

## Dirge For An Imaginary World Poems

Martin McGovern's *Bad Fame* muses on the perplexities and certainties of the human condition, often in soaring eulogies and searing elegies: as in "The Circle of Late Afternoon" which asks, "Isn't there an art to giving myself away slowly like wheat opening to the sun?"; or, "Processionalia," where "a bee/ abandons the tea roses/ and circle that black blossom of/ the widow's veiled face as if her tears were/ pollen and the bee could feather/ its legs with grief." Be it lore set in Colorado, or farther out, the personal and regional tributes unravel the universally familiar and pertinent. McGovern's debut collection is the work of a seasoned master in command of craft and themes. PRAISE FOR BAD FAME: Martin McGovern's long-awaited, well-constructed first book gives itself away slowly, artfully. It is carefully considered, quietly passionate, and deeply humane. —Edward Hirsch There is an unforsaken paradise in these pages, and a lot of ungodly anxiety. . . . Like *Dubliners*, *Bad Fame* darkens, deepens, darkens through its sections, understanding with Joyce the tidal pull of place that will never let us survive if we resist the current . . . the "blue snow," not of Dublin, but of memory, of Colorado . . . this extraordinarily unique McGovern flair for the Keatonish (Buster) aside mixed with lyrical intellection, these poetic rooms with their many blue lights, direct or indirect, for us to turn on as night comes on. —David Lazar (from the foreword) Here are exacting sentences, any number irregularly hugged into the ferocious clusters which are Mr. McGovern's poems. My likely favorite, "If the Light Could Kill Us," does heavy duty as a garden unfurled at dawn, the beloved "still sleeping,/ flame-pink welts our love leaves on your almost/ too delicate skin, brazen in this light." And then the assault of a very different sentence, "Samuel Johnson is dead. And Mrs. Thrale./ And the kind cherub of a straitjacket/ she kept closeted should reason fail/ him thoroughly, where's that deck-coat now?" followed by other people's torments inspected so closely that this morning "violence/ lingers like the last touch of a season." Hence: "Only as I rise to pull the window's shade/ do you wake, dusted and dazed, as from a fever." Strong as they are, the sentences, like the centuries, are treated pitilessly, as you can hear, yet there is what the poet calls "the shimmer of a teen movie" throughout. Resilient art, and no loitering. —Richard Howard

In William Baer's *Times Square and Other Stories*, there are everyday characters walking extraordinary paths for love; there are smart, skillful characters struggling to reconcile their viewpoints and convictions with the status quo in fields such as art, education, the cinema and religious doctrine. There is baseball and the story of the skills, training and ethics of pitching in the big leagues. And there is war and an enemy invasion juxtaposed with a do-or-die chess game. The stories take us coast to coast from New York to LA, away to South America, and overseas to Eastern and Western Europe. This is a fun-filled, fact-filled collection that smoothly melds scholarship with the everyday for unique, fresh, and highly intelligent stories, which are also highly entertaining. PRAISE FOR TIMES SQUARE AND OTHER STORIES: How wonderful to come across such a serious collection of short stories! Not "serious" as in boring and tendentious; but serious as in grown-up, broadminded, large-hearted, sharply observed, and dryly, obliquely funny. Bill Baer's fiction kicks ass. —Pinckney Benedict, author of *Town Smoke* As elegantly written as they are inventive, the short stories in *Times Square and Other Stories* engage the reader all the way from the title piece, an ambitious tale that draws upon art, love, and the complex beauty of the human narrative, through eight other works that touch upon the timeless questions of what it means to create and to act, to be and to pretend. Baer's collection achieves that Horatian goal so sorely lacking in much of contemporary fiction—informing while delighting at the same time. The obligation to craft is taken very seriously in these pages, but the effort that undoubtedly went into their composition could easily be overlooked due to the skill with which they are

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rendered, and the degree to which they are enjoyed. — A.G. Harmon, author of *A House All Stilled Times Square and Other Stories*, William Baer's twice-measured fictions, channel the reflecting reflections of James and Borges back into our self-conscious consciousness. Like the four-story signs plastering the "real" Times Square, these signs sing themselves, maps as detailed as the things they represent. These fictions resuscitate Poe's unities of effects, breathing life back into the simulacrum of life. I loved this book; it can't help but blurb itself! — Michael Martone, author of *Four for a Quarter*

*In Code* was born out of Maryann Corbett's years of work for the Minnesota Legislature, with a nonpartisan office that mandated that she maintain a public silence about politics. In poems that go from elegiac to fiery to funny, she examines behind-the-scenes legislative labor and the people who do it, the tensions of working for government in a climate hostile to government, and the buildings and grounds that put a beautiful face on a history full of ambiguities. This well-honed collection, Corbett's fifth, reflects on doublespeak and public poses; on coworkers and commutes; on legalese, courts, and elections; on news and history; and at last on retirement—through poems masterfully deployed in a dazzling array of forms: including the prose poem, the sonnet, the ghazal, the villanelle, and the canzone. Maryann Corbett is a candid, wistful, purposeful, and meditative poet in command of her craft. Of her years working for the Minnesota Legislature, Maryann Corbett writes in *Rattle*: "There was the frisson supplied by the constant presence of the media, the satisfaction of believing one's work served the public, the thrill of working with smart, motivated people, the pleasure of being surrounded by the striking buildings and gardens of the Capitol grounds, the sense of history. There was also the uncomfortable awareness that with every legislative session there are winners and losers, and that the same battles for justice are fought, and often lost, by the same people, year after year." *In Code* features poems that reflect on both those pleasures and that discomfort, as in these lines from "Seven Little Poems about Making Laws": Capitol café: German proverbs, whitewashed since 1917, are restored to view with bright applause. Old hatreds have new objects now. PRAISE FOR MARYANN CORBETT: Ned Balbo: . . . an extraordinary poet. Tony Barnstone: . . . metrical poetry infused with gorgeous imagery and the vernacular of our scientized world. Richard Wilbur: . . . accurate and delightful. Rhina P. Espaillat: . . . every section touches me and keeps calling me back. A.M. Juster: . . . wit without meanness, warmth without sentimentality, and craft without pretension. Geoffrey Brock: . . . one of the best-kept secrets of American poetry. Marilyn Taylor: . . . poignant, perceptive, exquisitely formed poems . . . a poet to be genuinely grateful for. Peter Campion: . . . a poet of the first order. Willis Barnstone: . . . a newborn Robert Frost, with a wicked eye for contemporary life. Susan McLean: . . . a stunner. ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Maryann Corbett earned a doctorate in English in 1981, with a specialization in medieval literature and linguistics. She expected to be teaching Beowulf and Chaucer and the history of the English language. Instead, she spent almost thirty-five years working for the Minnesota Legislature, helping attorneys to write in plain English and coordinating the creation of finding aids for the law. She is the author of five books of poetry and is a past winner of the Richard Wilbur Award and the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize. Her work is widely published in journals on both sides of the Atlantic and is included in anthologies like *Measure for Measure: An Anthology of Poetic Meters* and *The Best American Poetry 2018*.

*Fetch, Muse* is Rebecca Starks's second full-length collection, with precisely crafted, moving poems that are by turns heartwarming and heartrending. Starks presents a powerful account of the integration of a dog with behavioral issues into a family. Along the way, with "memory burning [her] into brilliance," understanding deepens of the dog Kismet as an individual, of human beings' wilder inclinations, and of the nature of warmth given and received. This is a unique collection of longing and introspection, uncovering a closer sense of the life around us, our inner nature, our humanity. PRAISE FOR FETCH, MUSE This book shows that the range of feelings that goes into taking on and then

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giving up a dog is as deep and wide an emotional swath as any we experience as people, which is to say non-dogs. The insights, confusions, misgivings, wary moments, and entangled joys are all here along with a steady self-scrutiny. We forget, we let go, but we don't forget the deep tie between dogs and humans and how crucial yet fraught that tie is. Fetch, Muse offers poetry of a very high order to apprehend matters that are basic to our flawed, yearning humanity. — Baron Wormser, Maine Poet Laureate Emeritus, author of Tom o' Vietnam What brims from this elegant collection? A sorrow both compassionate and contemplative, a sorrow wise and deep. Here, Rebecca Starks gives us poems spoken in direct address to her rescued dog named Kismet. "Fetch, Muse," she says, commanding the dog to ". . . do the work / of memory, dropping life at my feet . . ." And Kismet obeys. In mostly subverted, non-traditional sonnets, Starks's poems retrieve from memory the story of a rescue that is fated to ultimately fail. Rich with allusion, her work—with its wit and insight and music—salvages for us the story of her relationship with a creature whose very name means fate. — Paulann Petersen, Oregon Poet Laureate Emerita, author of Understory

Fetch, Muse is a book of real poems with a real subject, a subject which is difficult to tackle successfully, and Rebecca Starks achieves that success. The poems, mostly unrhymed sonnets, muse on her wayward dog and on her family life. The dog is her true muse. There are many great lines I could quote, but here are two from the title sonnet that begins "Fetch, Muse, bring me back what I rejected," and ends with the memorable final line "your fetch as long as your leash pulls you up." Powerful. — Greg Delanty, Guggenheim Fellow, author of No More Time

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rebecca Starks grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and earned a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in English from Stanford University. She works as a freelance editor and workshop leader. Her first book of poems, Time Is Always Now, was a finalist for the 2019 Able Muse Book Award. Her poems and short fiction have appeared in Baltimore Review, Ocean State Review, Slice Literary, Crab Orchard Review, Tahoma Literary Review, and elsewhere. Winner of Rattle's 2018 Neil Postman Award for Metaphor and past winner of Poetry Northwest's Richard Hugo Prize, she is the founding editor-in-chief of Mud Season Review and is a board member of Sundog Poetry Center. She lives with her family and two adopted dogs in a log cabin in the woods of Richmond, Vermont.

Rhina P. Espaillat's *And after All* meditates on the passage of time. The perspective sweeps from the panorama of foreign landmarks to the close view of a lover's feet in failing health, held and cared for. *And after All* displays the wit, wisdom, subtle voice, and supple mastery of forms that have established Espaillat as a contemporary master. This long-awaited collection from Espaillat is a treat not to be missed.

PRAISE FOR AND AFTER ALL Rhina P. Espaillat's *And After All* combines the formal fluency of Richard Wilbur, the precision of Elizabeth Bishop, and the easy conversational tones of Frank O'Hara, and yet her poems speak in a voice that is distinctively her own. They address the loss of loved ones and loved things of the world, but their extraordinary empathy and gentle wit keep them from becoming depressing or sentimental. Savor this book and share it with people you love. —A. M. Juster, author of *Sleaze & Slander: New and Selected Comic Verse, 1995–2015*

Rhina P. Espaillat, more than any living poet in English, gives ordinary language the glow of the sacred. Workaday words, trite with custom like thin coins, accrue new resonance and weight; plain objects are haloed with aureoles like figures in gold mosaics. Saints with their visions used to do this: wave away the veils that separate our shallow perceptions from a deeper reality. But not everyone is granted visions. How much harder it is to use the same words we all use and misuse, the same objects we all touch and ignore, common experiences we dismiss, and, by using words with precision, using the serendipity of rhyme, and the convention of metrical patterns, to give the reader the experience of revelation. Craft is not the opposite of inspiration, Espaillat reminds us, it is the only way to it. —A. E. Stallings, author of *Olives*

For most of its poems *And After All* is, as the title indicates, deeply elegiac in tone. There are many poignant evocations of the past in the book, rich with quotidian surface detail but always suffused with undemonstrative but palpably real emotion. A poem about the poet's

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grandmother, a tough no-nonsense farmer's wife who described how cows inarticulately but unmistakably grieved when they realized their calves were to be slaughtered, ends with the line, "She told it simply, but she faltered there." In its quiet pathos the line seems to sum up much of the book; exactness, no fuss, unforced fidelity to the anecdote, but the tremor of poignant empathy always present. A very eloquent collection of beautifully crafted poems, and one that it is hard to read dry-eyed. —Dick Davis, author of *Love in Another Language*

Maryann Corbett's *Street View* is a panorama of views: suburban and urban avenues, shown in leaf and in snow; alleyways where misfits lurk in darkness, but also where "Adonis, charioteer of municipal waste collection, rides with the morning"; and boulevards of old buildings whose elegance remains undeniable, even when "prinked in the clown suit of commerce." *Street View* also navigates the resiliency and failings of the human body, and the memories of family and pivotal acquaintances that shape viewpoints for good or ill. This is the work of a seasoned poet in command of her craft, and deservedly, a finalist for the 2016 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR STREET VIEW: Assaulted, as we all are, by relentless, restless noise-throbbing subwoofers, urban construction, cynical marketing and violent news, even our own banal chitchat-Maryann Corbett "strafe[s] back with the whole Roget/ and gun[s her] engine to its own rough strife. . . ." Though her weapons, her engines, are stillness, insight, and rhythm, there is indeed a sense in which the poems in *Street View* wallop their subjects with language. The exquisite, seemingly effortless grace of these poems with their penetrating music and humor deserve a commendation like that the poet gives Veronese: "This is the catechesis/ we need now, for the kind of sight we work with/ here, where the world kabooms."

-George David Clark Given her gift with detail, Maryann Corbett is the perfect person to offer a view, but an even more perfect person to offer a "street view," the title of her new collection. While Corbett has made a career of being precise, she can be whimsical as well, right down to the "Northrop Mall . . . as fixed and formal as an English sonnet." Yet perhaps her greatest strength is that she is not afraid to be the quiet steady gaze that takes in everything: all the things most people would miss. -Kim Bridgford Maryann Corbett takes the ode less traveled (not to mention the terzanelle less tried and the dactylic hexameter almost unheard of) to oddly familiar destinations: the West Side Y in New York City, Grand Avenue in St. Paul, the dentist's clinic. She is a rhapsodist of times past and places lost or endangered, but she also lives very much in the present. She examines experiences with shrewdness and fascination, crafting them into poems that are breathtaking in their intelligence and brio. -Susan McLean In Maryann Corbett's new book, we are given a *Street View* on the world, from Minneapolis to Jerusalem. These streets are populated with a variety of town characters, from the vagrant to the dangerous academic "Weirdo" with his void-sucked soul who makes one think of mass killings. Suffice it to say that the street view might be uglier than the view onto the mountains or the ocean, but in that ugliness can be found a clearer view on the truth of how we live today. -Tony Barnstone

*Uncontested Grounds*, William Conelly's first full-length collection of poetry, is eclectic in people and places, deftly moving from vineyard to beach, to a Hollywood filmmaking set, and even to the cockpit of a jet fighter. This is also a collection of contrasts-the din of war in "The Lead Man" versus the "hot reductive shore" of "R & R," the tragedy of suicide in "Ernest in Elysium" versus the stir of the unborn "In the Ninth Month." This collection of masterfully crafted poems of vivid insights, often delivered with minimalist verve and directness, is fittingly a finalist for the 2013 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR UNCONTESTED GROUNDS: *Uncontested Grounds* is a splendid, memorable book. The stylistic precision and trim architecture of these poems may remind us of Edgar Bowers and other California formalists. William Conelly, however, has a voice all his own-shrewd, wry, engaging. Even in his more expansive pieces he writes with epigrammatic force. The perceptions fueling his art are equally alert to the world's kindness and cruelty, and his work is impressive not only for its elegance but for its quality of lived experience-in short, for a kind of wisdom rarely found these days in verse. -Robert B. Shaw This generous collection of the

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poems of William Conelly is all the more welcome for being long overdue. Here is a poet who finds extraordinary dimensions in ordinary experience, as in "Treasure" and "The Ford Birthday Ode," two memorable moments of childhood; as in "Aubade," "The Sailor," "Memento," and "In the Ninth Month"-this last from the point of view of a woman about to give birth. Conelly commands both strict form and free verse, and his language is often fresh and unexpected. *Uncontested Grounds* will stand as a notable book in this or any year. -X.J. Kennedy  
Midwestern by birth, William Conelly has lived on both US coasts, as well as in England and the Middle East. He is smart and imaginative, and brings a thriving intelligence to life's experiences. I found the poems in *Uncontested Grounds* original, diverse, and lucid. Many are poems of place. The first of these features a bankrupt farmer who ponders the "blue, remorseless beauty" that first lured him onto the stricken acreage he must sell. But the places vary, and some exude enchantment. I am taken by the touch of a drowsy wife's feet in "Aubade," and the couple along Florida's "Gulf Coast" pitying "those who'll wake alone." Conelly writes so well, in a variety of forms, I initially absorbed his insights heedless of their traditional underpinnings. These poems easily bear rereading then; they compose a fine selection from one of our best writers. -William J. Smith

This is the seminannual *Able Muse Review* (Print Edition) - Winter 2013 issue, Number 16. This issue continues the tradition of masterfully crafted poetry, fiction, essays, art & photography, and book reviews that have become synonymous with the *Able Muse*-online and in print. After more than a decade of online publishing excellence, *Able Muse* print edition maintains the superlative standard of the work presented all these years in the online edition, and, the *Able Muse Anthology* (*Able Muse Press*, 2010). ". . . [ ABLE MUSE ] fills an important gap in understanding what is really happening in early twenty-first century American poetry." - Dana Gioia. CONTENTS: WITH THE 2013 ABLE MUSE WRITE PRIZE FOR POETRY & FICTION - Includes the winning story and poems from the contest winners and finalists. With the winner and runner-up sonnets from the 2013 *Able Muse / Eratosphere Sonnet Bake-Off*. EDITORIAL - Alexander Pepple. FEATURED ARTIST - Peter Svensson. FEATURED POET - Jehanne Dubrow; (Interviewed by Anna M. Evans). FICTION - Cheryl Diane Kidder, Charles Wilkinson, Blaine Vitallo, Donna Laemmlen. ESSAYS - A.E. Stallings, Peter Byrne, Philip Morre, David Mason, Chrissy Mason. BOOK REVIEWS - Rory Waterman, Jane Hammons. POETRY - Rachel Hadas, R.S. Gwynn, Catharine Savage Brosman, John Savoie, D.R. Goodman, Jeanne Wagner, Richard Wakefield, Melissa Balmain, Tara Tatum, Anna M. Evans, Matthew Buckley Smith, Stephen Harvey, Elise Hempel, Marly Youmans, Amanda Luecking Frost, Rachael Briggs, Chris Childers, James Matthew Wilson, Alex Greenberg, Catullus, Sappho, Theocritus.

*Sea Level Rising*, John Philip Drury's fourth collection, revels in water—flowing through rivers, splashing on quays and docked vessels, the wake of speeding boats, the elusive tang of sea salt in the heart of the prairie, even the water of baptism that rebirths the believer. The uplifting lure of water, as with a pair of honeymooners in Venice, may inspire a love "eager to divorce/ anything impeding its energy." Our state of being might mirror water's when "everything's in flux, repeated spasms/ of wake and wave, bright sun, reflecting pool,/ surges made up of intricate detail." The waves of music, like those of water, are also prominent in the musings of this collection, where that which "rises and returns/ approaches music, a blessing/ beyond sound." These are masterfully crafted poems of uncommon inspiration, and they whelm with a celebration and longing for that which ebbs or flows inside us. PRAISE FOR SEA LEVEL RISING: *Sea Level Rising* is about a lot of things, all in some way the same mystery—why we love tidal waters, why we feel a kinship with the pulse and ebb of time and emptiness, why we feel most alive when we stand at the fractal edges of perception, why the singing of a good poem evokes all those correspondences we can't help loving. John Philip Drury's new poems will please many and please often as he celebrates, and with mastery, the inexhaustible

## Get Free Dirge For An Imaginary World Poems

waters before and within each of us. —Dave Smith, author of *Hawks on Wires: Poems, 2005-2010* With candor and a close eye, Drury introduces us to a world of love and literature, nostalgia and new experiences—a world where water pervades everything: a constant and comforting reminder that what we depend on is, like us, also always in flux. Drury is deft at numerous forms, with a delicate touch. You can become so swept up in a poem you may not recognize it as a sonnet until you reach its resounding couplet; but, the beauty of the form—the force of its rhymes and the rapture of their song—has resonated since the opening lines and in all the energy that follows. That’s the wonder of this collection: the “film of beauty, tides that keep on rising,” as Drury writes. *Sea Level Rising* is an amazing achievement. It should not be missed. —Erica Dawson, author of *The Small Blades Hurt* John Philip Drury is a Marylander; it makes all the difference. The ever-changing sea defines these poems; Drury explores impermanence—destiny, the future, love, fame, desire—anchored by a rock-solid formal mastery. Land and sea interpenetrate here—loom up, fall away—transmuting one into the other, a way of seeing. His favorite city is Venice, a perfect metaphor for a sensibility too large to be only one thing or its opposite. The masks and play of that ancient meeting place of land, sky and sea divert us from the serious business of its survival—and that might be a good way to describe Drury’s art. In impermanence, through our art, we survive. —James Cummins, author of *Still Some Cake*

""My Dad's boring! Yes he is a boring Dad!"" Or is he..... Take a trip through this book with a young snail and his Dad, and discover whether or not Daddy snail really is boring after all. Includes colour and tell pages. That gives you and your children the chance to create your own story, that changes every time.

After solving the assassination case of his beloved uncle, Colt finds himself truly alone, ditched by his girlfriend. However, there’s not much respite or time for introspection for him: he’s called on again to solve a new murder case, along with a suspiciously related cold case. What follows is another gripping tale in the backdrop of the Garden State’s sights and scenes, including its picturesque beaches, casinos, and the rural Pine Barrens. In *New Jersey Noir: Cape May*—Book Two of his *Jack Colt Murder Mystery Novels* series—William Baer continues to enchant and spellbind. PRAISE FOR NEW JERSEY NOIR: CAPE MAY: In *Jack Colt*, William Baer gives us a private detective perfectly suited for the Garden State: gritty, charming in spite of himself, sidesplittingly hilarious and incomparably authentic. Baer proves himself the Sinatra of Noir, the Edison of Intrigue, the Springsteen of Suspense—and a rightful heir to Hammett and Chandler. Far more fun than a night out in Atlantic City or a weekend at the Jersey Shore. — Jacob M. Appel, author of *Millard Salter’s Last Day* PRAISE FOR WILLIAM BAER: “*New Jersey Noir* introduces an ultracool hometown detective from Paterson, set perfectly in his well-detailed locales. The writing is crisp, sarcastic, wryly funny, steeped in New Jersey lore and anecdotes that add great historical and cultural dimensions to its mystery.” — Robin Farrell Edmunds, *Foreword Reviews* (Five-star review) “A brilliant debut novel . . . precise prose, perfect pacing, stunning imagery, complex characterization, grand historical and cultural contexts, and a superb sense of place.” — Hollis Seamon, author of *Somebody Up There Hates You* “Not since Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History* have I read a novel as mesmerizing, engrossing, and delectable as William Baer’s *New Jersey Noir*. In prose as fast-moving as a bullet, Baer compels the reader to keep flipping pages more and more rapidly. The writing is taut and gut-wrenching.” — Terri Brown-Davidson, author of *Marie, Marie, Hold On Tight* “Baer evokes a cinematic chiaroscuro New Jersey—specifically Paterson—its history and politics limned over a baseline of Springsteen, doo-wop, and Whitney Houston.” — Dennis Must, author of *Hush Now*, Don’t Explain ABOUT THE AUTHOR: William Baer, a recent Guggenheim fellow, is the author of twenty-two books including *New Jersey Noir*; *Times Square and Other Stories*; *One-and-Twenty Tales*; *Companion*; *The Ballad Rode into Town*; *Formal Salutations: New & Selected Poems*; *Classic American Films*; and *The Unfortunates* (recipient of the T.S. Eliot Award). A former Fulbright in

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Portugal, he's also received the Jack Nicholson Screenwriting Award and a Creative Writing Fellowship in fiction from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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In *The Borrowed World*, Emily Leithauser transforms keenly felt experience and bittersweet memories into poems of impressive craftsmanship. She deftly muses on the dichotomies of, among other things, childhood and growing up, the headiness of love gained and the pangs of love lost, the joys of the nuclear family and the trials when it gets broken up. Although a first book, *The Borrowed World* is the seasoned work of poet of abundant talent coming into her powers and deservedly, the winner of the 2015 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR THE BORROWED WORLD: In *The Borrowed World*, Emily Leithauser's formal mastery—her consummate knack for writing lines and sentences as crisp and elegant as the Edo prints to which she pays homage—entwines with the sheer immediacy and vulnerability of the poet's voice. Leithauser portrays the inevitability of loss, in romantic and familial relationships, and yet, without ever offering false resolutions or pat conclusions, she manages to make her poems themselves convincing stays against loss. I mean that this book is made to endure. *The Borrowed World* marks the arrival of a major talent. —Peter Campion, 2015 Able Muse Book Award judge, author of *El Dorado* Emily Leithauser's first collection, *The Borrowed World*, is an elegant meditation on inheritance, the vagaries of love and loss, familial relations—with all the devastating implosions within—and our relationship to the past filtered through the flawed lens of memory. These are deeply felt poems and Leithauser has a finely-tuned ear for the lyricism of syntax and the enduring rhythms of traditional forms. *The Borrowed World* is her stunning debut. —Natasha Trethewey, 2012–2014 US Poet Laureate, author of *Thrall* If her intensely accurate perceptions of the physical world and the beautiful forms in which she sets those perceptions were all that Emily Leithauser gave us in these poems, they would be more than enough to satisfy the hungriest poetry reader. But step by perspicuous step, in poem after poem, she enlarges and encompasses, she broadens and deepens and transmutes perception into feeling, feeling into thought, and thought into revelation. —Vijay Seshadri, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, author of *3 Sections* Love poems, family poems, narrative poems: *The Borrowed World* is a moving and memorable debut which covers a lot of ground but is always rooted in actualities. The poems are very well-made, too, but their equally great distinction is to be well-felt—subtle in their account of the observing “I,” and simultaneously generous and shrewd in their understanding of others. Page by page, they create a series of powerful cameos; taken as a whole, their larger purpose emerges: to register what can be known and (especially) not known about our lives as individuals, and to value what time allows us to enjoy on earth, while admitting the brevity of our stay here. —Andrew Motion, 1999–2009 UK Poet Laureate, author of *The Customs House* I have read *The Borrowed World*

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several times, and each time I find more in it to be delighted and touched by. Emily Leithauser's art waits for you, and I am sure that you will be as pleased and moved by it as I have been. —Michael Palma (from the foreword), author of *Begin in Gladness*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by the anonymous Gawain-Poet (or Pearl-Poet) is, like *Beowulf*, one of the greatest classics of English literature. Hailed as the finest Arthurian romance, this technically brilliant tale of enchantment, faith, temptation, and chivalry is tautly constructed, with a wonderfully rich vocabulary and vivid language that blends sophisticated atmosphere with psychological depth. John Ridland's new Modern English translation, unlike most presentations, is complete, covering every passage and word of the Middle English, Northwest Midland dialect original with the same line numbering, contents and meaning. His is the only version written in a familiar modern meter—pleasurable to modern ears, yet retaining the spirit of repetition and alliteration of the medieval original. And Dr. Ridland's introduction and notes are enlightening. This translation is a must-have for unlocking all the pleasures and delights of the original classic. PRAISE FOR JOHN RIDLAND'S TRANSLATION: With his loving rendition of a great classic into vigorous metrical lines, John Ridland has given *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* a fresh lease on life. I've seen several other versions of this masterpiece, but none so engagingly readable as Ridland's. His preface, too, is useful and illuminating. Here is a book to enjoy right now and to cherish forever. —X.J. Kennedy John Ridland gives us a recognizably English *Gawain*, and a very pleasurable one at that. The language is ours. It is slightly elevated, as befits a work so finely crafted, but only enough to demand our attention. Originally written in the same alliterative verse as *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was archaic in its own day; now, over six-hundred years later, alliterative verse can be as inaccessible as the pentatonic harp tunes that apparently accompanied it. Ridland gives the poem a long, loose line that sings in the lyrical passages, creeps in the spooky ones, and cavorts in the comic ones. Just as important, the densely mythic ethos, fully intact, enriches every word. —Richard Wakefield *Panoramas of banqueting and hunting, closely observed rituals of dressing, arming, and game preparation, and rich descriptions of landscape and weather*—Ridland's translation presents these in all their delightful, over-the-top particularity. —Maryann Corbett (from the foreword) The language in which the consummate poet and translator John Ridland serves up this delicious story in verse is exactly what it deserves. The descriptions are exuberant, the narrative flows and exhilarates like the wine at the courts we're asked to imagine, and the exchanges between complex characters so subtly flavored by intelligent diplomacy that it makes the dialogue of much current fiction seem, by contrast, like a six-pack on the front stoop. Read this book. I suspect that, like all enchantments, it shifts and assumes different forms to different eyes. But I do guarantee surprises, and inexhaustible delight. —Rhina P. Espaillat

In his impressive bestiary, *The Blind Loon*, Ed Shacklee shows as keen an insight into the nature of the beast roaming free as into the beast within. This encyclopedic collection includes the commonplace python, monkey, crocodile, tortoise, camel; the mythical kraken, lamia, chimera, wyvern; the prehistoric ankylosaurus; the fantastical logorrhea, mope, snub, hipster. Shacklee doles out marvels, mischief and hilarity in *The Blind Loon*, and the breathtaking illustrations of Russ Spitkovsky provide an accompanying visual feast that are by themselves worth the price of admission. *A Fog of Blurbs* Their plumage is a sheen of words whose meanings are the same- inveigling, too often heard, obnoxious birds, but tame, their mewling call is pecks of praise without one speck of blame. Indifferent if they foul their nests or poop rains on the rabble, garrulously gathered on the garret eaves of Babel, they preen as they pontificate on arts in which they dabble, for truth goes out the window when the *Blurbs* fly into town; a mist of cloying tidings, thought essential to renown, their beaks grow long and longer and are uniformly brown.

*All the Wasted Beauty of the World*, a finalist for the 2012 Able Muse Book Award, extols the beautiful as readily as it expounds on the



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blemished. The reasoned commingles with the rambunctious, as in the case of the speaker who declares that “our lives span diaper to diaper,/ and in between we piss on anyone/ we can.” Little escapes notice in these poems of gutsy realism and formal deftness, which freely highlight the fringes of society—the speaker in “Bellefontaine Cemetery” exhorts teens to “party on people’s graves” and have “a few close shaves with county sheriffs,” the carcass of a Ford truck intrudes on a hiking trail’s gully, the homeless are lullabied to “find rest behind our dumpster/ . . . score a fifth of bourbon/ and find your stomach full.” Richard Newman brings us a collection that prods and soars with the grit and beauty of the real world. **PRAISE FOR ALL THE WASTED BEAUTY OF THE WORLD:** Richard Newman’s *All the Wasted Beauty of the World* is masterful and magnetic, from the “galaxy of gnats” hovering in the St. Louis twilight to the way a backwoods junkyard “gnaws on a pile of old Ford bones.” He sees a group of bored high school kids with “nothing to lose/ but stupid summer jobs and innocence,” and captures with perfect acuity how “September rain in streetlight/ silvers the cypress needles, scatters new dimes/ among the nuisance alley mulberry trees.” Newman’s poems, with their formal, lapidary precision, their indelible portraits of life in the cheap bars, back alleys, and rough-hewn edges of the Midwest, surprise a hunger in us for a language larger, wilder, and unabashedly loftier than daily speech. -George Bilgere, author of *Imperial* The poems in Richard Newman’s remarkable third collection, *All the Wasted Beauty of the World*, are heady explorers. They roam from Lost Man Pass to Benton Park, from downtown St. Louis to Southern Indiana, all the while balancing gorgeous musicality with lyric originality. In the midst of the wandering, there is longing in these poems—for place, for order, for morning. There is urgency, too, and beauty, wasted and otherwise, in places we don’t always expect it. Newman is a bold and masterful formalist in a free-verse world, and he uses sonnets, aubades, villanelles, and odes to reconcile the geographies of the interior and exterior. Again and again, this collection makes us recalibrate our true north and forces us to reconsider the world for all of the unpredictable places where we can find beauty. -Adrian Matejka, author of *The Big Smoke* Newman uses the power of recollection and imagery to craft odes, sonnets, villanelles, ballads, and free verse with titles like “Four Kids Pissing off the Overpass after a Cardinals Game.” Each poem calls our attention to a rough-and-tumble, everyday America we often drive past but overlook. *All the Wasted Beauty of the World* returns us to the real and, consequently, the new by putting on the brakes and asking us to look, if only briefly, beyond our rear-views. -Dorianne Laux, author of *The Book of Men*

Rebecca Starks’s *Time Is Always Now* unfolds against a backdrop of nature, often permeated in unexpected ways with the human dynamics of family, neighborhood, and nation. Her poems convey the urgency within moments of transformation—whether seasonal, as in wilderness and garden; physical, as in the trajectory of youth, aging, and death; or political, as in the challenges of misgovernance and the environmental exigencies of our time. This finalist in the Able Muse Book Award is a finely wrought, thought-provoking collection.

### **PRAISE FOR *TIME IS ALWAYS NOW***

Drawing from sources as wide-ranging as Emily Dickinson, *Apocalypse Now*, fairy tales, and social media, Rebecca Starks’s *Time Is Always Now* deftly balances intelligence and pathos, resisting easy dichotomies and judgments. As these fine poems insist, the

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present is relentless, and we are immersed: “No, not out of time; helplessly in it.” Ours is a country of guns; ours is a “middle-aged earth” in decline—and yet, we are here, witnessing, questioning. I am grateful for Starks’s voice in the present moment, and I’m grateful to have her poems to carry with me into the future, whatever it may bring.

??—Maggie Smith, author of *Good Bones*

Rebecca Starks writes with a sense that time can be stopped in a poem, lives suspended and drawn inward, even in the most aimless moments. There’s a wonderful clarity to *Time Is Always Now*, an electricity that feels bright and wild. It’s to be found in the roadsides and a robin’s “clutch,” in the retina that “registers pain,” in the sky at dusk and the “months of mud.” I greet these poems with so much enthusiasm—these poems that crave, clarify, and propose sublime ways to become refreshed in our most confused times.

??—David Biespiel (from the foreword), author of *Republic Café*

At one point, Rebecca Starks describes a winter hike, in which she crosses “sociable mouse hops, two feet together” and passes “a squirrel’s scramble at the base of a tree,/ then the bunched landings of a mustelid bound/ from the yawn under one log to another.” Several of her wonderful book’s qualities are evidenced here. If too many poets, in their ignorance, regard nature as a mere repository of metaphor, Starks, like Frost, is both knowledgeable and uncannily *accurate* about it. (“Yawn” is the perfect word, say, in this passage.) Her sinuous and heavily subordinated syntax is also suggestive of a mind with great range—geographical, thematic, and prosodic—though she can also, as, for instance, in “American Flag,” move by a cunning terseness.

??—Sydney Lea, author of *The Music of What Happens: Lyric and Everyday Life*

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rebecca Starks grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, earned a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in English from Stanford University, and works as a freelance editor and as a teacher for the Osher Institute of Lifelong Learning program at the University of Vermont. Her poems and short fiction have appeared in *Baltimore Review*, *Ocean State Review*, *Slice Literary*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, and elsewhere. Winner of *Rattle*’s 2018 Neil Postman Award for Metaphor and past winner of *Poetry Northwest*’s Richard Hugo Prize, she is the founding editor-in-chief of *Mud Season Review* and a former director of the Burlington Writers Workshop. She and her family live in a log cabin in the woods of Richmond, Vermont.

Asperity Street, Gail White’s most balanced poetry collection, explores the breadth of human existence with cutting wit,

irreverence, keen intelligence, and an uncommon mix of empathy and asperity. Besides the cynical or the lighthearted, which are hallmarks of White's work, there is a newfound earnestness and gravity in these poems in their survey and interrogation of the human condition. White journeys the span from nursery to hospice—in between, she navigates the prom, family occasions, mating, gossip, and money matters with masterful formal dexterity. This is a collection that rewards the reader with a thoroughly entertaining and illuminating experience. PRAISE FOR ASPERITY STREET: In her remarkable collection, *Asperity Street*, Gail White takes on the whole sweep of existence. The street becomes the road of a lifetime, beginning with a Southern childhood and ending with a hospice finale. Laconic, ironic and comic, White's drily resourceful, wickedly companionable voice takes aim on patrimony, matrimony, religion, money and the myth that assumes we choose our lives. With her sublime linguistic choreography, these poems dance to complex metrical tunes. We feel and hear them pulse with equal parts sympathy and vitriol. In Gail White's capable hands, *Asperity Street* unfolds as a brilliant mural we can return to again and again, as the poet does—still vulnerable, and wiser each time. — Molly Peacock, 2014 Able Muse Book Award judge, author of *The Paper Garden* Gail White has done it again: here is another collection by one of America's wittiest, most technically adept, funniest and most serious commentators on what it feels like to be human. — Rhina P. Espaillat (from the foreword), author of *Her Place in These Designs* I looked forward to reading Gail White's new book of poems, *Asperity Street*, because I know she is one of America's funniest poets, so when I got the manuscript I sat down to read it immediately. I knew how much I would enjoy it. I was not disappointed. The first three sections of this four-part collection have wit and bon mots in good measure, socko endings, words I'd never seen in poems before, like "cloaca" or a made-up word ending, "substitutth," to satisfy a droll rhyme. But nothing prepared me for part four. Nothing procedural changed. The insights were as sharp as ever, the language exact and clear, the cleverness and dexterity with form as deft, the music as mesmerizing . . . but this was a serious poet I'd not encountered before: there was a deepening of vision, an enhancement of feeling, the rueful treatment of life and death took on a cutting edge that slices to the bone. Don't miss reading this book. — Lewis Turco, author of *The Book of Forms*

Ellen Kaufman's *Double-Parked*, with *Tosca* navigates the natural and the manmade—often with an eye on their strained juxtaposition—or unravels the complex dynamics of the physical, social, and political. Kaufman can go from elegizing an Elizabethan old dress past to the environmentally conscious "now [when] the polar caps / undress themselves." She weaves the history of early settlements and their challenges and triumphs over the sometime inhospitable land; or negotiates the melding and mismatch of cultures in her native New York City. Kaufman's poems assert their claim inside violence, indifference, and exclusion. This surefooted second collection is a fitting special honoree for the 2019 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR DOUBLE-PARKED, WITH TOSCA Ellen Kaufman's poems pierce the reader the way a needle pierces fabric. With a stunningly precise apprehension of the real, she stitches immigration histories and the intimacies of family life, cityscapes and suburban developments, the recent past and the perilous future. She has the power to shapeshift, too, so that we experience, as if from inside, the hidden life of a retired battleship, an algae bloom, a bird nesting in a traffic light. Marked by grief, endurance, and the

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truths of beauty made manifest, these are essential poems. - Jennifer Barber, author of *Works on Paper* Ellen Kaufman's absolutely terrific second book can fearlessly slash through pretext, but also cohere unlikely pairs through the X-ray delicacy of an ace metaphorist. She can use "he wanted to get laid" as a refrain in a satisfyingly avenging villanelle, and also see how a beret looks like a "fluffy flounder," and a chandelier handed down through generations "rattles like a skeleton." A tick can alternate stanzas with its host, and an orchestra can create a landscape from its instruments. Kaufman uses form-including a masterful crown of sonnets about her father's end of life-and the speaker herself takes form in persona poems of NYC landmarks; of the USS Intrepid, she writes, "the old moon / shuttle Discovery perches / like an aphid on a rose leaf." I bet you never heard that before! And so you will feel about this whole body of poems. Kaufman's wit, her craft, her vision-this book celebrates their collaboration. - Jessica Greenbaum, author of *Spilled and Gone* As a young person, the best poem I ever read in my life was a Petrarchan sonnet by Ellen Kaufman-before I even knew what a Petrarchan sonnet was. Now, in reading Ellen Kaufman's newest book, *Double-Parked*, with *Tosca*, I immediately see everything I want poetry to be: imaginative, evocative, observant, musical, filled with sound and living breath, and brilliant. I can't recommend this book and this author enough. - Nicholas Samaras, author of *American Psalm*, *World Psalm* ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ellen Kaufman's first collection, *House Music*, was a finalist for the Able Muse Book Award (Able Muse, 2013). A poem from that book won the Morton Marr Poetry Prize awarded by *Southwest Review*, where it also appeared. Her poems have also been published by *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Epoch*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *the New Yorker*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Salamander*, *Shenandoah*, *the Yale Review*, and other literary magazines. Twice a MacDowell Fellow (2009 and 2013), she holds an AB from Cornell, and MFA and MSLS degrees from Columbia University. Formerly a poetry reviewer for *Library Journal*, she now reviews for *Publishers Weekly*. She lives near Straus Park in upper Manhattan.

In Ben Berman's second full-length collection, *Figuring in the Figure*, poems laden with aphorisms, puns, and witticisms meditate on shapes, angles, thinking about thinking, marriage, and the joys and trials of bringing a daughter into the world, among others. Sometimes with a Frostian spirit, sometimes with a touch of Zen, the known is questioned and wisdom gleaned from daily experience. This is a book that challenges us to reimagine the familiar, both physical and spiritual, while reminding us not to "wander through this world without wonder." PRAISE FOR FIGURING IN THE FIGURE: "Because design, alone, doesn't hold weight,/" Ben Berman writes in his remarkable second collection of poems, "we need concrete material—the image/ of a bridge over the sound of water." In *Figuring in the Figure*, Berman explores the nature of form in its deepest most complex sense. His luminous details evoke a world of mutable forms and shapes that suggest the fragility of our lives. The book culminates with a moving, realistic yet lyrical sequence of poems about the birth of his daughter. This is a quietly beautiful book that deserves attention and recognition. —Jeff Friedman, author of *Pretenders* *Figuring in the Figure* is a self-portrait of a man becoming a father. Ben Berman writes inside a modified terza rima that makes a virtue out of clarity and discernment. The influence here of Frost returns us to Frost's virtues: these poems make points and have a point of view. Like Frost, Berman is unsparing in his

introspection. He offers us an ongoing philosophy: when faced with the pain and contradiction of everyday life, “to delay judgment and contemplate . . . incompatible thoughts.” —Rodger Kamenetz, author of *The Jew in the Lotus* Ben Berman’s nimble terza rima is the perfect vehicle for the poems of *Figuring in the Figure*. Both expansive and structured, the interwoven stanzas allow him to form and reform probing questions of identity without ever forsaking a deep musicality. We watch the speaker ponder mouse droppings, hit the wall in a marathon, describe the great molasses flood of 1919, diaper a doll in a birthing class, then try to manage his “tiny fascist” of a toddler who wouldn’t stop until “every bookshelf toppled/ like a/ failed coup.” His observations are enriched with various kinds of humor—aphorisms, riddles, word plays, and puns. This book is wise and wonderful. —Beth Ann Fennelly, Poet Laureate of Mississippi, author of *Unmentionables* Ben Berman’s fine, clever poems are never merely clever. Their frisky formal play is finally and importantly about the finding of forms that might adequately contain our feelings. As his title, *Figuring in the Figure*, suggests, Berman is fond of double meanings; indeed, he is in love with all the twists and turns of language, as well as all the structures that display the pleasures of thinking. If invention is his inclination, order is his learned yet sly companion, “a partner,” he writes, “the type/ that coyly invites chaos to dance.” —Lawrence Raab, author of *Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts*

The recurrent theme of “home” connects the wide-ranging subjects of Lorna Knowles Blake’s *Green Hill*. These exquisitely crafted poems in free verse and metrical forms include conversations with such masters as Homer, Blake, Lorca, Saint John of the Cross, Giacomo Puccini, and Duke Ellington, in addition to reflections upon marvels of the natural world—oceans, flowering trees, birds’ nests. *Green Hill* is delightful, enlightening and inspirational, and an exceptional winner of the 2017 Able Muse Book Award. **PRAISE FOR GREEN HILL** In the poems in *Green Hill*, Lorna Knowles Blake takes the intimacies of human life and the riots of nature and transmutes them into forms that both discipline and liberate their beauty. By doing so, she also reveals the real, the secret, sovereign of that beauty—the human imagination, of which hers is a triumphant example. — Vijay Seshadri, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, author of *3 Sections Whatever* subject Lorna Knowles Blake turns her hand to, she displays a prosodic surefootedness and a continual freshness of perception. Poems as different from one another as “Glosa” and “The Allure of the Ledge” will find readers to admire not only Blake’s skill but the literary culture that she makes her own. — Charles Martin, 2017 Able Muse Book Award judge, author of *Future Perfect* Lorna Knowles Blake gives us *Green Hill*, poems both dark and lightheartedly inventive, the craft casual, poised—and audacious. Here, our twenty-first century Blake boldly converses with her nineteenth-century namesake, William Blake, as well as with Duke Ellington, St. John of the Cross, and others in musically dazzling poems set “free to feel/ the hook, the dock, the sun, the real/ experience.” What is the real experience? It is the sense of home. The title poem begins, “So many ways to remember a house,” and Blake means all abodes, from a hermit crab’s shell to a “refugee’s home/ the day after the raid.” Relationships, too, become houses as Blake evokes moments of tenderness in a mature marriage and fears for the future—though in this deft, understatedly mythic book, the background world is still shades of green. — Molly Peacock, author of *The Analyst Moving* and masterful, the poems in Lorna Knowles Blake’s *Green Hill* don’t just reveal an

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exquisite formal sensibility—they conduct passionate and original meditations on our fundamental need for form. In poems about artwork and landscape, myth and love, Blake considers the ways we give shape and meaning to our lives. And her poems are themselves vital enactments of that same urge. American poetry is richer for this superb collection. — Peter Champion, author of *El Dorado*

This is the semiannual *Able Muse Review* (Print Edition) - Winter 2015 issue, Number 20. This issue continues the tradition of masterfully crafted poetry, fiction, essays, art & photography, and book reviews that have become synonymous with the *Able Muse*—online and in print. After more than a decade of online publishing excellence, *Able Muse* print edition maintains the superlative standard of the work presented all these years in the online edition, and, the *Able Muse Anthology* (*Able Muse Press*, 2010). ". . . [ *ABLE MUSE* ] fills an important gap in understanding what is really happening in early twenty-first century American poetry." – Dana Gioia. CONTENTS: WITH THE 2015 *ABLE MUSE WRITE PRIZE FOR POETRY & FICTION* — Includes the winning story and poems from the contest winners and finalists. EDITORIAL — Alexander Pepple. FEATURED ARTIST — Léon Leijdekkers. FEATURED POET — Amit Majmudar; (Interviewed by Daniel Brown). FICTION — Paul Soto, Lynda Sexson, Andrea Witzke Slot. ESSAYS — N.S. Thompson, Moira Egan. BOOK REVIEWS — Stephen Kampa, Robert B. Shaw. POETRY — X.J. Kennedy, Wendy Videlock, Kim Bridgford, Peter Kline, Catharine Savage Brosman, Terese Coe, Steven Winn, Jay Udall, Beth Houston, Jennifer Reeser, Leslie Schultz, Ryan Wilson, Max Gutmann, Freeman Rogers, Dan Champion, Brooke Clark, David Stephenson, Autumn Newman, James Matthew Wilson, Athar C. Pavis, Jeanne Wagner, Elise Hempel.

*Naked for Tea*, a finalist in the *Able Muse Book Award*, is a uniquely uplifting and inspirational collection. Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's poems are at times humorously surreal, at times touchingly real, as they explore the ways in which our own brokenness can open us to new possibilities in a beautifully imperfect world. *Naked for Tea* proves that poems that are disarmingly witty on the surface can have surprising depths of wisdom. This is a collection not to be missed. PRAISE FOR *NAKED FOR TEA* Most anyone can make lemonade out of lemons. However, Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's welcoming voice, receptive heart, artistic mastery, and empathic vision become an alchemy of being. Out of mudslides, misunderstandings, the exploits of Wild Rose, deep loss, and chocolate cake that sinks in the center, she makes courage, care, joy, and compassion. When "what's the use" breaks down the back door, she is there, her great good soul encouraging us to sigh, laugh, renew our attention, and feel grateful for and delighted by any cake that sinks in the center. — Jack Ridl, author of *Practicing to Walk Like a Heron* and *Saint Peter* and the *Goldfinch Heart*-thawingly honest, deliriously sexy, and compassionate down to the fingertips. A book of kindness and bewilderment and delight from one of our best poets. — Teddy Macker, author of *This World* There is still rich ore in the Colorado San Juans. Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer is a treasure. In an era of seeming nonstop, subject-matterless, first person mirror dancing at the Temple of Narcissus incomprehension, it is a delight to find a poet who can tell a crackling story laced with gorgeous imagery and euphony that will appeal to the ancient seats of learning: the heart, belly, and brain. These are poems Sappho and Horace would love: they delight and instruct. They can be read and sung, and they will echo from the proverbial

## Get Free Dirge For An Imaginary World Poems

Colorado mountaintops through the archetypal red rock canyons of your mind. Prepare thyself to be smitten and to fall in love. — David Lee, Utah State Poet Laureate emeritus, author of *Last Call* and *A Legacy of Shadows* Reading Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer is to float upon a never-ending waterfall of wonder . . . Pay attention. The elegance of her simplicity will blind you to her mastery. Then, she will let you fall, head over heels, in *Love. With everything.* — Wayne Muller (from the foreword), author of *Sabbath* and *Legacy of the Heart*

In *Second Rain*, Elise Hempel gleans anecdotes of uncommon poignancy from the seemingly commonplace, and crafts them into memorable poems. Family settings and the world of nature are captured and shaped into insight through the poet's discerning eyes: here an only child in her room with a lone and captive katydid; here a feisty grandmother in the hospital; here a father fond of household projects, building two swimming pools, a basketball hoop in the driveway, and transforming the yard into a skating rink. This inspirational debut collection, charged with nostalgia and longing, is fittingly finalist in the 2015 Able Muse Book Award.

**PRAISE FOR SECOND RAIN:** The apparently domestic poems in *Second Rain* (poems about family, gardening, dogs, birds, and a few memorable tigers) deliver enough controlled intensity “to shake the trees all down.” A special gift of Elise Hempel's art is to evoke and suggest passions without spelling them out; we readers get to unscramble the anagram, to find the ache—and our own corresponding ache—beneath the poised surface. —Rachel Hadas, author of *Questions in the Vestibule* [Elise Hempel's] curiosity and insights singled her out as special, but her ability to shape her feelings into words remains what I find most unique . . . From the opening title poem on, this is a book about the often ignored, simple gifts that come to us, like “the second rain that comes/ when the first is over,” that “gentle scattering of drops” the breeze shakes down from the trees and “briefly blesses you.” —Bruce Guernsey (from the foreword), author of *From Rain: Poems, 1970–2010* From the title poem on, Elise Hempel's *Second Rain* matches form with feeling, delivering insights that seem at once inevitable and necessary. Her sense of the sonnet—its grace and shape—lends quiet force to what's remembered and observed, from a pet shop crow to memories of now-absent loved ones, mother-daughter conflicts to the ambiguities of language itself. Like the flock of geese described in one poem here, Hempel's collection succeeds in many “different keys.” —James Scruton, author of *Thrift* Through admirably controlled and marvelously controlling language, the compressed imagery in Elise Hempel's powerfully compact poems subtly evokes emotional responses, while the poet also smartly engages readers with an authentic and persuasive voice. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from the eighth and final line in the collection's title poem, each piece in *Second Rain* “briefly blesses you.” —Edward Byrne, author of *Seeded Light*

*Dirge for an Imaginary World* from Matthew Buckley Smith is the winner of the 2011 Able Muse Book Award, selected by Andrew Hudgins. These are poems of breathtaking craftsmanship that find inspiration in the simplicity of the quotidian, or the perplexity of the grand. Smith is equally at ease musing about Neanderthals or God as he is with a ballet exam or highway medians. These poems of personal and universal introspection are filled with grace, and sparkle with abundant intelligence and wit. This masterful debut collection is an event to celebrate.

**PRAISE FOR DIRGE FOR AN IMAGINARY WORLD:** Wildness and precision and passion balanced with wit—there are the hallmarks of

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Matthew Buckley Smith's superb Dirge for an Imaginary World. In subjects great ("For the Neanderthals") and small made great ("For the College Football Mascots"), the comic is rich with serious intent and gravity lightened with discerning wit. But only a poet who lifts heavy and unwieldy subjects—death, lost love, the absence of god—knows the imperatives of graceful balance. — Andrew Hudgins (Judge, 2011 Able Muse Book Award) In this deeply impressive debut volume of poetry, Dirge for an Imaginary World, Matthew Buckley Smith delivers a remarkable range of deft formal schemes, temporal movements, and varied settings. We encounter sonnets, couplets, quatrains, Sapphics, sestets and so forth written with a slick, delightful merging of technical expertise and smooth contemporary rhythms. The range of subjects is equally and as charmingly eclectic, from Neanderthals, Dante, Vermeer, for instance, to College Football Mascots, Highway Mediums, and Spring Ballet Exams. Mental and linguistic agility generously challenge the reader in poem after poem. — Greg Williamson (from the "Foreword") "If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst," wrote Thomas Hardy, whose spirit moves through the fine poems of Matthew Buckley Smith's debut collection. Like his blast-beruffled predecessor, Smith braves a clear-eyed look at our fallen world, mourning in elegantly precise language the sorrows inherent in "set(ting) out to map a promised land/ Out of reach and always just at hand," but also wishing great mercy upon us travelers failed and failing. These are poems full of both reckoning and grace, made all the more beautiful for their humane wisdom. Dirge for an Imaginary World is immensely impressive. — Carrie Jerrell

Carrie Shipers's Cause for Concern traverses a landscape of assorted disasters—such as overwork and layoffs, the ill-fated explorer, circus mishaps, nuclear disaster and radiation—but at its heart is the personal disaster of spousal illness. While a spouse might avow faith in the sentiment of love in sickness and in health, the practice of such faith might come undone when faced with the reality of the ravages of illness on the stricken body of the beloved, alongside the caregiving mate who "could love/ [her] husband but distrust his body,/ expect betrayal at every turn." Full of incisive meditations on frailties and fortitude often delivered with visceral honesty, Cause for Concern is spellbinding from start to finish and, deservedly, the winner of the 2014 Able Muse Book Award for Poetry. PRAISE FOR CAUSE FOR CONCERN: Carrie Shipers's magnificent endeavor aims to control the uncontrollable. In her splendid collection Cause for Concern she gives us her spirited poems—subversively satisfying in our era of cool wordplay. Both her comfort with ambiguity and her sassy candor aid the poet as she writes of a wife who is hoodwinked into a necessary patience—one she both chafes from and rebels against after her husband falls seriously ill. In rhythms that alternate between hope and defeat, the poems track the illness, but also punctuate the couple's changed world with quirky observations and a scrappy spirituality. (Not to mention a canine companion.) Her poet's craft, palpable in every arresting line, makes the subtlest turns of vulnerability with enviable poise. —Molly Peacock, 2014 Able Muse Book Award judge, author of The Paper Garden Only a poet of unquestionable bravery and technical acuity could rehearse the quotidian details of a middle class, middle aged existence with such exquisite, irresistible and terrifying honesty. —Kwame Dawes, author of Duppy Conqueror: New and Selected Poems If illness is a country inhospitable to guests, then Carrie Shipers's second poetry collection, Cause for Concern, is our guidebook, preparing us for what we will find in the waiting room, by the bedside, in the bathroom, or on the skin when the gauze is lifted. These are naked, open poems. They say things that make us wince, as when we look at an incision still puckered and red. Shipers reminds us that our lives must first be prodded and cauterized, if the injured parts are ever to heal. —Jehanne Dubrow, author of The Arranged Marriage

Chelsea Woodard's Vellum, a finalist for the 2013 Able Muse Book Award, propels the reader along new paths of discovery in the quotidian as in the mythical. Its scope is far-ranging: a flower press received as a gift in childhood, Tarot reading with a favorite aunt, unexpected reflections at a tattoo parlor, reminiscing about an old flame, the discovery of rare volumes at the local library, or auctioning off old toys on



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eBay. Woodward's insights and sensibilities in the visual and performing arts are deftly realized in fine or broad strokes—as in “Coppélia,” “The Painter and the Color-blind,” “Degas's Nudes,” or as in “Still Life,” which muses that “It's difficult/ to give back life/ to what's been cut off from the living.” Stories and scenes represented in popular artwork are reimagined in ekphrastics such as “Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting.” With excursions into the surreal, myth is made, lived or remade, as in “Philomela,” “Pegasus” and “The Feral Child.” This is an exquisite debut collection that rewards the mind and senses with its formal impetus and deft musicality, its precise and lively language, its emotional compass. PRAISE FOR VELLUM: In her stunning first collection, Vellum, Chelsea Woodard offers us poems whose lucidity of attention grounds an imaginative realism where narrative becomes speculation, witness becomes mystery, and the body a space where desire and dread complicate compassion's summons to the social order. The honed music here thus reveals a deeper vulnerability. Such is its gift, the way in which poems might be rooted to the difficulty and heartbreak of the physical and yet apart, “their keel and gristle finally set/ into some deathless, disembodied flight.” An astonishing book. -Bruce Bond In addition to her emotional maturity, part of what makes these poems memorable is Woodard's obvious mastery of language, her flawless sentences, the surprising way those sentences function and “mean” within the lines, the lines within the forms. -Claudia Emerson (from the foreword) Not the least of the attractions of this gifted young poet's first book is the exquisite, searing precision of her language—the obsessively exact diction; the tropes that map with such stunning accuracy the emotional contours of her narratives; the gestural, almost tactile quality of her syntax—all of these talents focused sharply on what Howard Nemerov said was the singular, most difficult achievement of poetry: “getting something right in language.” I predict for Chelsea Woodard a long and enviable career. -B.H. Fairchild

Dirge for an Imaginary World: Poems Able Muse Press

Rob Wright's Last Wishes is eclectic and delves into mining grit and lifestyle as fluently as it does into spiritual hopes and despairs, or the mind's lucidity and aberrations. Well-traveled in time and place, Last Wishes' culturally diverse characters and scenes—framed in Philadelphia, Fort Meyers, Manhattan, São Paulo, Kowloon, Majdanek, or elsewhere—are memorable or miserable. Accounts of ghosts and hauntings, imagined or real, include heart-stopping witness narratives of the Holocaust and other atrocities. This is a seasoned inaugural collection—a special honoree for the 2019 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR LAST WISHES Rob Wright's poems in Last Wishes ache with a quiet, exquisite music. Whether at the edge of the forest, or before a mirror regarding his own face, or at the limit of what a son can feel for his father, Wright calls us to join him on his search for order and meaning, even as he questions what he finds: “The shell that holds all grief and memory, / in chains of molecules that make a mind, / will turn back into atoms, hungry, free. / We're spirits caught inside our skin and hair-- / ephemeral our dramas, spun from air.” Such is the breathtaking beauty of Last Wishes, to long for what seems so close and yet, in the end, we cannot know. --Rafael Campo, author of Comfort Measures Only: New and Selected Poems One of Wright's gifts is the age-old poetic magic of conveying beauty in what might at first appear to offer up nothing but ugliness. . . . It is fitting that one of the titles here is “Prologue for an Imaginary Play,” because Wright's poems often are, in essence, little plays. The landscapes here are never static; like a photographer, or a cinematographer, Wright captures his subjects at their most revealing in a flash. Scenes are arranged and rendered at the moment of greatest drama and tension. --Alison Hicks (from the foreword), author of You Who Took the Boat Out ? The first poem in Last Wishes describes in evocatively exact and gritty detail a landscape of abandoned mines, and ends with the poet's mind reaching out toward the miners who once worked there: “I thought/ how hunger drives a man to crawl beneath/ the brittle crust that shuts out sun and sky.”

Moments like this are repeated again and again throughout this obsessively compelling book—a surface (often enough a fairly bleak one) is

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described in richly precise detail, and out of it pasts, ghosts, the dead, revenants and spectral appearances emerge with a kind of beckoning, unreachable clarity that is at times wistful and at times brutal. If these poems were photographs most of them would be in grimmest black and white, but they would make a most marvelously enthralling exhibition. —Dick Davis, author of *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz*

Slingshots and Love Plums, Wendy Videlock's third full-length collection, sometimes evokes the lightheartedness of *The Dark Gnu and Other Poems* previous to it, sometimes enchants with the frolics and insights of her *Nevertheless* debut. It especially shines with the brilliance of its wit, its spirituality—as in Videlock's fiat lux invocation for her "Dear Reader" "resembling the first, or the last word." Harnessing proverbs, myths, paeans, execrations, riddles, and pithy odes to the natural world and the people around her, Videlock delivers an inspired collection that rollicks, startles and uplifts. PRAISE FOR SLINGSHOTS AND LOVE PLUMS: From its title to its last poem, Wendy Videlock's *Slingshots and Love Plums* offers a delicious variety of treats, from witty send-ups of contemporary mores to somber reflections on mortality, love, and friendship. The pleasures include off-kilter rhymes, elegant turns, earthy revelations, and the skillful mockery of pretentiousness in its various forms. —David Caplan, author of *In the World He Created According to His Will*

Videlock arrests because she arrests the complacent drift of sense. She is so good at it that what begins as a taste for her work can quickly turn into a craving—for deliciously cryptic spiritual riddles. —David J. Rothman, author of *Part of the Darkness*, from the foreword

Wendy Videlock's poems in *Slingshots and Love Plums* sometimes hint at their Colorado origins but are never pinned down by a locality or a life story. They are gleefully universal, taking delight equally in huge abstraction and intimate real-worldliness. Whether enchanting, imploring, or arguing, they always fascinate, concentrating their acrobatics of thought and sound on the knots of the human experience. —Maryann Corbett, author of *Mid Evil*

Wendy Videlock is one of the few poets I can still read at length and purely for pleasure. Playfully wise, sharp-tongued, and surprising as ever, *Slingshots and Love Plums* is yet another treasure to be read and reread at your leisure. Thereafter you'll find all your thinking is rhymed—but, don't mind: it's just dust from the master. —Timothy Green, editor of *Rattle*

Susan de Sola's *Frozen Charlotte* spans the breadth of human experience—from celebration to lamentation, from gravity to lightheartedness, from domestic and quotidian scenarios to historic upheavals and their aftermaths, both European and American. She skillfully deploys an impressive range of formal styles and free verse in her debut collection. De Sola's *Frozen Charlotte* manifests all the hallmarks of a seasoned poet in surefootedness, wit, and depth of empathy.

### PRAISE FOR *FROZEN CHARLOTTE*

The breadth of Susan de Sola's poetry, by turns gossamer light and solemnly elegiac, offers a pleasurable aesthetic surprise from poem to poem—from "sun-starved Dutchmen" to immigrant Jews in Manhattan, from tulips to the life of a friend whose actual name she never knew, from the imagined language of rocks to a war widow's cedar closet, from the death of an infant to conjugal love. Susan de Sola evinces wit and knowingness, a dexterity with verse, a way with form. The pleasure of de Sola's poetry is to be in the presence of virtuosity and insight, of a poet who knows what it means to be human, and when to be serious and when to be light.

-Mark Jarman, author of *The Heronry*

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When I read Susan de Sola's uncanny title poem "Frozen Charlotte" for the first time, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I feel the same about the book as a whole, a virtuoso grouping of form and topic, a book that is haunting, yet which also sparkles with a sense of humor that I much enjoyed. Susan de Sola, it seems, can write in any form. While this book is her first full-length collection, it is the work of a master craftsman.

-Kim Bridgford, author of *Undone*

Whether their subject is a painting by Sargent, a gathering at the site of a Holocaust deportation center, or the bestial appearance of ATM machines, Susan de Sola's poems seem animate with her vision: the poems breathe on the page. Part of de Sola's power lies in her formal acumen. Every word here seems carefully sieved from the welter of English, and each poem's form is perfectly matched to its ambition and music. De Sola's tonal range is equally rich—she is by turns funny and dark, pensive and sly, her voice resounding in the reader's head long after a poem's final line. Like its memorable title poem, *Frozen Charlotte* intrigues, goes deep, surprises. It is a book rich with the pleasures the best poetry provides.

-Clare Rossini, author of *Lingo*

This book has many moods and many messages for any reader who pays the poems collected here the attention they deserve. At times it seems a fairground, at times a graveyard, and neither cancels the other out. It is a mark of Susan de Sola's always persuasive rhetoric that we see that both characterizations are somehow, simultaneously, true, and that despite their exhilarating variety these poems are of a piece and come from one complex, sophisticated, supremely alert sensibility.

-Dick Davis (from the foreword), author of *Love in Another Language*

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Susan de Sola's poems have appeared in many venues, such as the *Hudson Review* and *PN Review*, and in anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry 2018*. She is a winner of the David Reid Poetry Translation Prize and the Frost Farm Prize. She holds a PhD in English from the Johns Hopkins University and has published essays and reviews as Susan de Sola Rodstein. Her photography is featured in the chapbook *Little Blue Man*. A native New Yorker, she lives near Amsterdam with her family.

Alfred Nicol's *Animal Psalms* begins with the baseball field's organized uncertainties, and continues on many a trajectory of animal ruminations—with the human species well accounted for—ending in the imbalance of the everyday "Nuts" around us. The subjects include the elephant, snake, sheep, skunk, bee, couple dynamics, the trials and triumphs of the ruler or the everyman. This is a collection rich in aphorisms on the bright and shady spectra of our interactions. Recognizable soliloquies with the meditative self or dialogues with the beloved are unraveled for keen insights on the human condition—deconstructing them until the knotty connecting threads are exposed. Nicol gives us a mature collection of quiet reflection, with wit and wisdom deployed through finely crafted poems of masterly formal dexterity. PRAISE FOR ANIMAL PSALMS: Dear reader, I've fallen in love with this book, and that will happen to you too. Read, for instance, the very last poem,

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“Nuts,” and read the great “How to Ignore an Invisible Man,” and you’re hooked forever. Read all the rest, these poems by Alfred Nicol which have our numbers, and have his own too, that tell about our lives, and his, and the lives of snakes, and bees, and elephants, with such humor, and pity, and praise, for all of us, human and animal, in our situations. It’s impossible not to fall in love. —David Ferry, author of *Bewilderment*, winner of the National Book Award As the title *Animal Psalms* suggests, there is reverence here—a reverence that derives less from religion than from a religious attention to the things of the world, from baseball games to zoo elephants to the newly beloved. Nicol is a melodic writer, called first to the music of words, to “speech that lets the sound/ carry the greater part of what is said.” He’s also a poet whose images you won’t soon forget. They summon the real world and simultaneously render it otherworldly. While the poems offer moments of ecstatic escape, they’re more often held in check by an Augustan wit, ironic humor and a touch of Baudelaire. Poise and wit prevail in these psalms; they give us both despair inflected by light and illumination held fast by darkness. —Erica Funkhouser, author of *Earthly* If we would only take the time to let one of Alfred Nicol’s poems sink in through the brilliant latticed grid of its formal exterior, how the truth of what he has to say about the human condition would hit us the way a line drive whips toward you on a dreamy summer’s afternoon, startling you back into the electric now. I love these poems because they evoke for me the zany, spiritual energy of the Beats welded as only a workman can work unwieldy things to the tempered grid of six centuries of formalism. Don’t be surprised if—after reading these poems—you find them turning back to their true subject, dear reader, which turns out to be none other than you. —Paul Mariani, author of *Epitaphs for the Journey*

The *Powow River Poets Anthology II* continues the tradition of memorable poetry from the *Powow River Poets*. This group of uniquely talented, award-winning writers is centered in Newburyport, Massachusetts, but includes members from the Boston area and from as far away as New York and Maine. Twenty-seven poets are represented in this volume of the anthology, including Rhina P. Espailat, A.M. Juster, and Deborah Warren. Here, find masterful poems in form and free verse, on an eclectic range of subjects spanning the domestic to the global, celebrations to mourning, the whimsical to the heartbreaking. It is especially a showcase of the formal prowess of these accomplished poets. The dazzling array of given and nonce forms, including blank verse, triolet, abecedarian, sonnet, villanelle, sestina, and more will inspire with many examples of craftsmanship heightening emotional engagement and insight. **PRAISE FOR THE POWOW RIVER POETS ANTHOLOGY II:** Dedicated to the late *Powow River Poet*, David Berman, *The Powow River Poets Anthology II* continues in the splendid tradition of the group’s previous tome, published in 2006. Twenty-seven poets touch on themes ranging from the simple joys of friendship, nature, and art, to the complex issues of faith and doubt, love and loss. Guffaw-inducing humor and biting wit abound, as well as solemn reflections on suicide, domestic violence, social injustice, betrayal, illness, aging, and death. In Rhina P. Espailat’s beautiful villanelle, “Guidelines,” included in this collection, the poet wisely urges us to find something to love, perhaps “a line of verse . . . that feels like the world’s heart since time began.” Beyond question, the poems in *The Powow River Poets Anthology II* echo the world’s heart. —Catherine Chandler, author of *Pointing Home* It might be far-fetched to suggest that the Muses have sprinkled a generous share of their gifts into the waters of the *Powow River* . . . [near] the historic town of Newburyport . . . where the *Powow River Poets* established their home base three decades ago—but how else to explain the lyric fluency, robust talent, and refreshing wit that consistently distinguish this group? —Leslie Monsour (from the introduction), author of *The House Sitter* *The Powow River Poets* are a group known for their concern with the craftsmanship of verse, and for the formal dexterity and precision of their poems—qualities profusely exemplified in this new collection. As might be expected, there are tricky forms in abundance here—sonnets, villanelles, triolets, a sestina—but what is so memorable about so many

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of the poems is their continual precision of observation and depth of nuanced feeling. To paraphrase Pope, come for the flow of reason, stay for the feast of soul. This is a really delightfully various and moving collection, one to browse happily in and return to often. —Dick Davis, author of *Faces of Love: Hafez and the Poets of Shiraz* ABOUT THE AUTHOR: The Powow River Poets are a gathering of widely published, awardwinning New England poets, centered in Newburyport, Massachusetts, but including members from the Boston area and from as far away as New York and Maine. More about the Powow River Poets can be found at [powowriverpoets.com](http://powowriverpoets.com).

With remarkable erudition, Brian Culhane's *Remembering Lethe* provides apropos morals and metaphors for our own times through its clear-eyed exposition of history, myths, and legends from Latin, Sumerian, Saxon, and Greek among others. The character and might of the word, even in the midst of repression and censorship, is a pervading theme. This insightful and masterfully crafted collection is a worthy finalist for the 2020 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR REMEMBERING LETHE Brian Culhane is a poet whose work leaps across classical myths and World War II history; across poetic forms that shimmer with innovation; across loss and love and the deep river of Lethe, the river in Hades that causes forgetfulness. In our culture, in this time, we forget a lot of things. "You'll perhaps cross the abyss / Between words, though no margin of safety's promised us," Culhane writes, and the journey of *Remembering Lethe* is one into a language and imagination so alive and generous that it beckons to, and then surprises and engages, every reader. This book is a consolation and an inspiration.

—Frances McCue, author of *The Bled* Brian Culhane's poetry is a form of knowledge, and its truth and beauty as art would be recognizable at any time, in any era. The title *Remembering Lethe* presents us with the riddle of poetry itself. Lethe, the classical river of forgetfulness, may erase the memory of everything except the very poetry that created it. Reflecting a lifetime of reading, teaching, and writing, the poems in this book merge with their subjects in classical proportions, formed by a lyric impulse the poet calls in one poem "two parts darkness, one part song." Darkness may sometimes shadow these poems, but joy illuminates each of them in the end. —Mark Jarman, author of *The Heronry In "A Crack in the Amphora,"* just one of the many formally masterful, richly probing, and movingly resonant poems in *Remembering Lethe*, Brian Culhane enjoins the reader to "squeeze your eyes through / Past the dry outer world of painted clay," to find "a corridor leading away / From light," into the interior the sculptor's "palm knew / As wet, before any votive oil splashed in." Here, in a manner exemplary of this poet's ingenious imaginative powers, the poem opens to a world vital with allusion and pervasively attuned both to "the core of darkness" and to the world at hand with which, as he says elsewhere, "the longhand of thought" also must contend. Culhane's poems are unapologetically literate, inclusive in their pursuit of emotional and intellectual truth, and rare in their responsiveness to what is most necessary for the art. —Daniel Tobin, author of *Blood Labors* ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Brian Culhane's *The King's Question* (Graywolf Press, 2008) won the Poetry Foundation's Emily Dickinson Award for a first book by an author over fifty. His poems have appeared widely in such journals as the *Hudson Review*, the *New Criterion*, the *New Republic*, and the *Paris Review*. After getting his MFA at Columbia University, he received a PhD in English literature from the University of Washington, where he focused on epic literature and the history of criticism. The recipient of fellowships from Washington State's Artist Trust, MacDowell, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, he now divides his time between New York's Catskills and Seattle.

Carrie Green's *Studies of Familiar Birds* reflects upon the series of nest-and-egg illustrations that Virginia Jones saw to completion after her daughter, who had begun the project, died. The artist's loss in the late nineteenth century is presented in tandem with the poet's artistic response to the death of her own father. Other poems draw inspiration from altered vintage photographs in Sara Angelucci's *Aviary* series, or from firsthand observations of birds and humans. This collection, unique in subject and sensibility, is a special honoree of the 2019 Able

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Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR STUDIES OF FAMILIAR BIRDS: Carrie Green's poems are as exquisitely crafted as the nests they depict, honoring the delicacy of loss. *Studies of Familiar Birds* explores, through elegy, ekphrasis, and ode, the tender affections for family and nature. Whether it is the nineteenth-century egg-and-nest illustrations of Genevieve and Virginia Jones, the avid gaze upon commonplace birds, or the remembrance of the poet's own beloved father, this collection of poems creates an aviary of light. Green writes with such grace and skill that the reader can't help but feel both the ache of having lost and the joy of having loved. I will return to this book again and again as it "teach[es] us to sing our grief." —Amy Fleury, author of *Sympathetic Magic* Birds are the embodiment of freedom; unconstrained by terrestrial limitations, they lift effortlessly into the sky, forming a feathery link between Heaven and earth. People who have been visited by angels report they have bird wings. After losing her father to cancer, Carrie Green felt a kinship with Virginia Jones who endeavored to put her grief into concrete form by completing the drawings of nests and eggs for the book her daughter had just begun before she died in 1879. With words chosen as carefully as birds select components for a nest, *Studies of Familiar Birds* masterfully intertwines Carrie's insight into Virginia's griefwork with memories of her father and descriptions of altered photographs from Sara Angelucci's *Aviary* series, which merges images of endangered birds with anonymous nineteenth-century portraits. —Joy M. Kiser, author of *America's Other Audubon* We associate poets with birds: they mourn, call, cry, warn, and fly to places the gravity-bound human body can only follow with ear, eye, and heart.

Weaving accounts of winged things into unique receptacles for grief and praise ["But surely we all know/ this nest. We've found it/ in our coffee cans, / in our barns and privies—/ inside all our little caves/ of emptiness, mundane as pockets/ or a child's boot forgotten/ by the back door" ("House Wren")], Green resists the temptation to anthropomorphize, honoring in her animal subjects their inimitable features, instincts, capacities, and wildness. Her archive is the warp and weft of the world's remnants, "whether/ silk or weed stem,/ velvet or vine," garnering from them wisdom on how to survive life's losses and to sing despite them. —Lisa Russ Spaar, author of *Orexia* ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Carrie Green earned her MFA at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana, and has received grants from the Kentucky Foundation for Women, the Kentucky Arts Council, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts. Her poems have appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poetry Northwest*, *River Styx*, *Flyway*, *Blackbird*, *Cave Wall*, *DIAGRAM*, and elsewhere.

*Greed: A Confession* showcases D.R. Goodman's honed sensitivity to the human experience and the natural world around us. Her sensible scientific background melds with a meditative outlook: "this// is a vertebra/ from a cow./ It will win no prize./ It is just the childish wonder/ from which the rest derives." This collection is a wellspring of keen observations, insight and secrets of nature, freely spilling out for those greedy for knowledge and enlightenment—as in the immediacy of "a certain joy/ that depends on nothing" and "wraps a tightness around your heart." Here is a masterfully crafted finalist for the 2013 Able Muse Book Award—one brimming with delight, wit and insight. PRAISE FOR GREED: A CONFESSION I feel incredibly fortunate to have learned of D. R. Goodman's poetry. Her technical control and powers of observation are extraordinary; diction, meter, and rhyming, superb. Writing about an egret, she details its "mind,/ a laser-focused eye, the weight of will"—attributes that apply equally to the poet. In "Autumn in a Place Without Winter," she says, "The season brings/ no clarity, but this: we're here, alive. . . ." This poet is alive to everything. You want this book. It's terrific. —Kelly Cherry Goodman is greedy for things of this world—not in the rapacious, bottom-line manner of plutocrats, misers, and Wall Street brokers but for the enlightenment of the senses and the enrichment of her poetry. She's sharing the wealth she accumulates. —John Drury (from the foreword) At the core of *Greed: A Confession* are natural ironies, or disjunctures, or improbabilities replete with intrigue. The poems are frames through which we view the events. D.R. Goodman is a scientist of natural history, which, for her, includes human experience. The poet shows us how to see. The deep pleasure she

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takes in the process displays itself, with characteristic irony, in “A Certain Joy.” —Clive Matson D.R. Goodman’s carefully crafted poems register a deep appreciation of the intricate meanings emanating from Nature’s tangible riches. “Depth cannot hide” from Goodman’s keen eye. “And so it flutters, sings,/ Betrays itself upon the face of things.” From the sudden appearance of a hundred tiny, freshly metamorphosed frogs, to ginkgo leaves’ brilliant, moonlit gold that “spurs imagination to those old/ heroic, dangerous quests of greed and sin,” the wondrous wealth of existence evokes joy that compels the poet to confess her “greed” in the presence of such good fortune. Even the blithe partake of a “certain joy”—certain: particular and definite—that is not attained or stumbled upon; it simply is—the gift of being: “There is a certain joy/ that depends on nothing./ One inhabits it./ It is there in the day/ when you walk out, whether chill and gray/ or magnified by light, and you inhale it.” Complex yet accessible, these formal and free-verse poems gift us with abundant insights to enjoy. —Beth Houston

Aaron Poochigian’s prizewinning second collection of poetry, *Manhattanite*, is by turns frenzied and focused. It examines New York’s juxtaposed symbols of towering achievement and monumental desolation, and then traverses the country to California’s Central Valley, where the poet reclaims his grandparents’ home. Poochigian consistently entertains, whether his theme is lamentation or celebration—a grizzled urban pigeon (scavenging for “the sort of faith/ that holds for here and now and vibes like song”) or an Ohio wind turbine (an “ungatherable/ iron flower” seen “juggling . . . / three arms’ worth/ of gale-force wind”). *Manhattanite* is, deservedly, the winner of the 2016 Able Muse Book Award. PRAISE FOR MANHATTANITE: In *Manhattanite*, Aaron Poochigian takes on the role of American flâneur for the twenty-first century, drifting through the frenetic metropolis at a dreamer’s planetary pace. This collection is a celebration of exuberant melancholy, or melancholy exuberance, slick lyric cum urbane pastoral. —A. E. Stallings (from the foreword), 2016 Able Muse Book Award judge

*Manhattanite* gives us the Manhattan of speed chess players in the park, tipsy tipplers tipping off the rooftops, the night sky bright with city light, tenants, tenements and supers. Aaron Poochigian is the poet in New York seeking a holy aura in the song of gunshots and spiral sirens, picking like a grizzled pigeon through stray newspapers, bottles, bags, and candy wrappers for a scrap of religion. Each poem is a tower growing out of our human filth and scraping the sky with sky-lines, and together they build a city of words. Put New York in your pocket. It’s inside this book. —Tony Barnstone

Reading Aaron Poochigian’s *Manhattanite* is a dynamic, kinetic experience. These poems travel at a fast clip, pulling you along through cityscapes, wastelands, and other vistas. Some of the poems tunnel downward, plumbing depths of mood and memory. Whichever way they move, Poochigian’s poems perform with such panache and brio that it’s hard to know whether to laugh or cry. I’d say do both—and keep reading. But be warned: this isn’t a feel-good book. It’s a fearless book. —Rachel Hadas

Thoreau once boasted that he had traveled widely in Concord; Aaron Poochigian’s title indicates that he has traveled widely elsewhere—in the one borough worth experiencing, through western deserts, aboard “an ultra-modern train/ lipping through French or German woods,” and in a Paris of naked bulbs and seedy cabarets. In all of these settings, he deftly choreographs his cast of nameless characters. The concluding lines of “Song: Go and Do It” claim, “I’ll still swear/ we could be happy anywhere.” One sure location of that “anywhere” exists between the covers of *Manhattanite*. —R. S. Gwynn

In Sally Thomas’s *Motherland*, the poet keenly observes the ephemeral and the everlasting in the lens of time—the daily into seasonal transformations, the gifts and wonders of nature and people. *Motherland* by turns hails and interrogates in matters of flesh, of faith and spirituality—especially so in the “Richeldis of Walsingham” poem sequence. This finalist in the Able Muse Book Award is a collection abounding in insight, hope, grace, surprises, and yes, love. PRAISE FOR MOTHERLAND: A core of spiritual knowledge resides in the poems of Sally Thomas’s *Motherland*—knowledge that might seem strange to the poet herself, in fact, though it definitely resides in her, and radiates

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throughout this collection. Motherland is the perfect title, since the poet, herself a mother, regards all her human occupations as native and yet mysterious, occurring in a place which is both foreign and familiar. The final sequence, on Richeldis of Walsingham, includes lines that describe the expression of that knowledge, as “the eloquence/ Of the small river moving always forward to the unseen/ Sea.” Motherland is a book of the presence-radiant, benevolent, challenging-for which there is often no word, except as we find in poetry, like the poetry of Sally Thomas.” -Mark Jarman, author of *The Heronry* The poems of Sally Thomas are poems in which the act of looking at the world in all its depth and complexity is just about as close as possible to being fully realized in the corresponding “world” of poetic language and form. And the verses are compelling because in every line something is at stake: our very understanding of creation, the human condition, and the mystery of thought and its language that link us, however imperfectly, to what may be called the given world. As Thomas says in “Frost,” “Tricky winter light and my own eye/ Bend the world, if not to beauty, then/ To strangeness.” -David Middleton (from the foreword), author of *The Fiddler of Driskill Hill* In her most recent collection of poems, *Motherland*, Sally Thomas gives us a world we live in but, alas, too often don’t seem to see. So much is lost, these poems tell us, even as they manage to reinstate and re-imagine these losses for us. All poetry is elegiac, even as it can, in the hands of a serious poet, celebrate the very world which for all of us keeps slipping away in the great wheel of time. Then too there is her mastery of poetic form-among these the sonnet, the villanelle, the couplet, and her unparalleled command of rhyme and slant rhyme. What a delight to discover a poet who has found a way to allow the sacred and the sacramental inform her poems in a surprising range of contemporary idioms. -Paul Mariani, author of *Epitaphs for the Journey* ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sally Thomas was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1964, and was educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Memphis, and the University of Utah. She spent some years living in the American West and in Great Britain before settling in North Carolina, her current home. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Fallen Water* (2015) and *Richeldis of Walsingham* (2016), both from Finishing Line Press. Over the last two decades, her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Dappled Things*, *First Things*, *Relief: A Journal of Art and Faith*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *the New Yorker*, *the Rialto*, and other journals in the United States and Great Britain.

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