

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY PRESENTS

VOICES

THE 2019 DYER-IVES
POETRY COMPETITION

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition

This year we celebrate the 51st anniversary of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition, which was initiated in 1968 by poet James Allen at the urging of John Hunting, the founder of the Dyer-Ives Foundation. Its mission is to encourage excellence in writing and provide recognition for local work of high quality.

In 2016, the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition became a program of the Grand Rapids Public Library and is funded by the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation—Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund. It is the dedication and talent of our local community members, who are committed to dedicating their time and energy to the discovery of new and upcoming talent, that helps make this contest a significant annual literary event.

The Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition is free to enter every February for residents and students in Kent County and culminates in a reading ceremony during Festival of the Arts every June. The competition is divided into three categories, and winners and honorable mentions are published in *Voices*. First, second, and third place winners also receive cash prizes.

We are pleased to unveil a new look for this year's *Voices* and all competition materials. A special thank you to Hannah Snow for taking my colorful ideas and designing the beautiful and artistic publication you're holding.

I'd like to give a special thank you to Anne Keller, Abby Zwart, and Steve Tuit for their efforts to bring poetry to the classroom and to Brianne Carpenter and everyone at Creative Youth Center for their after-school literary programming for students.

Past coordinators include Walter Lockwood, Philip Jung, Larry Manglitz, Barbara Saunier, Patty Bridges, Kimberly Wyngarden, Mursalata Muhammad, and Christine Stephens Krieger.

A special thank you to this year's preliminary judges: Brianne Ross, David Cope, and Lamont Arrington.

A nationally known poet completes the final judging of our poetry submissions and determines the prize winners. Past judges include Anne Sexton, X.J. Kennedy, Robert Creeley, James Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Bly, William Stafford, Naomi Shihab Nye, Herb Scott, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Billy Collins, Alicia Ostriker, Patricia Clark, Linda Nemecek Foster, Mark Doty, and Azizi Jasper.

Many thanks to 2019's hardworking and thoughtful national judge, Nancy Huang.

Lastly, all of this would not have been possible without the dedication, organization, experience, and friendship of Kristen Krueger-Corrado.

On behalf of everyone whose work was published, read, and celebrated, thank you for making this happen! Now let's get to the poetry!

With gratitude,
Kelsey May

Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition, 2019 Coordinator

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First Division

Grief

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Empty Journal

Alissa Vezikov

Grief

Grieve,
Dear child
Every time you lose
A bit of purity, ever so mild
And a drop of innocence

Mourn of your sorrows,
My darling
Every time you break in two
By the pressure, smirking and snarling
At imperfection

Lay awake,
My sisters and brothers,
Fear the loss of fragility
Of hope and peace and every other
Being stolen from under you

Lament,
My dears,
For the small had that has held onto you,
Gripping with a spear
Removing beauty slowly

And for the children,
Not yet lost in deceit
Not yet drowning in disgrace –
Hold onto your innocent heat;
And never,
never
let go
But for those that have forgotten,
Or never have been told
Mourn, my beloved
For the innocence you no longer hold
Grieve

Zoey Jackson

Weird Love

My weird Brother,
Is as Weird as weird can be.

My weird Brother,
I Love as Much as can Be.

So you see,

Love is as important as weird can be.

Dia Sriram

A Man's Love

Love is the foundation of the world
Man loves the World
And World loves the man

Man loves
Every wave from the sea,
Every cloud in the sky,
Every leaf on the tree,
Every truth and lie

Man loves
Every friend,
Every enemy,
Every daughter and son,
Every grotesque and bellamy

Man loves
Every Priest
Every Preacher
Every Drunkard
Every Teacher

The Gurus and Saints
Bless Him
The Demons and Devils
Mess him
But the Gods and Lords
Press him –
To love all

Corbin DeVilbiss

Broken Crayons Still Color

Broken crayons still color
No matter where you are in life,
you can still shine a brilliant color
Whole, cracked, or snapped,
you can still color
You can color love and happiness
fulfilled hopes and dreams
and eventually when you can't color anymore
and the end of the crayon is used,
you memory will still shine
through photos left behind

Stella BooydeGraaff

Empty Journal

a poem on my mental health disorder

I would write about how I'm feeling
but I'm scared of the words

I would write about why I'm feeling it
but I'm scared of the answer

I would write a poem
but what is a poem without the words I'm too scared to find

Second Division

Hawk Island Girl

A Series of Self Portraits

Dear lack of space
between my thighs

Jesus Disguises Himself,
Lower Peninsula

Old Country Buffet is a Coffin

Aliya Hall

Hawk Island Girl

After Eve L. Ewing's "to the notebook kid"

Quick change Girl
one hand out of your shirt
one leg out of your shorts
pulling the water suit over your neck Girl.
Ssssliding the rusted white van door open
Hot sss Hot Hot Girl
bouncing from foot to foot like a pogo stick Girl.
Laughter on the playground
smiles arriving on faces,
running to the worn-out tire,
dragging momma by the fingers Girl.
Chills going down your back swimming like a fish Girl.
Free Girl.
Underwater with silence
it brings you peace Girl.
Ropes trying to stop you
green water grass slime all over you
gets scared of every moment Girl.
Volley ball pit stings with hit,
thumps on the water pad,
bikes swooshing past
the wind whistles in your ears Girl.
Girl surrounded by so much but yet is so little
so amazed Girl.
Lunch under the roof at the holey tables
dropping chips for the birds to snack
Girl.
Fingers get stuck in the crack Girl
running to be back in the water
back to the green grass slime
back to dragging momma by the fingertips.
It's time to leave Girl.
We will be back again
but we have to let the hawk
sleep on its island.

A Series of Self Portraits

For LKN

I. after Two Young Girls at the Piano

I pictured us there: my sister
 playing, me looking on. Their painted
faces more beautiful than I could imagine being. My hair,
 the color of wheat or sunset,
tied with blue. My sister's, the color of dying leaves,
 slipping from its bow, and I knew
she would never want to be seen like this—
 captured as a representation of an idealistic
homelife—we tried to be heard, and still, no one
 listened to us through the thick layer
of oil paint, tacky, then drying.

II. after Enigma, Op. 36: IX. Nimrod

The music I hear at funerals is the same my sister played on viola
 when we were young. The silken notes. The sage burning.
I see my grandmother in front of a coffin. Flowers
 and fake grass. We drop roses, one by one, to the earth.

III. after Acrobats at the Cirque Fernando

Standing at the edge of an empty museum, I realized
 I didn't know anyone at all—not the acrobats or dancers
in Degas' paintings. The tissue-wrapped oranges
 that lay at their feet. I only wanted applause—I had spent hours
searching for ideas that I had never truly believed even existed.

IV. after Allegan, Michigan

Here, I praise the cinnamon cider
 hot in styrofoam cups. The horses on the racetrack. How I learn
to place my palm
 flat enough to feed them. My ribs

slow as the night cleared. The tractor stopping
 in the soy field after a long, hot August
of work. What else seemed

like joy to me, then, but falling asleep
 in the backseat of a beaten car,
dimming the highway light.

Emily Ferrara

Dear lack of space between my thighs

why do you force me to feel
the chugging motion of my molars, the sickening
crackle of calories and potato chip dust? My jaw strains
with the chore of three meals a day.
If eating is so good, why does it exhaust me? The excess

energy festers; I want to burn it
out of my circuitry.

When the house turns dark, I hook my feet
under the bed like a trapeze.

I crunch out the folds of skin from my abdomen.
The wood of the bedframe slices
abstractions into my ankles.

I collapse under my mother's
worried glances at the ceramic dinner plate;
chicken breasts are cut into sixteenths,
the spaghetti strands added one-by-one. Who knew
the only prerequisite to wasting away is to be good at math?

My skeleton gawks at itself in a mirror
cloaked in a thick layer of shower steam.
Could I still be beautiful in a hospital
gown? What a terrible place to exist in, not because of the food
forced down your raw, clenching throat, but because you know
you'll never be as skinny as the feeding tube.

Joseph Felkers

Jesus Disguises Himself, Lower Peninsula

After Brad Trumpfheller

Three times I have seen the angel at the Bigby Coffee on Wealthy.
Oversized fleece and gray sweatpants. Local news on the TV.

So drunk Joseph likes to leave clues: a stolen spoon in the pillowcase
notes written like cigs are on your dresser, sorry about the glasses.

and I know we all hate poems about cigarettes, myself included, but at the lit end
someone watches

Minutes after the news aired about yr missing cousin a woman named Morgan
finds u in
aisle 4 & can tell you where her body is for free. No promises it's breathing.

Grandma's church in a rented out basement. Mildew stains. Cinderblock bathrooms.
Jesus disguises himself somewhere in the green velvet curtains.

Angel told me it was crazy, OJ getting released. She says she remembers the case

like it was yesterday and I was applying for colleges and Angel told me I needed
a lesson
in relaxation. His bare ass against my chest like I wanted it.

Watch for deer is how he tells me he loves me. One moment, safety,
the next, red for dead.

Nearly empty wine glass left out to catch the flies. Jumps out
like it's a surprise party, dented bumper just for you.

He teaches us in ways we wouldn't expect.

How many bodies floating in Lake Michigan?
All free to love, free to fall.

Tyler Fleser

Old Country Buffet is a Coffin

For Demetrius McKnight, 1994-2018

I wish I remembered more. I wish I remembered the taste of sitting
across from a boy who'd end up in a lake, face down. In our youth,

before storms of condolence, his father poured grace over bad sausage
to stomach it. The table and I bowed our heads.

Job showed storms are good whether your son dies. Whether
Little D liked his nickname, I don't know, but I do know

the investigation was like lightning — bombastically nonchalant.
"You know they would have searched longer for you" said even Bill-O'Reilly-

loving grandma. Little D was carbon because carbon is everything.
Job would agree. I pray *thankyoufors* and *forgivemefors*

so I can think of everything besides God. I wish I hurt more,
but greasy indigestion I sometimes call mourning is buried

in my cemetery called childhood.
Maybe I'll have the right tears

if Little D walks out of the lake
holding Job's hand, then I'll miss him.

I'll believe in fathers' Sunday hands reaching for
dead sons. I'll dig with a shovel called prayer

—bleed my tongue dry
trying to taste carbon.

Amen,
amen.

Third Division

Bed Bath

Congregations

Mourning

February 1st

Eastern Hognose

Lisa Gundry

Bed Bath

"And thus do I commend thee into the arms of our Creator."

—from the prayer of Last Rites

I fill a basin with water, warm, and carry it to his bedside. Using both hands, I squeeze the washcloth, releasing the excess water. I wrap the cloth around one hand, gloveless now, for my father, and start, as I was taught, with his face.

I swipe gently, over one eye, then the other. I reposition the cloth and move over his forehead and along his hairline. I wipe across his cheeks and over his nose. Using a fingertip, I wash away the tape residue from his feeding tube, now gone.

The monitor sits perched above us. Where once it had offered reassurance, its screen is now dark. I rinse the cloth, wrap it around my hand and continue. I clean his chin and around his mouth and lips, now slack.

I wash his neck and around his tracheotomy. The ventilator, now silent, sits in the corner. I rinse the cloth, let the water trickle into the basin. I turn his head carefully to one side, clean first one ear and then the other.

The hearing aids he's used since a childhood illness now sit in a drawer. I wash along the line of staples running down his sternum, and clean around the tiny black knots that once secured his chest tube, remnants from his heart surgery.

I rinse the cloth, wrap it around my hand and continue over his yellowed and rounded stomach and along his hips. The basin water, too, is tinged yellow, the color leaching from his skin, because of his failed liver.

I rinse, wrap my hand, and clean his right arm, using a light touch over the plum bruises. I take his hand in mine and clean it. I see again, those two fingers, scarred as a teen, from a fall through a plate glass window.

His legs are swollen now, nothing like his own, because his kidneys shut down. I wash his right leg and find at his ankle the long, wide scar from a fracture he sustained after falling from a ladder while painting.

I walk around the bed and bathe his other foot and leg. At his arm, I wash away the dried blood from the venipuncture marks. IV pumps with clear liquids line the wall, medications that are no longer needed.

I reach over him and pull him toward me, up onto his side. I rinse the cloth, wrap it around my hand and wash across his shoulders and along his back— where once there was enough strength to build our family home.

I reposition him on his back, place his arms gently at his sides. I dip a comb into the basin then slide it through his grayed hair, smoothing it down. At the sink, I empty the basin and set it aside. I wash my hands, then pat them dry.

From a pile of fresh linen on the chair, I find a crisp, white sheet. I hold it over his body, using the pressed lines as a guide — the center seam, down his center. I unfold it, one seam at time, until he is covered.

Kat Neis

Congregations

Hushed in a Michigan congregation, I said, *someday I will be holy or whole*. Someday the church will rip open

its dome and there will be birds in the shape of a god. Twenty years later, I am in Marseille, a city marble

and gold, *Notre-Damede la Garde* perched on the highest point, the Mediterranean a cloth of blue below. The mother

I am visiting takes off her aviators to study the ceiling and it is then I see she is crying. Always, she tells me.

It is just too beautiful for words. Now, in Michigan, miles from Marseille, I recall her rapture, the metallic echoing

of the cathedral all around our bodies. Dust accruing under cuticles, hymnals shelving their melodies between

our ribs. When I open my mouth to speak any language— English, French, Gaelic—the notes begin to swell sharp

and flat at once. *Am I not holy now at last?* Some semblance of doubt or of devotion—or simply

an inclination of the skull and palms towards the dome of the basilica littered with starlings congregating

in their own shrines. What I mean to say is
they too have lost their way.

Shelley Townsend-Hudson

Mourning

(For My Adopted Daughter)

You were on my lap, Ming vase,
fragile, dirty ankles and spindly arms
crying like all the other orphans in
the crowded hallway being handed over
to the arms of strangers with odd smells

foreign tongues, blanched hair
Everything changed like a dream
with a missing detail that if only
conjured could unlock the past
Though we returned home, China

would be like wind playing spy, whisking
open doors, slamming them shut.
Like the mourning dove whose song
retrieves distance across the roof,
what you needed to understand

was a window never receiving the sun.
I could not open blinds or push back curtains
to lighten panes. House noises, once love
songs to me, ceased, and as soon
as my foot touched the floor again

the walls awoke and the dream became hollow
We pressed on, caught in crosswinds,
tumbling in strained dynamics and your rage
But out of our home, wherever you went, your molecules
whirled in ecstasy, boundaries no longer

begrudged you, faces, friendly, curious, intrusive
(by my account) beguiled you into believing
you were the child of everyone by merely
lifting your now chubby arms. It worked.
Your charm was a kind of truth,

yet outward appearance is a cloud
before the soul's eye. Like Van Gogh's
cypresses were sadness hides, yours
and mine, you would find me waiting like
a small fire in the clearing. Never

the true mother like your secret one,
but one from whom you'd receive
transfusions. Anger broke attunement,
but reconnection brought new life,
and through the other we became

what we were born for. On the Great Wall
of China uneven stones forced me
to drop to all-fours, Mongolia undulating
along the horizon. Graffiti scratched
in stone, I could not decipher

I never knew how lost I was,
all my life, unknown terrain
from Dandong to Lop Lake,
how risky the path was, until vertigo
insisted, Arise. Be Alive

We are still in the holding room,
five of us, you, me, your father, two sisters:
a stronger circle to be lost in. Something more
than had been known before comforts us.
And we will not let you go.

Win Frederick

February 1st

1.
I've already begun
extending the lease
12 months within 14 hours
And in the blue light of my hand
You say *that's the kind of place
you fall in love with*
And allow me this
happiness

2.
There is a recession coming
And if we are lucky,
There will only be metal cranes
Suspended in sky

This time,
Not planes
Disposing napalm
To set Americana on fire
Burning everything alive

3.
I have this bit of crowd work
That I'd like to do
Where I ask a white person
their name
And when they reply,
Steven,
I'd tilt my head and say back
Wow that's so beautiful
What does it mean
in your language?

And when they say,
Kristen, I'd smile and ask them
To say it again
Before shaping my mouth
Into the purposefully mispronounced
Kersten? Karstan? Kristmas?
But I am not a comic

4.
And when I tell you
I have a hard time holding down a job,
I mean that jobs can't quite seem to hold me down

And when you say,
The men in our family
Seem to have a hard time with jobs
I wonder if I were meant to be a boy
And you just willed me into your form
But you are not a novelist or playwright
who would write something so dramatic

5.
And when I say this apartment
Has abundant natural light
You are fixated on my glow,
A glimmer in your foggy eyes
But the only thing I am carrying is the weight
of generations and we both know

There is a recession coming
And the man that I married and I
Have already begun calling this thing
Home, and our love is safe and sweet
Like an egg in a cupped palm,
Just itching to hatch
Exactly as you always wanted
Not away from home, at home

Jane Wheeler

Eastern Hognose

Raking leaf litter from
under the paddock gate
I turn over a small snake
still sleepy with winter,
who tries to tunnel
under the leaves
like my son at his other
house across town
who not yet awake,
burrows deeper
beneath his quilt
believing six thirty
is too early
to ready for school.
Cupping its coils
in my hands, I slide
it into a mason jar
with bits of grass and dirt
to wait his return,
when we will locate
Audubon's Field Guide
and investigate
together
the fake bravado
of the puff adder,
this imitation cobra
who rises
hissing and feinting,
head butting its foe
before it rolls over
as if dead,
doggedly out-waiting
the storm.

National Judge

Nancy Huang

Nancy Huang grew up in America and China. She is a winner of the 2016 Write Bloody Poetry Chapbook contest, an Andrew Julius Gutow Academy of American Poets Prize, a James F. Parker Award in Poetry, a 2015 YoungArts Finalist prize, and more. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vinyl*, *Bodega Magazine*, *TRACK//FOUR*, *Winter Tangerine Review*, *The Shade Journal*, and others. She is an alum of the Iowa Writer's Workshop summer graduate session and a VONA, Tin House, and Pink Door fellow. Her debut poetry collection, *Favorite Daughter*, is out by Write Bloody Publishing.

Preliminary Judges

Lamont Arrington

Lamont Arrington won the 2018 Adult Division of the Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition. His zine, "Lighting Up Grand Rapids," is available at Vault of Midnight. You can follow him on Instagram at @arrimonogatari.

David Cope

Former Grand Rapids Poet Laureate David Cope just returned from the Suining International Poetry Week in Sichuan, China, where he was the only American poet among a group of poets from China and across the globe. Cope has published seven books of poetry and spent last year promoting his new and selected poems, *The Invisible Keys*, on the east coast. He has edited and published over 200 poets in Big Scream over the past 45 years, and his papers are archived at the University of Michigan Special Collections Library.

Brianne Ross

Brianne Ross is a local spoken word artist that performs around Grand Rapids often and hosts the weekly open mic Creston Vibes on Tuesdays.

Judges' Comments

FIRST DIVISION

First Place

"Grief" treats its reader so tenderly. The speaker has such a kind voice! "My sisters and brothers" and "my dears" tells us that this is a poem written for a community. The reason for grief is never mentioned, but we don't need it to be. This poem has a strong emotional core. —Nancy Huang

Second Place

"Weird Love" works a little like a math problem! There are two outcomes for the "weird Brother" and they both fit together perfectly in the last line. I also like how the writer experimented with capitalization; some words, I could tell, are more important than others. —Nancy Huang

Third Place

"A Man's Love" has a lot of complication. The words "grotesque" and "bellamy" in the same line are so interesting to me. The rhyme pattern is unique, and towards the end the lines become like a song. —Nancy Huang

Honorable Mentions

"Broken Crayons Still Color" stuck me as very endearing and optimistic. It reminds me of the charm and determination young kids have when they fall off their bike for the first time and decide to get back on and try again. Even though it was simplistic, it has the depth for anyone reading it to have a perspective on it and apply it to their life. —Brienne Ross

"Empty Journal" pries at the emotional turmoil that often accompanies mental health issues. It's relatable and empathetic; I nod my head in acknowledgement while reading this poem. —Kelsey May, Coordinator

SECOND DIVISION

First Place

"Hawk Island Girl" blew me away because it broke so many rules; the daring ssss sound following Hot Hot, the noise and bouncing of words. I loved the way Girl seems alive and real, and the way the "you" is so tender when addressing Girl. There is something very ode-like in this piece, and the ending lets the reader off the hook so peaceably. —Nancy Huang

Second Place

"A Series of Self Portraits" was a very interesting tour of ekphrastic poetry: the paintings, the music, even the place. There was a smooth transition from section to section: painting to song to dancers to setting. Oranges are tissue-wrapped; ribs are slow. This poem is very generous and gives us so much. —Nancy Huang

Third Place

"Dear lack of space between my thighs" is a testimony to the violence enacted on a body. There is so much brilliant body in this piece: "chugging motion of molars" and "sickening/crackle of calories" are lines that made me flinch. The writer's skeleton "gawks at itself" and envies its own feeding tube. This piece is gothic and stays in my brain long after reading. —Nancy Huang

Honorable Mentions

"Jesus Disguises Himself, Lower Peninsula" shows a narrator struggling with the decadence of our world, wherein the figures of his religion appear disguised in one surreal scene after another. We learn that "He teaches us in ways we wouldn't expect." —David Cope

"Old Country Buffet is a Coffin" was extremely visual, which was very necessary to carry the dark message of the piece. It's difficult to paint such a great picture at a young age with striking descriptions of the details in items found in everyday life. Taking something as familiar as a well know serve-yourself haven and casting a shadow over it isn't hard to do, but it's barely about that place at all and more so about what that place represents now to the writer. Well done. —Brienne Ross

THIRD DIVISION

First Place

"Bed Bath" is an itinerary to grief and mourning. I am in awe of how the speaker takes complete inventory of their father's body, mapping all the bruises, veins, and old injuries. The ending haunts; there is no real resolution, an echo of how mourning works off the page. Not once does the speaker delve into how the ritual affects them, and it's not needed—reliving the movements is enough. —Nancy Huang

Second Place

"Congregations" is an interesting non-linear poem. The way time operates in this piece intrigued me, along with the skilled imagery. "Dust accruing under cuticles" and "hymnals shelving their melodies between our ribs" are beautiful ways that language manifests the body. The speaker's internal struggle is also articulated beautifully with the opening line. This poem is very skillfully rendered.

— Nancy Huang

Third Place

"Mourning" is a complicated poem navigating belonging and love. China is a character with agency in this poem, doing things like "wind playing spy, whisking / open doors, slamming them shut." The speaker talks about anger and reconnections all at once and actively questions the role that physical place plays in family. —Nancy Huang

Honorable Mentions

"Eastern Hognose" is a tightly written poem in which a sleepy hognose snake reminds the parent of her own son, at home in bed. She catches the snake so that she and her son may understand the snake's defensive behaviors—a parental gesture of love. The poem ends on a hopeful note, the snake "doggedly out-waiting the storm" as if to suggest that such survivors will live and go free. —David Cope

"February 1st" is an elegantly written poem with lines like "There will be only metal cranes / Suspended in sky" and "[T]he only thing I am carrying is the weight of generations." The different sections give the impression that the speaker is struggling to overcome both self-esteem and family issues and cope with societal stressors like war; in the midst of it all, I smile knowing they have found happiness in their relationship, "at home."

—Kelsey May, Coordinator

Dyer-Ives Poetry Competition Guidelines

The annual contest is open to Kent County residents ages 5 through adult and students who are attending Kent County Schools, including GVSU and Kent ISD. Winners selected in three age categories have their poems published in *Voices*, receive a cash award, and participate in a reading during the Festival of the Arts in June, held at the Main Library.

Divisions and Awards

First Division – Kindergarten through Eighth Grade:

1st Place: \$100, 2nd Place: \$75, 3rd Place: \$50

Second Division – High School through Undergraduate:

1st Place: \$125, 2nd Place: \$100, 3rd Place: \$75

Third Division – Graduate Student through Adult:

1st Place: \$150, 2nd Place: \$125, 3rd Place: \$100

Submitting a Poem

- Poems accepted every February.
- Free to enter.
- All ages.
- One original and unpublished poem per person will be accepted.
- Poems must be typed.
- Poems accepted via mail, email, or hand delivery to the Main Library.

For complete guidelines, visit grpl.org/dyer-ives.



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FOUNDATION

Dyer-Ives Foundation Poetry Fund