

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

Newsletter of the Poetry Society of Virginia

NOVEMBER 2015

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT _____

The Poetry Society has launched an ambitious new project: the establishing of the Poetry Society of Virginia Book Award for 2015, which will, hopefully, evolve into an annual award that will make the Poetry Society more visible and attract new members, and, thereby, make new cash, as well as promote poetry in the state and elsewhere.

Check out www.PoetrySocietyOfVirginia.org for complete guidelines and details.

In short, the book of poetry submitted must be the work of a single author and at least 48 pages in length, published in 2015 by an established press, and innocent of having won prior awards. Fees are \$25.00 for members of the PSV and \$40.00 for non-members (includes membership fee).

The submission deadline is February 1, 2016.

The award is a \$300.00 Honorarium and a Plaque, as well as an invitation to read his/her work at the May PSV Poetry Festival.

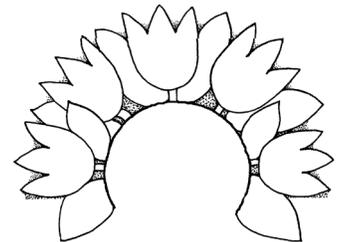
The brains behind the award are those of the award committee (Henry Hart, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Joshua Poteat, Ron Smith, and Sofia Starnes) and most of all, Chair Michal Mahgerefteh, who designed all of the promotional material and will guide submissions from her hands to the final judge, Delaware Poet Laureate, JoAnn Balingit.

Michal (Mitak) Mahgerefteh is an award-winning poet and artist from Israel, living in Virginia since 1986. When she first arrived in the United States and took a Creative Writing class from me, she spoke little English and struggled heroically. Now she's a veteran of the PSV Executive Committee and the author of four poetry collections: *In My Bustan*, *What's Left Behind*, *Sipping Memories: A Poetic Journal to Morocco*, and *Field of Harps*. She's also the editor and publisher of *Poetica Magazine*. Her art has been included in many solo and group exhibitions, and her poetry published in over 80 literary magazines/anthologies.

Israel is HOME - always will be. a sense
of vastness merges; time and
space mingle here. I go back
to self; the land of my birth

We're glad she's here.

Best,
Bob



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PROSE POETRY

What is the difference between prose and poetry? What is prose poetry? These are two frequently asked questions when writers talk about the writing of poetry. We are, as poetry readers, used to discussing the formal constructs, such as meter and rhyme. We know that modern, or contemporary, poets expand form to encompass free verse, with much less reliance on metrical patterns, but still keeping, even though subtle, some sense of rhythm or cadence. After all, we when speak, there is often a cadence to our syntax, and we sometimes are not even aware of it. Free verse may do innovative things with rhyme as well (see Kay Ryan).

But where do we “draw the line,” as it were? A line of poetry versus a sentence of prose? The conventional thinking is that prose poetry captures the visual requirement of poetry, expressing this in a more relaxed way. For instance, we are used to seeing “white space” in poetry to create desired effects of the poem’s impact. In prose poetry, white space is not the key component; density is the key.

The scarcity of words is not as important as expansive narration. The prose poet may want to give the impression of a passionate monologue on an important topic, say politics or nature. To make a point, the prose poet may take almost an essay or storytelling approach, drawing upon language to expand the experience of imagery and the subsequent effect on our senses.

We recall when we read long passages in novels by notables such as Herman Melville, William Faulkner, and Pat Conroy, we often think that the writing impressed us as poetic. The word choices were beautiful to us, and we were affected by the profound imagery.

This, then, is how prose poetry works. The sentences become lines; the lines form the image, in a style of free-flowing narrative that somehow carries us, energetically, to the end.

To see examples of masters of prose poetry I suggest the reader turn to the poets: Irving Feldman, Dave Smith, Carolyn Forché, the Bible; and one who may have had the strongest influence on prose poetry, Walt Whitman.

~ Sara Robinson

IN THE COMPANY OF LAUREATES AUDIENCE CALLING ENCORE!



Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, Marsha Owens,
and Kim Drew Wright. (Left to Right)

A “GENIUS” POET

Congratulations to Ellen Bryant Voigt, poet, teacher, and winner of a 2015 MacArthur “genius” award. A Virginian by birth, Voigt now lives in Vermont, where she served as poet laureate for four years. Her poems “meditate on will and fate and the life cycles of the natural world while exploring the expressive potential of both lyric and narrative elements,” said the MacArthur Foundation in announcing the award.

Voigt explains her work in more down-to-earth terms: “The world is so full of meaning we can’t even grab it by the tail,” she says in a video on the MacArthur site. “I try to make poems that capture something of the world and of the human experience of living in the world, which is fraught. It’s fraught, it’s challenging, it’s complicated.”

Her poem, “The Last Class” is one example. The poem opens with these lines: “Put this in your notebooks: / All verse is occasional verse” and goes on to describe an incident of a drunken man bothering a woman at a bus station. But the poem is less about this small occasion than about examining why Voigt felt driven to write about it:

I tried to recall how it felt
to live without grief; and then I wrote down
a few tentative lines about the drunk,
because of an old compulsion to record,
or sudden resolve not to be self-absorbed
and full of dread—

I wanted to salvage
something from my life, to fix
some truth beyond all change...

“It’s all failure in the making of art,” Voigt says in the video, “because you always fail to reach that thing that’s glimmering out there, that has no shape or form yet.”

She pauses, then says, “If you didn’t fail, why would you write the next one?”

Read more about Voigt, plus a sampling of her poems, at the Poetry Foundation.

~ Sally Zakariya

Poetry lovers from as far away as Norfolk, Virginia came to listen to Poet Laureates from five states who shared the stage of the Hylton Center’s Merchant’s Hall opera house. In addition to the readings, there was a presentation on the U.S. Poets Laureate, an “Inspiration and Experimentation” Panel discussion, a “Words on War” veterans’ panel, a lyrical poetry performance, and a Poet storyteller. North Carolina Poet Laureate Shelby picked up his guitar and closed the afternoon with an impromptu room-rocking medley of Hank Williams songs. Those in attendance remarked on the diversity and the approachability of the poets and appreciated the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Survey comments from the audience repeatedly ask for more poetry events of this type. With close to 200 people in attendance for a first-time event, *In the Company of Laureates* was deemed a huge success by the Hylton Center for Performing Arts.

~ June Forte

SNIPPETS OF INSPIRATION

~ gathered from the *In the Company of Laureates* event October 11th

No one could have blamed us if we had skipped the recent *In the Company of Laureates* event outside DC; the sky was so damn blue. But that just made for a beautiful Sunday drive with Marsha gunning it up I-95 and Guy disagreeing with the GPS auto drone. By the end of the day, we were glad we had made the trip. A plethora of poets shared their work, and attendees chose from four breakout sessions. I hit the jackpot with the panel on inspiration and experimentation. Below are the snippets I could decipher from my handwritten notes.

- Sofia Starnes receives inspiration from language itself. She immerses herself in words when she needs a creative spark. Her favorite reading as a child was the dictionary. She emphasized that words not only define but also suggest, and each word builds on the meanings of the ones before it. Sofia said, “We are a relationship that’s occurring,” talking about how everyone and everything interacts in the world, within ourselves, within our poetry.
- JoAnn Balingit (Delaware) gives herself assignments. Plugging into a selected form can take your mind off the narrative, or grief, or whatever agenda you are trying to insert into the poem, thereby letting the “weird magic alchemy of words rubbing against each other” do their own work. She said that words work in layers to become many things. She found inspiration in mentor poets like Li-Young Lee and Louise Glück. “It’s not a light bulb going off. It’s just courage and fortitude...It’s obsession.”
- Ron Smith said, “Every poem is an experiment,” and cited Ellen Bryant Voigt’s new book that contains no punctuation as an example of quality experimentation of form. He said good poems need four levels and doubted that many experimental poems achieved all four: world, mind, language, and genre. When he was a young poet, he worried that his “poems kept doing things I didn’t want them to,” then realized that was a good thing because “Writing poems—it’s not manufacture. It’s adventure...If your car breaks down and you’re a plumber, you’re just angry. If your car breaks down and you’re a poet—you’ve got new material.”
- Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda likes to write about issues that matter to her and to society. She is a master at research and going to the source. She takes field trips to nature preserves and art galleries to be close to her subjects. Carolyn enjoys experimenting in voices of different characters and interweaving them in simultaneous poetry. Her writer mentors are Peter Klappert and Ai Ogawa.
- Zan Hailey (Prince William County) challenges herself by writing poems that pertain to each college class she takes, whether it is Geography or the Bible as Literature. Observing everyday tasks and the movement of the car brings ideas.

~ Kim Drew Wright

POEMS

Questions for Dr. King

By Paulette Garner

Dr. King,
Did you know, your birthday is a holiday?
That we celebrate the day of your birth
And mourned the day you passed?

Are you surprised at all by this?
We would all like to know.

When you marched all through the South
Did your feet not ache?
How did you keep on going, Sir?
When they pelted you with stones?

And when they locked you in that cell
It must have been pure hell
How did you keep on going, Sir?
When Izola Curry stabbed you in the chest?

Were you never once discouraged?
By all the obstacles you faced
When the going got tough
Did you ever say, “Hey, this is enough, I may as well give up?”

Was the dream a beacon then?
Or was it clearer near the end?
Where did you get the Strength to Love?
Despite all the hurt and hate

We would all like to know.

Perhaps your life can help us all
To somehow realize
It is very easy to give in
But it’s not the way to win.

—read at the Hilton Performing Arts Center, In the Company of Laureates on October 11, 2015.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Eric Forsbergh recently had “Blade in Hand” published in *Artemis Journal*, and “Navy Coffee” published in *The Cafe Review*.

Joan Mazza published two poems in the October issue of *Verse-Virtual*: “Unpacked Box” and “Hibernation.” <http://www.verse-virtual.com/joan-mazza-2015-october.html##>. Her poem “Collect and Classify” is published at *Sliver of Stone*. <http://sliverofstonemagazine.com/collect-and-classify-by-joan-mazza/> She has two poems in *Switched on Gutenberg* in the current issue with the theme “Excuses.” Click on her name in the table of contents, please: <http://switched-ongutenberg.org/issue-22-excuses>. Joan’s poem “Love Poem to Brooklyn” is published in the November issue of *Allegro Poetry Magazine*. Page down to the fifth poem to read it. <http://allegropoetry.blogspot.co.uk/p/issue-7-november-2015.html>

Sara Robinson, founder of Lonesome Mountain Pros(e) Workshop, UVA/OLLI instructor of American Contemporary Poetry, and poetry columnist for *Southern Writers Magazine*, has been informed that her poem, “Risposta cora to a Spanish Ballad,” has been accepted for publication in Volume 11, #3 of the literary journal, *Loch Raven Review*.

Pia Taavila-Borsheim’s poem, “Marriage to a Widower,” was nominated by Julie Demoff-Larson, the Managing Editor *Blotterature Literary Magazine*, for the Best of the Net Award. The poem was also published in the *Fredericksburg Literary Review*.

Members of the Poetry Society of Virginia are invited to join us for a new poetry festival that will begin next summer: June 11–13, 2016, from 3 p.m. Friday the 11th, through 3 p.m. Sunday, the 13th. The Little River Poetry Festival will take place in scenic Floyd, Virginia, a mountain community where one out of every ten residents is an artist of some kind: poet, singer, writer, musician, potter, painter, or dancer. Daily poetry workshops and open mics will be held in an outdoor campground on the banks of The Little River. “Walt Whitman Yoga” and meditation will be offered out of doors by poets Jill Winkowski and Judith Stevens. Evening workshops and open mics will be held indoors. A hike to nearby Buffalo Mountain and a poetry-writing Ekphrastic kayak trip are special features of this writing weekend. A natural rock amphitheater will be the site for a reading by poets in kayaks on the water, to an audience on the shore. A list of nearby camping information, bed & breakfasts, motels & hotels, as well as a more detailed schedule will be sent to all who are interested. Call Jack Callan and Judith Stevens (757) 622-8721, or write us at 2931 Somme Ave., Norfolk, Virginia 23509, for more information or to reserve your spot.

CONTRIBUTORS

Paulette M. Garner is a creative writing teacher at Parkside Middle School in Manassas, Virginia. She loves writing about nature. She enjoys reading, traveling, and socializing with her book club buddies.

Catherine MacDonald is the author of *Rousing the Machinery*, winner of the 2012 Miller Williams Arkansas Poetry Prize (U. of Arkansas Press). Her work has been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Sou’wester*, *Washington Square*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Blackbird*, *Cortland Review*, and other journals. She lives in Richmond, Virginia.

Sara Robinson is poetry columnist for *Southern Writers’ Magazine*, poetry editor for the premier issue of *The Virginia Literary Journal*, and founder of the Lonesome Mountain Prose Writers Workshop. Her poetry has been published in several journals, including *Poetica*, *Loch Raven Review*, and anthologies, such as the *Blue Ridge Anthology* and *Scratching Against the Fabric* (poems from the Bridgewater International Poetry Festival, 2013). Her poetry books, *Two Little Girls in a Wading Pool* (Cedar Creek Publishing, 2012) and *Stones for Words* (Cedar Creek Publishing, 2015) have been nominated for Library of Virginia Literary Awards. In 2014 her workshop published its first anthology, *We Grew Wings and Flew*. Her forthcoming book, *Sometimes the Little Town* (Cedar Creek Publishing), will be released in early 2016.

Sally Zakariya’s poems have appeared in *Apeiron*, *Broadkill Review*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Emerge*, *Third Wednesday*, *Evening Street Review*, and elsewhere and won prizes from Poetry Virginia and Virginia Writers Club. She is the author of *Insectomania* (2013) and *Arithmetic and other verses* (2011) and editor of *Jays of the Table*, an anthology of poems about food. Zakariya blogs at www.ButDoesItRhyme.com.

Correction: The October 2015 newsletter cited R.L Kelly as the author of “Inside Looking Outside”. R.L. O’Kelly is the correct author. Please accept our apologies.

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