Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

2014 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Finalists

Cultural Daily · Thursday, October 2nd, 2014

We are proud to announce the finalists of the 2nd annual Cultural Weekly poetry contest, now officially called the Jack Grapes Poetry Prize. Our Poetry Editor, Alexis Rhone Fancher, explains the process of choosing the winning poems.

Our seven finalists (in alphabetical order) are:

Megan Dobkin, “Anthem For The Open-Hearted”
Peter Gordon, “Pantheon”
Shira Hereld, “Photographs of Me and My Mother”
Holly Hunt, “Alfalfa”
Cece Peri, “Why Dish Ran Away with Her Spoon”
Scott Silsbe, “Pinball, 1983”
John Smith, “Bullfights (for Valerie)”

The top three poems were published in last week’s edition of Cultural Weekly.

Our thanks to everyone that entered, or even thought about entering. Next year’s contest (July 1, 2015 – August 31, 2015) promises to be extraordinary, so stay tuned. And thanks to everyone who reads the poetry we publish at Cultural Weekly. A poet without an appreciative audience would be lonely, indeed.

Enjoy the seven finalists.

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Anthem for the Open-Hearted by Megan Dobkin

If you are looking
for a girl with a journal
I’m not her.
If I was supposed to go
through the 35mm phase
then I could be undeveloped.
If you search my walls
for foreign prints
of Betty Blue and Breakfast at Tiffany’s

then you very well may find me blank.

If the unavailable makes you show up
and survivalism makes you feel alive
and no makes your yes
and the cold makes you pant
and pushing pulls you in
and fortresses make you charge
and locking away cracks you wide open
if you crave a part of me you can never own
a part that will keep you
looking
guessing
chasing
if fear of hurt makes you hungry
then I guess I am just not for you.

For sometimes what
follows a seven-course meal
is an even greater hunger
and I am so very full.

Megan Dobkin spent fifteen years as a film and television producer/executive, working with writers on such films as Girl,Interrupted; The Recruit; Walk The Line; The Vow; and the two middle films of the Scream franchise. Now she stares at her own damn blinking cursor. Her poetry and flash fiction have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies including: ***The McNeese Review, Word Riot, Crack The Spine, Rind Literary Journal, The Los Angeles Review of Los Angeles, Literary Orphans,*** *and* ***The Missing Slate****. Her piece "Night Waking" (seen in Chrome Baby) is a 2014 "Best Of The Net" nominee. She is currently finishing her first novel-in-stories. She also develops projects for and with her husband, filmmaker David Dobkin (best known for his film Wedding Crashers and his upcoming The Judge). When she is not writing, she is fielding tough Star Wars questions from the two criminals who live in the backseat of her car. She graduated with degrees in English and Cultural Anthropology from Kenyon College and is a long time member of the Los Angeles Poets and Writers Collective. You can read more of her work at megandobkin.com.*

Pantheon by Peter Gordon

I am the god of Love
when I shoot arrows at barstools
making matches for the lonely.

I am the god of Wisdom
when I know the Jeopardy questions
to every answer.

I am the god of Wine
when I find a quality
five dollar bottle in the bargain bin

I am the god of Death
when I spare the humble ladybug but
shepherd my father and mother

from their apartment to a nursing home
overlooking the River Styx
provide them pennies for the boatman.

Propitiate me.

Peter M. Gordon's first collection of poetry, Two Car Garage, was published in 2012 by CHB Media. His poems have appeared in Slipstream, The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature, 34th Parallel, Provo Canyon Review, Poetry Breakfast, and several other anthologies and websites. Peter is President of Orlando Area Poets, a chapter of the Florida State Poets Association, and teaches poetry workshops for the Florida Writer's Association. He has over 30 years experience creating content ranging from live theater to digital video for media companies including HBO, PBS and NBC. He moved to Orlando in 1994 to launch Golf Channel as its first Director of Programming, and created the content and program plans that enabled the channel to grow from startup to a value of over $1 billion. He holds a BA from Yale and an MFA from Carnegie-Mellon, and teaches directing for Full Sail University's Film Production MFA program. He blogs about content creation at www.myprogramidea.blogspot.com and still lives in Orlando, Florida.

Photographs of Me and My Mother by Shira Hereld

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    I
we smile.  real joy,
teased out of us; laughing father's
finger obscures half the frame
Mommy holds me – a brand new doll.

    II
my sister and i flank her like pillars
a frozen monument;
her hands clutch my back
with desperate, iron-burned fingers.

    III
here, cousin Davey,
splayed across our laps.
my lips taut as safety cable:
two months before Davey will write me
how my breasts poke through my nightshirt,
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three years before he disappears from our photos.

    IV
alone, Mother and I –
her skin translucent as a cave frog;
my eyes far, far away, staring into a world
where I don’t call dad on Thanksgiving
from grandma’s mildewy bathroom.

    V
alone again. we smile.
graduation dresses, my mother’s arm
a noose around my waist.
a peephole of light shoves between our hips;
both our fingernails bitten to the quick.
    we appear like two strangers, united
    after witnessing some spectacular event:
    a water birth.
        a murder.
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Shira Hereld is a senior at The George Washington University, studying Political Science and Theater. Her poetry has been published in Vine Leaves Literary Magazine, The Baltimore Review, Assisi: An Online Journal of Arts and Letters, and won the Laura Thomas Junior Authors Poetry Contest.

Alfalfa by Holly Hunt

How she despises every syllable
of the word alfalfa.
She sees it spoken from the square
whiskered mouths of driveling cows.
Alfalfa alfalfa they low their mantra
and hooked like a Buddhist on the
rebirth of the mundane, the man’s obsessed
refilling metal stacks with furious grain.
Yet in the barn loft decked with rusty blades
dust-speckled ribbons of watery
daylight seep between the fat boards.
She leans toward the open blue
square with clouds going bye-bye.
If this was a Spanish movie
she would go bye-bye
have an affair
with a motorcycle gang.
If this was an Italian movie

she would fly from the loft and light
on a wind vane a wonder of balance
and see all over the country
one-hundred other farm women
perched on their own roofs waving.
They would rejoice in her acting
all wifey and leading the 4-H girls.
But this is no movie but a season for hay.
She whispers for him to lower the stupid
blade and cut it off short near the root.

Holly Hunt writes poetry and fiction and has published in The Southern Review, Poetry, The Georgia Review, Prairie Schooner and other literary journals. She lives in Vancouver, WA but is from Bismarck, Arkansas, from the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains.

Why Dish Ran Away with Her Spoon by Cece Peri

Blame it on the milky moon
that poured
through the kitchen

casement that night.
Never before had it come
so thick, so fluent.

Never before had it puddled
in your silver bowl,
flowed along

your finely etched handle.
Never before had I felt the rush
of wanting you.

When I called you
to the window, I knew
if you stood beside me

in that light,
saw the curve of my amber patina,
we would run away together,

lie side-by-side on the meadow—
a dew-stained table—
under a thousand-candled sky.

Come again O moon.

O come to the window,
Spoon.

Cece Peri's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Malpais Review, Luvina (Writers of Los Angeles Issue), NoirCon 2010 and 2012, Capital & Main: Words of Fire, Master Class: The Poetry Mystique (Duende Books), Beyond the Lyric Moment (Tebot Bach, 2014), and Wide Awake: The Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond (Beyond Baroque, 2014). Recent awards include poetry prizes from NoirCon 2012 and the Arroyo Arts Collective's Poetry in the Windows Contest 2014. Born and raised in New York City, Cece currently lives, writes, and geocaches in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Pinball, 1983 by Scott Silsbe

Marve's Bar was a basement with a television, a pool table, four stools, and a Star Trek pinball machine. I was 5 years old, but my sister was 9, so she would get pitchers of Bud Light fresh from the tap, sneaking off a sip—mostly of foam—on her way to delivering the pitcher to Marve while I flipped the flippers, sending the flashing silver ball past Uhura with Kirk and Spock looking on from the big bright Bally scoreboard.

The toys were endless—Atari, plastic pin bowling, electric racer cars. And when you were old enough, Marve taught you how to play pool—warning you not to miss the cue ball, explaining how expensive it was to pay for the soft green surface. And when you were older, you could go behind the bar to find the dirty joke books you couldn't understand.

Most of the regulars at Marve's Bar are nowhere to be found anymore. Dottie, Chuck, Marve. And I was just a kid, so I don't even know who all of the regulars were. Those are the ones who mattered to me though. I can still hear traces of those days in my head. Dottie slamming down a card on the kitchen table and screaming with delight. Chuck's laugh that was a funny high-pitched giggle trickling down into hearty cackle. And I can hear Marve making his way from his bar to his workshop, singing, "Hey mister, you better hide your sister 'cause the fleet's in."

Scott Silsbe was born in Detroit and now lives in Pittsburgh. His poems and prose have appeared in numerous periodicals including Third Coast, The Chariton Review, Nerve Cowboy, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. He is the author of two collections of poems—Unattended Fire (Six Gallery Press, 2012) and The River Underneath the City (Low Ghost Press, 2013).

Bullfights (for Valerie) by John Smith

when mom's water broke she yelled for dad

but he didn’t want to leave for the hospital
until the final bull was killed

later mom would say because you were
born premature dad never took her
to see you sleep or cry

then we found out about perception
(not exactly truths – but perception)

yes – dad was watching the bullfights on TV
but it seems he was ready at all times
mom only yelled as the last bull dropped

at the hospital the doctors told mom and dad
there was no reason to hang around
so dad took it to heart

well – he can be hard but you already know that
(he is ice while mom is water)

you turned out fairly normal by American standards
dancing lessons – discovered God
Afghan struggled in your dissertation

hang out with your nephew in airplanes
eat dim sum and spicy pot stickers
care a lot and smile always

but we often wonder about the bullfights
(and mom’s and dad’s fights)

and how we turned out okay when they were insane.

John Claude Smith has had over 60 short stories and 15 poems published, as well as a debut collection of “not your average horror,” The Dark Is Light Enough For Me. His second collection, Autumn in the Abyss, was published by Omnium Gatherum in March of 2014, and is garnering much positive response and reviews. He is presently writing his third novel, while shopping around the other two and putting together a follow-up collection and a poetry chapbook. Busy is good. He splits his time between the East Bay of northern California, across from San Francisco, and Rome, Italy, where his heart resides always.

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