

EXPOSITION REVIEW

2019

FLASH 405
2019 ISSUE



EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Jessica June Rowe
Lauren Gorski

Exposition Review

is published annually as an
independent online journal.

EDITOR-AT-LARGE

David L. Ulin

© 2020

FLASH 405 JUDGES

Maureen Lee Lenker
Jessica June Rowe
CD Eskilson
Nancy Au

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced in any form or by any means
without the prior written permission of
the respective author or artist.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Annlee Ellingson
Lauren Gorski
Mellinda Hensley
Rebecca Luxton
Laura Rensing
Jessica June Rowe
Brianna J.L. Smyk

DESIGN

Jessica June Rowe

COVER ART

Holly Elander, *Porch*, 2017. Acrylic on panel, 24 x48
inches. Copyright 2017 by Holly Elander Artwork

COLOPHON

Exposition Review is set in Georgia and Times New
Roman. Titling is set in Filosofia and accent text is
set in Oswald and Copperplate.

Contents

February 2019: “Happily Ever After”

Notes from Guest Judge Maureen Lee Lenker • 4

1ST PLACE: Brooke Seipel *Eros(ive)* (Poetry) • 5

2ND PLACE: Jason Nadler *Goodnight* (Fiction) • 6

HONORABLE MENTION:

Lyndsie Manusos *Glow* (Fiction) • 8

Charlene Moskal *Wall* (Experimental) • 9

Bobby Wilson *on a street in kowloon...* (Experimental) • 10

April 2019: “Magic & Myth”

Notes from Judge Jessica June Rowe • 11

1ST PLACE: Laylage Courie *Three Demi-Gods in Brooklyn* (Experimental Script) • 13

2ND PLACE: Kevin Flanagan *Einherjar* (Fiction) • 17

HONORABLE MENTION:

Melissa Cannon *Oracle* (Poetry) • 18

Rachel Richardson *Teething* (Fiction) • 19

Maria Zoccola *Pyrite* (Fiction) • 20

June 2019: “Legacy”

Notes from Judge CD Eskilson • 21

1ST PLACE: Brook McClurg *The Ride is the Line Itself* (Nonfiction) • 23

2ND PLACE: Summer Awad *Morbid Curiosity* (Poetry) • 24

HONORABLE MENTION:

Becky Lee *Remembering Sylvia* (Poetry) • 25

Stephan Toskar *Smitty’s Mom* (Fiction) • 26

August 2019: “Underneath the Words”

Notes from Guest Judge Nancy Au • 27

1ST PLACE: Sionnain Buckley *Stranger, Brother, Stranger (Nonfiction)* • 28

2ND PLACE: Maylin Tu *Mimesis (Nonfiction)* • 29

HONORABLE MENTION:

Olivia Kingery *Alice is 307 Years Old (Fiction)* • 30

Contributor Bios • 31

February 2018: “Greed”

On The Theme:

“We’re all looking for our own version of happily-ever-after, whether it’s the perfect partner, the dream job, the white picket fence, the urban loft, or something entirely off the beaten path. What would give our lives meaning if not the search for happiness? February means love is on the brain, and the cardinal rule of romance writing is that it have an HEA or Happily-Ever-After. It doesn’t matter if it’s in the arms of a duke, Prince Charming, or the leader of a motorcycle gang, we all are searching for our soulmate, our OTP, the person who makes us see stars and rainbows. So, give me your best happily-ever-afters. They can be funny, angsty, a long-time coming, or the result of a chance meeting. Love is love is love is love, so there are no rules here, including when it comes to the level of heat on the page. The only requirement is a happy ending. Much like life, it’s up to you how that’s defined and how you get there. So, go ahead, sweep me off my feet with your romantic entry—I can’t wait.”

On The Winners:

“Happily-Ever-Afterers are unique to whoever manages to find theirs and they come in so many different forms—so it was a delight to discover the wide range of happy endings offered up in these entries. From romantic bliss to familial devotion to fairy-tales made real and everything in between, the entries offered up a portrait of happily-ever-afters as complex and unique as the human heart.

I chose the theme of Happily-Ever-Afterers because as the romance columnist for Entertainment Weekly, happy endings are one of the most gratifying things in fiction for me—not to mention, they’re essential to the DNA of the genre. The thing about happily-ever-afters is people think they’re predictable or formulaic, but the best writing is anything but — the truly gifted romance writing can take the structure and guaranteed happy ending of the genre and make a novel as surprising, enthralling, and moving as any piece of literary fiction. The winning pieces reflect that ability to take a foregone conclusion and spin it into something unique and unexpected. I hope you’ll fall in love with them as much as I did.”

— *Maureen Lee Lenker*
WRITER/DIRECTOR, GUEST JUDGE

Eros(ive)

BROOKE SEIPEL

1ST PLACE

POETRY

The passion of a
deep canyon and the
river that kissed it.

Goodnight

JASON NADLER

2ND PLACE

FICTION

“Are you asleep, Phillip?”

After a considerate pause, “No.”

“Tell me a story.”

Phillip rolled to face her. “Is something the matter?”

“I was just thinking about all our wonderful trips and adventures. We’ve had a wonderful life, don’t you agree?”

Phillip nodded. “Wonderful and full, my dear.”

“What was your favorite part?”

“You’re asking me to choose? Can’t I say ‘all of it’ and go back to sleep?”

“Remember the day the ferry crossing from Aventland to Broheim broke down? We spent the night in that quaint inn. Do you remember?”

“The Rooster and the Lamb.”

“Yes. We sat at the bar, hungry and disappointed we weren’t going to Bronheim until the morning.”

“We ate and we drank and we talked until they closed. The chef came out and we told him how we enjoyed our meal.”

“Do you remember he sat at the piano and played for hours? Just for us.”

“I do remember dancing until I was so tired.” He said, “I nearly fell asleep on my feet.”

“It was a magical night. We never did get to Broheim, but neither of us cared.”

“It was a magical night.”

“And my favorite, too.”

“Really? Not the trip to Flothen? Sailing to Speiton?”

“Those were wonderful trips. But the night in Aventland was such a surprise. All our plans went wrong, and it turned out perfect anyway.”

“When you put it that way, I see your point. I can still remember the golden light, our candle-lit shadows spinning on the wall as we danced all alone, the sound of the piano, the chef’s silly mustache.”

She giggled. “It was silly, so bushy and long.”

“I guess it’s my favorite, too. In some ways, it seems like last year, not thirty years ago.”

She sat on the bed beside him. His hand touched her knee.

“Are you going to read now?”

She thought a moment. “I thought I might lie beside you.”

“That would be nice. The bed can be lonely.”

“You know what’s odd?”

“What?”

“I think I’m tired.”

“Tired?” He sat upright beside her.

“It’s been so long since I slept, I’ve forgotten what it’s like.”

“Are you sure you’re okay? After all these years?”

“I don’t know,” she yawned. “Maybe it took so long to become tired again.” She lay down and he beside her.

“I love you, Phillip.”

When she finally passed to sleep, Phillip whispered to her, “Goodnight, Aurora.”

Glow

LYNDSIE MANUSOS

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

When I began first grade, my parents forbade me to kiss anyone. They encouraged layers of clothes, as if that would protect me. It reminded me of my father; he always wore turtlenecks, even in the glowing heat of July. When I was eight, I crept to the bathroom while he took a shower. I saw his burnt skin, the way it bubbled and stretched.

Before the first day of middle school, my parents repeated the warning. My father took my mother's hand and held it to his chest.

It's your lips, my mother said. Our lips. Yours and mine.

Later, I saw two girls kiss each other in a bathroom stall of the locker room. The stall door was left slightly ajar. I watched them as I had watched my father. Their skin was different. It glowed a different way. One reached up the other's shirt, and I wanted to rise up between them. My parents said if I did such a thing, I'd scorch their skin. But then I remembered my father whisper—his eyes intense on my mother—*It was worth it.*

* * *

The need became worse after the truth. I imagined kissing everyone.

I entered high school, and there was an ache that grew along my limbs. I didn't realize it was the need until I met a boy in Trigonometry class. He had eyes the color of maple leaves and left candy wrappers on my desk, drawing on them with a Sharpie pen he always kept tucked behind his ear. His skin was racked with acne scars. He wrote me love notes, saying he wished he could burn the scars all away. I wrote back he was beautiful anyway, but I could grant his wish.

He met me in the girls' locker room after school. I instructed him to take off his shirt and meet me in a stall. I remembered the girls forming a chain of arms and legs and wanted to replicate it. I warned him of my curse. He didn't believe at first. My fingers traced the scars up his chest to his mouth. He exhaled. My fingers felt warm.

At first I was afraid to do harm, but he whispered trust, and the fear became the ache of my parents, and the ache became a fire, and the fire became a glow.

Wall

CHARLENE MOSKAL

HONORABLE MENTION

EXPERIMENTAL

All the neurotic pieces that hung marionette-like on nerve strings, on loose raw tendons, came together when there was you and formed me solid; a concrete cinder block wall. Some say you know it is right when the wall comes down. I knew it was right when the wall went up; fierce, protective. Love with hearts and flowers superimposed over the past. I was insulated by structure and hope. I was written on by your graffiti with murals of heroes, savages and saviors all of them wearing your face and mine. In the background Tina is singing, *What's love got to do with it?*, and I answer, Everything.

on a street in kowloon...

BOBBY WILSON

HONORABLE MENTION

EXPERIMENTAL

you will have two loves she said looking at me sternly, hrumphing so that the silky black hairs of her mustache rose from her upper lip, holding my hand with a mandibular grip, staring into my eyes she said one of these loves would stretch me across the baked caliche of the Mojave desert until I would become a black-haired Si-Te-Cah, a hybrid-calcrete golem, a Frankenstein (I know it was the doctor's name she said when I tried to interrupt) owned and operated (yes operated) as if by remote control or possession whichever you like, she told me it was up to the balance of science and whimsy in my soul how I interpreted her takeover of my person but that's what it would be, a takeover, she would come in and gentrify my life, taking first an old house but eventually bringing with her trendy breakfast places and vegan options and I would be fucked when artisanal toast made an appearance because by then I would be in love with the fabric of her neighborhood which combined the best parts of my old sad reality with the new exciting things I couldn't deny liking, I would be lulled to sleep by her charms, waking one day and realizing she could never leave me because that would be the end of it all, I would know then that she was the best and worst thing that ever happened to me and if she left I would go through all the houses in all the cities and smash up all of the glassware so there would be nothing but plastic and paper plates and many would be forced to drink piping-hot coffee out of their cupped hands, it will happen she said, she will leave and take a part of you with her, not for safekeeping, but for voodoo purposes, torture practices and other forms of malice and you will never ever take another breath that does not contain a particle of the question, where is she? she released my hand then and I rubbed feeling into my palm, stroked my mustache in ode to hers and tried a stern expression of my own, and what of my second love, I asked,

she will be the most perfect mug that holds the lukewarm brewed coffee that your life will have become she said and lit her cigarette.

April 2019: “Magic & Myth”

On The Theme:

“**M**agic and myth are inextricably linked. The belief in magic—the strange, the supernatural, the divine—has infused our storytelling from the dawn of civilization, a conduit for our understanding of the natural world.

But myths on their own are a kind of magic, too. They are living, breathing stories that are still evolving. We can trace their journey across centuries, continents, and cultures, and see the thematic ripples they left behind. We can use modern science to unravel ancient myths—[cyclops from mammoth skulls](#), [epic battles from volcanic eruptions](#)—and better understand our present. We can also reinvent myths, reclaiming harmful and incorrect narratives to ensure a better future.

Myths are where the past, present, and future can exist all at once, and it’s these kind of intersections I’m most interested in: the clashing of times, cultures, and genres. Also, I just freaking love history. There’s nothing better than reading a story that teaches you something about the world and the beautiful, diverse people within it.

So teach me something new. Send me your magical realism, your personal mythologies, your future histories. I want to see modern Odysseys, literal black girl magic, the six wives of Henry VIII having cocktails in Manhattan (except not really, because we [already published that](#), and you should read it right now.) I especially want to see short narratives that end with an *oomph*—a laugh, or a twist, or an enchanting punch to the gut that leaves me thinking about your work long after the page has turned.”

On The Winners:

“**I**’ve been anticipating my turn as judge for Flash 405 for so long that my expectations were very high, and I was absolutely delighted with the turn-out for “Magic & Myths.” I had a vague idea of what I was looking for in a winning piece, but it’s always fascinating (and pleasantly surprising!) to see how different minds will interpret the same prompt. The range of submissions certainly made it a very (*very*) difficult decision to narrow it down to the final five.

Ultimately, as it should, it came down to the quality of writing. The winning works shone brightest in their short form: complete narratives that blended the fantastic and the familiar, using the otherworldly to shed light on our earthly experience. More than that, each piece used the magic of their words to immediately establish the vision and rules of their world: their own internal mythology. I was swept away by the mastery of language and voice, and have reread each piece so many times (*so many times, guys. Did I mention*

it was difficult to pick?). Every time I return to the winners I find a new facet to explore and appreciate—I'm so happy to finally share them now so you can explore them, too.”

— *Jessica June Rowe*
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Three Demi-Gods in Brooklyn

LAYLAGE COURIE

1ST PLACE

EXPERIMENTAL SCRIPT

*Let me have no happy fortune which brings pain with it
or prosperity which is upsetting to the mind
when love is in excess it brings a woman no honor nor any worthiness*

—Euripides

CIRCE

(looks out her apartment window at the East River bridges.)

Another island. Palatial two room studio apartment. Trains crisscross the east river bridges like shuttles across looms. The lions and wolves of lower Manhattan paw their way home.

Men on this island are mostly pigs. It's not my doing. Exactly. Where's a man with whom a witch doesn't have to bargain? In the old days men parted my thighs as if parting the branches about a holy bower. I privileged them.

Time to light the lamps that line the path between burner and bed. As if it is feast-time. Like the old days. Lay the scarlet roast upon the formica counter, its fat sizzling with resinous herbs. Pour honey into scalded milk. Sprinkle barley upon the sill. The buxom moon pops out of its brownstone corset, floats towards the city like a white heart.

The next man that dares my door I'm turning into a fish.

I will never again turn "nobody" into somebody.

From now on, I'm only changing men into something I can eat.

A SONG

I cannot endure joy, that most temporary thing
dragged by horsemen to a height it can hold but briefly
before it crashes down again

The sun comes to soon from a night in which each minute is endless.
 The days pass slowly, but time?
 Time is swift.

ARIADNE

(Drunk, on a pier jutting into the harbor.)

On the last day of the saddest month he sailed off holding the loose end of my ball of string. First it unraveled, then drew taut then

now oh now the rattling spool of loneliness my

loneliness.

Woe, O, woe! The gulls circle o'er my lovely head wanting all the meaty coils stuffed inside it. Here's my piping-hot skull bowl proffered to scavengers. My bones become apparent. See how I lose my youthful plump? If I soak my finger in this bottle I'll calcify it.

Bottle, finger, I lift you in a toast. To stars and electrical stars. To the moon lost among windows. To city and sound long island sound before sea I drain

my bottle for ships that come in, then sail without me.

(She empties the bottle and tosses it into the lapping waves.)

Bully captain carousing on your ill-omened ship I hope you
 or someone you love jumps off a cliff and drowns.

ANOTHER SONG

Poor suffering wretches we are left alone without love.
 When love has abandoned us what is left?
 What is the fire pit without a fire but a pile of ash?
 What is the night sky without the moon
 but a great city whose lights are always in the distance?
 Where am I going on the long road at night alone?
 The ground is torn in many places.
 I will stumble and help myself up.
 Stumble again.
 I will sleep alone with only the view for warmth.
 Everyone feels sorry and even arrogant towards people who lose love.

MEDEA

(In a museum looking at an ancient culture's gold idolized in glass cases.)

Circe you should-a-never you shouldn't have
atoned
atoned me

Circe you shouldn't you should a never atoned me
for murder
for brother murder
for leaving my father
for running real far
for killing the serpent coiled at the base of
my sacred tree.
It guarded the gold
sacred to my people.

I'm exhausted fading towards (out of) time.
Mind wrecked ravaged ravaging woman naked yet clothed in my own skin I sing I sing I—

Circe you should a never you shouldn't have atoned me.
At each moment when my heart should bend—like a reed woven into a basket, a basket to
cradle fragile things—my heart snaps, taut as a bow string, letting arrows fly.

The blood on my hands is the blood on my thighs.
It'll eat at my insides until I'm pure, white as acid.

That snake who encircled with his many folds the golden fleece and guarded it and never
slept I killed

and so lost my light.

A FINAL SONG AFTER APOLLODORUS

The days pass slowly
but time? Time is swift.
A ship, vanishing into the nether-darkness
on the wings
of the wind.

LOVERS, PLEASE CONSIDER THAT

When you love a stranger, suddenly, rest assured there's a god who wants something that's nothing to do with you. Gods never want anything from a woman except sex. Their favorites are all men.

The best thing to do when you feel this god working love in you is to identify the thing or skill or idea or power that the god needs you to exercise.

Maybe you will do all that is required of you.

But don't do it for *love*.

Do it to learn what capacity lies latent in you that the god, provoking love, actually requires.

REMEMBER: You are a needle the hero's thread passes through. In his narrative, you are an event.

His story is the garment you are betrothed in.
But the hero is not your bridegroom.

You will wed

Who, grand-daughter of the sun, wild-voiced, carried by the sun opposite the sun that means east, in a chariot fierce-drawn?

Who, drunk princess who can outwit man's most elaborate labyrinth, now that you are thinning like an hourglass in a desert of sand? A disintegrating god? A mystery? A thread-bare patch of black velvet in which you are set eternal as star?

Look at Circe. I suppose Odysseus, for her, since not a pig, was a seed.

He became something in her garden. A poppy? A laurel? A death-cool cypress tree?

We don't hear much about her anymore. She has no narrative. She is available for speculation, as are you. Surely her island has a garden hither-to and nether-yon it flourishes and decays and in it we may wander taking whatever path we prefer it is there for us (un-heroic) to explore.

Einherjar

KEVIN FLANAGAN

2ND PLACE

FICTION

You have been fighting well, my warrior.

I have known many warriors. People of the longships, souls that fought for the glory of Asgard. Those cradled by the rocking of the black sea beneath them—your forebearers, who travelled far and saw the strange places of this world.

Gaange Rolf, who fought the Franks and was made ruler of Normandy. Harald, who was a boy when he served the Prince of Kiev, who traveled as far as Constantinople. Erik, who traveled west to unknown shores. Erik, your namesake, which you have duly earned. You fight as well as any of them, and have done so every day of your short life.

Come, little Eric. Your fight ends. I am the valkyrie of this battlefield, and I bear you to Valhalla. Let this incubator be your longship, this ventilator your warhorn.

You have fought bravely, my warrior, since that day not so long ago when you were born, blue and silent. Your life is short, other's lives will be much longer. This is the fate woven for you. Your mother and father have watched over you these three months, but now I have come to take you beyond.

You have battled the greatest foe since they placed you in this natal isolette and ran tubes into your nose to make you breath. Unable to move your limbs of your own power, unable to cry. Many of the warriors I have taken to the great hall cried in one battle or another, but not you. Not in this battle.

The nurses of this place hang beads on the outside of your isolette—"Bravery beads" they call them, but they have no idea. A day will come, when three roosters crow and Garmr will howl and break his chains, but that day is far from today. When the dawn of that day breaks, we will need souls as strong as yours. The chosen await you as comrades and friends, fellow einherjar. Odin expects you, hero come from this world, and glad is his heart to meet you.

You have fought well in your little life. There are many things of this world you will never know, but there is glory that awaits you beyond. Come with me now, on wings of swans and ravens. Cattle die. Kindred die. Every man is mortal, but the good name never dies of one who has done well.

You have done well.

Oracle

MELISSA CANNON

HONORABLE MENTION

POETRY

expecting honey?
my mist-wreathed mouth's a smoking lily
the famished voices swarm from my lips
they sting me to speech
like wraiths of bees

Teething

RACHEL RICHARDSON

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

Daddy taught me how to hunt hog. Now it's not hog we're after, though the wild ones grow hideous big out in the trees. One dead boar and the whole three of us could be fed for weeks, Daddy and me and Baby. But that much pig-meat goes sour fast, and shooting's not worth the bullet.

I trap rabbits and squirrels and possums. We eat anything unsick. Most cook up same, different only in chew, and Baby's got no teeth for that. I'd give her milk if I made any, but Baby's not mine.

Daddy asked what the good goddamn we'd do with a baby. I don't know, but I'd found her and I couldn't leave her. She squalled but she was shushable. I carried her, dandled her, quieted her as we toured that house gone still: fridge warm, stove cold, oven dead. I found Baby, and Daddy found cans in the pantry and a meatgrinder in the shed.

That was a day ago.

Daddy's been gone since duskfall. Now it's near noon. I'm out on the porch, watching, while Baby plays with a cup and spoon inside.

Branches snap and leaves rustle. Midst the bark and boughs I see Daddy's plaid in the trees. His mouth's not foaming. He walks with no stagger. He's just late, just been gone, and me awake and alone all night with my eyes so open the dark made shapes. The shadows grew tall, became women, a crowd of mothers sick and dead like mine and Baby's.

I sat all night in the rocking chair and rocked with Baby cradled hard against me. She slept and dreamt, deaf to my heart drubbing thunder-hard under my ribs.

With the sun singing high overhead, hunger gets up and grows in me. I hear again what Daddy said when we came, when I showed him Baby, limp and lovely in my arms.

You name it, and it's yours. You bury it when it dies. You give it a name, you give it a grave.

Inside, Baby pats her playthings together, a pop and smack. Outside, I raise the rifle.

I aim at Daddy how he showed me. I squint and pull, a pop and smack.

I crank the meatgrinder and our dinner drops down. My daughter laughs and laughs. In her gums is a glimmer of white, an edge of bone. Soon she will have her first tooth.

Pyrite

MARIA ZOCCOLA

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

The worst part about dating Andrew was the ghost of his ex-girlfriend, who kept hanging around.

“He murdered me,” the ghost wailed. She was draped all over in silver chains, which she rattled. The cat hated her.

“I most certainly did not,” Andrew said. Andrew was tall and handsome and rich and gave Sarah jewelry. Sarah decided to believe Andrew.

Andrew collected jewelry, which he liked to see Sarah wear. He brought her diamonds with platinum backings, opals set in gold, antique watches, tennis bracelets, little dangling charms carved from coral. Often he liked to see her wear the jewelry and nothing else, so Sarah would lie naked on the bed, weighed down and glittering. The ghost stood in the corner and howled.

Sarah was in love with Andrew. Sarah was in love with Andrew’s jewelry. Sarah was in love with the way Andrew’s hands twitched to her throat when they had sex, fingers caressing an emerald choker, a cascade of Burma rubies.

“He killed me! I’m dead!” moaned the ghost.

“Oh, shut up,” Sarah said.

The ghost lay around on the sofa in the afternoons. She liked Maury. Sarah left the TV on for her, like the neighbors did for their anxious parrot. At night Andrew changed the channel to a program about commercial fishing, sleek shining bodies flopped on the deck, opening and closing their mouths. The cat batted at the screen, claws to the buzzing glass.

There were bangles crusted in garnets. There were rings studded with sapphires. There were brooches of gold so pure she could crush them under her thumb.

And of course there came a day when Andrew’s hands tightened in the strands of deep-sea pearls around Sarah’s neck, pulling tight, tighter, too tight. Sarah emerged from her body draped in a mesh of silver chains: gleaming, brilliant, sparking in the sun. She shook them. They rattled. The cat yowled.

“He murdered me,” Sarah told the ghost of Andrew’s ex-girlfriend.

“I know,” the ghost said, and then she faded away and Sarah never saw her again.

June 2019: “Legacy”

On The Theme:

“June bears special weight this year in LGBTQ+ circles. In addition to being annual Pride month across the country, June 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. One of the most pivotal events in the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States, the uprising saw community members of the Stonewall Inn demonstrate and protest continued NYPD raids on the establishment and the larger criminalization of their identities.

LGBTQ+ folks today owe much to the work and sacrifice of those who participated in the rebellion 50 years ago. Transgender elders such as Sylvia Rivera, Marsha Johnson, and Miss Major played key roles at Stonewall and continued to advocate for LGBTQ+ people in coming decades. The continued LGBTQ+ rights movement extends out of their struggle those nights in June and afterwards.

A legacy serves as a map through generations. It charts where our forebears went and what they faced, and what got us the ground we stand on. An elder’s legacy holds a past that helps explain our present moment, but it also helps us navigate our future. It shows us what work needs to be done and, hopefully, how to do it.

Tell me what legacy you’re following. Its contours, and where it takes you. Where did your spiritual ancestors walk so you may run? Perhaps their pasts haunt you in the night; perhaps you try desperately to flee their shadows. What past guides your present to the future? What legacy are you leaving?”

On The Winners:

“Legacy” is such a broad term, and invokes something so personal to whoever hears it. At first, I wondered if I’d goofed picking the theme for my first time judging a competition: was it too subjective? Throughout June, as submissions stacked up, I was eager to see how people responded to the prompt. Come July, when reading through the work, I was certainly not disappointed. Its subjectivity proved to be a strength. I was amazed to see the breadth of forms and themes in the work I read. From reflections on family to place, on fleeting friendships and pop culture, the submissions took their work to powerful and moving places. It was humbling to have such personal and evocative work shared with me, and I’m grateful to everyone who submitted. It cannot be overstated how much great work we received, and how hard it was to choose between the pieces.

What strikes me looking back at the winners and honorable mentions here is how different they all are. In tone, in style, in language, in what even constitutes a “legacy.” At

the same time, there's a unified feeling that surrounds all of these pieces—a gnawing, I would say. A real need to unravel the origins of one's place in the world in order to make sense of the present moment. That's what swept me away in these five pieces, and what I hope you find in them as well. Happy reading and reflection.”

— *CD Eskilson*
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The Ride is the Line Itself

BROOK McCLURG

1ST PLACE

NONFICTION

Spring meant nothing in drought-stricken Southern California. Seasons passed unnoticed. Look left, right. Wait for the tourists to change. We ran kissing each other, them, hanging out of Jeeps and low-riders, flying the riverbed past curfew. The electricity of skin-on-sunburned-skin begging for eucalyptus relief and a fingertip's graze; tussled hair and chapped lips soothed by the moisture of strangers. Every relationship lasted the theme park length of a line.

Easter sweltered, the chocolate eggs and jellybeans melting into the lawn before they could be collected. April showers came brief if at all. June gloom burned off by noon but only locals knew started in May. The spirit-dampening marine layer was but a half-day sentence; the beach still, just later.

I left. Several times and each time for longer, I left, until my own transience became constant. A circus coming through town: tent up, tent down.

I returned this el Niño year to a Superbloom even Death Valley couldn't avoid. Life sprouted in verdant greens, goldenrods and fuchsias: the slender phlox and desert parsley of the Antelope valley, chia on the Carrizo plain and a pink chaparral currant pouring through Placerita. On a map the spots are an outbreak that resemble a backslash that mimics California's Cartesian tilt: Left to right, and downward, a floral fault line dividing coast and desert.

Angelinos and tourists alike are careless and heavy-footed, trampling the foliage for a #poppies picture above what is—most seasons—the ugliest lake in the state. Park rangers bemoan the off-path liberties taken. People pretend not to hear. Someone lands a helicopter in the valley because traffic. Why must we love things to death?

Homogenization is a process of reduction. Through pressure, one thing is made small enough so as not to be noticed in the other. This is how I feel on streets once familiar: Encroached upon. Invisible. Unkissable. From a beach overlooking newly strip-malled PCH, I avoid eye contact, hide from exes as surely as they would me. I determine not to turn if I hear my name, but nobody calls it.

Morbid Curiosity

SUMMER AWAD

2ND PLACE

POETRY

Did you know they make bras for burial?
Yes, 6-feet-underwire, push-up daisies.
Will my conserved cleavage appall bearers of my body?
Those casket cacklers, what will they have to say of me
Except: "She came from a long line of well-endowed women?"

Remembering Sylvia

BECKY LEE

HONORABLE MENTION

POETRY

in 3-inch heels (or was it 4?) scaling the walls of City Hall. Sylvia in the chic coat & fierce dress marching the streets on winter and summer days of action. Sylvia with perfectly combed hair, powerful & poised with fist in the air. Interrupting! Demanding! Fighting! Sylvia, a S.T.A.R., lighting up truth. Sylvia Rivera: Presente! It's been 50 years & we are still standing here at the wall, the intersection, shouting: Why the hell are "our" people still leaving our people behind?

Smitty's Mom

STEPHEN TOSKAR

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

Smitty's mom was the first saint to lay hands on me, first wiping them dry on her stained apron, her husband drunk as always in his work clothes on the chaise lounge in the Florida room, barely able to hold up his beer. Without perfume, her sweat smelled like flowers, like crushed jasmine. Or maybe petals of angel's trumpet so sweet and psychedelic you'd be tempted to suck on them, knowing you might never wake up.

But we'd returned from a different joy ride gone wrong. Smitty had stolen another car, so naturally we piled in, racing up and down US 441 until he clipped a Buick from behind trying to pass too close, one wing taking flight on its own, all of us suddenly accomplices. So we ditched the car in an empty lot on a cul-de-sac in Sky Lake Estates, blue water so clear you could see tarpon and turtles without goggles. That's where Smitty says he got Elaine, both of them in an inner tube for hours one scorching afternoon. But that was junior high. This was high school, walking with sore feet for miles with an adrenaline rush long after curfew.

We heard Smitty's mom mopping the kitchen, but without a word she comes right up to me, the only Jew in the house, then lays both hands on my head while she prays. What could I do? Like the others, all I could think about was no dinner waiting for me back home, but she was already heading back to the kitchen to make us chicken sandwiches and had no way of knowing I'd let three other saints touch me because of her.

August 2019: “Underneath the Words”

On The Theme:

“**I**n *The Empathy Exams*, a collection of essays by Leslie Jamison, the author writes:

“You live in a world underneath the words you are saying in this clean white room, *it’s okay I’m okay I feel sad I guess*. You are blind in this other world. Your seizures are how you move through it—thrashing and fumbling—feeling for what its walls are made of... Your body wasn’t anything special until it rebelled... I imagine you in every possible direction, and then I cover my tracks and imagine you all over again. Sometimes I can’t stand how much of you I don’t know.” (—Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*, pp12-13)

Write into the worlds “underneath the words,” places where you’ve never explored before, or the places where you’ve had difficulty finding access to. Don’t worry about finding answers or closure or conclusions. Rather, thrash and fumble, explore the questions, the roadblocks, the blind spots, the invisibilities and unsayables.”

On The Winners:

“**T**he theme of “Underneath the Words” is something that I hold very close to my heart. I love the challenge of writing into the meanings layered beneath the skin of a story, the challenge of expressing my characters’ desires in ways that can be touched, held up to a reader’s nose and breathed in. I was drawn to the immersiveness of the stories that I selected for this contest because of the ways they unfolded, whether slowly or at lightning speed, revealing deeper truths and meanings (loss, love, belonging) beneath the wrinkles and pimples, stones and marbles, cat paws and thumb.”

— Nancy Au
AUTHOR, GUEST JUDGE

Stranger, Brother, Stranger

SNIONNAIN BUCKLEY

1ST PLACE

NONFICTION

When I think of our childhood, we're on the third floor, on the musty carpet of our attic playroom, strewn with Playmobil bodies and plastic flowers small enough to swallow. We watched Rugrats even though mom forbade it, and staged sales where we bartered small belongings we had managed to squirrel away. Marbles, rubber balls, baseball cards and Homies figurines, little stones or medallions we had rubbed some worth into with the warmth of our fingers. I knew you were duping me somehow—you were older, better at math—but I didn't mind, because with my dimes and quarters I could claim pieces of you. Nevermind they were pieces you didn't want. I hoarded them, cherished them, just the same.

* * *

I've started to laugh like you. No one can tell except me, and there's no one to tell except you, but I don't call, because you haven't called, and we can keep going like this, I swear, brother, I swear. The last time we spoke we skirted around every important thing, landing on weather and dinner and small jokes we hoped wouldn't offend. Your face on my screen looked just as it always had—there: your Adam's apple; there: your dark eyebrows—and I could almost ignore the collar, the white square peering up at me like a third eye, its judgment unspoken but received. Forgive me, brother. I've been avoiding you, and the difference is noticeable, the quiet has heavy hands. In the dark outside my bedroom window a tree moves like the shadow of a shadow, but I'm not afraid. It's warm inside, and the bed fits two, and before we fall asleep my lover makes me laugh, and the room is filled with you for a few long seconds, and then you're gone.

* * *

We're hundreds of miles and thousands of days from where we started, but I can still place us back there, with our matching sharp elbows, sharp noses. On the dirt strip that lined the driveway we used to beach our bikes in ruts so that only the front wheels spun, so we could pedal as fast as we wanted without going anywhere, without risking the speed or the flight or the fall. We lined up end to end, you in front straddling your black frame, and me on my pink, following. We pedaled in tandem, making our wheels whine and whine with the effort of going nowhere at all.

Mimesis

MAYLIN TU

2ND PLACE

NONFICTION

I have decided to become my father, to put on his body like a second skin.

I practice rolling my head back and forth around on my neck, like a bobblehead. I put my hands on my hips and shake one finger up and down in front of me. My face tightens into an exaggerated grimace as my finger picks up speed.

I lie in bed on my stomach, face turned to one side, eyes closed. I pretend to be asleep. I extend one arm out and flap my hand like I'm hailing a cab. I beat it through the air in an insistent rhythm, going and going, on and on forever. My eyes stay closed. I wait for five-year-old me, six-year-old me, seven-year-old me to massage my fingers one by one, to dig thumbs into the fleshy part of my palm. I wait for a very long time.

I try on his voice: "Your good looks come from ME, from ME, from ME, from ME, from ME."

I jab my finger at my chest with emphasis.

I grab my face, one hand under my chin, one hand gripping the top of my head, and suck on my cheek, covering it with a sloppy wetness I'm too afraid to wipe off, saliva slowly drying.

I grab my face, one hand gripping underneath my chin, holding my head still. I narrow my eyes and lean in, so close I can see every flaw, every imperfection. Is that makeup? Is that a pimple? Is that a wrinkle?

"I'll have no problem marrying you out," I say, in Chinese. "Mei wen ti ba ni jia chu qu."

I grab the flesh at my waist with both hands.

I squeeze my waist compulsively, repetitively, fingers reveling in soft flesh.

I hold out my arms in an embrace, body rod-straight, rigid. My arms bend stiffly at the elbows as I beat the air with my palm, patting my back.

"Why would you say I don't love you? Of course I love you. Of course." My hand beats at the air. "I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you."

Alice is 307 Years Old

OLIVIA KINGERY

HONORABLE MENTION

FICTION

Alice is 307 years old.

Of course this includes the past lives before she was a cat, but mostly, she has lounged on four paws for the better half of her life. Alice has loved, been loved, been the middle of a lovers quarrel, but she has never learned to love herself. She has water stuck in her left ear from when she was a small blonde girl swimming in the ocean. Alice has been Margret, Suzanne, Lauren, and Charlie. Alice has even been a boy, and he thought about girls and licorice and joining the army. Alice the boy didn't last long.

What Alice misses most is watermelon juice on her chin. She misses swim suits and slices of pie and sex. She mourns hot tea and fresh bread, the feeling of Christmas morning, the first swim of summer. She mourns herself; but as a cat, she moves on and remembers there is food in her dish. She misses the sensation of pulling weeds by the roots, of guessing weeds by their roots. She misses being a root.

Before Alice was a cat, like right before, the life before, she turned down ten men for the woman she loved. Alice is counting, maybe the days until she is human again, or the days in bliss she has left. She tells people she has been a dinosaur, a sea lion, a Monarch, and only one of these is a lie. Alice loves lying, as all cats do, about where she has been and who she has been.

Contributors

Judges

NANCY AU • Nancy Au's essays, flash and short stories appear in *Redivider*, *Gulf Coast*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Catapult*, *Lunch Ticket*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, among many others. She has an MFA from San Francisco State University where she teaches creative writing. She also teaches creative writing (to biology majors!) at California State University Stanislaus, and is co-founder of The Escapery (www.TheEscapery.org). Her flash fiction is included in the Best Small Fictions 2018 anthology, and her writing was named Best Short Fiction of 2018 by *Entropy*. She won *The Vestal Review's* 2018 VERA Flash Fiction Prize, as well as *Redivider's* 2018 Blurred Genre Contest. Her debut full-length collection, *Spider Love Song & Other Stories*, is forthcoming from Acre Books (University of Cincinnati) in September 2019. www.peascarrots.com.

CD ESKILSON • Christopher "CD" Eskilson is a poet, editor, and bookseller from Southern California. They're an associate editor for *Exposition Review* and an editor emeritus for *foothill: a journal of poetry*. Their work appears or is forthcoming in *Teen Vogue*, *Yes Poetry*, *After the Pause*, and *Butter*, among others. They like coffee and reenacting David Lynch movies. Find them on Twitter at [@CdEskilson](https://twitter.com/CdEskilson).

MAUREEN LEE LENKER • Maureen Lee Lenker is the romance columnist at *Entertainment Weekly*. She also covers film, theatre, and TV as a writer there. Her work has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Turner Classic Movies*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *LA Weekly*, and more. In addition to covering romance, she has also had two romantic short stories published in the anthologies *Christmas Nookies* and *Then Comes Winter*. Maureen has previously been involved with *Exposition Review* as a director of their annual staged readings, and is thrilled to be joining the journal for this more literary adventure.

JESSICA JUNE ROWE • Jessica June Rowe is an author, playwright, and editor from Los Angeles. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Exposition Review*, and former fiction editor of *Southern California Review*. Her fiction has appeared in *Noble/Gas Qtrly*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Timber Journal*, among others, while her short plays have appeared on stage at the Zephyr Theatre, Broadwater Theatre, and Lounge Theatre in Los Angeles. She is a Best of the Net nominee, and her flash fiction received honorable mention in the *New Millennium Writings* 33rd Short-Short Story Award. A Playground-

LA playwright, she has been twice featured in *The Best Of Playground-LA* (2016, 2019). She also really loves chai lattes. Find her on Twitter [@willwrite4chai](https://twitter.com/willwrite4chai).

February 2019: “Happily Ever After”

LYNDSIE MANUSOS • Lyndsie Manusos’s work has appeared in *The Masters Review* blog, *Midwestern Gothic online*, *PANK*, *A Cappella Zoo*, among other notable publications. She received the Sara Patton Stipend Award in fiction from the 2017 Writers Hotel conference. Her story ‘*Everything There Is to Love on Earth*’ was recently listed as a finalist for *SmokeLong Quarterly*’s Flash Fiction Contest and was published in their 60th anniversary issue.

CHARLENE MOSKAL • Charlene Moskal is a Fellow of the New Jersey Writing Project and a Teaching Artist for the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project in Las Vegas, Nevada. Prior to moving to Las Vegas, she taught art, theater and speech in secondary public schools in Brownsville, Texas. Charlene has been published in numerous anthologies, magazines and e-zines, including *Dash*, *Helen*, a literary magazine, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *The Raven’s Perch*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Chaleur Journal*, and others. *Zeitgeist Press* recently released her chapbook, “One Bare Foot.”

JASON NADLER • Jason Nadler wrote his first novella in the sixth grade, and has dreamed of being a full-time writer ever since. He is currently writing an urban fantasy trilogy called *The Books of Alexandria*. He lives on the North Fork of Long Island with his wife and two cats.

BROOKE SEIPEL • Brooke Seipel is a journalist and budding poet living in Los Angeles. Her non-fiction work has been featured in *The New Republic*, *The Hill*, and *The OC Register*, and her fiction has been featured on the *Of Gods and Ghosts* podcast. Oh and also on her mom’s fridge.

BOBBY WILSON • Bobby Wilson lives in China where he teaches English and writes. His creative non-fiction has appeared in the *Longridge Review*, *Feminine Collective*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature* and *Unlikely Stories*. He spends most of his time reading, writing, studying languages, and cooking. He’s married and owns a cat.

April 2019: “Magic & Myth”

MELISSA CANNON • Melissa Cannon has had careers in academia and in fast-food. She has published poems in over 100 small-press journals and anthologies, including

HOMEWORKS and *HOMEWORDS*, two volumes of Tennessee writers from the University of Tennessee Press. She lives in Nashville.

LAYLAUGE COURIE • Laylage Courie is a writer, performer, and maker-of-things-from-words. Her latest big thing is the art-pop, dream-folk radio play *these fountains rare here*—a coming-of-age fairy tale about one woman’s quest for springs deep enough for her to bathe in. It is available everywhere you download and stream (Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon, etc.), and on CD. Her work is published in *Fence*, *Adbusters*, experimental performance journals, been a finalist for the Jane Chambers Award for Feminist Performance Text, received Axe-Houghton grant funding, and been performed all over downtown NYC. Her strange and not-so-strange poetry readings are featured in the Apple podcast *cosmic dream radio*. She’s online at luminouswork.org. Laylage was born in the rural South, educated at Agnes Scott College (B.A. in Mathematics), and now lives in New York with lots of rocks, teapots, and houseplants.

KEVIN FLANAGAN • Kevin Flanagan is a writer, performer, and artist living in Phoenix, Arizona. When Kevin was three years old, he pushed a sheet metal screw up his nose. It was there some time before being discovered, and required a trip to the emergency room to remove. This is Kevin’s earliest memory. He can be reached at KevinMFlanagan.com.

RACHEL RICHARDSON • Rachel Richardson was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and lives in Baltimore, Maryland. She attended the Clarion Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers Workshop in 2017 and tweets [@pintojamesbean](https://twitter.com/pintojamesbean).

MARIA ZOCCOLA • Maria Zoccola is a Southern writer currently working in nonprofit. She has a BA in Creative Writing from Emory University and an MA in Professional Writing from Falmouth University. She has been published in *Luna Station Quarterly*.

June 2019: “Legacy”

SUMMER AWAD • Summer Awad, a Tennessee native of Palestinian descent, is a poet, activist, and playwright. Her play *WALLS: A Play for Palestine* was performed at the 2016 New York International Fringe Festival. She currently lives in Knoxville and work as a case manager for Bridge Refugee Services, the local refugee resettlement affiliate. She performs spoken word under the stage name “Uncensored.”

BROOK McCLURG • Brook McClurg received his B.A. in Creative Writing from Columbia University (fiction) and an MFA from Rutgers University-Camden (nonfiction). Originally from Southern California, he currently lives in Lubbock, Texas where he is a second-year PhD student in the graduate English Department at Texas Tech.

BECKY LEE • Becky Lee is a queer Asian American writer and educator currently living in Portland, Oregon. Becky was born and raised in New York City and graduated from Sarah Lawrence College where she studied poetry, dance, and literature. At the age of 40, Becky earned her Master's degree in Education. As a public high school English Language Arts teacher and social justice educator, Becky is committed to helping young people discover their voices as writers. Her poetry has appeared in *Rise Up Review* and *Cold Mountain Review*.

STEPHEN TOSKAR • Brooklyn-born Stephen Toskar is a longtime US expat resident of Japan. His poems have appeared in *Sixty Four Best Poets of 2018* by *Black Mountain Press*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *LA Progressive*, *Hollywood Progressive*, *Tokyo Poetry Journal*, *Transcend Media Service*, *Dissident Voice*, and *Poetry Nippon*, among others; as well as in the anthologies *Manifestations* and *Farewell to Nuclear, Welcome to Renewable Energy*. He co-translated *Selection from Mother Burning and Other Poems: Parallel Translation of Selected Poems of Soh Sakon* with two Japanese women poets. Living on the northern island of Hokkaido, he is a professor of English at Hokkaido Bunkyo University in Eniwa.

August 2019: "Underneath the Words"

SIONNAIN BUCKLEY • Sionnain Buckley is a writer and visual artist based in Boston. Her work has appeared in *Winter Tangerine*, *Wigleaf*, *Strange Horizons*, *wildness*, and others. She was a 2019 Rhinebeck Resident with *The Seventh Wave*, and serves as the Art Editor for *3Elements Review*. More of her work can be found at sionnainbuckley.com.

OLIVIA KINGERY • Olivia Kingery is a gardener of plants and words in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She is an MFA candidate at Northern Michigan University where she reads for *Passages North*. When not writing, she is in the woods with her Chihuahua and Saint Bernard.

MAYLIN TU • Maylin Tu grew up in Maine, Beijing, and North Carolina (in that order) and currently lives in Los Angeles. She writes about race, identity, hybridity, religion, family, and pop culture.