

# FRESH VOICES

This year marks the 21st season of Fresh Voices, a tradition established in 1993 by the Young Writers Institute in conjunction with Hill-Stead Museum and maintained thereafter by the Museum. Each year Hill-Stead conducts a high school poetry contest and chooses a number of winners, who receive mentoring at the Museum and present a reading in the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival. This reading has always been one of the main attractions of the Festival. Organized this year by John L. Stanizzi in conjunction with Hill-Stead's Kate Ebner, the Night of Fresh Voices is part of the Museum's ongoing commitment to promoting poetry in area high schools, which is augmented by a school-year poetry program that has long been under the direction of Pit Pinegar. We hope that you will enjoy this year's reading by the winners of our competition and that this booklet will enhance your appreciation of their poetry.

Susan Ballek  
Director & CEO  
Hill-Stead Museum

SUNKEN  
GARDEN 2014  
*poetry* FESTIVAL

# FRESH VOICES



Poems by  
Winners of Hill-Stead Museum's  
Young Poets Competition  
2014



Antrim House  
Simsbury, Connecticut

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Poems by

SHANA BLATT



Shana will be entering her Senior year at Foran High School in Milford, Connecticut and also studies Creative Writing at the ACES Educational Center for the Arts in New Haven. A particularly important mentor at the Center has been Bruce Cohen. She has tentative plans to major in English at college and is interested in editing as a career. Shana's interests beyond poetry include fashion, ornithology, traveling, modern art, political activism, and music.

## Think It's Normal

It's a classic American scene –  
a boy, halfway between  
kidhood  
and grown-up-hood  
and he knows it.

He found Mom's liquor,  
Daddy's cigarettes,  
found bruises in bar fights  
he wasn't in

and he sports them  
outwardly, like badges:  
his smoke, his flask,  
his discolored skin,  
while so hard he tries  
to be contemplative

he's staring at the ceiling  
he's calling back  
the seven zeros  
he's hoping he can  
fall asleep tonight

but it's five PM and  
the stairs aren't carpeted.  
He wants to hate  
his parents, his roots;  
he wants to ruin himself  
so much  
that no one claims him  
as theirs.

Hotwire cars, smoke pot  
in the garage; take a  
gap year, become a hippie  
or an addict; crawl under  
turnstiles; feign  
homelessness;

all he has,  
clenched  
in his hands:  
a rum & coke;  
an unlit cigarette;  
a pocket knife;  
and a scholarship.

## That Afternoon I Fell Asleep in My Jeans

We're going to be late, she says,  
yelling from downstairs  
and I'm fine with it  
like I'm fine with the staples on  
my floor, and the breakfast  
of our Advil and a sip  
of a friend of a friend's coffee,

four pills, all at once;  
standing at my dresser,  
peeling back labels  
to see more label  
to see what I'm ignoring.

She yells again, a question,  
voice lost in directions and dosages  
and the sound stored in my head;  
my head set to burst –  
can't blame her for not knowing,  
like she can't blame me for  
stealing her ibuprofen.

I raise my eyes to the window,  
carefully, because the sun hurts,  
even reflected off the snow, it hurts –  
I don't see stars, but little magnet  
rocks, never touching, but  
sounding like  
metallic kisses  
bizarre and jarring.

## Far Eastern

Open windows next to dinner tables.  
Imagine the impulse to jump out.  
Peel the skin from your fingers until  
blood mixes with new coats of polish.  
City lights itself from the inside –  
lights on the same circuit as the sun.  
The children duck under tumstiles,  
with swelled masks, painted by lights, storefronts;  
the city gave them life when they rose  
up from crosswalks, shouldering backpacks.  
The Chinese greaser fans himself with  
a deck of cards. He commutes to Here.

## Tinnitus

My room sounds different  
with people in it.  
My friend sits on my bed,  
I lie  
shirtless on the floor,  
mumbling – I forget about the rain.  
She says major and minor keys  
affect our moods in daily life,  
then asks what I hear.

1. I walk across the lawn  
in early December. In one window  
Alex's air conditioner rattles  
from the ice inside it.  
He prefers a dark room,  
sixty degrees,  
one light switch,  
one lamp.

2. I sit in a waiting room  
with my dad  
and a basket of toys  
I am too old to play with.  
I don't understand  
the white noise machine  
but I can make out the words  
on the radio.

3. The rain on the window  
turns to footsteps in the hall  
when I close my eyes.  
A man walks endlessly

trying to reach my door.  
When he shows  
I hope his gun jams.  
The thunder claps. The man stops.  
Stuck to my ceiling are  
glow-in-the-dark stars;  
I think I'd fit in  
the stratosphere.  
There's space for me,  
I bet.

4. I stare into the drain  
with my forehead pressed  
against the faucet,  
eyes fixed on what's leaving.  
I hear the flow of water  
in my head, and it's useless  
because it cleanses nothing.

5. In late winter I walk  
barefoot in the snow.  
Snow crunches under feet  
which have lost feeling, turned into  
singular amethysts.  
The wind blows minute tumbleweeds  
nowhere in particular.  
Moccasin-less, I  
silently declared  
myself an adventurer,  
and turned blue  
like the sky behind the clouds.

She knows everything,  
so I say "nothing."  
We sit in silence, then,  
and wonder what key it's in.

Poems by  
COLLEEN FEENEY



Colleen will soon begin her senior year at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, where she majors in Creative Writing. She has always loved writing and making up stories, but it has been at the GHAA that she has discovered her love for poetry. All of her writing teachers—Meghan Evans, Pit Pinegar, Megan (Collins) Hatfield, Maureen O’Brien, Rafael Oses, and Pam Nomura—have helped her not only to love poetry as an art form but also to craft it and find her voice. They have taught her to understand that every word counts and to revise energetically. Colleen hopes to find ways of combining her two loves: creative writing and visual arts. In college, she plans to double major in Creative Writing and Art Education or Art Therapy.

## Projected Space

“Look at the stars,” you said with one arm around my shoulder  
and the other pointing at the planetarium’s ceiling.  
You whispered the names of constellations  
before the announcer had a chance,  
the stars were just another piece of your vast knowledge.

You wanted me to love them as you did.

But the constellations never quite looked like  
the stories you told me,  
and as I tried to touch the stars  
the projection of the night sky  
disappeared.

And when the harsh lights of the auditorium came on  
you were gone,  
just an image of a  
father  
projected on a screen for a 30 minute showing.

And I was left alone,  
wondering how the stars we thought were brightest  
could have already  
burned out.

## Arcadia

*Noun: any place real or imaginary of peace and simplicity*

I will forever connect the sweet scent of grass  
with the sweet scent of you.  
There is something so right  
about the smell of grass and the taste of summer air,  
so right the way our laughter intertwines and fills the night.

There is something so sacred about  
our fingers finding each other,  
our backs pressing against the ground,  
and for the first time in who knows how long  
our eyes realizing the sky.

For now, I will forget  
how temporary this is,  
that gravity will force us back  
to the loneliness we don't dare talk about,  
and your sickness will take you again,  
until the space between us is too large to be filled  
with meadows and fingertips.

But in this moment, we do not think  
of tomorrows or yesterdays not spent together  
but of how grass, often unnoticed  
can be so sharp, so sweet.

## Seeing You Break

I will never forget you broken,  
the time I tripped over your shattered pieces,  
and the only words I had to offer were “Are you okay?”  
words you tried to return  
but I wouldn’t let you.

I won’t forget that day  
our world fell apart  
and we were all just victims  
of the shockwaves  
and I saw tears cracking  
the surface of your cheeks.

Because I never thought you could break.  
Not you, you are the teacher who rolls her eyes,  
yours is laughter we can hear down the hall,  
you are the one we warned the incoming sophomores  
“Don’t give her any crap, she won’t take it.”

Yet somehow, there you were  
as shattered as the rest of us.

I will never forget you holding my hand  
and telling me “Together.”  
“Together we will make it through.”

I will never forget you broken,  
because your brokenness reminded me  
how fragile we are,  
because you showed me how strong we can be.

## For Fear of Water

I think of you  
though you are miles from here,  
but you haven't left my mind in  
weeks and even by this shore  
it is no different.

You are with me,  
breathing down my neck  
as the cool November wind reminds me  
it is long past beach season.

You follow me as I walk along the water's edge  
afraid of its cold touch,  
yet unwilling to leave its side.

And at night,  
I dream.  
Not of you,  
but of torrent waters,  
waves washing over me.

Poems by

SOPHIA O'BRIEN-UDRY



Sophia attends the Creative Writing Department of the Educational Center for the Arts located in downtown New Haven, as well as Wilbur Cross High School. Next fall she'll enter Bard College with an undecided major. Outside of writing, she is interested in film and music. An important mentor in her life has been her poetry teacher, Bruce Cohen.

## Celestial Navigation

I want to tell you  
about the dung beetles.  
About how without the Milky Way  
they can't walk  
straight or so narrow,  
just stumble like first-time teens  
drunk with wine.

It's tough to navigate when I'm staring  
at you through a pinhole in a pixeled laptop,  
and I think maybe we'd fare better  
with a pair of space suits, just able  
to squint through the asteroids.

Khepri, his head the body  
of a dung beetle, was seen  
as the emblem of rebirth, the pulling  
of dung across sand, a sheepish  
translation of the sun  
being pulled across the sky

and I wonder if he's like me  
or the beetles, maybe you,  
lost and a little confused,  
unable to see his galaxy,

or does he stay  
content, dreaming up  
his own planetarium?

## Sugar Pops

50 years ago, his Keds echoed  
against the checkerboard bricks  
laid out like hopscotch chalk. With knives,  
these streets were whittled  
from the curb, carved in

for him, he thinks, (and maybe for the man-hole  
men whose drills pound asphalt and palms;  
their hands are tough and small)  
and maybe for *her*, that waitress  
with sunspots, who serves  
him pink crepes and Sugar Pops  
in the dusty leather diner seats. 50 years  
and he still can't figure out

the mechanics of her – how the shadows  
of her chin line pour over her neck, bobbing  
as she bites down on the blue jaw breakers  
that take chips off her front teeth. He watches  
as she slices pineapple on a butcher's block,  
into discs, into cubes. To him, her hands, now loose  
and shaking, still seem tender.

## The Greats

Fingers crinkle around  
the stub of her cigarette, smoked  
down to an elbow-crook curl.  
Jo slips behind the strips  
of ash-littered hospice sheets,  
missing her husband's Irish riddles,  
how their tea mugs smelled of vodka.

Ankle gauze-swaddled and strung up  
above his calves,  
diabetes swallowed up Jules's toes  
and left him to wrinkle  
by the plaster of Cincinnati.  
Remembering only  
pillbox letters, the name  
of his fifth daughter.

Dot wanders to the brim  
of Shady Oaks, down to the marsh  
that swells with spartina blue crabs  
and the whistling of Georgian hen-hunters  
when everything is quiet. Dot doesn't know  
how to make malts or lists or stories  
anymore. She can only forget.

## Clippings

Aunt Patty tells me she's got a 12-pack  
of cherry cola sitting in her trunk, spoiling.  
I file my thumb nails – left right left right,  
even though Cosmo tells me it's better  
if I file in one direction only. Aunt Patty  
and all her sisters have toenails that curl  
inwards and pierce the skin  
around them. She'll sit on the couch and stick  
her toes in foam molds to stop the pain.  
I clip away at the borderlines  
of my toenails – little shards sprinkling  
around my bathroom tiles, an ugly mosaic.  
“I didn't know soda could spoil,”  
I tell her, and she's bitter  
with me: “Flatten then, it'll flatten.”

## Cherry Pits

She spills Earl Gray on her blouse, a blotch  
seeping down her stomach. He looks, thinks  
of her butt in that little hound's-tooth  
skirt, doesn't offer her a napkin.

He'd seen her for the first time  
at his cousin's barbeque, tucked up  
in the den, watching some show  
about a woman who eats her husband's ashes.  
He thought she looked so sweet.

A decade later, he comes  
to this diner. Eats a Cheese  
Danish in neat bites and pays  
for her omelets. She spills  
Earl Gray on her blouse.

Poems by

TAITE PUHALA



Taite attends Westminster school in Simsbury and in the fall will enter Brown University, where she plans to major in Literary Arts. In addition to writing, she is interested in photography, dogs, baseball (the Red Sox!), feminism “and other social justice-y stuff,” and “pretentious indie rock.” She is pondering a career as an English professor “since there’s nothing else you can do with a degree in writing.” The important mentors in her life as a poet have been Michael Cervas and Naomi Shihab Nye. As her favorite writers she lists Emily Dickinson, David Mitchell, David Foster Wallace, Adrienne Rich, and John Darnielle.

## The Dogs of Central Park

The first one I see is small,  
half the size of my forearm,  
and wearing a cable knit sweater  
to keep out the autumn morning chill.  
The next is curly and off-white,  
like a t-shirt that was mixed in  
the laundry with the darks  
one too many times.

I measure the walk in dogs that go by:  
two French bulldogs, one white, one black,  
circling each other in a philosophic dance;  
a dachshund scurrying along like a centipede;  
the ubiquitous yellow lab, unshakably  
jovial and carrying a Wiffle ball it stole from  
a little-league pickup game.

A trio of dog walkers is dragged  
by a horde of pit bulls, Rottweilers,  
Weimaraners, and a few enthusiastic  
mutts. Behind them, a team of Chihuahuas  
in pink socks tugs along, taking their sweet time.

Two frantic owners try to separate  
their German Shepherds while parents  
pull their children to the side. They are only  
barking at each other, but it's no use  
trying to tell anybody else that.  
Two tiny dogs posture on the ground,  
drawing an entirely different reaction.

A well-dressed businesswoman hides

a tiny black furball in the chest  
of her double-breasted peacoat.  
It squirms, looks up, realizes  
it is meant to be secret and stays put.

A wizened, silvering Irish Wolfhound  
lowers his head. At home, my oldest dog moves  
slow, slower than you would expect  
considering his age, creaking along on bad knees.  
You can see the way the cold nips at them,  
ankles shaking, eyes dark and determined.

I measure the space from home  
in the number of dogs I have seen  
since I left mine. Our puppy bounds along,  
chewing the world as she goes. Behind  
this majestic old hound, a puppy  
with feet too big for its body dashes,  
tumbles, gets back up, barks at the big dog  
as if to egg him on. He bends his forelegs,  
quickly wags his tail.

Dogs keep moving because we love them,  
because they love being alive,  
even as their joints ache and buckle  
and give out, they keep moving

like the lights and sounds in the city, not created  
or destroyed, just transferred from body  
to warm squirming body in this frosted,  
pre-winter morning.

## Parting Is All We Know of Heaven

My friend tells me ghost stories  
from back home, of jinn,

the virulent kinds of spirits  
leveling villages. I want to say

that kind of thing doesn't happen here,  
though I've heard of ghosts

more wistful than angry  
sitting on windowsills and sharing

the details of their lives. I guess it depends  
on the circumstances of their deaths,

or the gossamer shapes of their lives.  
The things you thought were solid –

bones, frameworks, first loves –  
turn out to be only tulle.

It's enough to make anyone bitter,  
after it's gone.

The body dies all the time,  
skin and hair only shells of cells

already spent and peeled off.  
Some people speed up the process.

From eleven onward I hardly ate,  
couldn't see the point,

watched blandly as my body fell away,  
adding new layers of wool and cashmere

to protect against the cold, but holding  
on to the slough. I sometimes have dreams

of things before they happen,  
and think I might be half a ghost.

Which part of you is living?  
Is it the center of rushing blood,

or the thin scarf you call your soul?

## The Fall of a Sparrow

A bird does not fly, it suspends  
from a length of fishing line  
the width of a hair, the kind you'd use  
to cut clay, the way spiderweb silk  
is stronger than steel.

Today, like Atropos, I cut the thread  
and let the sparrow fall. By now  
it was almost picked over. The fate of the bird  
does not depend on the shape of its life,  
though augury would have it otherwise –

but its death like this is a red thread  
caught on fire. The infinity of sand  
descends to dust on the horizon.  
At the table, I pluck a tiny bird bone  
from my whitened throat.

## for love is immortality

black dust makes you  
mortal, battle-marked  
two fingers in soot and  
sweat to paint your face  
with a blaze of glory

black ink makes you  
untouchable, new  
tattoo popping off  
your skin like squid  
spray, growing beyond

the confines of your body,  
which will fade, you say defiantly,  
hiding your eyes behind shades,  
counting the days like rosary beads.

Poems by

WENELL ST.HILL



Wenell is a graduating Senior at Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, soon to be a freshman at Hampshire College. She enjoys reading works by Sharon Olds and won the Wallace Stevens Scholarship Award last year as a Junior. She is seventeen and spends most of her time hanging out with her baby sister and reading in whatever spare time she has. Wenell writes mostly poetry, something her mother inspired her to do, and uses it as a way to articulate how she views the world. She plans to major in Neuroscience in college and one day open a private practice for therapy. But for now, Wenell plans to spend her time traveling when she isn't "juggling college."

## Interior

Tonight,  
through bare rooms,  
looking for heaven,  
his love  
for what is dead  
is restless, burning.

“Have you prayed?”  
a man asks a coffin,  
wondering if the dead might respond.

Someone tell him  
a light that mends love  
is like sewing various colors,  
uneven.  
“Have you prayed?” the room echoes back;  
the man shivers.

Though what is dead  
doesn't worry about what is living.  
Tell him he should sleep now,  
keeping his breath.

There is nothing of sleep,  
there is nothing of home,  
discarded with the first fragrance of burial clothes.

The man begins to cry; the dead stays silent.

His love for  
what is dead is helpless,  
hopeless.

It's called:  
Loss  
Displaced Person.

## Dust Bowl

He stood there, arms extended,  
reaching towards the light,  
his suit pressed and steamed,  
standing in the Oklahoma sun.  
It was 1934.

He walks the streets every day.  
Filth builds up in his lungs,  
dry wind cuts at his skin,  
dust collects.  
He is looking for money.

Families assemble  
on broken streets,  
begging, crying,  
falling apart.  
Hunger, stress, mortality eat at memory.  
Daughters once proud turn to eloquent bone;  
sons develop cancer playing in sandboxes.

The man stops waiting for hope to ride his horse,  
unaware that the disease brewing in his heart is not greed  
but honesty.  
His outstretched hand grabs at loss, not light.

## Epithalamium

I dreamed we were married again,  
purple lilies lining the aisle.  
Faceless people clapping,  
clouds of valium in the air.

I see your face in profile,  
unshaven,  
suit made of rags,  
your trembling hands  
reaching towards  
my veil made of dust.

We were both moths  
against a buglight,  
wings twitching  
as our bodies burned,

I woke up thinking  
*Hell has not let go of me yet.*

## Funeral

Sometime later I woke to noise;  
he lost his job again,  
she was weeping.  
We children hid behind paper walls  
and cellophane doors.  
Same old story:  
*Why do you do this to me?*

Love had vanished in our hearts;  
used as iron chains,  
we reminded their fraudulent necks  
that this relationship was suicide.  
But they couldn't leave us,  
we were fledglings,  
unaware of a world beyond  
ignorance and varnish.

Their hatred pulsed  
behind every memory of "family";  
they grew older and so did we.

We left our nest with crooked wings,  
our view of family distorted under our parents' clumsy hands.  
The noise stops  
but the memories continue haunting.

It won't stop raining.  
The city tries to overpower the sound  
of the kitchen clock ticking,  
but the incense burning seems to amplify everything:  
*boxes, memories, black garments.*

The saddest part is despite all they did  
even in death  
hatred never brought them separation  
and we children learned  
that sorrow is a thing that scars.

## Within You

There was an ocean within you,  
that had waited almost a century to still.  
An ocean that had carried  
the weight of family,  
an ocean that had watched some  
of its children die young.

You carried me as though  
I was a part of your very body,  
your waves lulling me to sleep.

Waves that have been saturated  
with salt tears and fisher man's blood.  
Waves that have sunk ships  
carrying the abusive husbands of  
grandkids.

Your eyes told me that  
you were so happy to hold me,  
rock me,  
know me.  
Getting ready to protect me  
from summer storms.

If you had lived,  
would you have shared with me  
stories of friends  
that died before you  
and memories of times  
spent smoking on this porch?



This book is set in Garamond Premier Pro, which had its genesis in 1988 when type-designer Robert Slimbach visited the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp, Belgium, to study its collection of Claude Garamond’s metal punches and typefaces. During the mid-fifteen hundreds, Garamond—a Parisian punch-cutter—produced a refined array of book types that combined an unprecedented degree of balance and elegance, for centuries standing as the pinnacle of beauty and practicality in type-founding. Slimbach has created an entirely new interpretation based on Garamond’s designs and on compatible italics cut by Robert Granjon, Garamond’s contemporary.

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