



NATIONAL POETRY MONTH PROJECT

2022



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Introduction

To celebrate National Poetry Month, which takes place every April, Middle Georgia State University (MGA) is highlighting several student and faculty poets. Read the written versions of their poems here and listen to them read their work on the University's YouTube channel.

Dr. Kelly Whiddon is an MGA English professor specializing in creative writing. She has published poems in *Cimarron Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Meridian*, *Summerset Review*, *Southeast Review*, and *Poetry International*, among others. Her book, *The House Began to Pitch* (Mercer UP), was honored with the Adrienne Bond Poetry Award, and she has served as associate editor of *Apalachee Review* and on the staff of *International Quarterly*. She lives in Macon with her husband, Dr. Steven Wallace (MGA math professor), their nine year-old twins, a very entitled Pomeranian, and a sweet but food-aggressive chug.

Kelly Whiddon

Riding in Cars with Poets

Or were you poems? Or witches? Or gods?
The first poet I drove filled her rhythms and meters
with her parents' deaths, and my dad died
that night. She said dead bodies live in the oak
and ivy, and I mean, I can't blame her.
Can I? Can I blame her?
Maybe they were prophets,
their words not incantations but messages.

I picked them up at hotels, airports,
alumni houses, like complimentary
shampoos. I was their ferryman.
And it's too obvious to say that we
are all travelers, that each time we slam
the car door, its shimmer and widgets
are polished and waxed
into the vehicle of history,

but I carried a poet who wrote of families
deserting their farms, burning barns,
and taking only the nails with them
to start again. I went home that day
to find my house robbed—empty,
the covers of my bed used to carry the loot.

Another poet, who wrote of Demeter's agony
in losing her child, consoled
me on my infertility as we drove
from Columbus in the rain.

Did we go by first names in those minutes
we shared?—I called you Margaret, Robert,
Cleopatra; you called me Kelly or cabbie
or first mate? Or maybe I just called you
poem, Poem, and when you asked what
to tip the boatman, I told you this, only this.

William Bercini has been exploring his artistic side since retiring from his career as a systems analyst in early 2017. He began acting in community theatre in 2018 and was last seen as Inspector Hubbard in *Dial M for Murder* in Warner Robins. At MGA, where he is a senior majoring in interdisciplinary studies, Bercini has been focusing on theatre and communication. Outside of the theatre, Bercini enjoys building model aircraft, role playing games, the peace and quiet of his home in the woods, and the company of his two spoiled dogs, Honey Magnolia and Lilly Mae, neither of whom complain when he sings.

William Bercini

Early Wednesday Morning

The keening of the hairdryer means
John is up. The morning is murky.
Dreams stampede away, leaving dust
to settle into the corners of my eyes. My feet
jolt the floor, and get a cold slap in return.
Fingertips plow the dust
aside. Ten minutes to get lunch packed. Can't be late
again.

My head is taxidermy art. Somehow
expert fingers find the ragged robe. I swirl it
about myself like a matador's cape.
Stretch and yawn. Sniffle and scratch.
Stumble and mumble. I pour
a steaming mug of liquid clarity
again.

Muttering into the fridge, I rummage: "fruit...salad...cold cuts..."
The zipper strip in the sandwich bag vibrates
my fingers. It tickles. Snickering, I lob Hershey kisses
into the lunch bag. If only the NBA knew of
my talent. The dresser drawers groan and thump
on the other side of the wall. Soon he'll be ready to leave
again.

He emerges: eager and expectant.
We perform the inventory ritual: "wallet...badge...phone..."
We hug. It is as if we are having the last slow dance
of the night. I greedily drink
in the fragrances of Dove soap,
and hairspray, and freshly-ironed scrubs.
Lunch bag bouncing behind, he's out the door

again.

Moments later, I kiss the rim of my mug
while watching the headlights glint from one window
to the next, like fireflies playing leapfrog.
Turning off the closet light,
I strain to hear the motor. The silence is monstrous. I am
alone

again.

Kalecia Asquith is an MGA English major with a concentration in secondary education. She is originally from Miami but moved to Georgia when she was 16. Her favorite things to do are watch anime, write short stories and poetry, travel internationally, and spend time with her seven siblings. She plays seven different instruments and her number one fan is her pet bunny, Sugarplum.

Kalecia Asquith

A Friend Ensures Peace

This day feels like others
but the sky holds more clouds
and keeps no birds,
so it is calm
other than the soft voice
of the girl parallel to me
that terrorizes my ear
just for a moment here...
I can hear what the girl says
but I can't listen
because the buzzzzing
is in orbit around my skull.
I strain to focus.
My eyes rob the clouds of rain.
I wish I could hear her.
Because she lifts a slice of watermelon,
the one now holding the fly,
as it rubs its legs with arrogance.
The red fruit is at her mouth
... She ate it.
The watermelon...
My eyes are large
My mouth is unhinged
But my ears are relaxed
Because I am calm

And it is hushed;

And a zzzzzzzzzz

And there!

And I think she knows.

And!

And the fly.

And the fly is hushed.

Ashley Beasley is a senior at MGA. She is currently pursuing a BA in English with a minor in professional writing and a concentration in creative writing.

Ashley Beasley

Big Truth

Remember last winter when we were sitting
outside the old brick apartments
in the biting cold rain?
The cold air bled through our jackets,
and the sound of the rain ricocheted
off the flowerpots in a cadence that changed
every time it started to become
catchy. I was pregnant. I looked you in the eyes
and told you I didn't eat your jar of peppers.
They were just thrown away because someone left
them out. You smiled with half-moon eyes
and said Okay, Pup Pup.

I'm sorry for eating your jar of peppers.
Panda was hungry.

Vanessa Jimison is an MGA English major with a concentration in creative writing. She is an Army veteran (medic and Airborne) and has been a massage therapist for 16 years. Her interests include traveling, exploring, visiting museums, reading, writing poetry, working out, and everything health and human body and medical-related. She raises bearded dragons and currently has three.

Vanessa Jimison

The Fading Light

This was no blood-red blistering
apple, plucked from the braided basket
of a stranger at my door-
this was no arrow, licked
with poison, sailing swift
among the branches, toward
my open window -
this came from here, inside this house,
where strangers never meet-
it whistled under doorways
and slithered at our feet
and moaned until we listened,
then it disappeared and slinked
like a starving dog who licks
at heaps of scraps and hungry,
snaps, snarling and defeated
...this ghost is yours
and mine, and like disappearing
light and heat, is vanishing from
you and me, and slips away
in heavy echoes,
like the shadows in faint
familiar scenes, so hold
me here and don't forget
who I am, and promises
we meant to keep, hold me here
till all that's left
is you and me
in wakeless sleep.

Dr. Kevin Cantwell, special assistant to the president at MGA, is a regular reviewer of poetry collections and edited *Quarterly West* in graduate school. His poems have appeared in *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, *Metre (UK)*, *Commonweal*, *Antioch Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Irish Pages*, and *Salmagundi*. One of his poems was reprinted in *The Paris Review Book of Heartbreak, Madness, Sex, Love, Betrayal, Outsiders, Intoxication, War, Whimsy, Horrors, God, Dinner, Death, Baseball, Travels, the Art of Writing, and Everything Else in the World Since 1953* (Picador, 2003). In 2002, his book *Something Black in the Green Part of Your Eye* was published by New Issues Press. His second book of poetry, *One of Those Russian Novels*, was published in 2009. He has won the Academy of American Poets Prize; has twice won the River City Poetry Award; has won a Tennessee Williams Scholarship; has been awarded a Djerassi residency; and has won the James Dickey Prize poetry prize from *Five Points* magazine. His poems have been reprinted on *Poetry Daily* and *Poem-of-the-Day*, as well as in *The Irish Times* as its weekly poem and reprinted on RTE (Ireland). He has a forthcoming book from Mercer University Press in 2023, *One Thousand Sheets of Rice Paper*.

Kevin Cantwell

The Blizzard

Crossing the threshold itself is what makes us forget,
so says the new science of coming and going.
One room or one day to the next, so much
can be set aside. On a school morning, my son slams the door
of the old truck. The next time it is this cold,
he tells me, I should warm up the cab first
before I tap the horn to call him outside.
My own father had ridden a transport into the rain-
blackened woods of the Ardennes. This was outside of St. Vith,
Belgium, and later in life, he repeated from Bonhoeffer:
“If you board the wrong train, it is no use
running along the corridor in the other direction.”
I was not sure what that meant at first, surprised
that he would say it at all, but believed it to be
about despair, or something like the helplessness of sleep,
as in the early-morning house on holy days of obligation,
he would say from the dark hallway, Time to go,
the bus is leaving. And now, after my son is grown,
when driving back from the coast after midnight, his car
has slid sideways into a deer. At home, we must switch
the lamp on, then drive nearly to Sardis Church Road
to gather his young family. They pack the baby in our car
and are driven home, and there in the dark
I wait by myself for the amber strobes of the wrecker.
As they had strapped the car seat in, I held the grandson,
and we had hugged each other at how wonderful
the night was, frost sparkling on the high grass,
and freightliners, like Christmas-lit houses,
shuddering past. Sentimentality is a sin.
Shooting a boy in a frozen field who begs for his life
is a sin. One night I walked with my father in the first hours
of a blizzard to buy a snow-shovel from the hardware store,
and as we returned, we had to dip our heads
against the hard nicks of slanting ice.
Years later they would cart him downtown
in the limo-wagon the coroner called a bus.

Neither is this what Bonhoeffer meant exactly,
but going backward will get you nowhere.
And too much sadness is another sin.