

2024

ISSUE 61



JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS



# **JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS**

ISSUE 61  
2024



# JOURNAL OF NEW JERSEY POETS

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Issue 61 / 2024

Published annually by the Department of English and  
Communication, County College of Morris, Randolph, NJ

The editors extend special thanks to Theresa Gehring  
for her assistance in bringing this issue to print through the  
Printing Department, County College of Morris.

[www.journalofnjpoets.org](http://www.journalofnjpoets.org)

## CONTENTS

---

Jonathan Greenhouse	Achilles' heel / 2
Megha Sood	Fruitless Attempt / 4
	Desire and its Haunting / 5
	Sometimes / 6
Erik Roth	The Last Thing / 8
	Recurvature / 9
	<i>NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention</i>
	An Observance in Battery Park/ 10
Charlotte Friedman	Voracious Lover / 12
	Red Circles / 13
	At the Game / 14
Firas Sulaiman	Clumsy army / 16
<i>Jonas Elbousty, trans.</i>	
Ellen June Wright	Blushing Into Dusk / 18
Muyassarkhon Abdurasulova	Porcelain Doll / 20
David Reuter	Harbinger / 22
	The Stranger on Gettysburg Way / 22
Chuck Tripi	... LIKE AN OLD FOOL / 24
Nick Jiorle	Bird of the Sea / 26
Madison Hoff	Fresh cut flowers / 30
	Once Heroes / 31
Wanda Praisner	After Reading Lines from John Keats on a Card You Once Bought For Me / 34

Mariam Ali	For Hyesue / 36 When I Grow Up / 37 Limbs / 38
Michael T. Young	Bird-brained / 40 The Gulag Cento / 41 Signs of the Invasion / 42
Emily Vega	Barbara Isn't Sand / 44
David Burr	Toy Soldiers / 46
Lia DiStefano	Floating on my back on a neap tide / 48  We don't know what world we're going to wake up into / 49  The Morning News / 49  Train Time / 50  Skylight Binging / 51 <i>2024 NJ Poets Prize Winner</i>
Simon Tertychniy	Multiple choice / 54 Dedication to the muses / 55  At our home in New Jersey, we keep four chairs stacked in the pantry as overflow seating / 56
Peter Mladinic	Swirl / 58
Lois Marie Harrod	Those Artful Errors / 60

Ayla Rose Miller	Buckets / 62 Boyhood / 63 Animal / 64 Dreams / 65 Thrills / 66
K. H. Donahue	Things Are Better in Threes / 68 The Candy Dish / 69 The Cockroach / 70
R. S. D. Weatherman	The Rabbit Not the Cat / 72
Laura Daniels	JOY: A Golden Shovel / 76 Reflection: A Golden Shovel / 76
Anika Bukkapatnam	Lies About Chai / 78 <i>NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention</i> Love Letters (but not to each other) / 79 -- ----/ 80
Oliver Van Ness	Heartburn / 84
Elaine Koplow	Editor's Lament / 86
Faleeha Hassan	War / 88 A message to my poem / 88
David Austin	TWIN STONES / 90
George Marano	Collectables / 94
Joel Lewis	Countdown: The Origins of Hersch Silverman's Jazz Poetics / 96



Herschel Silverman

A BLUESPOEM FOR  
LOUIS G. / 106

Brecht West / 107

May 5, 1979 / 108

Contributors

111

NJ Poets Prize

120



# JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

## ACHILLES' HEEL

was his Achilles' heel,  
but his contemporary Greeks  
called it his sheep's belly,  
that tender spot where a wolf  
sinks in her yellowed teeth

for sustenance, back  
when wolves were plentiful,  
shadows lurking at the outskirts  
of a timorous flock;  
though Trojans balked, insisted

the sheep's soft bellies  
were really their bulls' balls,  
a fleeting vitality  
lopped off at the source,  
converting those raging males

into oxen, a ritual sacrifice  
to appease the gods,  
who still possess  
a perfect saying to suffice  
but teasingly mask it from us.

# MEGHA SOOD

## FRUITLESS ATTEMPT

Thin corridors of silence cave in as I walk through them—  
my elbow grazing old memories and reshuffling feathers of time.

I know this path is tainted with my pain cutting too close to my skin  
but still, I wait with my ears pressed to the walls to listen to one sweet hum,

one solitary note of lullaby to make it to this side of the wall.  
Loneliness has no language but still needs interpretation.

*What does one need to be whole?*  
Who could tell?

But here I am stitching old tattered parts of me in this frail afternoon,  
Looking at the sepia-tinged pages of my family album,

losing pieces of me to this damn time,  
and yet feverishly trying to make me whole.

## DESIRE AND ITS HAUNTING

They call us animals, those who think they hold a lien to our souls,  
for this haunting, for this incessant wanting

that lives and births every second in this sinful soul of mine  
only to be judged by those exalted Gods in heaven

The slithering, intertwining hunger for the flesh  
a desire that turns this kindness into love

our desires birthing the fire of life, the plinth of our existence,  
the effervescent of the small wants—

that exists in every nook and cranny of your wrinkles,  
those small marks at the back of your neck

that slender neck catching the apricity of the kind sun to reward  
me one and the only thing

that sits and sings softly with a moan  
in the soft pink bosom of our longing and wants

the one that calls your name in the thicket of the night  
the one like a brightly burning star as it reaches its death

Like the simmering collective songs of Monarchs  
and we put our innocent wish on its wings

How fragile is this love? How tender is its existence?

Like a penny clutched in the soft palms of a kid caught  
in the sheer excitement of holding and letting that red balloon go.

## SOMETIMES

I arrive at a poem following the blood trails of another.  
There is so much hunger seeped into words. Only if you see it.

Sometimes enjambment doesn't add to the beauty. Sometimes, there is only death  
in the end. I call your name in the thicket of the night, hoping to call you mine.

We take the beauty out of everything we try to name. Naming is ownership  
and who has ever felt alive under the shackles?

Sometimes you end up somewhere looking for something else. Serenity disguised as ignorance.

I call this my calling. The inherent hunger to carry my hyphenated identity across the  
demarcated lines.

Sometimes, I think the essence of this soil drenched by the monsoon rain will bring back the  
smell of home I feverishly long for. Sometimes I can almost feel your presence lingering at the  
nape of my neck.

Sometimes the rainbow after the rain is just a trick of the light. Sometimes the presence of  
emotions makes up for the poetry of absence.



# ERIK ROTH

*NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention*

## THE LAST THING

*for Naomi*

Mom turned stone deaf  
when she trained you to sleep.  
Muting rattling crib rails, lowering  
the frequency of your screams,

she read your needs, their lips'  
separation, a first language  
she rendered into *time for us*. Barely  
two when we flew to San Francisco,

you barred me in a restless Alcatraz  
from a faraway toddler bed; Mom  
led our escape, nodded off  
like a rock. Twelve, you saw

her cancer spread. Firsthand,  
you witnessed labored breaths,  
whispered her peace in the gaps  
of an apneic flow. Air moving

in erratic patterns, the struggle  
rapidly slowed: we knew  
she could hear you – we heard  
hearing's the last thing to go. I bet

she can now catch your voice  
testing the sky's acoustics. You,  
sixteen. Your friend's car idling  
in the blue tooth of night. *Don't*

*worry, Dad*, bites like the stereo's  
steadily pounding beat. Rhythms  
that keep me awake, repeat. Sounds  
still audible as I turn out the light.

## RECURVATURE

*NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention*

Peripheral swirls. Watery,  
    upward churn. Heavy  
        turbulence. Flashes  
        of lightning. Crash-  
    landing – a hurricane  
searches for survivors,  
like you, me. Believers.  
    Faith-keepers ditched  
        in deep clefts. Cliffs  
        above moving seafloor.  
    Clouds, like trapdoors,  
over piled scree. It wants  
to break us; it wants us  
    alive. Flood tide pads  
        our freefall; the distant  
        tempest inspires swells,  
    spumy backwash purging  
gulls, shells. Salt water  
boarding us on beachrock  
    expects details in return.  
        Names. Precise locations  
        exchanged for lulling  
    its surge. Secrets  
traded for breathing on this  
this friable block. The ocean  
    demands truth; we draw  
        lies in sand –  
        fugitives of a storm  
    never tip their hands.  
We shift its course offshore,  
cough up briny deceit.  
    Mislead prevailing  
        westerlies singing  
        to a violent eye. A wind-  
    driven circle of waves

spinning in disbelief,  
whirling miles & miles  
    back east, greeted  
        by an empty scene - nothing  
        on the island - only cataracts,  
    streams. Far away  
our hopes, dreams survive  
on sunrise, clear skies.  
    A new beginning. A new day.  
        A horizon beaming with light  
            from the wrong direction.

## **AN OBSERVANCE IN BATTERY PARK**

Common terns, squirrels scurry  
across the Bosque, like churchgoers  
late for morning service. They hurry

past old men, vendors. Sunday's  
early birds. The homeless, wrenched  
from tree beds by chattering vermin.

Voices stirring inside their heads,  
the street people speak for demons  
in whispers carried by a midsummer

breeze. Crazed susurrations driving  
rage, riving veins in blades of leaves,  
their quiet rants crash on the bay,

vanishing before the seawall, dying  
in waves. Passersby move quickly,  
shift their gaze. The lawn, a nave

without a ceiling, windows glazed  
with air. A liturgy of empty verses,  
curses, unheard prayers. Faint slurs

spurning the sky hosting a merciless  
sunrise, a heavenly body of eternal  
light burning, like hell, in their eyes.

# CHARLOTTE FRIEDMAN

## VORACIOUS LOVER

Voracious lover of food,  
my husband—two to three helpings  
every night, praised every dish  
I ever made—couldn't eat that spring.  
Bags of thick, milky liquid  
arrived in a cooler surrounded by dry ice.  
I'd stack them in the fridge, top shelf  
out of the way.

But twice each day I'd pull one down,  
cold and floppy, lay it flat  
on the counter to warm.  
If I was in a rush, I'd slip  
the plastic pouch under my shirt, press  
it against my skin, initial shock  
dissipating with body heat. When I felt  
no difference between me and it, I'd hang  
the bag, flush the Hickman catheter  
with saline and hook up my husband.

At first, I'd sit nearby with our young son  
and eat real dinners—pasta marinara,  
broccoli, maybe whole grain bread.  
You okay, honey? I'd call between bites.  
Yeah, I'm fine, he'd answer.

As the weeks went by, in solidarity  
or protest, my throat closed, said no  
to everything, No matter how much I chewed,  
I choked. I drank milkshakes for a week,  
scheduled an endoscopy, my doctor  
ordered a Barium Swallow test.  
Me, in my paper gown, munching  
a Saltine, watching crumbs bounce  
down my esophagus on screen until I gagged,  
then cried on the phone to my mother,  
three thousand miles away, at a dinner party.

Her companion, retired but a doctor, called  
in a script—Valium, old-fashioned  
muscle relaxer. I took two.

Next bag from the fridge, I slapped down  
on the counter as if slinging hash.

I served my son's plate  
then mine.

Emboldened by the drug, I poked  
a tortellini, swirled it in sauce, chewed  
it as if steak, gripped  
the table, said a prayer  
and swallowed. Nothing.

By which I mean, nothing stuck.

I laughed as the tiny bits glided  
down, another bite and another,  
I was drunk with tastes and textures.

Honey? my husband called. I'm finished.

I put down my fork, wiped  
my mouth, walked slowly  
across the room, hoping he couldn't  
smell the garlic on my breath.

I'm no foodie and left alone,  
I'd stand at the counter, nibble  
sharp cheddar, ok-mök crackers,  
green apple wedges, maybe a glass  
of cabernet. Food never meant much  
to me, until now.

## RED CIRCLES

I couldn't stand the place.  
Recliners around the room, unlucky  
souls stranded in the middle.  
Never mind my husband,  
he treated the time

like hours once spent at the office—  
put on his glasses, read emails, took calls.  
Not me. The place felt like some store-  
front meth clinic—out of date, dirty  
picture windows facing a cemetery  
and the street. I remembered  
oncology suites—private and cozy  
temporary, an end in sight.  
Dialysis was life, red circle  
drawn around each chair, blood  
flowed into a machine and out,  
looping coiling twirling twisting,  
bright cherry-red.

## AT THE GAME

In some African cultures, a woman carves three lines  
in her forehead, evidence her husband has died. I wear black.  
My smile's not easy, my features are sharp, and yet—

I long for a man's eyes to score my body.  
At my son's hockey game, the fathers stand  
at the plexi barrier, watching their young sons,

how finely the sharp blades carve the ice.  
The men ignore me but I watch them and wonder  
if any are widowed like me. My son likes to skate  
but lacks "killer instinct," we have little relevance

in this world of hard play, that's how I explain  
the chilly climate. I would understand if they ran  
from my grief, but how would they know?

Who could guess seven piercings (my ears)  
would have to do with a dead husband—  
the hard pinch, pain, residual throb of heat.



# FIRAS SULAIMAN

*Translated by* JONAS ELBOUSTY

## CLUMSY ARMY

In a far country, I live in a country that has neither a flag nor a national anthem  
its people are made of breezes and loyal people without places of worship or  
institutions

a nation with a thin laziness that brightens the mood of the seasons

I live in a safe, beautiful, and far country without any need for brothers, friends or  
work

everything is wonderful except for my memory, which from time-to-time storms into  
me like an adverse clumsy army.

# ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT

## BLUSHING INTO DUSK

(after Thomas Eakins' "Female Model," circa 1867-69.)

Transparent every other moment of living  
except on honey afternoons watching  
shadows cross the wide-plank floor.

The slow workmanship of dabbing  
paint on canvas until the light begins  
to fade and his day's work is done.

As Eakins puts down his hog bristle  
brush, like Eden after the fall,  
she feels the weight of nakedness—

reaches for her first layer of clothing  
to cover what never should have been  
revealed. Turpentine's scent still in her

nostrils on the evening walk home,  
the sky blushes as if kissed. The sun's  
ardor collapses, gives way to dusk.

# **MUYASSARKHON ABDURASULOVA**

## PORCELAIN DOLL

I am as perfect as  
can be.  
no troubles, no depression  
as far as the eye  
can see.

I excel in what  
I do,  
be it school,  
or life  
I am as perfect as  
can be.

They wonder how I  
do it all,  
put together all the time  
like a porcelain doll  
perfectly perfect.

But in the dead  
of night,  
they don't see the cracks  
in the porcelain.  
Her hair frayed  
the knots of the bows  
coming undone.  
They don't see that  
the doll is done,  
broken beyond repair.

Just add a lot of paint,  
and put on her scarf,  
the doll is back  
without defect.  
She is perfectly perfect.

**DAVID  
REUTER**

## HARBINGER

The prism warps the liquid light  
that crashes callous on the jagged ground.  
The ages rest behind this shadowed glass,  
reposing deep into my skin  
that's sinking, though I stand in place.  
It's fed as to a hungry beast  
that lurks on haunches, ever-primed  
to feast upon the sylphlike scraps  
that still exist inside my sight.

## THE STRANGER ON GETTYSBURG WAY

The wraithlike glow behind each glass  
that lines this barren street,  
fires burning brittle bones to dust,  
haunts every yard that rises steep  
above the dying ground.  
The wisps of ice upon the grass  
gleam through the knotted dark,  
where all these silent structures stand,  
encased in place without a sign  
of souls that still remain within.

This must be where they sleep,  
like concrete in their hallowed homes,  
without a thought of rainbow sails  
or dragons brightening the stolid sky.  
There's only one who dreams of ships  
that scoot across the rainbow sea,  
defying looming stones that scar  
this dull and shadowed space.



# CHUCK TRIPPI

## ... LIKE AN OLD FOOL

Our children say my love is only loneliness,  
just an echo from the chasm of ache.  
A howl of an ancient gust come and gone,  
the scar of a sweet participation.

Etched, sharp and deep, the letters on our grave  
and still the surface is smooth, warm in the sun.  
Two stylized angels rise above our names  
here where I will join you as dust one day.

And it is true, she talks a little young,  
is flighty and outré, and jangles a bit at dinner.  
They are right as to the daring ensemble,  
and right about this too—there is no fool. . .

but they are kind to save me, or to try—  
I will have to find a better thing to do  
these Sunday afternoons, the haunted hours  
weeping in a field of stones and flowers.

NICK  
JIORLE

## BIRD OF THE SEA

I am fascinated by death,  
I keep it my boon companion always.  
Yet this town beckons me on,  
Just a poor wayfaring stranger  
Chasing a distrustful evening light.  
The shadows move with a dignified grace here  
Comfortable in their assurances.  
The tranquility can be supped upon  
Rolling over the edges of your tongue.

The book lies lifeless on my left thigh.  
A sleek white bird stalking small prey,  
motionless.  
It is at its most resolute when the other  
Birds of the sea hurl insults  
At each other from great distances.  
Silken white hunter, elegantly perched,  
Poised for the taking of life  
In order to survive it.  
The birds of the sea believe this gospel all the way through.  
I live in this town as it lives in me  
With every subtle movement of  
The vein-like ripples on Grand Ave.

Of the broadest spectrum of wonder  
Does this calamity occasionally settle  
Into gracious swells atop stoic waters,  
Among the comings and goings  
Of everything that will ever be.  
Let them glide by like a cool breeze  
Laughing along the mountain lake's  
serendipitous edges.  
Life and death find equal footing  
In the mountains.

And the birds of the sea, well,  
Sometimes they let their quarrels of food and safe harbor  
Be bygone for the sake of a moment's peace.  
I am thankful to bow in worship  
To the subtle charms of a casual evening fading,  
Coupled with the thought  
of something else I may  
Yet become.



# MADISON HOFF

## FRESH CUT FLOWERS

all my flowers are purple  
I've swallowed Listerine  
(my bruised hips)  
to disinfect my canteen

all my flowers are blue  
mastery of mystery  
(I live in waters muck bound)  
trying to climb above for vistas of trees

all my flowers are pink  
high powder cheeks hot  
(Sunset starts late)  
The timing that would not wait

all my flowers are yellow  
my wet sand hair cut in bangs  
(an infinite gaze)  
lost in a field of dead bouquets



## ONCE HEROES

Sat near the East Pinetum  
I spot a blue check  
with blue bar friends  
they shuffle but not scurry  
unbothered people ignore them  
But I recall our ancestral bonds  
they gladly share these spaces  
as I recount fondly tales of medals and races

My youth mornings spent  
crating Ludo Classens  
slapping bands on scaley feet  
the box of birds huddled together  
cooing in anticipation  
placed in an 18 wheeler fastened  
we'd sit at home agonizing  
for those blue bars and checks  
to sweep in with our keys rattling  
clocks locked in their time flying

but while I sit on this bench  
they're lost in their pacing  
wild with no bands  
no awards, no racing.  
They look up at me  
head cocked and I sign—  
there was a time we used to love them  
offered them war medals and prizes

These domesticated birds  
now are free—  
free to stay close  
to their people and debris.  
They followed us to cities  
as rejected champions  
because with us is home  
for a homing pigeon



# WANDA PRAISNER

**AFTER READING LINES FROM JOHN KEATS  
ON A CARD YOU ONCE BOUGHT FOR ME**

O thou whose face hath felt  
the winter's wind...

I found the card still wrapped—  
and yes, I felt that wind, and my eye  
...has seen the snow clouds  
hung in mist, and the black elm tops,  
'mong the freezing stars. You liked  
these lines he wrote a friend—

you, my love, who left last winter  
to enter those stars—the need  
to put you in the past tense.  
The quote ends, ...To thee  
the spring will be a harvest time.  
But it wasn't, and not summer.

Now November, soon December—  
another winter. Time to gather  
holly, balsam, cedar and pine,  
string garlands of white lights,  
red berries and bows everywhere,  
make our house merry again.

I remember late fall football games—  
you tucked programs inside my coat.  
"To keep your heart warm," you said.

**MARIAM**  
**ALI**

## FOR HYESUE

The lines I draw skip  
Beats I cannot keep up  
With: your cadence like  
Cicadas in concert, constant.

I break like hairs, split  
Wishbone style. If we each take  
An end and pull, we might unzip  
Me to reveal you.

I promise never to box you in, but  
I still try to figure you out. Then,  
like water through fingertips  
pruned and loyal, you dissolve.

## WHEN I GROW UP

When I grow up, I want to live  
in the pages of my notebooks and climb  
the red rope of their margins from line to line,  
floor to floor of my twenty-five-story home.

I will slide down the curves of each letter, curl  
my body up safe in their hollows and touch  
the tip of my index finger to each sparkling speck  
that twinkles in the ink and drink from its winding  
rivers colored green and blue and pink.

Should I choose to travel time, I could  
close my eyes and let my hand  
land on another page, or flip through all  
the sheets (skipping past the leaden grays of lonely  
days) until I've heard enough of their rustling.

And if I grow up and find  
I prefer to write my stories anew,  
an unmarked paper will beckon my pen  
with her twenty-six gaping white grins.

## LIMBS

"Come closer," sigh  
The leaves, and I do

My limbs can only  
Embrace

Reach for galaxies  
And gather

Space like skeins  
Knotted

Grief unwinds, as  
I do

Weeping beyond  
My wounds

Arm in arm,  
we surrender.



**MICHAEL T.  
YOUNG**

## BIRD-BRAINED

No matter what we call a thing, we rarely get the name right. And after we know that we're wrong, insist on sticking to it, the way we did with American Indians who never were in India. We think we know something, but are mistaken, misunderstand and call it knowledge, like a turn of phrase that wasn't exactly what was meant, but which hardens into an entire philosophy.

Just look at poor Epicurus, so reduced by history to hedonism that all his existing writings to the contrary can't correct it. Or how we call someone a "birdbrain," while the etymologies can't trace back an origin that tells us exactly why. Maybe someone watched a pigeon peck at a rock or twig, mistaking it for food, and they, as I have, thought "what an idiot." Then

the next time their nephew grabbed the wrong tool from the shed, he said, "you're as dimwitted as that bird, you're bird witted," which was the first version of the expression. But really, it was just a day his allergies fogged his mind while his head was filled with the image of a girl from down the street, the one he dreamed of dancing with, even clumsily,

even hoping for a misstep, his one chance to hold her tighter and closer than all the rules and right moves would permit.

## THE GULAG CENTO

--A pantoum composed of lines from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's  
*The Gulag Archipelago*  
(Translated by Thomas P. Whitney)

You were always being watched and always in their power  
Everyone here was imprisoned because of nothing much  
The cell walls gave off nothing of the past  
The sentence for nothing at all is ten years

Everyone here was imprisoned because of nothing much  
They arrested people right and left—for taking a stalk of grain, a cucumber  
The sentence for nothing at all is ten years  
The jailer's key is rattling brazenly in the lock

They arrested people right and left—for taking a stalk of grain, a cucumber  
You will never return to your former world  
The jailer's key is rattling brazenly in the lock  
Newcomers are all given the most meaningless work

You will never return to your former world  
They will survive in the offices and the barbershops. And you will perish.  
Newcomers are all given the most meaningless work  
Things were enveloped in mist and darkness

They will survive in the offices and the barbershops. And you will perish.  
The humiliation will poison your heart  
Things were enveloped in mist and darkness  
Things have longer memories than people

The humiliation will poison your heart  
A greenish Arctic moisture has to replace the warm blood inside you  
Things have longer memories than people  
They had forgotten how to walk, to breathe, to look at the light

A greenish Arctic moisture has to replace the warm blood inside you  
Reduce the number of prisoners (And not by releasing them . . . )  
They had forgotten how to walk, to breathe, to look at the light  
In this joke one can foresee all Gulag! Both its tempo and the price of a human being

Reduce the number of prisoners (And not by releasing them . . . )  
Thus many were shot—thousands at first, then hundreds of thousands.  
In this joke one can foresee all Gulag! Both its tempo and the price of a human being  
Even unsure whether we have the right to talk about the events of our own lives

Thus many were shot—thousands at first, then hundreds of thousands  
You were always being watched and always in their power  
Even unsure whether we have the right to talk about the events of our own lives  
The cell walls gave off nothing of the past

## SIGNS OF THE INVASION

What surprises the young boy are the clarities  
disclosed by morning fog. What puzzles him  
are the mysteries lingering after each lesson  
at school. Between these two points that repeat  
every day, he passes a field of geese, walking  
to or from an understanding he can't fit  
into any of his notebooks, but which is fixed  
in the scar on his hand like a crescent moon,  
what he earned hiking the woods on a dare  
one summer day when he was sure an angel  
in the shape of a fox disappeared into an oak tree.  
Ever since, even the winter trees call to him,  
and he follows their conductor batons  
orchestrating light according to that symphony  
written in sleep, the night weather that whistles  
through the body, waking the ear to a tune  
composed before the meaning of things  
was set in their constellations. He shares these,  
like eggs that hold some new reality, if only  
we could crack them open. But we can't.  
They're too hard and we just keep arranging them  
on the windowsill, making different patterns  
to watch as light plays across their surfaces.

**EMILY  
VEGA**

## BARBARA ISN'T SAND

Sleep was never quite  
an issue.

With the morning came paperwork for the  
In-house nurse,  
Who would carry him from bed to couch,  
Bottles of little pills stuffed in oatmeal and  
Bottles of big pills thrust between swollen lips.  
TVs on  
Coffee brews,  
When he asks for a napkin you fetch a Costco  
Box from storage, place it on his lap, and use one to  
Gently pat his drooling chin.

Sometimes you don't see the sun,  
Until it makes itself known through the  
Slats of your window. Tucking itself away,  
Freeing itself into the night.  
Leaving the house for more than a few hours is  
Impossible. He may need his food brought, his bag changed,  
his shirt cleaned, his hair combed.

Though you dream about places far;  
(bathe him, change him, clean his ears)  
Maybe an island where the wind isn't  
So bitter and the waves  
(paperwork, couch-to-bed, TV on)  
Punch into the still sand, begging  
(bag changed, tucked in, more pills)  
Move dammit! Why must I meet you,  
Here where you live,  
When I can move anywhere!  
Anywhere!

(turn off the light, kiss him even though his skin is prickly, climb  
in the bed too)

Where would the waves go, if no beach to crash onto?  
(think about the morning, remember to call the doctor, remember  
to call the other doctor)  
It must fold into itself and drown in its absence.

# DAVID BURR

## TOY SOLDIERS

Not only are the masses of men and material and suffering  
and inconvenience too monstrously big for reason, but—  
the available heads we have for it, are too small.

—H. G. Wells, *Little Wars* (1913)

In the mêlée I led my lead soldiers  
into lead, some of them fled, many dead  
knocked over, strewn across the battlefield,  
our garden which I had landscaped for war.  
No smashed or sanguinary bodies, just  
fun tin murder then set them up again  
as good as new, a bit of paint loss there  
from my pea-shooter's projectile  
as I took turns, general of this side  
then of my belligerent's. It quickly  
became apparent which side wantonly  
blundered, obliged to retire pell-mell  
on nursery or parlour floors, out of doors,  
in the small scale of battle-game wrought hot

like that soon blown-up grown-ups' war when I  
am older, where wager is dearer  
and paint redder. What mêlée will scuttle me—  
no longer vainglorious general  
of hollow-cast kilted and red-coated  
Highlanders with black busbies charging at  
the run, frozen in eternal attack?  
How will my Great Adventure into which  
I will venture play out, what misadventure  
on that foreign battlefield will claim me  
from where I whiled away my childhood hours?  
Somewhere my soldiers—boxed and forgotten.  
Somewhere in Flanders—unboxed and unknown.



# LIA DISTEFANO

*Winner of the 2024 NJ Poets Prize*

## FLOATING ON MY BACK ON A NEAP TIDE

Like flotsam, like foam, like floating on clouds  
above me, below me, in the space between echoes  
and mirrors, floating on the gentlest current—  
a barely perceptible drag  
on the rudder of consciousness.

Once, I asked another poem of water—*is what I see  
my reflection, or am I walking upside down?*  
It would not tell me.

So I close my eyes, let the sun glow red through  
closed lids, tint all I can imagine to a palette  
of perpetual sunrise or sunset. I hear the call  
and answer of voices from a directionless shoreline,  
bouncing off water this way and that, picture  
the eye of a hermit crab, like a semaphore swinging  
from sand to sea, weighing the wisdom to forage,  
or bolt for the safety of another's shell.

I know the weakest stroke of a finger  
can shift my course like an ounce of wishfulness  
commands a Ouija—how we want  
to believe in magic.

So I disconnect all will from muscle, meld  
with water, with salt, float, not knowing where  
or when I'll make landfall—knowing landfall  
has little to do with land or falling, if falling means  
rudderless on a tide that takes me a heartbeat or  
two from where I began to where I need to be.

## WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WORLD WE'RE GOING TO WAKE UP INTO \*

...or what body, eyes the color of what they've seen, ears tuned  
by stories heard hearing—sobs, or the jubilation of a Carolina Wren  
needing to tell us the countdown to spring is quickening.

I think I know what Orlando knew waking—called to breakfast  
by an unfamiliar name, a different pronoun, seeing another face  
in the mirror...and yet, there's always something about the eyes.

Don't we all dream sometimes, of a day where we wake up new—  
memory still fat with what we've borne, ready to be put to good use  
without the weight of it pulling us down? Forgiven.

Forgiving. We get to choose a new favorite color, break in a new name,  
hear the voice in our head say *I love you*, spell *Y-E-S*, out loud.  
in a new language we somehow already know.

\* a line from *Ida Western Exile*, a short film by Courtney Stephens

## THE MORNING NEWS

Green tea with lemon, a little honey,  
half a banana, an English muffin,  
freshly ground peanut butter—  
if I were able to swallow.

If I were able to parse  
this nonsensical caption, understand—  
a dying mother trying to comfort  
her dead baby,

the maw of a flayed facade—  
a kitchen table, still set,

one leg standing  
on a phantom floor.

We want to be informed—  
chroniclers of war oblige,  
give us what we should never  
need to know—

no prospect of bread,  
no tea or honey, no milk  
for crying babies.  
And I can not swallow.

## TRAIN TIME

I know that river bank—swung from a rope just there, laughing  
splash-landed...

a child who never felt the fleeing heartbeats of children praying  
a river might make them invisible to dogs to Nazis.

And that blur of terracotta roof—I lay dreaming once, on the other side of that upstairs window,  
the one reflecting a fragrant sun setting on fields of sunflowers and lavender...

the forgotten rot of a soldier asleep beneath their roots, dreaming still  
of splashing in a river—bequeaths blossoms a reason to thrive.

I boarded this TGV from Gare de l'Est at 8:37AM, but steel song steals memories—an anthem,  
a dirge, a love song, sweet lullaby—beckons dreams drifts toggles time...

I could be riding the Simplon Orient Express swaddled  
in velvet, or a box car bound for smoke stacks in Poland.

The click click click click coursing veins syncopate disengage  
timetables, pocket watches, tick to the pulse of criss-crossed lifetimes blur focus hypnotize...

someone's running, a river, a fragrance, a field of poppies,  
a chimney, a cry...

## SKYLIGHT BINGING

*Winner of the 2024 NJ Poets Prize*

1

A 72 x 30 inch swath of sky in wide screen mode, broadcast in real-time. No buttons to push. Pre-analog. Programmed by polar vortices, air traffic controllers, the determination of migrating water fowl, by whimsy, by God. I can sit here for hours. Watching. Embracing the privilege of not choosing.

2

This morning's sky is what we've come to call nine-eleven blue. Infinite and deep. Sometimes, there is no sky. No pulse. No breath. And sometimes, the echo of a ripe sun falling calls white walls coral—exquisite fields of light, of color—my very own Rothko Chapel.

3

A soundtrack out of sync—like what must have bounced between Charles Ives' ears: a ferry horn announcing fog, the disembodied morning *Yo!* of high schoolers across the street, Seagulls. A chopper beating, beating—*breaking news! leave early*, the alto sax next door pleading, *stay*.

4

Contrails—tic-tac-toe for winged things. A miniature 747 silently whisking miniature travelers away...to somewhere I might like to be, to somewhere a faint honking gaggle inscribing scrimshaw on the weather, barely remembers it ought to be. A solitary egret, its long-necked gracefulness folded like origami sails by, oh so slowly, I wonder how it does not fall from the sky.

I am privy to the secret underbelly of snow, and the spreading bottoms of rain drops stippling sky into the glass of bathroom windows to shield April while she showers, or exchanges secret missives with the weather—orders clouds to float south to northwest, for a change. And I've seen the imperceptible oomph of the Mockingbird diva's toes before she lifts off to the highest perch to sing.

# SIMON TERTYCHNIY

## MULTIPLE CHOICE

A town in Morris County,  
where Park Ave. blossoms into Madison Ave. at Chipotle,  
late into the second fall of the global pandemic,  
at age 45, I'm learning to drive.  
It is my aim to master the arcane art of conduct on the road,  
the etiquette known to the chosen many.  
Excluded for the moment from their exalted numbers,  
I dwell under the yield sign. At 20 mph,  
I drive a burgundy Forester with heated seats.  
For the inexpert motorist surprises lie in wait –  
knobs, buttons, paddles: sometimes the tachycardic wiper  
jerks into motion, sometimes the radio kicks in  
mid-tune, sometimes, the brights.

Timidly toeing the gas pedal,  
I pass some vestals at a crosswalk stalled;  
adjusting the wheel, hand over hand,  
I pay no mind, follow the line, watching the road unfurl.  
Today, strobing headlights strain to convey  
something important as the Midtown Direct hisses by.  
'Keep in your lane. Stay off the double lines.  
At the light we go straight,' my instructor exclaims.  
'Do not let go the wheel. Signal! Turn!  
You ran a stop sign. This way you fail.'  
A martinet with a background in construction,  
mister James is mirthless and relentless.  
I crane my neck to fix the car's dimensions  
against the dotted lines that separate us  
from a disaster surely in the making.  
'Don't merge with the oncoming traffic.  
Don't cross the yellow line, don't cross  
the white line. Much better this time!'  
Jabbing his thumb up in the air,  
mister James is pleased with my white-knuckled efforts.  
'When people curse at me, I wave,' he tells me.

I'm taking driving lessons  
so I can drive my wife when she goes into labor.



Above the intersection with its shuffling lights,  
the sun's pink setting.  
Birds scuttle, planes overfly our town,  
departures running late, early arrivals.  
A weathered wooden post pierced by rusty staples,  
displays a piece of traffic signage:  
left lane ends ahead.

## DEDICATION TO THE MUSES

With my wife's dispensation,  
at the monthly open mic reading,  
sipping on seven dollars' worth  
of a 14-dollar red from a Contigo insulated mug  
that my daughter once begged me to get her  
and never used.

The half-bottle absconded in the travel mug,  
I half-pretend it's coffee.  
With each mouthful, braver,  
then brave all at once,  
I storm the little stage  
at the last tolling of my first name.

Upon delivering the poem, the poet  
is momentarily dazzled by glory's swift transit.

I stutter off-stage, over backpacks and purses.  
In honor of Calliope, the muse of open mic,  
I audibly withhold my curses.

Carried back by the wind, walking home inspired,  
alongside the train tracks up on the embankment,  
I admire the double-decker New Jersey Transit train  
rattling in the dark, lit from inside,  
train car after train car, like a strip of 35 mm film  
pulled by a jittery hand across a lightbox.

## AT OUR HOME IN NEW JERSEY, WE KEEP FOUR CHAIRS STACKED IN THE PANTRY AS OVERFLOW SEATING

A brittle rattan back,  
a wooden framework  
stained NATO brown,  
with a tan vinyl seat,  
spray-painted hinges,  
and a folding mechanism  
that squeaks but folds.  
Stenciled on the unvarnished  
underside of each chair,  
the date of manufacture, OCT-1970.  
Meant for a trailer,  
the chairs scratched the floor  
in our rental adobe abode,  
so we glued felt glides to their legs.

We lived in Albuquerque  
when we first got them,  
our first year living together.  
Our long long-distance days  
behind us,  
we shared a bed, fervidly cuddling,  
then sleeping on our sides  
like switchblades.

Moving from place to place,  
from house to finally this house,  
from day to day to years,  
we have arrived here,  
now we unfold the chairs  
to seat the family  
when they come,  
my sister and her kids,  
my wife's brother and his,  
with my nineteen-year-old  
home from college,  
and our baby learning to sit on his own.

# PETER MLADINIC

## SWIRL

This was before the George Washington  
Bridge had its lower deck.

This was the red and black '55  
Studebaker wagon era  
and the coming off the bridge,  
under a short tunnel, out and up,  
to the turn at once sharp and gradual  
so it was dangerous but not too.

I knew what was coming  
because from my seat in the back  
I'd done it before, gone out to blue sky  
with white clouds, out over water,  
only it was more a matter of feeling  
than seeing, though I never closed my eyes.

I don't even know if I was in New York  
or New Jersey. I'd say New York.

But then, there were the big buildings  
across the Hudson, at a time  
people drove Hudsons. I remember  
the going up and out, and the little maze  
I took just to get to that swirl.

# LOIS MARIE HARROD

## THOSE ARTFUL ERRORS

What I mistook for a poem  
was a scam, not that the scum

thought he was a scheme,  
no, he thought he was true

to me, but the wife—always  
the strife in these lyric blues—

knew he was bunko—knew  
that though she did not love him—

or maybe she did—who knows  
what couples recurring play?

She wants to control me, he said,  
and I knew that's what poems say,

while the wife claimed he was nothing but scruff,  
called me his coy mistress, his sextina-bluff,

his two-toed goose-ode, his cyhydedd fer,  
his wanna-be pentameter, his empty aire . . .

**AYLA  
ROSE  
MILLER**

## BUCKETS

I pull out of the driveway pavement, heading down the long and snaky mountain, my same daily path, when I see a furry body on the road. I drift to the opposing side avoiding this unknown body, curiosity in my body. They look to be asleep, chest toward pavement, face laid to the side, looking similar to my tuxedo cat asleep on the carpet at home. I feel a pulling in my chest for this creature I recognize as an opossum.

I drive up the steep hill, returning from a long day of work past the eternal sleeping opossum, this time, one leg poised in the air, like a dancer, toe pointed, perhaps smirking at a crowd. My chest tightens and I laugh loudly, this juxtaposition both humorous and painful. I think about the rubber gloves I have at home and the vast woods behind my house, able to house this creature as its body decomposes. I go home and there I stay.

I drive down the mountain road, the sun yet to rise over the horizon, visibility dark, sleep still filling my eyes, brain not yet awake. I drive past him, gender now assigned, as I have filled my head with his story, my heart clenching, clock ticking, work beckoning.

I drive home, having picked up my partner from her job. We are both tired and sensitive, and when we see the friend lying on the pavement, ear torn, belly up, looking more and more like roadkill and less like a sleeping cat, we discuss the buckets that reside in the yard, if we have a shovel, and what we would do if he took a breath as we lifted him into the bucket. I drive home where we stay for the night.

I drive down the hill, holding my breath, waiting to see what today holds for my friend. He is gone, all that is left: a bloody pavement smear. Tears gently leak from my eye sockets. I will never know what has become of this gentle vermin.



## BOYHOOD

There's sugar and basketball, a golden lab and picture books with worn pages. A house on a hill and two cars in the driveway, pavement and chalk. There's boxes to play in, a fort in a tree, birthday candles and hugs that are what they mean. A boy of six runs through grass and blows dandelion seeds into cool winter air. They should be dead, but Mom saved them for the deep winter blues. They're bubbles to the boy. She calls his name as he's trudging along. He's growing so fast, the sun's on his skin, he's humming out loud. He's running so fast and skinning his knee, band aid in hand, Mom holds him close.

Mom zips up his coat, snagging a thread, says there's practice at three. They pull out of the driveway and onto the street, past mailboxes and shutters, he points to it all. He asks why and who and where and why. When? And then...? And why again. It's "Mom" and "Mom" and "Mom" and "Mom". They laugh and park and he practices at three. He looks up after scoring, but Mom's on the phone.

He's less chatty and happy, chipper, different than before. When they're almost home, he looks up ahead, sees a cat in the road; he shrieks in excitement asking Mom to pull over. She says no, then relents because it's not moving and he's begging. He wants to take kitty home and "make him my brother". She takes his hand wrapped in hers and explains. It's all broken picture frames and cracked bats, achy dog joints, and broken records. There's rotting shutters and a rusty bumper, cracked pavement and empty pens. There are no cats in the road, only an animal struck dead.

## ANIMAL

I'm waiting for night to fall, pattering in drifts of snow atop fallen leaves. There's no one left to call, I'm alone now navigating winter, willing spring to rise. Staring at this monumental tree in the face, wondering if this is the place to try, I'm certain there's a nest up top, perhaps some eggs to get me by. I'm missing her today. Picturing her next to our favorite place, the stream that swallows the forest sounds, helps, but not enough. My thoughts are perpetually interrupted by the pains of belly hunger.

I decide to climb the tree. One limb in front of the other, I make it to the first branch. There's nothing but chattering squirrels and half dead twigs. I think about looking down, imagine what the sky would look like as I plummeted through the air before the ground caught my back. I shake the thoughts off (physically) as I catch sight of some bent twigs and grasses. I'm tentative the whole way up, digging nails into bark. My silent prayers are answered and I make it to the top. I peer my nose into the nest and see nothing but buttons and bits of string, a hoarder's collection at best. I curse this bird and retrace my steps, back to the forest floor.

Dusk is settling, darkness soon to rise. I'm kicking leaves, dejected and dead tired. I'm counting all the ways I've failed myself and her, when a leaf jumps off a tree. I stop dead in my tracks, not moving a muscle. I'm playing dead, hoping for leaves to rustle. I count a minute and am about to move when a grasshopper reveals itself, fatally thinking I had gone. I clamber after the hopper, this game of cat and mouse. I'll win, a snack to pass until I follow the scent of rotting meat. I spring from bush to pavement. But suddenly there's bright lights. The grasshopper is under foot, but so am I. Under the foot of a tire, a fire grows in my veins until black melts in and everything disappears.

## DREAMS

I'm lying in the road. Not on it, but in it – a thin layer of pavement sealing me down. It's translucent and I can see sky. It looks like bubble wrap and hamburger meat.

I'm flipping through the pages of a catalogue, each one filled with TV static and mold. Crawling out of the ball pit, I sit on a diving board waiting for them to call my name. They keep saying "Sarah" expectantly but that's not my name. There's a knock on the door and a girl who won't answer it. I think she's Sarah, but I'm not really sure.

There's a ticking clock on the floor, its' vocal chords counting down from four. It tells me to watch my back and at zero the pool fills with minnows. They school me and I'm drowning in a bucket nailed to tree.

I look out to the direction of the street and watch a plane emerge from the meat. I'm sitting in the pilot seat as it falls from the sky and into the pavement. We're crushing an animal dead. It's silent but there's blood in my eye. I'm sitting on the chest of the animal, but it's actually my cousin and her name is Sarah.

## THRILLS

He leaves the office, highway speeding down I-80 West in his E-Class Mercedes Benz. A long day of high powered docket depression falls away with each uptick of the speedometer. Dodging minivans and tractor trailers proves easier and easier with each passing mile. His ecstasy climbs higher. At mile marker 30 he swerves onto the shoulder to avoid a car, moving so quickly he can't even identify it beyond 'sedan'. There's a thump beneath his wheels and he exhales with a forced evenness, feeling a rise in his trousers.

He takes his exit; he's pushing buttons. On his dashboard, heat – rises, volume – blares. This adrenaline is his ecstasy and flashes of death his aphrodisiac. He's running 90 in the 45, weaving in and out of lanes, blasting past neon signs, scaring the shit out of commuters almost home. His pants are pulling tighter, he's nipping at the bone.

He's in the backwoods now, it's all hills and blind spots, cars parked on the pavement. He's weaved this web before and isn't slowing down. The dusky shadows taunt him, flashing would be lives right before his eyes. Praying for release, driveway nearly in sight, an animal jumps from behind a bush like a fire and he swerves, aiming at it, his tire. Ejaculation release. This, his moment of peace, creature deceased, all wiped away as he pulls into his driveway, kid waiting for him in the picture window, wife out of sight but just around the corner.

**K. H.**  
**DONAHUE**

## THINGS ARE BETTER IN THREES

“Oh, you have three girls? Oof, that must be rough.”

*I was one of three girls, and I loved it.*

“It’s another girl, huh. Your husband must not have the Y chromosome.”

*It’s only my second baby, and she’s unborn.*

“Oh, wow, another girl for you. Doesn’t your husband miss throwing a ball around?”

*My partner still plays ball with our daughter.*

“Only girls? I guess it must run in your family.”

*Actually, the sex of the baby is determined by sperm.*

In a game, three of any card  
is a good hand.

But a mother wants a son  
to carry on the family’s name  
to prove to the world she is not  
insignificant.

She can birth  
politicians,  
leaders,  
and builders  
of law and power and structure.

I’m the oldest of three daughters.  
There is loyalty and resilience and strength  
in sisterhood.

I never was without  
significance in my hand  
of three. I always felt  
extra special  
as three of the same.

When I was pregnant with my third baby,  
I was told I was having a boy.  
I cried tears of mourning,  
not for a lack of loving this new life,  
but losing  
three of a kind.

## THE CANDY DISH

Appearing  
with an outstretched arm  
on the way out the door  
of our second-grade classroom,  
my teacher let us pick from a candy dish:  
one Necco,  
or, one Tic-Tac,  
or, one Smartie,  
or one, small, Sour Patch Kid.  
One was never enough  
to capture the sweetness  
or quell my hunger.  
And, even at seven,  
I knew it was cheap,  
a succor to leave us with,  
as we parted by the end of the week.

## THE COCKROACH

You never forget  
how the cockroach  
flitters over the reflection  
of the kitchen counter.

The manipulative legs  
of the unwelcome,  
and sly, furtive, creature  
dance in your peripheral.

Sometimes the coffee pot  
harbors more than caffeine  
when the quick shadow  
chases the darkness.

When do you really  
know that a cockroach  
is just a cockroach  
and not a permanent guest?



**R. S. D.**

**WEATHERMAN**

## THE RABBIT NOT THE CAT

The Cat caught its trouble  
its curiosity by the mouth  
A mouse hole with a trap  
that felt it considerate enough to snap

The Cat learned that day,  
it was best to play keep away  
with The Mice who danced in the bubbles of the walls

so she scratches and peels  
Meowing in pleas for her comedic heels  
to dance for her again  
and stave off the boredom  
that shades her lust of a life  
unperformed

But it was the white rabbit  
with black nose and socks  
tucked comfortably in a velvet hat  
who stunned the world with her attempted valor

the same way Halley shreds through the sky  
letting that perforated scrap of brilliance  
scratch the fitful lens of reality  
enough to claim relevancy

In an effort that took too long to coordinate  
coddled with the comforts of the  
*theoretical* metaphysical  
boundaries that separate soul from skin

the magician, popped the socket of his wand  
loaded the paper  
and kept it in his back pocket  
in preparation for his act

Clumsy he  
with his long limbs  
that fought to stay upright  
dropped the wand  
three phases too early

Clumsy he  
with his glazed exterior  
dull and deliberate  
Managed to crack open  
and hiss  
Becoming a bleeding chimney  
smoke visible from the balcony

box of tricks  
beginning to light  
his everwinding rope of colorful cloth tied tongue to tongue  
a simmering fuse  
that climbed with the trialing assurance  
of a man looking for a Woman in a tower  
*he is not a prince.*

But She was.

In Her tower of satin,  
curled comfortable  
pinwheel of snow dabbled fur  
Her nose twitched at the smell before She did  
and though She was a rabbit,  
there was a capitalized modifier

of “*Tamed*”

she hadn’t noticed the specifics of the term  
until the hat started to catch flame

It was The Rabbit not The Cat  
who’s deep eyes reflected no sense of mourning  
when fate tried to catch Her  
by the singed cotton of Her tail

It was The Rabbit not The Cat  
who scene, by scene  
felt the heat leak into the pores of the hat  
Jumping, tripping  
hormonal current to transmitter  
out of Her sueded den

directly into

The Pyre.

...

It was The Rabbit not The Cat  
Who welded Herself with the world.  
Became dead as fresh cut grass  
dampened with a spool of winding red thread  
That dragged Her to the molten core of the earth

Like a slinky sent slipping down the stairs.

she would, then  
find herself beyond the grave  
Realize just there  
In the dew swept sweat of morning  
her lust for life finally  
Unshaded

as she claimed for Herself, Her long-limbed owner

his body otherwise, well  
unforsaken

to claim a life that was never Hers  
the same way She was claimed  
with nary a word against  
the terror She would soon reign.

# LAURA DANIELS

## JOY: A GOLDEN SHOVEL

*JOY / does not want to be / written. It does not need me.*  
Seema Reza's "JOY"

Soft eyes worship warm joy  
it slackens a frozen frown, that's what it does

A tree smile blossoms, how could it not  
foiling complacency, striving to want  
creation bursts forth—able to  
end sheltering, now it's time to be

Bring forth life, or so it's written  
rejuvenation abounds, there's no hiding from it

Joy thaws rigid restrictions, that's what it does  
fauna flaunts fanciful buds, how can they not  
after winter's weariness, springtide will need  
joyful magic, it finds me, but doesn't need me

## REFLECTION: A GOLDEN SHOVEL

*The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard, / dies young.*  
Anne Sexton's "Welcome Morning"

In the morning the  
sun tried to shine joy  
into a mirror that  
sits alone. Its reflection isn't  
something I want shared,

it dampens my spirit, but I've  
embraced what the sun heard,  
*Your shadow light dies*  
*early. It longs to remain young.*

# ANIKA BUKKAPATNAM

*NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention*

## LIES ABOUT CHAI

*NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention*

A millimeter thick strand of white thread  
Weaves  
And weaves  
And weaves itself  
Around my neck

I want to  
Spit  
Choke  
And, vomit  
This is not what I meant

They forgot, not only the turmeric  
But the cardamom and the  
Love  
Soul  
Heart  
Of chai

They bagged our story  
Shoved to a corner with the  
Other  
stolen  
Arts, clothes, blood,  
I try

To compose myself  
In the exposed-brick coffee shop  
Because they don't know that they are  
Laundering lies

They don't know about  
Colonization  
Robberies  
Famines  
They don't know about  
Chai



I'd push them to the side, make a brew  
That's like a mug of sepia Kolkata  
With my pinky down, my skin dark (my blouse),  
Chipped mugs, a Tagore sonata

Cracked fingers and bellies, a trophy from war  
That we were starved, and are alive  
Now, I meet a solace with a scalding reminder  
Now, I find my home in my chai

## LOVE LETTERS (BUT NOT TO EACH OTHER)

*When another person  
Talks of you,  
You're said to bite your tongue...*

I've been  
Suffering from hard  
Clasps of teeth over  
Cheeks and lips

You have been  
Speaking of me  
So caught in me  
That you bite and miss

You can't breathe  
But I know for certain that  
You cannot not  
Chew

If you've been  
Biting your tongue  
I won't say that I haven't been  
Speaking of you

Enthralled, right?  
I am your sun  
Every word you utter  
Your moon

Taken with every  
Step and every concept  
Your mind  
Consumed

This is why I believe  
My mouth is a battlefield and  
A streak tracks red  
From your lips

Our tongues and lips and teeth  
Are stubborn, themselves  
In belief they'll  
Never eclipse

-- -- --

I wanted to let you  
Know that I saw you  
On the night you  
Left

You sat next to me  
As I sat on the ground  
You sat next to me  
As I wept

And as you know  
Parts of it  
Are regret, and woe  
It's tough

As you're aware  
Parts of it  
Are that your  
Absence is bit much

Parts of it  
Are the rubble that's been  
Left in the wake  
Of your flight

Parts of it  
Are unthinkable  
(They keep me up  
At night)

A part of me  
Is at peace with  
No piece of you  
Hurt

And every piece of  
Me now holds your  
Strength, it holds my  
Earth

And I currently  
(Maybe always)  
Will feel like  
A million shards as one

But my every piece  
Is changed by  
You and again I  
Am undone



# OLIVER VAN NESS

## HEARTBURN

I was born into a house on fire.  
I can still feel the smoke in my lungs today,  
like the ghost of all the things I ran away from;

because when the fire burnt out,  
when its last flame dwindled,  
leaving only the house's foundation,  
burnt, black, and barren,  
charcoal painted over in beiges and blues,

my ribs remained burning, red-hot,  
like the last flame snuck into my chest,  
to escape its own death.

**ELAINE  
KOPLOW**

## EDITOR'S LAMENT

*When it's dark enough, you can see the stars*  
—attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson

Submission #34's poem is anguished, full of despair.  
Possibly suicidal. But I do not know  
the poet—somewhere in Sacramento.  
Even if I drove there—left now—it could be  
too late. But death is not a metaphor here.  
Paid three bucks to Submittable  
in a desperate cry for help. Help

me here. I've never been to Sacramento.  
The closest I came was in '73 when I hiked  
the Tetons—the air pristine, not a cloud.  
It was before wildfire smoke. Before I was married.  
Before the divorce. Before I learned trust  
was something you kept only for yourself.  
We camped in a nylon tent with a mesh door—  
a view of the ridgeline, the stars. A flood of stars  
across the October sky, illuminating the valley,  
the mountains, the whole of Wyoming.  
And it was enough.

They are with me still,  
fifty years later, lighting the darkness. Wait,  
number 34. Listen. I am three thousand miles  
away, but I'm sending you the stars.  
Watch for them.



**FALEEHA  
HASSAN**

## WAR

Our mothers, who loved us more than we do ourselves,  
Were baffled by wars.  
They forgot to anoint our lives with balms to ward off battles.  
That's why every time a king sobers up  
And slips on victory's shoes, crafted from the skins of loyal  
soldiers,  
And breathlessly  
Delivers rotten orations  
From the dais of prevarication,  
Once he opens his mouth  
The words' drizzle spatters us,  
And our lives fester with  
War's abscesses.

## A MESSAGE TO MY POEM

Is this fair?  
You leave me with the pale whiteness of my paper  
like an orphan stretching out his hand in the void  
wating for a moment of kindness,  
Is this fair?  
I open the door of my broken heart to celebrate the pride of  
your words  
And you, in vain, give me an indifferent look  
Pure silence, around me now  
Where did you get your hardness?  
I'm like whisper of a silk glove.  
I fall asleep on a velvet sheet waiting for you  
I'm not a word hunter  
to make traps for you.  
No dice player  
to collect the glow of your body from a lost throw.  
I am a poet,  
I am born from a wing of a word  
and drowning deeply in the emptiness of the paper.  
Nothing can be more cruel than your absence now.

# DAVID AUSTIN

## TWIN STONES

I sit here trying again to remember exactly  
    when it was that I first learned of your existence.  
Before then, you were just whispers, quiet sobbing from a bedroom late at night,  
    or those afternoons when “Mom just needed some quiet time alone.”  
You couldn’t know this, but I was only two  
    when the two of you arrived.  
Dad took Mom to the hospital but  
    they came home empty-handed.  
And two years later,  
    our baby sister showed up –  
    the miracle child, the one who couldn’t be born but still was,  
    and you became what’s left behind after a shadow passes.  
And then one time, when I’d complained again  
    that she was always getting her way  
    that she could do anything  
    that she could never do anything wrong,  
Dad took me aside and explained:  
    you’d come too early, too soon,  
    unformed, incomplete, not ready to be in the world with us,  
    but here anyway.  
And all they could do was  
    hold you and name you and then  
    let you go.  
    But not really.  
I once heard someone say that a person doesn’t really die  
    until the very last person they knew stops  
    remembering them.  
So here I am, an old man now,  
    remembering ghosts.  
Wondering so many things:  
    Would you have laughed like our mother?  
    Would you have been able to sing like our father?  
    Who would you have become?  
The house I grew up in was haunted.  
    They didn’t speak about you  
    but you were there  
    the whole time.  
These two flat stones are tiny, like you were,  
    side by side, two names, one date.  
I brush away some dry black leaves,  
    pull back some stubborn weeds.  
    I’d plant some purple vinca here – Mom’s favorite –  
    but they’d just mow it down.

Flowers aren't really my style anyway.  
I've always preferred words.  
So I'll come back again soon,  
and I'll sit here in the grass  
and we'll talk some more.  
I still have lots of questions.



# GEORGE MARANO

## COLLECTABLES

We collect, parse, edit thoughts in chasing profundity  
It is found crumpled in waste bins and dumpsters  
Ripped from the babbling mouths of the homeless  
In the studded pocket of Levis buried for a hundred years  
In the aha moment of an ancient language worked from clay.

We x-ray the mind of an artist through his children,  
The writer by what was not said in the interstices,  
A Strad's alluring perfection through depth, curvature, vibration.

When we can't comprehend or decipher intent,  
It's squirreled away in wooden drawers  
Stacked in dark passages, sealed in vaults.

The intrinsic to its creator is lost on us  
Quantifiable value becomes the essence of its existence,  
To only taste and touch is a consolation far short of the mark.



JOEL  
LEWIS

## COUNTDOWN: THE ORIGINS OF HERSCH SILVERMAN'S JAZZ POETICS

When Hersch Silverman published his first book, the *Krishna Poems*, in 1970, it received scant notice in the poetry scene. Although it is now recognized as a minor Beat classic, its publication occurred at a time when interest in the Beats was on the wane as the Hippie/Underground Rock axis began to define the counter-culture of the time. Kerouac had died the year before as an almost forgotten figure, following a string of poorly received novels. Gregory Corso and William Burroughs were both residing outside of the USA and publishing little. Only Allen Ginsberg had managed to cross the generational creek, thanks to his significant role as an anti-Vietnam War activist.

Hersch's obstinate commitment to a Beat aesthetic had much to do with his residency in Bayonne, a city surrounded on three sides by the New York Harbor's waters and sealed at its northern boundary by the very tough Curries Woods Housing Project (where Richard Price did his primary research for his novel *Clockers*, later to be turned into a Spike Lee Joint). The cultural isolation and inwardness that characterized Bayonne ensured that little outside influences made it into its working-class streets. And when both the central New Jersey trains and the CNJ ferries ceased running in '67, ending swift egress into Manhattan, Bayonne became a literal backwater in full view of the Manhattan skyline.

Although Hersch was a child of the Depression and served in both WWII and Korea, he was essentially a man of the pre-Beatles early 60s and retained that generation's values of mutual aid, community spirit and a gentle antipathy towards stuffy "uptown" types. Early in our friendship, I schlepped him down to hear proto-language poet Clark Coolidge read at The Poetry Project, whom I thought he'd dig because of the jazz content in his work. Hersch was politely receptive to the work, but I could sense he'd rather be home listening to an Art Blakey album.

Hersch's journey as a poet began in the early 50s, attending workshops at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y and hearing readings by Dylan

Thomas, Robert Frost and e.e. cummings. Eliot, Auden and the philosophy of New Criticism ruled the roost of American poetry, and the few alternative poetries available existed within miniscule coteries. When Hersch talked about that period, I sensed his disconnection from the normative poetry of that era. It was his accidental discovery of the Beats in '57 and his subsequent correspondence with Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso that pointed him to the nascent New American Poetry scene germinating at downtown Manhattan bars and espresso joints like Les Deux Megots and Dr. Generosity's.

I always loved Hersch's relationship to Allen Ginsberg. He treated Allen like he was a first cousin who happened to make good in the world – in fact, Hersch was friendly with the entire Ginsberg clan: brother Eugene, Allen's stepmother and his father Louis. Allen, in turn, wore his mentorship lightly – Hersch, after all, was a contemporary—and wisely pointed Hersch back to writing about his own neighborhood and its residents. And Hersch holds the rare distinction of being the only poet I know of who managed to gross-out Allen, the author of the censor's delight: *Howl*. When Louis Ginsberg was in the late stages of the cancer that would claim him, Hersch wrote a poem called "A Blues Poem to Louis G." which contains the lines "O Louis I sing a Bayonne Blues,/I eat your tumor/ on pumpernickel/ with mayonnaise and lettuce,/your life sandwich" which Allen asked to PLEASE delete. Hersch stuck to his guns and published it in his fine late 70s chapbook "Elegies".

Another mentor/friend of Hersch's was the Maine poet Theodore Enslin. Although not that well known today, Enslin was about as far out as you could get in American poetry in the mid-60s. Famous for his philosophical poems and for enormous works like the 1,200 page poem *Forms*, Enslin was trained as a classical composer and went to Paris on a scholarship to study with the great pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, who encouraged him to pursue poetry. Their friendship seemed a bit unlikely, the well-educated Enslin was the child of a Bible Scholar father and a Latin Scholar mother and came from old Yankee stock, while the orphaned Hersch, a second generation Jewish-American, grew up in a lower middle-class community and graduated from a Jersey City high

school. But whatever their backgrounds, something clicked and they were good friends and close correspondents over a forty year period. Their letters can now be found in the SUNY Buffalo Library. I think what Hersch received poetically from Enslin was both a sense of form and a way of placing a poem on the page, a line based on musical phrasing and the permission to make music, in Hersch's case jazz, as a central subject for his poetry.

Bernadette Mayer's mentorship came at a crucial time in his life, following the closing of his Beehive candy store and the death of his wife. I ran into Hersch at a backroom reading in Hoboken at some point in the late 80s. He was looking a bit down, stating he had not written much in a while. I suggested he take a workshop at the Poetry Project with Mayer. The next time I ran into Hersch, he was telling me all about the whole new poetry scene he had discovered and the wild readings he was participating in up and down Manhattan island – and that was the start of a remarkable 25 year plus run of poetic activity at a time when many scribes his age start wrapping up their writing careers. I'm not sure what specifically Hersch got from Bernadette other than the permission to be as crazy and wild as he wanted to be – but Hersch's work definitely did turn more experimental in his later years --also thanks in part to his work with musicians like clarinetist Perry Robinson. I think what the younger poets he met during that period loved about Hersch, beyond his kindness and genuine interest in them, was that he always wrote with the enthusiasm of a younger person and not like a crabby waiting-to-die alter koker (Yiddish for "old fart").

When I think of Hersch, I often think of those famous William Carlos Williams lines from "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower": "It is difficult/to get the news from poems/yet men die miserably every day/for lack/ of what is/ found there." I got a great deal of insight about Hersch's poetry and the environment that he lived in from the year I spent as a social work intern at the Bayonne Community Mental Health Center. I spent three days a week listening to the struggles of local grocery boys, unemployed steel workers, disabled toll collectors, exercise instructors, mothers unequipped to deal with motherhood and, all too common, the last adult child

living in the family home now trapped in Bayonne due to an ill or bedridden parent. Many of the people I worked with rarely left Bayonne, except for an occasional jaunt to a suburban shopping mall.

Hersch, from his perch at his 7-day a week candy store, saw this local parade and saw the effects of lives chained to limited horizons, the cash nexus and to the deep shallowness of consumer culture. Poetry allowed him to transcend his candystoreness and be part of a world culture, to be part of community of creative, like-minded individuals. It allowed him to dream big.

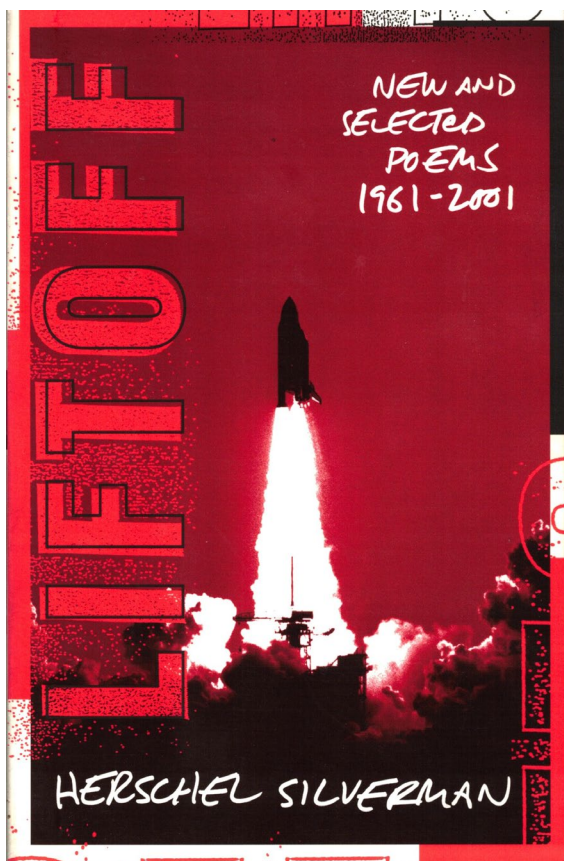
Hersch once told about giving a reading in Boston in the mid-60s. He closed the candy store a little early. Made the arduous trip to Manhattan to board the Greyhound Bus to Boston. He was picked up at the Back Bay Terminal by his hosts and driven to the reading site. He listened to the other poets. He then read his poetry as a featured reader. Then he was rushed back to the bus terminal to make the midnight bus for another 5 hours of “riding the Dog”. He arrived back to Bayonne in time to pull in the daily papers and start another day at his candy store. When he told this story, it was not one of those “how tough it is to be a poet” stories. It was more about the fact that he got a chance to read his poetry out loud. In Boston. And that the audience loved his work.

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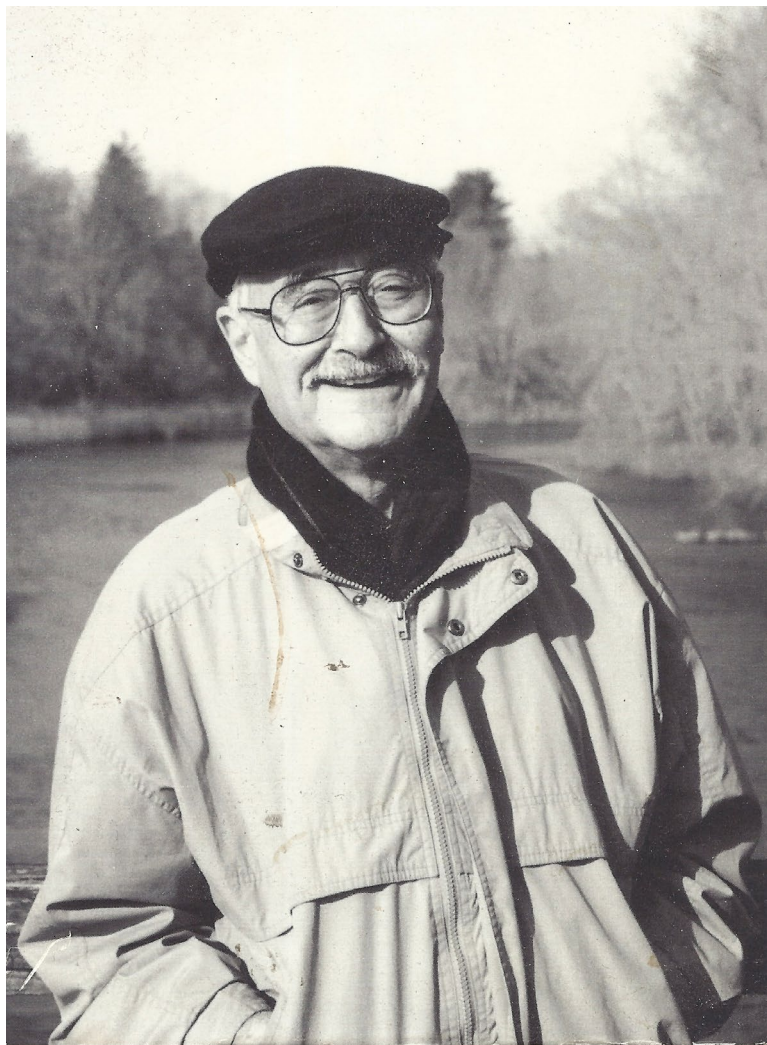














# HERSCHEL SILVERMAN

## A BLUESPOEM FOR LOUIS G.

—dedicated to Edith, Allen, and Eugene

Physical body's hip structure  
vanishing into bluespoem.

Louis' malignant tumor  
salved by Allen-compassion.

Is Hope romantic illusion?  
Is Louis? Am I/We?

Is illusion Hope?

O Louis i sing a Bayonne Blues,  
i eat your tumor  
                                on pumpernickel  
                        mayo and lettuce,  
your Life sandwich –

Honey drips from heart to wound,  
i sprinkle myrrh from lips of love,  
i sprinkle love on old memory of you,  
your speaking on telephone Bayonne to Paterson,  
your passing my mail on to Allen-

O Louis, Louis,  
man o' richwords, funnypuns, deep-puns,  
i'd like you to be there in Paterson forever –

Let 's sing to your freedom  
the last blue cool words of soul –

i salute you,  
your Full life of Meaning...

## BRECHT WEST

for Eric Krebs

long-haired granny-glassed bell-bottomed student faces  
conversing in old drugstore now converted informal  
    coffeehouse,  
New Brunswick New Jersey Easton St.  
conceived by Eric Krebs, ex-wrestler, student, poet, playwright,  
ole-movie promotor of V. Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Hitchcock,  
Charley Chaplin—King Kong overlooking neat chairs and  
    tables  
where sit Rutgers angel-faced students, Douglass English majors  
some with accents reminiscent of Oxford put-on,  
some non-student poets around to read their poems—  
colored strobilites and hi-fi music, massagic—  
Viveca Lindfors advertised in One-Woman-Show April 4th  
with discussion on arts to follow  
i suppose to enhance Brecht West's image—  
quiet kissing of ancestral lips and conversation  
soft—guitar strumming Folk—  
thin girls in jeans, thin-hipped, small breasts  
that seem aflame at confessional reading poems of love—  
friends at table loudly clapping—  
celestial thoughts—  
the Easton streetside door slamming to Eternity—  
words lost as new heads appear between hanging curtains in  
    doorway,  
rhythm broken, i pause in midst of nite train poem  
to glance toward door then go on reading words  
of Coney Island nitemare train of generation Past  
to this gathering Now, serious hippie-kids  
attired in threads of old fantasy—  
my ancient green-couch dreams come true  
in poetic pyramid coffee-house labyrinth 1969 Springtime—  
Beautiful Pat McCole, blind,  
listens to poems  
in Brecht West this St. Patrick's Day  
digging the sounds in tortured mind, acute,  
almost ready to nervously recite a poem of own—  
funny apology self-consciously made by reader of an obscene word—  
a meerschaum professor secret poet admirer sits inhibited  
quiet almost hidden in dark corner—  
nude art-work hung on walls where previously Ex-lax, alcohol,

fennel tea, and hairpins stood—  
in back a bar with coffee urns and old movie memories of Youth—  
a ghost rising Christ-like in psychedelic mind  
as Mrs. Cotton poem powerfully makes trip from Occult  
and Zuber's idiot hungry feeds New Brunswick—

March 17, 1969

## MAY 5, 1979

little black train-engine  
brought up from Central America  
to Paterson  
about as old as my Bayonne townhouse

Paterson once a prosperous powerful city  
now growing strong with poetry

old factories near Great Falls  
and the Falls themselves  
a National Landmark

Spruce and Maple Sts.—  
a whole section of the city named after trees!

Ah, to name this day after William Carlos Williams!  
To honor Allen Ginsberg!  
How Time heals.  
How poems are balm for a city's wounds.  
How poems deal with chicken pox  
and mumps and broken bones.

A french-fry american cheese  
coca-cola lunch in diner.

Absolute awesome tour of Great Falls  
with Eugene Brooks, Bob Rosenthal,  
Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman,  
and Edith Ginsberg.

Supper at Edith's.

My candystore in Bayonne  
with Allen and Tommy Wanko,  
sampling giant chocolate eggcream,  
milky way.  
Looking at pictures  
writing down mentally a Bayonne poem.





## CONTRIBUTORS

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When **MUYASSARKHON ABDURASULOVA** is not devouring books or crocheting herself into a blanket, she loves to write poetry or as she calls it, "Little journal entries of emotion." She loves going on long walks to hear the latest bird gossip, especially in the rain. This will be her first, but certainly not last, poetry publication.

**MARIAM ALI** is a lifelong writer. She enjoys dancing and is a fan of flowers.

**DAVID AUSTIN** a resident of Marlton, New Jersey, and a retired public school educator, having taught English, history, and Holocaust education for forty years. His poems have previously appeared in a number of publications, most of them small and most of them now extinct. The exceptions are *Journal of New Jersey Poets* and *The Paterson Literary Review*. His first book, a novel-in-verse entitled *Small Miracle: A Holocaust Story from France*, was published by Fernwood Press in May of 2020.

**ANIKA BUKKAPATNAM** is an author, scientist, and insomniac. Author of several anthologies, Anika's work centers around the unseen complexities of every day. Inspired by her many roots, she uses her literary voice to call attention to the diverse human narrative (in a rhyming form). When she is not draining pen ink, you can find her at the local rescue, giving the best ear scratches, or at home, experimenting with, you guessed it, chai recipes. Find out more about her at [buzzanika.com](http://buzzanika.com).

**DAVID BURR** authored *Ledger Domain* (poems) (New York Quarterly Books, 2019), *The Poet's Notebook: Inspiration, Techniques, and Advice on Craft* (Running Press, 2000), and was the selection editor of seven hardcover poetry anthologies for St. Martin's Press and Barnes & Noble. He taught at NYU as an adjunct associate professor, leading poetry workshops for twenty-five years, was a managing editor at Macmillan Publishers for thirty-six years, and has edited 297 poetry books, including the last seventeen Best American Poetry series annuals.

**LAURA DANIELS** (she/her) is a multi-genre writer and founder of the Facebook blog *The Fringe 999*. Curated in *NJ Bards Anthology*, Silver Birch Press, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. She resides with her partner in Mt Arlington, NJ, where she crafts her musings. Follow her at: <https://lauradanielswriter.wordpress.com>.

For **LIA DiSTEFANO** graphic designer, painter, photographer, poet...not necessarily in that order, the creative process isn't bound by genre, medium or motive. She began writing seriously later in life, integrating her life-long love of words and the nuance of language with the clarity of observation found in her visual work. Sometimes introspective, sometimes wry, she examines the complexities and simple truths of 'what is' in a world our minds can't always fathom. A recipient of a NJSC 2023 Fellowship Finalist Award, her work has appeared in *The Stillwater Review*, *U.S.1 Worksheets*, *Paterson Literary Review* (Hon.Mention, Allen Ginsberg Awards), and the *Red Wheelbarrow*. She and her rescued greyhound Shanti live on the South branch of the Raritan River in Califon, and she still has close ties to Weehawken along the Hudson.

**K. H. DONAHUE**, she/ her/ hers, is a graduate of Douglass College, Rutgers University, and Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ. Her style is influenced by American modernist poets, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, and Ezra Pound as well as contemporary writers Margaret Atwood, Clint Smith, and Naomi Shahib Nye. K.H. teaches secondary English and advises Echoes Literary Magazine at Pascack Hills High School, Montvale, NJ. She was first published at the age of nine in *The Bergen Record*. Her most discerning critics are her three children.

**JONAS ELBOUSTY** holds an MPhil and PhD from Columbia University. He is a writer, literary critic and translator, and an academic. He teaches in the department of Near Eastern Studies at Yale where he was the Director of Undergraduate Studies for seven years. He is currently the Director of Undergraduate Studies at the Council on Middle East Studies at the Yale MacMillan Center. In addition to his nine published books, his publications have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *ArabLit Quarterly*, *Asheville Poetry*

*Review*, *Banipal*, *Prospectus*, *Sekka*, *Live Encounters*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Journal of African Studies*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and *Middle Eastern Literatures*, *Comparative Literature*, and *World Literature Today*, amongst others. He is the editor of the *Routledge Book Series on Cultural Production in the Middle East and North Africa* and the Editor-in-Chief of *Aswat*, *Journal of Maghreb Studies*. His forthcoming books are *Faces* by Georgetown University Press and *Voices from the Arab Gulf Countries: Exploring Contemporary Arab Novels* from Routledge Press.

**CHARLOTTE FRIEDMAN** is a poet, translator and teacher who grew up in the Pacific Northwest and now lives in New Jersey. Her nonfiction book, *The Girl Pages*, was published by Hyperion, and her poetry in journals such as *Connecticut River Review*, *Intima* and *Timberline Review*. Her translations of Ch'ol poetry (with Carol Rose Little) have been published in *World Literature Today*, *The Arkansas International* and elsewhere.  
<https://www.charlottemfriedman.com>

**JONATHAN GREENHAUSE**'s first poetry collection, *Cupping Our Palms* (Meadowlark Press, 2022), was the winner of the 2022 Birdy Poetry Prize, and his poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *Harpur Palate*, *Lake Effect*, *New York Quarterly*, and *Saranac Review*. He is also a 5-time contributor to *Journal of New Jersey Poets*.

**LOIS MARIE HARROD**'s *Spat* was published by Finishing Line Press in May 2021, and her 17th collection *Woman* was published by Blue Lyra in February 2020. *Nightmares of the Minor Poet* appeared in June 2016; her chapbook *And She Took the Heart* appeared in January 2016; *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* (Cherry Grove Press) and the chapbook *How Marlene Mae Longs for Truth* (Dancing Girl Press) appeared in 2013. A Dodge poet, life-long educator and writer, she is published in literary journals and online ezines from *American Poetry Review* to *Tar River* to *Zone 3* Links to her online work at [www.loismarieharrod.org](http://www.loismarieharrod.org).

**FALEEHA HASSAN** is a poet, teacher, editor, writer, and playwright born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1967, who now lives in the United States. Faleeha was the first woman to write poetry for children in Iraq. She received her master's degree in Arabic

literature, and has now published 26 books. Her poems have been translated into English, Turkmen, Bosnian, Indian, French, Italian, German, Kurdish, Spanish, Korean, Greek, Serbian, Albanian, Pakistani, Romanian, Malayalam, Chinese, OIA, Nepali and Macedonian language. She was a Pulitzer Prize Nominee in 2018 and a Pushcart Prize nominee in 2019.

**MADISON HOFF**, a poet living in Northern NJ, is the author of her debut poetry book, *Molecularly Made* (2023). She helps run the Milkweed Poetry Workshop in the Hudson Valley area. Her work has been published in *Bombfirelit*, *Orange & Black*, *The Milkweed Zine*, among others. Her work can be followed on Instagram @thefolkinglife.

**NICK JIORLE** is a small business owner and freelance philosopher residing in Asbury Park. Nick has published two chapbooks through Two Key Customs Press, *When The Circus Leaves Town* (2023) and *A Wonderful Waste of Time* (2024). Beyond honing his craft for the written word, Nick is an avid surfer, snowboarder, and hiker who draws inspiration from the many situations these hobbies uncover as well as the thriving community of artists across all mediums in Asbury Park.

**ELAINE KOPLOW**, retired English teacher and union organizer, is Director of the Sussex County Writers' Roundtable and Associate Editor of *The Stillwater Review*. A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems appear in several anthologies and in numerous literary journals including *Spillway*, *Edison Literary Review*, *Adanna*, *Exit 13 Magazine*, *U.S.1 Worksheets*, *Tiferet*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Lips*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two poetry collections, *Sketch Pad* and *The Way the Light Comes Through*.

**JOEL LEWIS** is a lifelong resident of Hudson County, NJ and long bases in Hoboken. He is the author of 7 books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Well You Needn't* (Hanging Loose Press).

**GEORGE MARANO** was born in Hoboken in 1954 and has been a lifelong resident of New Jersey. He is a graduate of St. Peter's College, having earned a BS in Biology in 1976 and

then an MBA from Pace University in 1980. His early career spanned pharmaceutical research, sales and marketing. Now retired, he spent 31 years as a career counselor and academic advisor at New Jersey City University. Several of his poems were published in the 2022 edition of *The Pavan*, St. Peter's University's literary magazine, in celebration of the University's sesquicentennial founding. A memoir essay and several poems were featured in the 2023 edition of *The Pavan*.

**AYLA ROSE MILLER** is a writer from Morris County, New Jersey. She has a BA in Filmmaking and uses her education to introduce cinematic elements into her writing. She has been published in *Bi Women Quarterly* and *Journal of New Jersey Poets*. When she is not writing, Ayla spends most of her time reading, snuggling her cats, staring into fires and hiking.

Although **PETER MLADINIC** has lived in southeast New Mexico for the past 34 years, he was born and raised in northern New Jersey, and to him it will always be home. His most recent book of poems, *The Homesick Mortician*, is available from BlazeVOX books. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico, United States.

**WANDA PRAISNER**, a resident poet for the state and the recipient of fellowships from the NJ State Council on the Arts, the Dodge Foundation, the Provincetown Fine Arts Center, and VCCA, has received 26 Pushcart Prize nominations, the Princemere Prize, Egan Award, Kudzu Prize, First Prize in Poetry at the College of NJ Writers' Conference, and the 2017 New Jersey Poets Prize. She's appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Lullwater Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her 6th book: *To Illuminate the Way* (2018).

**DAVID REUTER** has been published in *A Thin Slice of Anxiety*, *Apricity Magazine*, *The Cape Rock*, *Courtship of Winds*, *El Portal*, *Existere Journal*, *The Literatus*, *Near Window Magazine*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Perceptions Magazine*, *Sandpiper*, *Sanskrit Literary-Arts Magazine*, *SLAB*, *South Shore Review*, *Visitant* and *Vox Poetica*. I attended William Paterson University's Writer's Conference in 2018 and Rutgers Writers' Conferences in 2017, 2018 and 2019. I have a bachelor's degree from Caldwell College and

work as a paralegal. In my free time I enjoy practicing martial arts, playing guitar and cooking.

**ERIK ROTH** is poet based in Bergen County and a former recipient of a poetry writing scholarship from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Most recently, his work has appeared in the November 2023 release of *Discretionary Love* and summer 2023's Issue 54.2 of *Modern Haiku*. His poem "Adjusting" received an honorable mention for the New Jersey Poets Prize in the spring of 2022.

**HERSCHEL SILVERMAN** (1926-2015) was part of a group of Beat poets who were born and raised in New Jersey; his compatriots included Ray Bremer, Amiri Baraka, Jeanine Pommy Vega and his close friend Allen Ginsberg. Hersch was a local fixture in Bayonne where he resided for many years and ran a sweet shop called Hersch's Beehive (named for Bayonne High School's mascot). A dabbler in poetry, his imagination was sparked reading about the Beats in the magazines of his shop. He began corresponding with Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg and soon became a public poet reading in downtown Manhattan venues and publishing in the small presses of the period. In later years, he ran Beehive Press literally out of his basement where he kept an offset press and a binder and mentored a generation of poets during the heyday of Poetry Slams. *Lift Off: New and Selected Poems* (1961-2001 Water Row Press) is a comprehensive selection of his work.

**MEGHA SOOD** is an Award-winning Asian-American Poet, Editor, Author, Blogger, and Literary Activist. Literary Partner with "Life in Quarantine", at Stanford University. Member of National League of American Pen Women (NLAPW), The Artists Forum (USA), ArtPride (NJ), and United Nations Association-US Chapter. Author of two chapbooks and one full collection including Chapbook ( *My Body is Not an Apology*, Finishing Line Press, 2021) and Full Length (*My Body Lives Like a Threat*, FlowerSong Press, 2022). Her co-edited anthology *The Medusa Project* has been selected to be sent to the moon as part of the historical Lunar Codex Project in collaboration with NASA/SpaceX. Find her at <https://linktr.ee/meghasood>.

**FIRAS SULAIMAN** is Syrian poet residing in the State of New York. He has been writing poetry over the last three decades. Suleiman has published numerous poetry collections, including *The City I Live Far Away*, *Al-Raseef*, *Margin*, etc. He has participated in poetry reading and festivals both nationally and internationally.

**SIMON TERTYCHNIY** - Some of my work has been published over the years, most recently, two of my poems were published in the Fall 2023 issue of *Platform Review*. A selection of eleven Russian poems appeared in *The Emigrant Lyre* in 2020. In 2013, my translation into Spanish of a book of short stories by Daniil Kharms, a Russian absurdist writer, was published in Chile. The current submission consists of six poems selected from an unpublished manuscript titled “KNOTS”.

**CHUCK TRIPI** has been a full-time poet since 1998 when a medical catastrophe suddenly ended his career as an airline pilot. His poems and essays appear in collections and literary journals including *Boston Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Quiddity* among others. With his late wife, Barbara, he was founder of the Paulinskill Poetry Project, a boutique press and community resource, publisher of anthologies and first books.

**OLIVER VAN NESS** is a queer poet, artist, and musician born and raised in New Jersey. This is his first poem in print, though he has been writing creatively since he could talk. He is currently attending Mercer County Community College. He can be found at @ollytheartist on Instagram.

**EMILY VEGA** is a writer and poet whose work explores themes of loss, connection, and family. As a student at Binghamton University, Emily is working towards a master's degree in English. She currently resides in New Jersey with her family where she continues to draw inspiration from folk music, nature walks, and the people she loves.

**R.S.D. WEATHERMAN** is a specter cast on the shadow of a wall whose tangled roots & buckshot style of writing blasts the stability of the spoken word through a canon of sharp glitter, cold iron, and blood-thick ink. Until their current debut, their fiction has largely gone unpublished; preferring to work

as both an illustrator, and a purveyor of things starkly digital and disquieting. They live within the steel-rimmed bubble of Randolph, NJ and hope to surface more poetry to the eyes of the public when they are not attending to their (newly acquired) four-limbed form.

**ELLEN JUNE WRIGHT** is an American poet with British and Caribbean roots. Her work has been published in *Plume*, *Tar River*, *Missouri Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Gulf Stream*, *Solstice*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Leon Literary Review*, *North American Review*, *Prelude*, *Gulf Coast*, and is forthcoming in the *Cimarron Review*. She's a Cave Canem and Hurston/Wright alumna and has received Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations.

**MICHAEL T. YOUNG**'s third full-length collection, *The Infinite Doctrine of Water*, was longlisted for the Julie Suk Award. My previous collections are *The Beautiful Moment of Being Lost* and *Transcriptions of Daylight*. I received a Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. My chapbook, *Living in the Counterpoint*, received the Jean Pedrick Chapbook Award. My poetry has been featured on *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*. It has also appeared in numerous journals including *Pinyon*, *Talking River Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review* and *Vox Populi*.





# NEW JERSEY POETS PRIZE WINNERS

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## 2024 New Jersey Poets Prize

LIA DiSTEFANO

for

“Skylight Binging”

### PAST WINNERS

2023	Theresa Burns
2022	Elizabeth Smith
2021	Tamara Zbrizher
2020	Paula Neves
2019	Emari DiGiorgio
2018	Meghan Privitello
2017	Wanda Praisner
2016	Timothy Walsh
2015	Judith Rowe Michaels
2014	Tina Kelley
2013	Edwin Romond

## 2025 NEW JERSEY POETS PRIZE

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\$1000 prize for a poem written by  
a past or current New Jersey poet.

One winning poem will be selected by the editors  
and awarded the 2025 New Jersey Poets Prize.  
Honorable Mention winners may also be selected.  
All winners will be published in the 2025 issue of  
the *Journal of New Jersey Poets*.  
All entries will be considered for publication.

Visit [www.journalofnjpoets.org](http://www.journalofnjpoets.org) for further  
guidelines and subscription information.



