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P O E T R Y

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Overview

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PRAISE FOR THE NATIONAL POETRY SERIES

“By enabling five new volumes of poetry to appear annually over the past 35 years, the National Poetry Series has radically changed the face of American poetry. A number of poets who are now among our best-known first appeared there as beginners, and might never have been heard from were it not for the publication opportunity the Series offers. It’s vital to our literary health as a nation that the work continue.”

—**JOHN ASHBERY**

“The National Poetry Series may be the single most important poetry publishing venture of the last half-century. Nothing matches it in terms of the number and quality of books of poetry it has mid-wifed into existence, books that will be read well into the next half century and beyond. No other cultural institution, public or private, no publisher or foundation, has so ably facilitated the publication of the poetry of our time. There’s nothing out there that can replace it, so we damn well better support it.”

—**RUSSELL BANKS**

“I know of no program more vital to the launching of a poet's career than the National Poetry Series. For over 30 years, 5 poets annually have enjoyed the immense benefit of having their manuscripts transformed into handsome books by some of the most prestigious publishers in the country. Measured by these hard, practical results alone, the Series deserves the support of every devotee of poetry. My own *Questions About Angels*, selected by Edward Hirsch in 1990, marked the true beginning of my public life in poetry.”

—**BILLY COLLINS**

“A true luck of The National Poetry Series is that beyond the feat of publication it offers a team, a family, a community ready to receive, carry, and shout your book from the rooftops, out the windows, and down the lanes, into the hearts and minds of one’s soon-to-be readers. It is an award and honor for sure, but it is also a ward against or cure for any potential loneliness or lostness as you continue to make your way out into the wild world as a published writer and dreamer.”

—**NATALIE DIAZ**

“Every beginning poet depends on the word ‘yes.’ It’s a word that isn’t only for the benefit of the writer, it is also for the reader, hungry for discovery, for the publisher, itching to be persuaded, and the loud, wide and deep sound we call the voice of American Poetry, waiting to add one more layer of affirmation to it’s shifting, never ending chorus. This is the work The National Poetry Series has been doing, and doing well, and needs to continue doing. Listen: There is always a new voice, wringing out what it’s picked up along the way, plumage out, just about to warble. You want to know what they know, yes?”

—**CORNELIUS EADY**

“Over its long history, The National Poetry Series has provided a long and distinguished list of poets with their all-important first publication. It’s a wide-tent collaborative effort among the poets themselves that speaks beautifully to the variety and depth and liveliness of our poetic culture.”

—JONATHAN GALASSI

“The National Poetry Series is one of the rare prizes that automatically confers distinction. Not only that: it confers distinction on five poets each year, making it the only important prize that acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of our culture. Each year it allows the publication of five poets of unusual talent and, as has been proven, infinite potential. It must continue to thrive.”

—LOUISE GLÜCK

“The National Poetry Series for the last three decades has been one of the two or three bright promises out there for American poets, especially young poets. Young writers, working mainly in deep private, even if they are in an MFA program, even if they have found their way to a coterie as some poets do, feel themselves when they are lucky to be conjuring a kind of magic, as if they were shaping liquid phosphor, and then the work is done, with whatever psychic magic they've put into it and taken from it, and then what do you do? Looking at the world one of the things they'd see, have seen, is The National Poetry Series—poets reading poets in order to publish new work and keep the art fresh, keep renewing it. Not for the world at large but for those poets, the new ones or the ones with no special connection to the world of publishing, NPS has been crucial, a flare in the dark, and it needs to be kept alive.”

—ROBERT HASS

“Happy to say exactly what NPS means to me. The series lead me to Penguin, the publisher I have had for twenty years, and to my twenty-year friendship with my editor, Paul Slovak. NPS brought us together. The series is directly responsible for my publishing career. I don’t suppose I can be more exact than that. NPS is the North Star of all poetry competitions. Having judged it twice, I know it attracts more diverse and more gifted entries than any other contest I’ve judged these last twenty or so years.”

—TERRANCE HAYES

“The National Poetry Series gives widespread attention each year to five of the best emerging poets in the country. This prize has jumpstarted the careers of many of our finest poets, including Jake Skeets, Patricia Smith, and Terrance Hayes, even as it opens doors for new audiences who appreciate fresh, diverse voices.”

—JOY HARJO

“The National Poetry Series has been a landmark of American Poetry for such a long time that it's hard to envisage a skyline in which it would be absent. We've got to do everything we can to assure the continuation, and continuity, of the series.”

—PAUL MULDOON

“The National Poetry Series has brought us Larry Levis’ *The Dollmaker’s Ghost*, Naomi Shihab Nye’s *Hugging the Jukebox*, Rigoberto Gonzalez’s *So Often the Pitcher Goes to Water until It Breaks*, Patricia Smith’s *Teahouse of the Almighty*, among other classic collections. I can’t imagine a world in which these works do not exist. Which is to say, I can’t and don’t want to imagine a world without NPS.”

—NICOLE SEALEY

“It’s impossible not to be dazzled by The National Poetry Series—by its continuity and vitality as a literary adventure across almost a half century, by the amazing poets it’s given us through the excellent judgment and distinction of the poets who choose them, and by the labors of love that have made the choosing possible and have kept the series alive and flourishing through decades of changes. I can’t think of an enterprise in literature—or, in fact, anywhere else in American culture—that is broader and more generous in intention, and more precise and effective and consistent in achievement.”

—VIJAY SESHADRI

“It’s astonishing to realize that The National Poetry Series has been in existence since 1978 and that it has been instrumental in having American publishers bring out over hundred and seventy-five books of poetry by my count. The list of books and names is staggering, too, for it includes just about every now well-known name in contemporary poetry that was once totally unknown, until rescued from oblivion by one of the discerning judges on which the series depends for making its yearly selections. This is an accomplishment unmatched by any other poetry series or a single publisher in this country and deserves both our congratulations and our support that it continues.”

—CHARLES SIMIC

“As a reader, poet and educator invested in the ever-expanding canon of African American poetry, I am forever indebted to the National Poetry Series as a publisher of books by Sterling A. Brown, Nathaniel Mackey, Thylia Moss, Ed Roberson, Cyrus Cassels, Kevin Young, Patricia Smith, Terrance Hayes, Tyehimba Jess, Douglas Kearney and Joshua Bennett. And NPS is as much an emblem of extraordinary curatorial vision as it is a home for the most vital voices in poetry. I owe more than I can succinctly say to this series. So does American poetry.”

—TRACEY K. SMITH

“The National Poetry Series has been the single most important means for discovering who the best young American poets are and for publishing their first books. The list of poets who have been its beneficiaries is astonishing.”

—MARK STRAND

“The National Poetry Series, by employing five different presses a year, is a robust and wide-ranging benchmark for American poetry. The series shows us how far we have come with the art—and, most importantly, where we are headed. It is a collective and collaborative choir—and evinces our best selves. It is truly a treasure.”

—OCEAN VUONG

“In the last 35 years, a plethora of poetry contests have sprung up, but the National Poetry Series still towers above the rest. Every year, it illuminates not just one, but a spectrum of poets from a variety of identities and approaches. As splendidly various as poetry itself, it has launched the careers of a constellation of our brightest stars.”

—MONICA YOUN

Strong Men

STERLING A. BROWN

From *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, 1979

Selected by Michael Harper for the inaugural National Poetry Series Open Competition

*They dragged you from homeland,
They chained you in coffles,
They huddled you spoon-fashion in filthy hatches,
They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease.*

*They broke you in like oxen,
They scourged you,
They branded you,
They made your women breeders,
They swelled your numbers with bastards. . . .
They taught you the religion they disgraced.*

*You sang:
Keep a inchin' along
Lak a po' inch worm. . . .*

*You sang:
Bye and bye
I'm gonna lay down dis heaby load. . . .*

*You sang.
Walk togedder, chillen,
Dontcha git weary. . . .
The strong men keep a-comin' on
The strong men git stronger.*

They point with pride to the roads you built for them,
They ride in comfort over the rails you laid for them.
They put hammers in your hands
And said—Drive so much before sundown.

They cooped you in their kitchens,
They penned you in their factories,
They gave you the jobs that they were too good for,
They tried to guarantee happiness to themselves
By shunting dirt and misery to you.

You sang:

*Me an' muh baby gonna shine, shine
Me an' muh baby gonna shine.*

*The strong men keep a-comin' on
The strong men git stronger . . .*

*They bought off some of your leaders
You stumbled, as blind men will . . .
They coaxed you, unwontedly soft voiced . . .
You followed a way.
Then laughed as usual.
They heard the laugh and wondered;
Uncomfortable;
Unadmitting a deeper terror. . . .
The strong men keep a-comin' on
Gittin' stronger. . . .*

*What, from the slums
Where they have hemmed you,
What, from the tiny huts
They could not keep from you—
What reaches them
Making them ill at ease, fearful?
Today they shout prohibition at you
“Thou shalt not this”
“Thou shalt not that”
“Reserved for whites only”
You laugh.*

*One thing they cannot prohibit—
The strong men . . . coming on
The strong men gittin' stronger.
Strong men . . .
Stronger . . .*



Strongmen

TERRANCE HAYES

Terrance Hayes, a winner of the 2001 Open Competition for his collection *Hip Logic*, combines a recording of Brown's poem with videos and images to create a compelling piece of mixed media art, titled *Strongmen*. You can find the short video [here](#).

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The National Poetry Series is a literary awards program which sponsors the publication of five books of poetry each year. The manuscripts, solicited through an annual Open Competition, are selected by poets of national stature and published by a distinguished group of trade, university, and small presses.

The specific purposes for which this organization is incorporated are as follows:

- ◆ To add in a meaningful way to the number of poetry books published each year, making possible books which might not otherwise be published by providing both financial support and assistance in the process of manuscript solicitation, selection, and promotion.
- ◆ To support poetry and increase the audience for poetry by heightening its visibility among readers, broadening publisher involvement with its publication, and increasing booksellers' willingness to display and promote it.
- ◆ To give American poets, of all ethnic and racial groups, gender, religion, and poetic style, access to publishing outlets not ordinarily available to them.
- ◆ To involve poets of national renown in the identification of emerging or less well-established poets.
- ◆ To provide the conditions and mechanisms for a group of trade, university, and small press publishers to work together on the promotion and marketing of five poetry books each year, thus providing a structural model for collective literary publishing ventures.

“How do today’s poets, especially lesser-known ones, find an audience? How are readers, or would-be readers, introduced to new poets? Efforts to make this connection come alive deserve our gratitude and support, and the National Poetry Series is one of the most successful and long-lived. If you’re familiar with it, you know the quality and quantity of books it’s brought before the public. If you’re not, take a look at the list of works and poets (not to mention those who’ve served as judges)—and decide for yourself.”

—JEFFREY BROWN,
PBS NEWSHOUR

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY



DANIEL HALPERN

Daniel Halpern first proposed The National Poetry Series (NPS) in a speech at the Library of Congress in 1975. As a teacher, poet, small press publisher and editor, Halpern was frustrated by the discrepancy between the amount of quality poetry he knew was being written and the number of poetry volumes being published. If there are so many poets in the United States, he wondered, why are there not more poetry

books available? How can we help these poets to be heard at a time when the bottom line is limiting their availability, at a time when we most need to hear them?

Most major trade publishers argue, if only by their silence, that poetry is in no way cost-effective to produce. In response to the need to enhance the availability of good poetry, Halpern devised a plan whereby he could reduce cost and difficulty by facilitating the selection process and promotion of books through a nationwide contest with our most eminent and talented poets as judges. He presented this plan at the Library of Congress as an annual contest in which five winning manuscripts would be published with the help of modest subsidies, by participating trade and university presses, thus increasing the amount of quality poetry available to the public.

Although not present for the speech itself, the novelist James Michener read a transcript later published by the Library of Congress. He was so moved by the issues outlined in this speech that he immediately called Halpern and offered funding to initiate NPS. He explained his reasons for doing so in a statement released to the press:

I thought it deplorable that...the poet was at such a disadvantage, and it occurred to me that in my education the study of poetry was of at least as much significance as the study of prose. And in the conduct of my present life I found myself reading rather more poetry than prose myself reading rather more poetry than prose

I did so because I needed poetry. It was an essential part of my inheritance and I would feel impoverished without it, and without constant renewal

But I also suspected that while I was writing my long books of prose, there might be some gifted young woman at the University of Michigan who was saying it all in some eight-line verse, and saying it much better. There was a real chance that her verse might live a hell of a lot longer than my eight hundred pages, and I deemed it deplorable that I could get published while she could not.

I would not like to be a party to any publishing system which was able to publish prose but no poetry, because our nation probably needed poets a lot more than it needed novelists.



JAMES A. MICHENER

With the help of Edward J. Pizek of The Copernicus Society, Mr. Michener's gift was increased in such a way as to allow the yearly support to be made from interest only, thus guaranteeing NPS a permanent stream of yearly assistance. Additional start-up funding was provided by The Ford Foundation, and five distinguished publishing houses volunteered to participate in the program. With the efforts and assistance of these and other individuals, foundations, and corporations, The National Poetry Series was begun in 1978, leading to its first contest in 1979, and its first cycle of books published in 1980. Since those first years, NPS has received funding from Poetry Foundation, Hawthornden Foundation, Lannan Foundation, Tiny Tiger Foundation, Exxon, the Mellon Foundation, the Mobil Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry—as well as several generous, private contributions.

Over the last 47 years, The National Poetry Series has continued to support the annual publication of five books of poetry. More than 200 books have been sponsored by NPS, in collaboration with the accomplished poets who have served as judges and a distinguished roster of trade, university, and small press publishers. NPS receives approximately 1,500 manuscripts yearly. Each manuscript is screened by a team of poets who choose a group of approximately 50 finalists. From that group, five winning poets are selected by a team of judges. The five winners each receive a \$10,000 cash prize from NPS, in addition to having their manuscript published by a participating press. NPS has sponsored the publication of poetry by an impressive array of both new and more established talent, ushering in the first books of Marie Howe, Denis Johnson, Laura Mullen, and Sherod Santos, and honoring the continuing achievements of such mature poets as Sterling Brown, Billy Collins, Stephen Dunn, Stephen Dobyns, Alice Fulton, Terrance Hayes, Tyehimba Jess, Larry Levis, Eleni Sikelianos, and Patricia Smith.

We have been told countless times how much our organization means to struggling poets. The award supports valuable time to write, to travel, and to simply live. The five annual publications bring new poetry into the world, offering a platform for these voices to be heard. The Paz Prize gives recognition to Hispanic poets and highlights the power and potency of poetic translation. NPS has recently launched community engagement initiatives including interviews with current and past winners, insights and manuscript advice from judges, poetry readings, and poetry anthologies.

The work The National Poetry Series does is far-reaching, long-standing, and successful inherently by its continued publication of poetry year after year. The subsequent success of the poets, in their receiving awards for their winning collection as well as future publications, is particularly rewarding as we understand that the opportunity we offer is life-changing and garners national recognition. We will do this work in perpetuity as poetry is one of the most human activities we can perform, and The National Poetry Series is committed to keeping it alive.

PARTICIPATING PUBLISHERS

The winning books from the National Poetry Series Open Competition are currently published by the following presses:

- ◆ **Akashic Books**
New York, NY
- ◆ **Beacon Press**
Boston, MA
- ◆ **Milkweed Editions**
Minneapolis, MN
- ◆ **Penguin Books**
New York, NY
- ◆ **University of Georgia Press**
Atlanta, GA

In previous years, winning collections have been published by the following: Arte Publico Press; Atlantic Monthly Press; Coffee House Press; Copper Canyon Press; Dalkey Archive Press; Doubleday & Co.; Ecco; E. P. Dutton; Fence Books; Graywolf Press; HarperCollins Publishers; Harper & Row; Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Louisiana State University Press; Persea Books; Random House; Sun & Moon Press; University of Illinois Press; Verse Press; Viking Penguin; Wave Books; William Morrow and Co.; and W. W. Norton.



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA PRESS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The National Poetry Series Board is comprised of a range of writers, philanthropists, and advocates. In May, the board assembles for an annual meeting, followed by a fundraising dinner and poetry reading hosted by Balthazar Restaurant in New York City.

- ◆ James Berman
- ◆ Mariana Cook
- ◆ Natalie Diaz
- ◆ Andrew Foote
- ◆ Stephen Graham
- ◆ Daniel Halpern
- ◆ Cathy Park Hong
- ◆ William Kistler
- ◆ Alan Klein
- ◆ Ada Limón
- ◆ Imani Perry
- ◆ Karen Pritzker
- ◆ Francine Prose
- ◆ Glenn Schaeffer
- ◆ Lea Hillman Simonds
- ◆ Paul Slovak
- ◆ Tracy K. Smith
- ◆ Amy Tan
- ◆ Natasha Trethewey
- ◆ Lisa Trulaske

“The National Poetry Series is a treasure. Over four decades, this institution has given us access to poets who are brilliantly imaginative, deeply feeling, and revelatory. With a selection process that is tender and precise, you know when you pick up these books, you’ll be hit in the gut. And your mind will expand. I’m so very grateful for it.”

—**IMANI PERRY**

“Every year I look forward to buying the five books published in the National Poetry Series. It’s like having a curator who gathers again and again the most exciting and diverse collections of poetry in the country, selections that continue to represent the breadth of American poetry. Not only is it the most distinguished series, it is also the only one I know of that consistently identifies, at an early stage in their careers, the writers we are likely to be reading for a long time.”

—**NATASHA TRETHERWEY**

RECOGNITION FOR NPS POETS



Patricia Smith, author of a 2005 NPS winning collection, recently won the National Book Award for Poetry for her collection *The Intentions of Thunder: New and Selected Poems*. She is also the recipient of a Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and NAACP Image Award.

In 2025, 2022 NPS winner **Alisha Dietzman**'s manuscript-in-progress, *XOXO*, was selected by Cynthia Cruz for the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay di Castagnola Award.

Tennison S. Black's winning collection, *Survival Strategies*, won a 2024 New Mexico–Arizona Book Award.

Kinsale Drake, 2023 NPS winner, received a 2023 Adroit Prize for Poetry and the Joy Harjo Poetry Award.

No'u Revilla's *Ask the Brindled*, a winning NPS collection in 2021, won a 2023 Balcones Prize.

Diane Louie, 2020 NPS winner of *Fractal Shores*, was awarded the 2021 John Pollard Foundation International Poetry Prize for her debut collection of poems.

2017 NPS winner **J. Michael Martinez**' acclaimed collection of poems, *Museum of the Americas*, was longlisted for the 2018 National Book Award in Poetry.

Jos Charles, 2017 NPS winner for *feeld*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, was longlisted for the National Book Award, and named a New Yorker Best Poetry Book of 2018, a Vulture Best Poetry Book of 2018, and a Library Journal Best Book of 2018.

2014 MacArthur Fellow and 2010 National Book Award winner, **Terrance Hayes**, is a former NPS winner for his collection, *Hip Logic*. The most inspiring note to the success of his NPS book, is that additional printings were done by NPS participating press Penguin Books, who then went on to publish Terrance's future work.

Recently awarded a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship, NPS-winner **Adrian Matejka**, was also named a finalist for the 2014 Pulitzer Prize and the 2013 National Book Award. (NPS winner **Martha Ronk** also was a National Book Award finalist that year.) Adrian also was nominated for a 2010 NAACP Image Award for his poetry.

Ange Mlinko was awarded the 2009 Randall Jarrell Award in Poetry Criticism, given by the Poetry Foundation. Ms. Mlinko's NPS-winning collection, *Starred Wire*, also was a finalist for the James Laughlin Award.

2008 winner **Douglas Kearney** was awarded a Whiting Award for showing promise early in his creative writing career.

2008 National Book Award winner **Mark Doty** won the National Book Critics' Circle Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for his 1992 winning manuscript *My Alexandria*.

Winner **Gabriel Spera** was awarded the 2004 PEN Center USA Award for Poetry, for his collection, *The Standing Wave*.

Nathaniel Mackey's *Splay Anthem* won the 2006 National Book Award in Poetry.

Sandra Alcosser was chosen for the 1998 James Laughlin Award, honoring her second collection of poems, *Except by Nature*.

THE PAZ PRIZE

The National Poetry Series and Miami Book Fair have established **The Paz Prize for Poetry**. This biannual award—named in the spirit of the late Nobel Prize-winning poet, Octavio Paz—honors a previously unpublished book of poetry written originally in Spanish by an American resident. An open competition is held each May, when an esteemed Spanish-speaking poet selects a winning manuscript. The book is then published in a bilingual edition by Alliteration Publishing (previously Akashic Books), and honored at the Miami Book Fair.

In 2012, **Dinapiera Di Donato** was the first winner of the Paz Prize. She has received much acclaim for her collection, *Colaterales/Collateral*. Other winners include:

- 2014 *Nueva Monedas* by **Carlos Pintado**.
Chosen by Richard Blanco.
- 2016 *Miami Century Fox* by **Legna Rodriguez Iglesias**.
Chosen by Achy Obejas.
- 2018 *Ofrezco mi corazón como una diana* by **Johanny Vazquez Paz**.
Chosen by Rigoberto Gonzalez.
- 2020 *Ima y Coli: Arbol que nunca fue Semilla* by **Alejandro Perez-Cortez**
Chosen by Jose Kozer
- 2022 *The Infinite Loop / El Lazo Infinito* by **Oneyda González**
Chosen by Lourdes Vázquez
- 2024 *A Sun Behind Us / Un sol caído avanza* by **María Auxiliadora Álvarez**
Chosen by Germán Guerra



OCTAVIO PAZ



N P S W I N N E R S 1 9 7 9 – 2 0 2 5

2025

LOW FLYING PLANES by Hajjar Baban. Chosen by Jake Skeets. (Milkweed Editions)
Field of Vision by Stephanie Horvath. Chosen by Elisa Gonzalez. (Penguin Books)
Cloud Builder by Weston Morrow. Chosen by Ariana Benson. (University of Georgia Press)
Wildest by Kira Alexis Tucker. Chosen by Siwar Masannat. (Akashic Books)
Diary by Yi Wei. Chosen by Sasha Roque Pimentel. (Beacon Press)

2024

82nd Division by D. M. Aderibigbe. Chosen by Colin Channer. (Akashic Books)
Shade is a place by MaKshya Tolbert. Chosen by Maggie Millner. (Penguin Books)
Our Hands Hold Violence by Kieron Walquist. Chosen by Brenda Hillman. (Beacon Press)
Blue Loop by AJ White. Chosen by Chelsea Dingman. (University of Georgia Press)
Games for Childern by Keith Wilson. Chosen by Rosalie Moffett. (Milkweed Editions)

2023

Field Guide for Accidents by Albert Abonado. Chosen by Mahogany L. Browne. (Beacon Press)
The Sky Was Once a Dark Blanket by Kinsale Drake. Chosen by Jacqueline Trimble. (University of Georgia Press)
Post-Volcanic Folk Tales by Mackenzie Schubert Poloyni Donnelly. Chosen by Ishion Hutchinson. (Akashic Books)
the space between men by Mia S. Willis. Chosen by Morgan Parker. (Penguin Books)
Transgenesis by Ava Nathaniel Winter. Chosen by Sean Hill. (Milkweed Editions)

2022

Survival Strategies by Tennison S. Black. Chosen by Adrienne Su. (University of Georgia Press)
I Love Information by Courtney Bush. Chosen by Brian Teare. (Milkweed Editions)
Organs of Little Importance by Adrienne Chung. Chosen by Solmaz Sharif. (Penguin Books)
Sweet Movie by Alisha Dietzman. Chosen by Victoria Chang. (Beacon Press)
Tender Headed by Olatunde Osinaike. Chosen by Camille Rankine. (Akashic Books)

2021

Symmetry of Fish by Su Cho. Chosen by Paige Lewis. (Penguin Books)
Extinction Theory by Kien Lam. Chosen by Kyle Dargan. (University of Georgia Press)
Harbinger by Shelley Puhak. Chosen by Nicole Sealey. (Ecco)
Relinquenda by Alexandra Lytton Regalado. Chosen by Reginald Betts. (Beacon Press)
Ask the Brindled by No'u Revilla. Chosen by Rick Barot. (Milkweed Editions)

2020

[WHITE] by Trevor Ketner. Chosen by Forrest Gander. (University of Georgia Press)
Dear Specimen by W. J. Herbert. Chosen by Kwame Dawes. (Beacon Press)
Borderline Fortune by Teresa K. Miller. Chosen by Carol Muske-Dukes. (Penguin Books)
Requeening by Amanda Moore. Chosen by Ocean Vuong. (Ecco)
Philomath by Devon Walker-Figueroa. Chosen by Sally Keith. (Milkweed Editions)

2019

Little Big Bully by Heid Erdrich. Chosen by Amy Gerstler. (Penguin Books)
Thrown in the Throat by Benjamin Garcia. Chosen by Kazim Ali. (Milkweed Editions)
Field Music by Alexandria Hall. Chosen by Rosanna Warren. (Ecco)
Fractal Shores by Diane Louie. Chosen by Sherod Santos. (University of Georgia Press)
An Incomplete List of Names by Michael Torres. Chosen by Raquel Salas Rivera. (Beacon Press)

2018

Valuing by Christopher Kondrich. Chosen by Jericho Brown. (University of Georgia Press)
Nervous System by Rosalie Moffett. Chosen by Monica Youn. (Ecco)
Fear of Description by Daniel Poppick. Chosen by Branda Shaughnessy. (Penguin Books)
It's Not Magic by Jon Sands. Chosen by Richard Blanco. (Beacon Press)
Eyes Bottle Dark with a Mouthful of Flowers by Jake Skeets. Chosen by Kathy Fagan. (Milkweed Editions)

2017

What It Doesn't Have to Do With by Lindsay Bernal. Chosen by Paul Guest. (University of Georgia Press)
feld by Jos Charles. Chosen by Fady Joudah. (Milkweed Editions)
Anarcha Speaks by Dominique Christina. Chosen by Tyehimba Jess. (Beacon Press)
Museum of the Americas by J. Michael Martinez. Chosen by Cornelius Eady. (Penguin Books)
The Lumberjack's Dove by GennaRose Nethercott. Chosen by Louise Glück. (Ecco)

2016

I Know Your Kind by William Brewer. Chosen by Ada Limon. (Milkweed Editions)
Thaw by Chelsea Dingman. Chosen by Allison Joseph. (University of Georgia Press)
Madness by Sam Sax. Chosen by Terrance Hayes. (Penguin Books)
For Want of Water by Sasha Pimentel. Chosen by Gregory Pardlo. (Beacon Press)
Civil Twilight by Jeffrey Schultz. Chosen by David M. St. John. (Ecco)

2015

The Sobbing School by Joshua Bennett. Chosen by Eugene Gloria. (Penguin Books)
Not on the Last Day, But on the Very Last by Justin Boening. Chosen by Wayne Miller.
The WUG Test by Jennifer Kronovet. Chosen by Eliza Griswold. (Ecco)
Scriptorium by Melissa Range. Chosen by Tracy K. Smith. (Beacon Press)
Trebuchet by Danniell Schoonebeek. Chosen by Kevin Prufer. (University of Georgia Press)
(Milkweed Editions)

2014

Monograph by Simeon Berry. Chosen by Denise Duhamel. (University of Georgia Press)
Let's Let That Are Not Yet: Inferno by Ed Pavlić. Chosen by John Keene. (Fence Books)
The Regret Histories by Joshua Poteat. Chosen by Campbell McGrath. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Double Jinx by Nancy Reddy. Chosen by Alex Lemon. (Milkweed Editions)
Viability by Sarah Vap. Chosen by Mary Jo Bang. (Penguin Books)

2013

Ampersand Revisited by Simeon Berry. Chosen by Ariana Reines. (Fence Books)
Trespass by Thomas Dooley. Chosen by Charlie Smith. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Bone Map by Sara Eliza Johnson. Chosen by Martha Collins. (Milkweed Editions)
Its Day Being Gone by Rose McLarney. Chosen by Robert Wrigley. (Penguin Books)
What Ridiculous Things We Could Ask of Each Other by Jeffrey Schultz. Chosen by Kevin Young. (University of Georgia Press)

2012

the meatgirl whatever by Kristin Hatch. Chosen by K. Silem Mohammad. (Fence Books)
The Narrow Circle by Nathan Hoks. Chosen by Dean Young. (Penguin Books)
The Cloud that Contained the Lightning by Cynthia Lowen. Chosen by Nikky Finney. (University of Georgia Press)
Visiting Hours at the Color Line by Ed Pavli. Chosen by Dan Beachy-Quick. (Milkweed Editions)
Failure & I Bury the Body by Sasha West. Chosen by D. Nurkse. (HarperCollins Publishers)

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The Apothecary's Heir by Julianne Buchsbaum. Chosen by Lucie Brock-Broido. (Penguin Books)
Your Invitation to a Modest Breakfast by Hannah Gamble. Chosen by Bernadette Mayer. (Fence Books)
Green is for World by Juliana Leslie. Chosen by Ange Mlinko. (Coffee House Press)
Exit, Civilian by Idra Novey. Chosen by Patricia Smith. (University of Georgia Press)
Maybe the Saddest Thing by Marcus Wicker. Chosen by D.A. Powell. (HarperCollins Publishers)

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The Lifting Dress by Lauren Berry. Chosen by Terrance Hayes. (Penguin Books)
Stutter by William Billiter. Chosen by Hilda Raz. (University of Georgia Press)
Exhibit of Forking Paths by James Grinwis. Chosen by Eleni Sikelianos. (Coffee House Press)
The Lamp with Wings: 60 love sonnets by M.A. Vizsolyi. Chosen by Ilya Kaminsky. (HarperCollins Publishers)
A Map Predetermined and Chance by Laura Wetherington. Chosen by C.S. Giscombe. (Fence Books)

2009

Sarah—Of Fragments and Lines by Julie Carr. Chosen by Eileen Myles. (Coffee House Press)
Here Be Monsters by Colin Cheney. Chosen by David Wojahn. (University of Georgia Press)
Burn Lake by Carrie Fountain. Chosen by Natasha Trethewey. (Penguin Books)
Ideal Cities by Erika Meitner. Chosen by Paul Guest. (HarperCollins Publishers)
The Network by Jena Osman. Chosen by Prageeta Sharma. (Fence Books)

2014

Monograph by Simeon Berry. Chosen by Denise Duhamel. (University of Georgia Press)
Let's Let That Are Not Yet: Inferno by Ed Pavlić. Chosen by John Keene. (Fence Books)
The Regret Histories by Joshua Poteat. Chosen by Campbell McGrath. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Double Jinx by Nancy Reddy. Chosen by Alex Lemon. (Milkweed Editions)
Viability by Sarah Vap. Chosen by Mary Jo Bang. (Penguin Books)

2013

Ampersand Revisited by Simeon Berry. Chosen by Ariana Reines. (Fence Books)
Trespass by Thomas Dooley. Chosen by Charlie Smith. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Bone Map by Sara Eliza Johnson. Chosen by Martha Collins. (Milkweed Editions)
Its Day Being Gone by Rose McLarney. Chosen by Robert Wrigley. (Penguin Books)
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Ideal Cities by Erika Meitner. Chosen by Paul Guest. (HarperCollins Publishers)
The Network by Jena Osman. Chosen by Prageeta Sharma. (Fence Books)

2008

If Birds Gather Your Hair for Nesting, by Anna Journey. Chosen by Thomas Lux. (University of Georgia Press)

The Black Automaton by Douglas Kearney. Chosen by Catherine Wagner. (Fence Books)

Mixology by Adrian Matejka. Chosen by Kevin Young. (Penguin Books)

Bird Eating Bird by Kristin Naca. Chosen by Yusef Komunyakaa. (HarperCollins Publishers)

catch light by Sarah O'Brien. Chosen by David Shapiro. (Coffee House Press)

2007

Installations by Joe Bonomo. Chosen by Naomi Shihab Nye. (Penguin Books)

Spring by Oni Buchanan. Chosen by Mark Doty. (University of Illinois Press)

House Held Together by Winds by Sabra Loomis. Chosen by James Tate. (HarperCollins Publishers)

The Cosmopolitan by Donna Stonecipher. Chosen by John Yau. (Coffee House Press)

Collapsible Poetics Theater by Rodrigo Toscano. Chosen by Marjorie Welish. (Fence Books)

2006

The Scented Fox by Laynie Browne. Chosen by Alice Notley. (Wave Books)

Novel Pictorial Noise by Noah Eli Gordon. Chosen by John Ashbery. (HarperCollins Publishers)

Veil and Burn by Laurie Clements Lambeth. Chosen by Maxine Kumin. (University of Illinois Press)

Vertigo by Martha Ronk. Chosen by C.D. Wright. (Coffee House Press)

Nervous Systems by William Stobb. Chosen by August Kleinzahler. (Penguin Books)

2005

Michelangelo's Seizure by Steve Gehrke. Chosen by T.R. Hummer. (University of Illinois Press)

The Anatomy Theater by Nadine Meyer. Chosen by John Koethe. (HarperCollins Publishers)

Teahouse of the Almighty by Patricia Smith. Chosen by Edward Sanders. (Coffee House Press)

Three, Breathing by S.A. Stepanek. Chosen by Mary Ruefle. (Wave Books)

An Almost Pure Empty Walking by Tryfon Tolides. Chosen by Mary Karr. (Penguin Books)

2004

The Welcome by David Friedman. Chosen by Stephen Dunn. (University of Illinois Press)

Leadbelly by Tychimba Jess. Chosen by Brigit Pegeen Kelly. (Verse Press)

PYX by Corinne Lee. Chosen by Pattiann Rogers. (Penguin Books)

Starred Wire by Ange Mlinko. Chosen by Bob Holman. (Coffee House Press)

Corruption by Camille Norton. Chosen by Campbell McGrath. (HarperCollins Publishers)

2003

Shiva's Drum by Stephen Cramer. Chosen by Grace Schulman. (University of Illinois Press)

Citizen by Andrew Feld. Chosen by Ellen Bryant Voigt. (HarperCollins Publishers)

Murder: A Violet by Raymond McDaniel. Chosen by Anselm Hollo. (Coffee House Press)

The White Train: Poems from Photographs by John Spaulding. Chosen by Henry Taylor. (Louisiana State University Press)

Unrelated Individuals Forming a Group Waiting to Cross by Mark Yakich. Chosen by James Galvin. (Penguin Books)

2002

Rhythm & Booze by Julie Kane. Chosen by Maxine Kumin. (University of Illinois Press)
Sanskrit of the Body by William Keckler. Chosen by Mary Oliver. (Viking Penguin)
Footnotes to the Lambs by Eleni Sikelianos. Chosen by Diane Ward. (Sun & Moon Press)
The Standing Wave by Gabriel Spera. Chosen by Dave Smith. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Tenderness Shore by Meredith Stricker. Chosen by Fred Chappell. (Louisiana State University Press)

2001

Year of Morphines by Betsy Brown. Chosen by George Garrett. (Louisiana State University Press)
Theory of Devolution by David Groff. Chosen by Mark Doty. (University of Illinois Press)
Hip Logic by Terrance Hayes. Chosen by Cornelius Eady. (Viking Penguin)
The Tunnell, by Elizabeth Robinson. Chosen by Fanny Howe. (Sun & Moon Press)
Edgewater, by Ruth L. Schwartz. Chosen by Jane Hirshfield. (HarperCollins Publishers)

2000

That Kind of Sleep by Susan Atefat Peckham. Chosen by Victor Hernandez Cruz. (Coffee House Press)
Anthem by Jean Donnelly. Chosen by Charles Bernstein. (Sun & Moon Press)
Tremolo by Spencer Short. Chosen by Billy Collins. (HarperCollins Publishers)
Asunder by Susan Wood. Chosen by Garrett Hongo. (Viking Penguin)
Manderley by Rebecca Wolff. Chosen by Robert Pinsky. (University of Illinois Press)

1999

Madame Deluxe by Tenaya Darlington. Chosen by Lawson Inada. (Coffee House Press)
Nova by Standard Schaefer. Chosen by Nick Piombino. (Sun & Moon Press)
Climbing Back by Dionisio Martinez. Chosen by Jorie Graham. (W.W. Norton)
Drivers at the Short-Time Motel by Eugene Gloria. Chosen by Yusef Komunyakaa. (Viking Penguin)
Renunciation by Corey Marks. Chosen by Philip Levine. (University of Illinois Press)

1998

Ghost Pain by Harry Humes. Chosen by Pattiann Rogers. (Milkweed Editions)
Atmosphere Conditions by Ed Roberson. Chosen by Nathaniel Mackey. (Sun & Moon Press)
Looking for the Parade by Joan Murray. Chosen by Robert Bly. (W.W. Norton)
Heart Mountain by Lee Ann Roripaugh. Chosen by Ishmael Reed. (Viking Penguin)
So Often the Pitcher Goes to Water Until It Breaks by Rigoberto Gonzalez. Chosen by Ai. (University of Illinois Press)

1997

Except By Nature by Sandra Alcosser. Chosen by Eamon Grennan. (Graywolf Press)
Tales of Murasaki and Other Poems by Martine Bellen. Chosen by Rosmarie Waldrop. (Sun & Moon Press.)
The Origins of Evening by Robert Gibb. Chosen by Eavan Boland. (W.W. Norton)
Silent Treatment by Lisa Lewis. Chosen by Stanley Plumly. (Penguin Books)
Lost Wax by Heather Ramsdell. Chosen by James Tate. (University of Illinois Press)

1996

Placebo Effects by Jeanne Marie Beaumont. Chosen by William Matthews. (W.W. Norton)
Nine Skies by A.V. Christie. Chosen by Sandra McPherson. (University of Illinois Press)
The Little Door Slides Back by Jeff Clark. Chosen by Ray DiPalma. (Sun & Moon Press)
The New Intimacy by Barbara Cully. Chosen by Carolyn Forché. (Viking Penguin Press)
Red Signature by Mary Leader. Chosen by Deborah Digges. (Graywolf Press)

1995

Leaving a Shadow by Heather Allen. Chosen by Denise Levertov. (Copper Canyon Press)
The Broken World by Marcus Cafagna. Chosen by Yusef Komunyakaa. (University of Illinois Press)
Strange Relations by Daniel Hall. Chosen by Mark Doty. (Viking Penguin Press)
Response by Juliana Spahr. Chosen by Lyn Hejinian. (Sun & Moon Press)
Crash's Law by Karen Volkman. Chosen by Heather McHugh. (W.W. Norton)

1994

Infanta by Erin Belieu. Chosen by Hayden Carruth. (Copper Canyon Press)
A Hummock in the Malookas by Matthew Rohrer. Chosen by Mary Oliver. (W.W. Norton)
To Give It Up by Pam Rehm. Chosen by Barbara Guest. (Sun & Moon Press)
Theater of Animals by Samn Stockwell. Chosen by Louise Glück. (University of Illinois Press)
The Human Abstract by Elizabeth Willis. Chosen by Ann Lauterbach. (Penguin Books)

1993

The Other Man Was Me: A Voyage to the New World by Rafael Campo. Chosen by Gloria Vando. (Arte Publico Press)
The High Road to Taos by Martin Edmunds. Chosen by Donald Hall. (University of Illinois Press)
The Landlady in Bangkok and Other Poems by Karen Swenson. Chosen by Maxin Kumin.
The Other Stars by Rachel Wetzton. Chosen by John Hollander. (Viking Penguin)
Most Way Home by Kevin Young. Chosen by Lucille Clifton. (William Morrow and Co.)
(Copper Canyon Press)

1992

Shorter Poems by Gerald Burns. Chosen by Robert Creeley. (Dalkey Archive Press)
My Alexandria by Mark Doty. Chosen by Philip Levine. (University of Illinois Press)
Lost Body by Terry Ehret. Chosen by Carolyn Kizer. (Copper Canyon Press)
Debt by Mark Levine. Chosen by Jorie Graham. (William Morrow and Co.)
What We Don't Know About Each Other by Lawrence Raab. Chosen by Stephen Dunn. (Viking Penguin)

1991

Good Hope Road by Stuart Dischell. Chosen by Thomas Lux. (Viking Penguin)
The Dig by Lynn Emmanuel. Chosen by Gerald Stern. (University of Illinois Press)
To Put the Mouth To by Judith Hall. Chosen by Richard Howard. (William Morrow and Co.)
As If by James Richardson. Chosen by Amy Clampitt. (Persea Books)
A Flower Whose Name I Do Not Know by David Romtvedt. Chosen by John Haines. (Copper Canyon Press)

1990

Words For My Daughter by John Balaban. Chosen by W.S. Merwin. (Copper Canyon Press)
Questions About Angels by Billy Collins. Chosen by Edward Hirsch. (William Morrow and Co.)
The Island Itself by Roger Fanning. Chosen by Michael Ryan. (Viking Penguin)
Rainbow Remnants in Rock Bottom Ghetto Sky by Thylia Moss. Chosen by Charles Simic. (Persea Books)
The Surface by Laura Mullen. Chosen by C.K. Williams. (University of Illinois Press)

1989

The Brother's Country by Tom Andrews. Chosen by Charles Wright. (Persea Books)
Terra Firma by Thomas Centolella. Chosen by Denise Levertov. (Copper Canyon Press)
Blessings in Disguise by David Clewell. Chosen by Quincy Troupe. (Viking Penguin)
Stubborn by Roland Flint. Chosen by Dave Smith. (University of Illinois Press)
Artist and Model by Carol Snow. Chosen by Robert Hass. (Atlantic Monthly Press)

1988

Green The Witch Hazel Wood by Emily Hiestand. Chosen by Jorie Graham. (Graywolf Press)
After We Lost Our Way by David Mura. Chosen by Gerald Stern. (E.P. Dutton)
Black Wings by Len Roberts. Chosen by Sharon Olds. (Persea Books)
No Mercy by Lee Upton. Chosen by James Tate. (Atlantic Monthly Press)
The Great Bird of Love by Paul Zimmer. Chosen by William Stafford. (University of Illinois Press)

1987

The Singing Underneath by Jeffrey Harrison. Chosen by James Merrill. (E.P. Dutton)
The Good Thief by Marie Howe. Chosen by Margaret Atwood. (Persea Books)
The Hand of God And A Few Bright Flowers by William Olsen. Chosen by David Wagoner. (University of Illinois Press)
A Guide to Forgetting by Jeffrey Skinner. Chosen by Tess Gallagher. (Graywolf Press)
New Math by Cole Swenson. Chosen by Michael Palmer. (William Morrow and Co.)

1986

Junk City, by Barbara Anderson. Chosen by Robert Pinsky. (Persea Books)
Cardinals in the Ice Age by John Engels. Chosen by Philip Levine. (Graywolf Press)
Little Star by Mark Halliday. Chosen by Heather McHugh. (William Morrow and Co.)
Cities in Motion by Sylvia Moss. Chosen by Derek Walcott. (University of Illinois Press)
Red Roads by Charlie Smith. Chosen by Stanley Kunitz. (E.P. Dutton)

1985

Living Gloves by Lynn Doyle. Chosen by Cynthia Macdonald. (E.P. Dutton)
Local Time by Stephen Dunn. Chosen by Dave Smith. (William Morrow and Co.)
Palladium by Alice Fulton. Chosen by Mark Strand. (University of Illinois Press)
Saints by Reginald Gibbons. Chosen by Roland Flint. (Persea Books)
As Long As You're Happy by Jack Myers. Chosen by Seamus Heaney. (Graywolf Press)

1984

- Afterwards* by Amy Bartlett. Chosen by Galway Kinnell. (Persea Books)
The Raft by Kathy Fagan. Chosen by Daniel Halpern. (E.P. Dutton)
Wild Onion by Robert L. Jones. Chosen by Carolyn Forché. (Graywolf Press)
Eroding Witness by Nathaniel Mackey. Chosen by Michael Harper. (University of Illinois Press)
Silver & Information by Bruce Smith. Chosen by Hayden Carruth. (University of Georgia Press)

1983

- In the Solar Wind* by Wendy Battin. Chosen by William Matthews. (Doubleday & Co.)
Black Dog, Red Dog by Stephen Dobyns. Chosen by Robert Hass. (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)
The Persistence of Memory by Mary Fell. Chosen by Madeline deFrees. (Random House)
God's Mistress by James Galvin. Chosen by Marvin Bell. (Harper & Row)
Ark 50 by Ronald Johnson. Chosen by Charles Simic. (E.P. Dutton)

1982

- Selected Poems 1958-1980* by Joanne Kyger. Chosen by Robert Creeley. (E.P. Dutton)
The Greater Leisures by Jane Miller. Chosen by Stanley Plumly. (Doubleday & Co.)
From the Abandoned Cities by Donald Revell. Chosen by C.K. Williams. (Harper & Row) Hands in
Exile by Susan Tichy. Chosen by Sandra McPherson. (Random House)
Corpse and Mirror by John Yau. Chosen by John Ashbery. (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)

1981

- Second Sight* by Jonathan Aaron. Chosen by Anthony Hecht. (Harper & Row)
The Mud Actor by Cyrus Cassells. Chosen by Al Young. (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)
The Incognito Lounge by Denis Johnson. Chosen by Mark Strand. (Random House)
Accidental Weather by Sherod Santos. Chosen by Charles Wright. (Doubleday & Co.)
Hugging the Jukebox by Naomi Shihab Nye. Chosen by Josephine Miles. (E.P. Dutton)

1980

- Gumbo* by George Barlow. Chosen by Ishmael Reed. (Doubleday & Co.)
The Dollmaker's Ghost by Larry Levis. Chosen by Stanley Kunitz. (E.P. Dutton)
Leaving Taos by Robert Peterson. Chosen by Carolyn Kizer. (Harper & Row)
In Winter by Michael Ryan. Chosen by Louise Glück. (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)
So This Is the Map by Reg Saner. Chosen by Derek Walcott. (Random House)

1979

- Collected Poems* by Sterling Brown. Chosen by Michael Harper. (Harper & Row)
Any Body's Song by Joseph Langland. Chosen by Ann Stanford. (Doubleday & Co.)
Denizens by Ronald Perry. Chosen by Donald Justice. (Random House)
Folly River by Wendy Salinger. Chosen by Donald Hall. (E.P. Dutton)
Silks by Roberta Spear. Chosen by Philip Levine. (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)



IN THE NEWS



The New York Times

CRITIC'S TAKE

A Few Questions for Poetry

BY DANIEL HALPERN
DEC. 30, 2016

Why Poetry? Well, yes. Most books of poetry sell a couple of thousand copies, at best. So in a quantitative sense, what's the point of supporting it? With dollars or sense? Would we make the same argument for investing in an endangered species? Like the great Indian bustard, one of the heaviest flying birds, down to a couple of hundred of its kind.

The issue is larger than the number of collections of poetry sold each year. It's about the language — our language. Is it, too, endangered? If the depleted language of emails and texts and Twitter is any indication, then there's a case to be made that it might be.

Still, a question I often ask myself is why so many people (and we're now talking about millions of people) turn to poetry for all important rites of passage—weddings, funerals, toasts, tragedies, eulogies, birthdays. . . . Why? Because the language of poetry avoids the quotidian—but the best poetry simultaneously celebrates the quotidian. Language that's focused in such a way that true meaning and emotion is redolent in the air. The poet W.S. Merwin once said: "Poetry addresses individuals in their most intimate, private, frightened and elated moments . . . because it comes closer than any other art form to addressing what cannot be said. In expressing the inexpressible, poetry remains close to the origins of language."

Why poetry? I sent out a few emails to see what various people had to say. The poet Louise Glück, on the subject of book sales, wrote back, "The books may not sell, but neither are they given away or thrown away. They tend, more than other books, to fall apart in their owners' hands. Not I suppose good news in a culture and economy built on obsolescence. But for a book to be loved this way and turned to this way for consolation and intense renewable excitement seems to me a marvel."

The Greek poet Yiannis Ritsos, jailed for political reasons, wrote his poems on cigarette papers while in prison, stuffed them into the lining of his jacket and, when he was released, walked out wearing his collected poems. They were mostly short.

The Ukrainian poet Irina Ratushinskaya, while in prison, wrote her poems on bars of soap. When she had them memorized, she washed them away.

The novelist Richard Ford differed from the poets in his take: "The question 'Why poetry?' isn't asking what makes poetry unique among art forms; poetry may indeed share its origins with other forms of privileged utterance. A somewhat more interesting question would be: "What is the nature of experience,

and especially the experience of using language, that calls poetic utterance into existence? What is there about experience that's unutterable?" You can't generalize very usefully about poetry; you can't reduce its nature down to a kernel that underlies all its various incarnations. I guess my internal conversation suggests that if you can't successfully answer the question of "Why poetry?," can't reduce it in the way I think you can't, then maybe that's the strongest evidence that poetry's doing its job; it's creating an essential need and then satisfying it."

When you're looking for a poem to read at a memorial service, what is it you're looking for? And why are you looking for a poem? Do you imagine that it is in poetry that you'll find something you could not have said yourself? And when you find the right poem, what have you discovered? What do you hear? What's been said? And what do you imagine the mourners are going to hear?

Why read poetry? Emily Dickinson wrote: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?"

Again, why poetry? I wrote the poet Robert Hass. His response: "'Paradise Lost' was printed in an edition of no more than 1,500 copies and transformed the English language. Took a while. Wordsworth had new ideas about nature: Thoreau read Wordsworth, Muir read Thoreau, Teddy Roosevelt read Muir, and we got a lot of national parks. Took a century. What poetry gives us is an archive, the fullest existent archive of what human beings have thought and felt by the kind of artists who loved language in a way that allowed them to labor over how you make a music of words to render experience exactly and fully."

So to the question at hand: Why support poetry? Those of us who engage in the publication and sustenance of the written word do so to insure that language for our future generations remains intact, powerful and ultimately renewed, capable of its role during times of crisis and celebration.

Wallace Stevens wrote that the poet's function was "to help people live their lives." And because he was a financial guy as well as a poet, he wrote, "Money is a kind of poetry." I'd reverse that and say poetry is a kind of currency. As Stevens himself put it, "The imagination is man's power over nature."

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U.S. | CULTURE

National Poetry Series Jumpstarts Careers

Patti Smith, Louise Glück and other writers celebrate at the Ace Hotel

BY BARBARA CHAI
APRIL 28, 2015

About 50 illustrious writers gathered in the basement of the Breslin at Ace Hotel on Tuesday night for an evening of fried chicken, beer-battered fish and poetry.

The guests included rocker-writer Patti Smith and guitarist Lenny Kaye; poets Louise Glück and Natasha Trethewey; novelists Amy Tan, Colm Tóibín and Colum McCann; and “Top Chef” star and author Padma Lakshmi.

They feasted on chef April Bloomfield’s “fry” dinner in between two sections of poetry readings. The dinner was held to celebrate the National Poetry Series, an awards program that has sponsored the publication of 185 poetry books through annual competitions.

“Our mission is to jump-start a poet’s life in the art by ensuring the most important thing for any poet: publication,” said Daniel Halpern, director of the series and president and publisher of Ecco (a division of HarperCollins, which is owned by The Wall Street Journal publisher News Corp.).

Mary Karr read a poem by the late Nobel Prize winner, Tomas Tranströmer, and Ms. Glück read her poem, “A Foreshortened Journey.” Ms. Smith brought a cupcake with a candle before reading her poem, “Hecatomb,” to celebrate the late writer Roberto Bolaño’s birthday.

Ms. Smith’s new memoir, “M Train,” will be out in October, and she planned to do final copy edits this week.

“I think that ‘M Train’ is most like me,” she said. “It’s not a book about the past so much. It’s who I am, what I do, what I’m thinking about, what I read and the coffee I drink. The floors I pace.”

During the readings, Mr. Tóibín listened by closing his eyes and lowering his head, while Richard Ford leaned forward and rested his chin on folded hands, his eyes wide with attention.

Mr. Ford said the influence of poetry on him has been huge. “Half of my most significant teachers were poets—James McMichael, Donald Hall, Galway Kinnell—those people were immensely affecting to me as a writer insofar as they taught me how to look at something smaller than a sentence,” he said. “Look at the

choice of the word. Look at where a sentence breaks. I'm sure they account for the way I write sentences now."

Poet Kevin Young recalled winning the National Poetry Series, which publishes five books of poetry a year, chosen by distinguished poets and supported by a group of publishers. Lucille Clifton selected his Mr. Young's "Most Way Home" in 1993.

"I wouldn't be published without this series," he said.

Others have celebrated from afar. "I support Dan and this organization, and it's no secret that I have a weakness for writers," said Ms. Lakshmi, who is working on two new books with Ecco.

Poets & Writers

NEWS AND TRENDS

National Poetry Series Ups the Ante

BY JOANNA SCUTTS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

It has been quite a turnaround. In December 2013, The National Poetry Series (NPS), which for thirty-five years had been one of the most well-known publication prizes for emerging poets, was in danger of shutting down due to lack of funds. Then founder and organizer Daniel Halpern got a call from Camille Lannan, the director of the Lannan Foundation's literary program, which supports writers and literary organizations through grants, fellowships, events, and residencies. She not only wanted to help keep the long-running prize going, but also the increase its modest thousand-dollar honorarium tenfold. "Publication and ten thousand dollars?" says Halpern. "It's a dream." The series will continue to administer five annual awards for poetry collections, each of which includes publication by a participating press, as well as the more recently established Paz Prize, given biennially for a book of poetry originally written in Spanish.

The NPS traces its roots back to 1975, when Halpern, a poet, teacher, and publisher, gave a speech at the Library of Congress lamenting the difficulty of getting good poetry into the hands of readers. The novelist James Michener read Halpern's remarks and immediately offered to help, saying that the discrepancy between publishers' attitudes to fiction and to poetry was "deplorable." The first contest, held in 1979, placed a premium on publication rather than money. "It's always seemed to me that the most important thing you could have is a book of poems published," Halpern says, "because then you get teaching jobs, you get readings, you build a reputation, and you start a career." The NPS works with five publishers—two trade houses, one university press, and two rotating small presses (recent partners have included Coffee House Press, Fence Books, and Milkweed Editions)—and covers a portion of publication costs. Many notable poets, including Billy Collins, Stephen Dunn, Mark Doty, Marie Howe, Nathaniel Mackey, Terrance Hayes, and Adrian Matejka, have published poetry collections through the NPS.

The other founding principle of the NPS is its selection system, through which five judges each choose one winner. Halpern believes this system is more effective than judging by committee, which he says has a tendency to create "a kind of plaining effect . . . You knock off the top and the bottom" and too often the result is an overcautious middle range that excludes riskier choices. But in such a small world, where so many poets teach and meet younger poets, individualized judging carries its own hazard of nepotism. To minimize that, a team of readers narrows down the initial pool of submissions and then sends thirty to fifty manuscripts—all anonymous—to the five judges. After that, it's a question of trust. "You hope someone's not going to pick his or her own student, because once the book comes out, it will be clear—the name of the poet who selected the book is on the front cover." Halpern says there hasn't been a problem so far, and that "you usually hear pretty quickly if something like that has happened."

The benefits for poets clearly outweigh the risks. According to 2012 winner Sasha West, “The NPS is unique for its breadth of presses and judges—and ultimately, its breadth of writers.” West’s debut collection, *Failure and I Bury the Body*, was published in 2013 by a major trade house, which brought her an audience beyond the poetry community. “I teach in a public-policy school, so publishing through Harper Perennial has made my book visible to my colleagues (and my non-poetry-reading relatives) in a different way.”

With its newly increased monetary award, the NPS prize becomes even more of a game changer for poets. Most other poetry publication prizes offer monetary awards from one to three thousand dollars—*American Poetry Review*’s coveted Honickman First Book prize, for example, offers three thousand dollars—or various nonmonetary benefits. The Yale Series of Younger Poets award doesn’t offer the winner money as part of the prize, but rather a writing fellowship at The James Merrill House. Other prizes, however, are keeping pace with the NPS—the Academy of American Poets recently revamped its Whitman prize to include a six-week residency in Italy, an all-expenses-paid trip to New York City, and publication with Graywolf Press along with five thousand dollars.

For the 2015 competition, the National Poetry Series will accept submissions from January 1 through February 15. Winners will be announced next fall. In the meantime, Halpern will still be celebrating the revival of his series: “It’s one of the most generous things I’ve seen—and I’ve been publishing poetry for forty years,” he says of the grant. “It’s great for the poetry community.”



BOOKS

Back From the Brink, Poetry Group Makes Cash Prizes Bigger Thanks to a Grant

BY ALLAN KOZINN
SEPT. 11, 2014

The National Poetry Series has upgraded the prize available to the winners of its annual Open Competition for unpublished books of poetry. The series also announced the first five winners of the beefed-up award. Part of the prize – the part that for many poets is the most crucial – remains unchanged: the series arranges for the publication of the winning books. But the prize also includes a cash award, which has been raised to \$10,000 from \$1,000, thanks to a grant from the Lannan Foundation, which has awarded literary prizes since 1989.

The first winners of the \$10,000 prize are Simeon Berry’s “Monograph” (to be published by the University of Georgia Press); “The Regret Histories,” by Joshua Poteat (HarperCollins); Ed Pavlic’s “Let’s Let That Are Not Yet: Inferno” (Fence); Nancy Reddy’s “Double Jinx” (Milkweed Editions) and Sarah Vap’s “Viability” (Penguin).

The increase in the cash prize shows how far the organization has come since December, when Daniel Halpern, the organization’s director, said that the series could not pay its employees’ salaries and was in danger of closing down.

Mr. Halpern, who founded the series in 1978 with the writer James A. Michener, said that about 1,200 manuscripts are entered for the Open Competition every year.

“We raised (from December through March), enough money to continue for at least another year,” Mr. Halpern said in an email. “I think partly due to this success, Lannan wanted to create a really meaningful prize – publication and money. Overall, I was amazed by the support the series received.”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Roast Pig and Poetry With the Best Writers in the World

BY BARBARA CHAI
APRIL 25, 2014

Mark Doty reads his poem, ‘A Display of Mackerel,’ at the National Poetry Series dinner. **Richard Ford** served us suckling pig. **Anthony Bourdain** told us to eat the tails.

“Wait,” Ford said. “You need the cracklins.”

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of “Independence Day” heaped fried pork skin onto the plates of Bourdain, **Willem Dafoe** and **Olaf Olafsson**—but not **Amy Tan**. Tan is a pescatarian.

The writers had gathered at The Breslin gastropub in New York this week not just for pig tails, but for poetry. **Daniel Halpern**, publisher of Ecco and the director of the **National Poetry Series**, had gathered friends and writers to celebrate the program, which publishes five books of poetry a year.

“If you dropped a bomb down here, you’d destroy half of American literature,” said **Russell Banks**, a guest.

The evening featured poetry readings by **Natasha Trethewey**, **Charles Simic**, **Mark Doty** (all of whom read works about food), **Tom Healy**, **Mary Karr**, **William Kistler** and **Eleanor Choi**. The guests included prose writers who also write, or devour, poetry—**Michael Ondaatje**, **Joyce Carol Oates**, **Michael Cunningham**, **Mary Karr**, **Jeffrey Eugenides**, **Colum McCann** and **Colm Tóibín**.

“I wanted this to be a celebration of poetry in America and all these people feel strongly about it. Many of them gave a lot of money,” Halpern said.

The National Poetry Series nearly folded in January, but raised about \$75,000 from individuals and organizations including Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Random House and HarperCollins.

HarperCollins and Ecco are both run by News Corp., which made a separate donation to the NPS. News Corp. publishes *The Wall Street Journal*.

“Poetry is probably the toughest form of literature to make a living out of, and the one that is extremely difficult to do well,” said Olafsson, an Icelandic novelist and supporter of NPS. “It’s an art form you don’t want to have disappear.”

Roger Rosenblatt, who writes both non-fiction and fiction, said the roomful of illustrious writers expressed a genuine appreciation of poets. “It’s very rare to find writers who aren’t in a fistfight,” he said.

Dafoe, a longtime friend of Banks who starred in the film adaptation of the author's "Affliction," sat quietly next to Ford as he ate salmon and suckling pig. Though he doesn't call himself a serious writer, the 58-year-old actor has kept daily journals since he was 22—Fabriano notebooks, lined up by date in his basement. "It's a lot of nonsense, but it's an exercise partly to take inventory, to get in the practice of expressing myself," he said.

The humidity in Dafoe's basement damaged some of the journals and left many pages illegible. While some of the authors in the room would throw a fit, the actor doesn't seem to mind. "It's not for anything. In fact, my handwriting is so bad that I can barely read it."

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