden-Sydney College.

The next phase of the Metro art installation will feature the work of Henry Hart, Sharon Singleton, David Huddle, Felicia Mitchell, Jim Minick, Jeff Mann, Vivian Teeter, and Dan Stryk. A third phase will feature emerging poets Warren Harris, Lee Pelham Cotton, and Joan Ellen Casey.

Best,
Bob



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SHARON LIBBY LEITER



*Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me –
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.*
By Emily Dickinson

The world is a sadder place since the death of **Sharon Libby Leiter**. Sharon died Saturday, January 16, 2016, another cancer casualty. While Sharon and I mostly communicated by electronic mail the last couple of years, with the exception of chance encounters at various writing events, we were unwavering friends since our first meeting. Sharon was my neighbor when my now deceased first spouse and I built a home at Lake Monticello (Palmyra, Virginia). My spouse and I moved into our new home July 1, 1996, and he died December 23, 1996, his birthday. Sharon was a supportive friend and neighbor to me during my grieving process. She and I kept a check on each other's homes during absences, and I fed and loved her two lovely cats.

Sharon, the poetry editor of *Street Light*, was an acclaimed poet, author of fiction and various scholarly works, and so much more. She and I greatly admired the poetry of Emily Dickinson; and when I read Dickinson's poetry, I always have a copy close by of Sharon's *Critical Companion to Emily Dickinson: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*. Most importantly, Sharon was the first person, since my high school English teacher, who told me my poetry had value. I will always be grateful for Sharon's gentle critiques, comments, and encouragement about my writing.

I had e-mail contact with Sharon recently, when I asked her to judge a category in the 2016 Annual Poetry Contest, *POETRY VIRGINIA*, Poetry Society of Virginia. Sharon told me she was honored that I asked, but she had to decline because of her health. We agreed, once more, to schedule a dinner date. I'll always regret I missed an opportunity to share a meal with Sharon, one last time. I will miss my friend.

~L. Lynn Young

POEMS

Wasteful Gesture Only Not

By Tony Hoagland

Ruth visits her mother's grave in the California hills.
She knows her mother isn't there but the rectangle of grass
marks off the place where the memories are kept,
like a library book named Dorothy.
Some of the chapters might be: Dorothy:
Better Bird-Watcher Than Cook;
Dorothy, Wife and Atheist;
Passionate Recycler Dorothy, Here Lies But Not.
In the summer hills, where the tall tough grass
reminds you of persistence
and the endless wind
reminds you of indifference,
Ruth brings batches of white roses,
extravagant gesture not entirely wasteful
because as soon as she is gone she knows
the deer come out of the woods to eat them.
What was made for the eye
goes into the mouth,
thinks Ruth to herself as she drives away,
and in bed when she tries to remember her mother,
she drifts instead to the roses,
and when she thinks about the roses she
sees instead the deer chewing them—
pale petals of the roses in the dark
warm bellies of the sleeping deer—
that's what going to sleep is like.

~from *What Narcissism Means to Me*. Copyright © 2003
by Tony Hoagland. Reprinted with the permission of
Graywolf Press, St. Paul, Minnesota

Horizon

Picasso, "Mother and Child on the Shore,"
Barcelona, 1902, pastel on paper
By Claudia Gary

I can do no less, no more
than be your vanishing point.
My son looks at a space
before us as we step
along the windblown shore.
Colors we do not own~
the sky, the sea~contain
my shawl. He grasps its corner
as if I will slip away.
His own wrap is the color
of lip, or flame, or flower,
of a life that needs no answer
but my hand across his shoulder.
My other hand, concealed,
cradles a warm new shape.
You trace and retrace lines
in sand around our feet.
My hair and skirt are shadows.
I can do no less, no more
than lead you to this moment
where I gaze into your eyes
and you draw me to your distance.

~first published in *Raum* (Scotland)



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Save the date for the 2016 Annual Poetry Awards Ceremony, Poetry Society of Virginia. It will be held April 16, 2016, at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, at 145 Ednam Drive, Charlottesville, Virginia. (The VFH is located on the Boar's Head complex. A map is available at the Virginia Foundation for Humanities Web page.) A flyer will come with the April newsletter. The prize-winning poets will be contacted in advance of the date. We urge all members of our community who can do so to attend, to help us celebrate their achievement. This is why we exist: to support and encourage one another.

Save the date for The Poetry Society of Virginia annual conference, Friday, May 20th and Saturday, May 21st in Richmond. Let's get together for an exciting two days of speakers, workshops, readings, and much more! Details and registration information soon.

Call for poets: Third annual 30 for 30 National Poetry Month celebration. For more information, visit www.mikemaggio.net

Ellen Brown wrote a profile of poet Ellen Bass that recently appeared in *The Rumpus*. Here's a link: <http://therumpus.net/2016/01/in-plain-sight-the-vanishing-of-ellen-bass/>

Andrew Jarvis has been awarded a poetry residency at the Noepe Center for Literary Arts on Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. He will spend two weeks writing, reading, and studying poetry on the beautiful island.

Joan Mazza has two poems, "Night Visitor" and "Six Inches of Snow" published in the February issue of *Verse-Virtual*. <http://www.verse-virtual.com/joan-mazza-2016-february.html> She also has a poem, "Medical Advice to Women of Childbearing Age," in *New Verse News*, Sunday, January 31, 2016. <http://newversenews.blogspot.com/2016/01/medical-advice-to-women-of-childbearing.html>. Her poem "Why do you live alone in the woods?" is published in the current (Spring 2016) issue of *The South Carolina Review*. She has 270 poems published or forthcoming in literary magazines and anthologies.

Diana Woodcock's *Under the Spell of a Persian Nightingale* has been recently released by Word Press. The desert narratives in Diana Woodcock's collection become scenes of lush lyricism, color, and life bursting from the arid landscapes. "Throughout the ages, poets and prophets have gone out into the desert for inspiration. In that vast quiet, far from the petty bickering of the tribe, they can hear their inner voice, the voice of God. Wherever they live, in Arctic waste or urban jungle, poets must have the courage to confront their own personal desert: the seeming emptiness within, the blank expanses of the page before them. They discover, time and time again, that this is only a seeming emptiness, that the fountains of creation flow beneath its surface. In this book, the summation of a lifetime's wandering in the dunes, Diana Woodcock digs deep beneath the sands, brings us back the 'pure gift' of the desert."—Dan Veach, editor of *Atlanta Review*, author of *Elephant Water*.

Newsletter Deadline: The deadline for our next newsletter is March 19, 2016.

CONTRIBUTORS

Claudia Gary was a third-time finalist for the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award in 2015. Her recent radio interview/reading can be heard (at the 28-minute mark) here: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/newmercurymedia/2016/02/15/pnn-salute-to-love-2016>, and her newest chapbook (mostly war poems), *Let's Get Out of Here*, is available from her at claudiagary611@gmail.com. For more information: pw.org/content/claudia_gary.

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).

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