

► BLUE HIGH HORSE RIDER

Duo in the rain, cult brothers
 folding effortlessly into one losing all self-binding bad thoughts together,
 plunging into innocent beginnings and ending.
 Lucubrating reverence, feint attacks on scanty
 anticipating blood, anticipating shivering following their names.
 Have you ever watched a dead man swing?
 Connecting cries in unison
 babe wails as thick white wool is snatched leaving behind naked scarlet
 dripping into eyes that see sin.
 You're not alone brother you got me
 we gonna get them mercy will be ours to give you are mine I am yours.
 Have you ever watched a dead man swing?

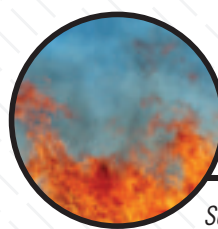


Egypt Mayo, 16

Sponsored by Mary Reid, teacher, NYSOCFS

Fogel: "Blue High horse Rider' starts right in with lively, rhythmic speech and a viewpoint we don't often see in poems--winning us over with its pain, anger, and loyalties."

Meinke: "This is a spooky poem, not clear, suggesting a dark story with hints of light at the end."



► RAT-A-TAT

*See, you're telling me,
 all we are is echoes.* The remains
 of yesterday's gods are tangled
 in your eyeslipshair electric and all I am
 is footnotes. I live in narrow margins, that crisp dry cycle
 of a mustard laundromat, a caesura slicing poets
 across their silver tongues, all cacophony and no bite---
 the orchestra is tuning its violins to the sound
 of your voice, the blessings of a false
 prophet and his luminous beings, wailing
 deicide, deicide, deicide---
 (Perhaps I am a better anecdote than human.)

See, I live with lions, you're telling me, and *I don't
 pull my punches,* and I'm smiling because I live
 in a polyphony of red and your prayers come
 with teeth: the whispered apology of satin on skin---
 I have no time for your devotionals. I have saints
 of my own. I dance with them when you have not
 kissed away the ghost
 of a body electric. I once sang
 with swamp water and radiant light. (I came
 with open palms, sap-stained longing, knew you
 were a fletchling aching for flight; I am not holy enough
 to save you.)

See, I am burning, you're whispering
 through corrupted lungs, *and sooner or later I'll burn
 you alive.* And I thought, Rat-a- tat girl, you taste
 like gunpowder, and I have always loved

smoke.

Allie Humphrey, 18

*Sponsored by Tim Carrier, young adult services manager,
 Jefferson-Madison Regional Library*

Fogel: "Rat-a-Tat' rose easily above the rest, with its sophistication of concept and its execution. With a spirited, original voice, unexpected images and language, attention to craft, and a realistic, suggested backstory, this poem was a pleasure to read."

Meinke: "Rat-a-Tat' is a poem about passion, vividly imaginative, with a good start and conclusion, and a fine vocabulary. Like all good poems, it makes you want to read it again."

VOYA's TEEN POETRY

CONTEST

2017

The poems entered into this year's contest consistently represented the sociopolitical climate of the United States right now, from several different perspectives of the young and talented authors who submitted them. There were also themes of love, sports-related nervousness, and family dynamics. This year's entries demonstrated a level of talent and creativity from young writers that was impressive and difficult to judge due to the merits of each and every entry. But . . . a contest needs winners, and so VOYA was honored to have two state Poet Laureates read and judge all the poems, Alice B. Fogel and Peter Meinke. Their accomplished, highly-awarded talent as writers, as well as their expertise in poetry, brought professional knowledge to the task. Their difficulty in arriving at a short list and a final list of winners demonstrates how competitive this year's contest entries were. Congratulations to all the young adult poets who entered. You are all talented writers who should continue to pursue your passion. To enter the 2018 Teen Poetry Contest, see <http://voyamagazine.com/contests/teen-poetry-contest/>.



► I AM THE OCEAN

I am waves of unspoken words
And without even the slightest provocation
I sweep my way over everything,
Graceful yet utterly devastating,
Until there is nothing left
But the rubble of what we used to be.

Maygan Reynolds, 17

Sponsored by Tim Carrier, young adult services manager, Jefferson-Madison Regional Library



Fogel: "It's not easy to make a short poem deliver real emotion by carrying a mood and an idea that expand far beyond literal content; this succeeds through its subtle use of metaphor."

Meinke: "'I Am the Ocean' is a short poem that looks deep within, and condenses very effectively a complex and original thought."

► WELCOME TO AMERICA

I was born in China, at night
A small town under polluted sky
I was given pure black eyes
Through the darkness, I see lives

I traveled, thousands of miles to reach another land
A land across the ocean
A land dreamed to be fine
But I could still see, see people cry

I asked my warm-hearted friend
Why, why there is trash everywhere beside the street
With those homeless people, hopeless and weak
Why people protest, to fight for things they deserve

Why is there still injustice between rich and poor,
Men and women, black and white
These scenes were not in my dream
The dream of a great country

She smiled at me with stars in her eyes
And a kind of soft sorrow, then she replied
Oh, dear friend, welcome to America
This is another heart-broken land

Huangzwen Qian, 16

Sponsored by: Becky Fyolek, teen librarian, Monroe County Public Library



Fogel: "Through both showing and telling, 'Welcome to America' offers a sober look at the hope and disappointment of a young immigrant."

Meinke: "'Welcome to America' is well-organized, idealistic, and clear. This poem has an emotional punch."

► SMILE

The same routine every day:
She dreaded those smirking faces,
Worried what they thought of her,
Knew they branded her *Weirdo!*

Classmates gave her scars inside
To remind her of all her flaws;
They could barely endure her,
And she lived trembling near them.

All she ached for was a smile:
Her hurt heart hoped for a smiling face,
Just one face that didn't petrify her,
One smile to save her from herself.

Returning home, sitting alone
On the school bus again, she gazed
At the driving rain outside the glass
And shivered at her inner cold,

Until the chill left her as someone,
For the first time, sat down next to her;
For the first time, she heard, *Hi Mia!*
And turned to him to see his smile.

Aashna Belenje, 13

Sponsored by Birgit Spring, teen librarian, Saratoga Library

Fogel: "'Smile' is both devastating and sweet in its depiction of how it feels to be rejected and accepted. It's not just the topic, which so many of us can connect with, that makes the poem succeed, though; it's the way the writer constructed the details of the story and its progression of emotions."

Meinke: "'Smile' is a touching little narrative about a young and lonely student, with a happy ending."

THE JUDGES

ALICE B. FOGEL is the Poet Laureate of New Hampshire. In addition to **Strange Terrain**, a guide to appreciating poetry without necessarily "getting" it, she is the author of four poetry collections and the winner of the Nicholas Schaffner Award for Music in Literature, the New Hampshire Literary Award in Poetry, and is a national bestseller. A nine-time Pushcart nominee and recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship and other awards, her poems appear in many journals and anthologies. Her new collection, **A Doubtful House**, is forthcoming in April 2017. She works with learning disabled students at Landmark College in Putney, Vermont, and hikes mountains whenever possible.

PETER MEINKE, Poet Laureate of Florida, has published over twenty-five books, with poems appearing in several top literary magazines. His awards include three prizes from the Poetry Society of America, two NEA Fellowships, a Fulbright Professorship to the University of Warsaw, among others. Meinke has been a Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at numerous colleges/universities and organizations. His most recent book, **The Expert Witness** (2016), is a collection of short stories, while his previous title won a Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. He has read his poetry, fiction, and children's books at schools and universities throughout America and at the Library of Congress, as well as abroad in London, Paris, Warsaw, Geneva, and Africa. ■