

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## 2017 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Contest: Winners

Cultural Daily · Wednesday, October 11th, 2017

The 5th annual Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Contest was the toughest ever to judge. We received over 600 poems from all over the U.S.A. and abroad! So many truly fine poems; we were hard-pressed to decide on the winners.

Here they are:

**\$250/First Prize:** Lee Rossi “Pastures”

**\$150/Second Prize:** Kelly Grace Thomas “The Polite Bird of Story”

**\$100/Third Prize:** Meg Eden “Her Arms Are Calendars”

**\$50/each 5 Finalists:**

(in alphabetical order)

Steve Henn “A Melody”

Tony Gloeggler “About Time”

Natasha Moni “We have all been that woman on the bottom of the pool”

Beate Sigriddaughter “Emily Watches Her Husband Bring Kate A Glass Of Water”

Rebecca Schumejda “Anniversary Poem”

Additionally, we wanted to include these ten, **Honorable Mentions:**

(in alphabetical order)

Elaine Alarcon “An Absence”

John Bellinger “Whither”

Olivia Collins “Blood Orange”

Peggy Dobreer “Is There A Doctor In The House?”

Evelyn Duboff “Smoke”

Debra Franco “I Will Not Die In Paris”

Peter M. Gordon “My Therapist Told Me to Change My Socks”

Arminé Iknadossian “Ossuary”

Tanya Ko Hong “Confronting My Father’s Mistress”

Janaya Martin “Long-term Relationship”

The 6th Annual Jack Grapes’ Poetry Prize Contest opens on July 1st, 2018 and runs through August 31st, 2018. We eagerly look forward to reading your poems!

Alexis Rhone Fancher  
Poetry Editor  
Cultural Weekly

[alert type=alert-white ]Please consider making a tax-deductible donation now so we can keep publishing strong creative voices.[/alert]

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## Pastures

*We come with the dust and we go with the wind*  
Woody Guthrie

A friend calls to say she's been in the hospital  
again,  
not just the E.R., but intensive care,  
her blood pressure erratic as the stock market.  
It's been raining  
there, mudslides and flash floods sweeping  
household pets into canyons. At least, she's still got her view of  
the Pacific,  
even if she's not enjoying it like she used to.

Up here, I tell her, the lawns are drying out,  
sunburnt  
like an old man's skull -

the hottest year on record, two years  
in a row.  
*How long can we keep the string alive,* the sportscaster  
jokes with the weatherman. GPS won't help us navigate  
the Anthropocene -  
terrible name for this terrible new age.

We see it coming on the Weather Channel - windstorm,  
firestorm,  
deluge - but refuse to do anything that might  
make our lives less comfortable. Thank you,  
say the forests,  
raining ash and cinders on suburban roofs.

Thank you, say the streambeds, charting

the dried  
 arteries of the past. Our dog, a rescue  
 pet, has the whole back yard, brown and dusty  
 as himself,  
 to shit in. We've loved and cared for  
 him like the finest pure bred, but he's  
 damaged goods,  
 barks at every leaf blower and garbage man,  
 bites friends and strangers without distinction,  
 shivers  
 when our daughter howls with headache  
 or anxiety. Last week someone in our church  
 lost her son,  
 twenty-one and with a history  
 of drugs and alcohol. His girlfriend found him  
 in bed, unconscious.  
 He never woke up. Was it drugs? Alcohol?  
 Nobody will say. All they'll say is what a bright  
 spirit he was,  
 how creative, filled with life.  
 And now it's gone, nobody's fault. At least  
 nobody's  
 taking the blame.

*Lee Rossi (photo at top) has authored 3 books of poetry, most recently Wheelchair Samurai from Plain View Press. His poems, reviews and interviews have appeared widely in journals such as the Harvard Review, Poetry Northwest, Poet Lore and the Sun. Although he currently lives in the Bay Area, he still thinks fondly of L.A., where he lived and wrote for over 30 years.*

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## The Polite Bird of Story

Takes flight, against God or the sky.  
 We are always open domes looking for rest.

All the linoleum stung with spilled salt.  
 The cabinets full of hard parts.

I have been thinking about the shells

of Russians Dolls snapping like twigs

under the hunter's footsteps.

The way each woman looks in the mirror and

sees the window a sparrow flew into.

Sometimes there is too much female

they call it monster. I roil a tiny teakettle

behind this mug shot of picket teeth. Perfection

a cold cup of tea. This menu of vacancy, I chew

and chew. Please don't watch me eat.

The living room for sitting. The bedroom for silence.

My mother's breath wintered. My father speaks in drywall.


Their daughter: a museum. Put a rope around this smile.

Quote the hours I spent like dried paint.

And in this world there are kitchens and there  
are mothers. Both cold like the sky left waiting.

Food is another ghost story

the starved like to tell.

 **Kelly Grace Thomas** is the winner of the 2017 Neil Postman Award for Metaphor from Rattle, a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee and a Best of the Next nominee. *BOAT/BURNED*, her first full-length collection, is forthcoming from YesYes Books. Kelly's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in: *DIAGRAM*, *Tinderbox*, *Nashville Review*, *Sixth Finch*, *Muzzle*, *PANK* and more. Kelly was also a 2016 Fellow for the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop. Kelly currently works to bring poetry to underserved youth as the Manager of Education and Pedagogy for Get Lit-Words Ignite. She is also the co-author of *Words Ignite: Explore, Write and Perform, Classic and Spoken Word Poetry (Literary Riot)*. She is also the founder of *FeministWrites*, a creative collective that connects and champions feminist voices. She lives in Los Angeles. For more please visit [kellygracethomas.com](http://kellygracethomas.com)

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## Her Arms Are Calendars

Despite warning labels reading: *do not use on skin*,

Kelly used her arms like paper reams, writing

Gelly Roll reminders: *Math problem set due Tuesday*.

*Call Anna*. I told her the ink was toxic

but she shrugged, drawing a heart on the gap

between her ring and pinkie fingers.

The marks were milky pink, luminescent even—  
 I think about the radium girls who painted

their teeth glow-in-the-dark for late-night pranks,  
 who pointed their paintbrush tips with their lips

the way their managers showed them, who were told  
 the only effect from radium was some color in their cheeks—

In the dark, the radium girls glowed like those clocks  
 they made, even the dust on their corsets was illuminated.

One girl got her tooth pulled but the whole jaw came with it.  
 Another broke her leg tripping on the dance floor.

I don't know what it's like, to feel my jaw collapse  
 like an eroded cliff, teeth falling out, honeycombed bone—

my mother, on my getting married, gives me three pump-  
 bottles of Johnson & Johnson baby soap. *If it's made*

*for babies, it's gotta be safe*, she says. I don't tell her  
 about the article that just came out: the moms asking why

there's formaldehyde in that soap. I can't know  
 what gave my mother her fibromyalgia. I wash

my hands in her soap— it's been three years  
 and I still haven't gone through all the bottles.



**Meg Eden** 's work has been published in various magazines, including *CV2*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, *RHINO* and *Gargoyle*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Maryland. She has five poetry chapbooks, and her novel *Post-High School Reality Quest* is published with California Coldblood, an imprint of Rare Bird Books. Find her online at [www.megedenbooks.com](http://www.megedenbooks.com) or on Twitter at @ConfusedNarwhal.

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