

# STANZA

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MAINE POETS SOCIETY

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## RESULTS OF THE MAINE POETS SOCIETY'S 2020 PRIZE POEM CONTESTS

### For the Published Poets Contest the winner was Jay Franzel of Wayne

This special edition of the *Stanza* is to share the results of our 2020 Prize Poem Contests. The Published Poets segment was judged by Richard Foerster. The winner of the \$100 prize was Jay Franzel with his poem "The Cage." There were 69 entries this year. The winner was announced the evening of May 28 at the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance's Literary Awards Ceremony, this year held on Zoom.

Two poems were also chosen as runners-up: Alice Haines came in second with her poem "Ellipsis." Jay Franzel's "Giacomo Manzu Makes Father Angelo's Death Mask" was third. Three poems, two poets.

#### The Cage

by Jay Franzel

A cage unable to contain  
the light that fills it.

A tiger asleep on the floor  
breathing caged light.

#### The Ellipsis by Alice Haines, Auburn, Maine

Three dots of punctuation...the pause  
of hidden thoughts, missing  
now implied,

embodied in this starving man  
we pass upon the street, unseen.  
Bundled in an out-sized coat,  
his home a nowhere haze  
of alcoves and abandoned lots,  
he brings alive our formless dread.  
Surrounded by debris  
of scavenged food, smelling of decay,  
His friendly demon visits night  
and day to broadcast destinies and warnings.  
His visions prophesy the ending  
of the world.

We fear the gap that's incompletely understood,  
that linear space that blooms  
out to the three dimensions of unsaid,

and so, we overlook the odor  
of our greed, feed upon  
the waste of dying fish, remnants  
of honeybees, fragments  
of discarded birdsong.  
Loss is now normality, and our response—  
to disregard our sorrow—  
is a void of numbness  
so vast we cannot see the fate  
that we are sentenced to:  
the massive arctic melted to mud,  
nations deluged by oceans, humans  
slowly cooked by unrelenting heat.

Our own insane ellipsis,  
the interval before destruction,  
is compressing, compressing,  
soon to fuse into one period,  
end-stop.

## Giacomo Manzu Makes Father Angelo's Death Mask

by Jay Franzel, Wayne, Maine

*With a tiny golden hammer  
they bang John's balding head,  
a Cardinal stands and yammers,  
"Roncalli are you dead?"*

Manzu's fingers work the clay  
across the face of good Pope John,  
as darkness melts away  
the crowd outside chants psalms.

Across the face of Good Pope John  
an enigmatic smile,  
the crowd outside chants psalms  
on the plaza's ancient tile.

An enigmatic smile  
to bend the mask of death,  
on the plaza's ancient tile  
the masses breathe one breath.

To bend the mask of death  
Manzu himself might pray,  
the masses breathe one breath  
while John fades into gray.

Manzu himself might pray  
as he hasn't done for years,  
while John fades into gray  
wet with Manzu's tears.

As he hasn't done for years,  
as darkness melts away,  
wet with Manzu's tears,  
Manzu's fingers work the clay.

Manzu: Sculptor, commissioned by John XXIII for various works, despite opposition from the Vatican hierarchy (Manzu was a Communist). *are you dead?* Part of the Vatican ritual on the Pope's death (see Pepper, **An Artist and the Pope**).

As many of you know, the Maine Poets Society sponsors the annual Youth Poetry Contest offered by the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Our involvement is financial, and includes a one-year membership in the society. The judging is done by someone of MWPA's choice. This year's winner was Lulu Razor for her poem "Grendel's Mother Takes the Mic." We welcome her to the society.

## Grendel's Mother Takes the Mic

by Lulu Razor, Yarmouth, Maine

Listen up! I don't care for your petty battles, your forgettable epics. Your tongues can't pronounce

my name, so don't even try. They say to name a thing is to tame a thing, so I'm safe from domestication. Just hand

me that mic—while you still can. A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye might not be your class of justice, but I make my own rule

beneath the murk and algae, over silver-darting slashes and the endless sway of reeds. Where's your hero now, safely

sleeping in dreams of victory? Your swords and soldiers can't hold me—I line my kitchen with the bones of kings. I won't pretend

I'm here for parley or peace. We don't have diplomacy down in the mud and sludge. Teeth are the only treaty I know.

I'm unnamed, untamed, unnatural, unloved because I know the silent death of womanhood. Mother sister wife

daughter lover princess queen—they stitch the world together when your honor slashes it apart,

but who knows their names now? Tell me how it's worthwhile to follow rules when all you get is a gouge in the family tree.

Names are overrated, legacy's a scam—that's the truth you only find alone at the bottom of a lake.

And here's a secret: wicked witches always have more fun. I'm going down, but I'll claw my way into your epics anyway, nameless as I am.

### About the Poet:

Lulu Razor is 19 years old and describes herself as a lifelong mythology nerd who frequently explores the women of literature, mythology, and fairytales in her writing. She is currently a student at Oberlin College. Her debut book of poetry, *An Open Letter to Ophelia*, was published through the Telling Room's Young Emerging Authors fellowship in 2019.

**For the Unpublished Poets Contest  
the winner was Sarah Hyde of Pownal, Maine**

**When I Die I Want Honey**

When I die,  
I want honey,  
small jars of Manna  
passed to friends and family  
as they leave the church.

I want them to know,  
my husband bathed me  
in honey, wrapped my body  
in a red silk from China,  
placed me in a hole  
deep beneath my beehives...

When they go home  
and taste the gold  
and warmth of summer  
on their tongues,

may they remember the nectar  
and pollen of sunflower,  
zinnia and lily as it flows  
through their blood like stardust –

when they open their mouths  
to receive the bee bread      and bee blood,  
consecrated by my hands,  
may they hear them      humming

*this is my body, this is my blood*

and know in that moment  
no grief,  
no fear,  
nothing but sweetness

and the beating of wings.

*Sarah Hyde, Pownal, Maine*

The Maine Poets Society Executive Board met online to discuss the 37 poems submitted. We all had an opportunity to review them prior to the online meeting, and each was asked to decide on what they would choose as their top three. We were really pleased with the entries and thoroughly enjoyed our discussion. Although we chose the winner and the second-place poem easily, there was a three-way tie for third place. We've chosen to include all of those poems in this special issue.

**Second Place**

**New Snow**

low, pearlescent light of a snowy day,  
you know it as a kind glow,  
blurring,  
stretching easy  
across the path and up to the door.  
tender, insistent flakes somersault to the scarred handle –  
the woods are trunks retreating.  
you'll go out.

pull the wool cap, veteran of long winters,  
close and low across your brow.  
lift the gloves with the gashed thumb,  
red thread dangling giving pause  
before you burrow into its tunnels  
press feet into boots rippled at the ankles  
spattered still, from last spring's swollen river,  
shrug on the winter coat with its vast pockets,  
step to the door,  
and wonder at the face remade in the mirror.  
  
this snow will drift and who can say how long it will remain.

*Jacqueline M Gryphon, Portland, Maine*

### Three-Way Tie for Third Place

#### Primal

Beware those who claim indifference  
And say we should not be at odds  
With collecting the kind of audience  
That welcomes agitation into a mob.

Whether fair or foul in action,  
All nations of this human sphere  
Are in essence fabrications  
Woven in the space between our ears.

Every mind conceals a dungeon  
Which contains the wily beast  
Born at life's first foundation;  
It still waits to be released.

Wonder why we savor reason  
And the safety of sunlit noon?  
Darkness stirs our primal instinct  
To prowl, howling at the moon.

Instinct will make ashes  
Out of common sense,  
Allowing self destruction  
To seem like self-defense.

That's why wise folk shudder  
When civilization sheds its skin –  
Everything that comes thereafter  
Fiercely rises from within.

*John R. Seksay, Augusta, Maine*

#### Waddling to Wisdom

When did I realize  
That I didn't have to peel the avocado,  
But just slice and scoop?

How many years to know  
That if I sharpied a dot on the lid  
And another below on the body  
Of my Jack-O-Lantern, that I could switch  
The waxy nub for a bright new candle  
And align top and bottom  
Before a Trick-or-Treater blinked?

How many decades to discover  
That I could fill but not replace  
That empty space on a queen-sized bed  
With a dog, books, papers  
Peanuts, pepitas and pistachios?

Then how long after that did I figure  
It was a waste to spread blankets  
Over an abyss? Why not triple  
And quadruple them in folds;  
Layer them from the knees down  
And be warm for the first time in my life  
As the heat flowed upward?

Now... when will I stop looking over my shoulder?

*Pat Karpen, Caribou, Maine*

#### Painting (lipstick on pigs)

Spent a lifetime painting

Over truth

lies

secrets

holes

smudges

and ashes.

Putting lipstick on pigs.

Never making a masterpiece.

Wasting time

inspiration

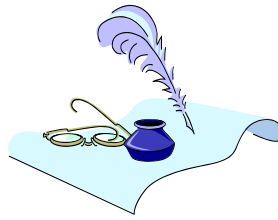
imagination

color

and space

Chasing blank canvases.

*Michelle Y. Verrier, Camden, Maine*



### President's Ink June 2020

Welcome to our special prizewinners' issue of Stanza.

We had 69 entries for the previously published poet section of our Prize Poem Contest, and 37 for the previously unpublished poet section. The standard was very high overall, and the winners of both contests were thoroughly worthy.

Richard Foerster, our judge, said of the winner of our previously published poets section: *Yes it's short, but, in my judgment, it is perfect in what it sets out to do, much in the manner of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" and Williams's "Red Wheelbarrow." And then there are the allusions to Blake's Tyger and, more obliquely, Rilke's Panther. I read this poem as an ars poetica: The well-crafted poem is a cage overbrimming with light (meaning, emotion, beauty?); the tiger might well then be the reader, content to lie within the dream of the poem. Short as it is, this poem retains mystery and, I'm sure, other possible interpretations.*

We as a board found Sarah Hyde's poem "When I Die I want Honey" impossible to forget. We really struggled to judge between it and the second place poem, "New Snow." Both poems had their supporters and there was a lot of debate among the board members, but in the end we admired its lyricism, its imagery and its use of layout, all of which worked very well together. And then we hung up on the third place, and ended up with a three-way tie, so we have even more poetry to offer you in this issue.

One of the most pleasant aspects of our Prize Poem Contest has been its expansion of our membership. We intend to continue with it, and we hope that more and more poets in Maine will enjoy the companionship of other poets in our society. We have big plans, which I will tell you more about in July's Stanza. I believe that is what's known as a teaser, so be sure to read the next copy!

Finally, I would like to welcome the winner of the Youth Poetry Award (which we sponsor via the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance but do not judge) Lulu Razor to the Maine Poets Society. I thank her very much for allowing us to publish her winning poem "Grendel's Mother Takes the Mic," and for telling us a little about herself and her interest in poetry. I was very impressed by the quality of her poem. I really enjoyed the way she used the details and style of "Beowulf" in her work, including her "Listen up!" at the beginning echoing the "Hwaet!" at the beginning of "Beowulf." She already has a debut book of poetry, *An Open Letter to Ophelia*, to her credit, published through the Telling Room's Young Emerging Authors fellowship in 2019, and I look forward to reading a lot more of her work in the future.

It has been a long lockdown, and for many of us the need to stay safe and protect ourselves from contact with other people because of the coronavirus is going to continue for a while yet. However, at least we as poets have a mode of expression that allows us a creative response to it. I wish all of you good health.

Jenny Doughty, President, Maine Poets Society

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FIRST CLASS

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*Stanza* is the tri-annual  
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promoting good poetry  
since 1936

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MPS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1747588905507733/>. When you indicate an interest in joining the group, Jenny (as Administrator) will be able to confirm your request. You can also search within Facebook for Maine Poets Society. Choose the option that says “public group.”