



Eduardo C. Corral

Eduardo C. Corral is the son of Mexican immigrants. He's the author of *Guillotine*, published by Graywolf Press, and *Slow Lightning*, which won the 2011 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition. He's the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Lannan Foundation Literary Fellowship, a Whiting Writers' Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University. He teaches in the MFA program at North Carolina State University.

TO A BLOSSOMING SAGUARO

You have kin in Mexico.
Shooting you is called “cactus plugging.”
Humidity & wind speed shape the path of a bullet.
Your shadow will outlive my father.
That’s kind of comforting.
Ghost-faced bats pollinate your dog-eared flowers
which smell like wet rope, melon.
The sky is a century with no windows.
I say things like that. Sorry.
You have more rights than the undocumented:
I need a permit to uproot you.
Ofelia believes only rain can touch all of you.
My mother is my favorite immigrant.
After her? The sonnet.

Ilya Kaminsky

Ilya Kaminsky is the author of *Dancing in Odessa* and *Deaf Republic*. He is also the translator and editor of many other books, including *Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva* and *The Ecco Anthology of International Poetry*. He was a finalist for the National Book Award and won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the National Jewish Book Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Whiting Award, among others. He teaches at Princeton University and lives in New Jersey.

LETTERS

Rain has eaten 1/4 of me

yet I believe against
all evidence

these raindrops are my letters of
recommendation

here is a man worth falling on.

Jericho Brown

Jericho Brown is author of *The Tradition*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize. Brown's first book, *Please*, won the American Book Award. His second book, *The New Testament*, won the Anisfield- Wolf Book Award. His poems have appeared in *Buzzfeed*, the *New Republic*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, the *Paris Review*, *TIME* magazine, and several volumes of *The Best American Poetry*. He is the Charles Howard Candler Professor of English and Creative Writing at Emory University.

AERIAL VIEW

People who romanticize an Africa
They've never seen
Like to identify themselves
With lions. It's all roar and hunt,
Quick fucks and blond manes.
People love the word *pride*.
Haven't you seen the parades?
Everybody adores a lion
But me. I want to be a giraffe.
I'm already tall and long-necked.
In the real Sahara, a giraffe beats
A lion's ass every day
On Instagram. I've seen
A giraffe shake the leaping cat
Off its back and toss it like litter.
I've seen a giraffe stomp hooves
Down hard on the lion's face
Before it got the chance
To meow. I want to be a giraffe
And eat greens of every variety
Straight out the tree. I already
Like to get high. Lions need
Animals like us. We need no prey.
I already won't chase anybody
For my food. But maybe
I can still be romantic. Maybe
I can still be romantic in spite
Of my pride. Someone will notice.
Up the sky, Not down the street.
You can watch me while I watch you
And the rest of the savanna
From my aerial view. Lord,
Let me get higher. Just one of me
Is a parade.

Matthew Zapruder

Matthew Zapruder is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Story of a Poem*, *Father's Day*, and *Why Poetry*. He is editor-at-large at Wave Books, where he edits contemporary poetry, prose, and translations. From 2016–2017 he held the annually rotating position of editor of the Poem column for the *New York Times Magazine*, and was the editor of the anthology *The Best American Poetry 2022*. He teaches in the MFA in Creative Writing program at Saint Mary's College of California and lives in the Bay Area of Northern California.

IT WAS SUMMER. THE WIND BLEW

It was summer. The wind blew away from me, and I stayed here thinking about a certain mountain. Things got green then forgot, and in their forgetting remembered everything that was not grass, or me. My son forgot he could not swim, then emerged tall as laughter, hidden as the lesson in a song. He forgot how to tie his shoes then learned how to draw a face and tie it to a string and run far off into the place only he could go. I chased him but he just grew larger. For a week he became a carpenter, hammering filled my heart. My heart went to the hardware store and bought all the napping spatulas. It was summer, so I let them stay up all night, or they let me. We swung from the magnolia, our great leaves fell, it remained our friend. Each day was that same sweet holiday that never ended until the windows got soft. It was summer. Candles came on like televisions.

That was the last time things were real.

Patricia Smith

Patricia Smith is the author of *Unshuttered; Incendiary Art*, winner of the Kingsley Tufts Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the NAACP Image Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; *Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah*, winner of the Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets; *Blood Dazzler*, a National Book Award finalist; *Africans in America*, a companion volume to the award-winning PBS series; and the children's book *Janna and the Kings*. Her work has also appeared in *The Best American Poetry*, *The Best American Essays*, and *The Best American Mystery Stories*. Smith is the recipient of the Ruth Lilly Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation. She is a professor in the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University, a former distinguished professor for the City University of New York, a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She lives in Mercer County, New Jersey.

TO LITTLE BLACK GIRLS, RISKING FLOWER

A Double Golden Shovel

*And then the day came,
when the risk
to remain tight
in a bud
was more painful
than the risk
it took
to blossom.*

—ANAÏS NIN

Blossom when you're ready, but rough. Be quaint explosive. And to those who spoke you dim, dismissed your failed green, then took your witless imagination for manic romps in the drizzle—the *it* named Weather was wee drama, cartoonish in the clutch of day.

Risk the lush you have never seen. Forget how winter first came—the unrhymed shudder, the gray dressed like your father; when, thanks to the loud religion of wind, you couldn't find your face, and the painful trick of season moved through you like a knife of ice. Risk

more. Risk smolder. Risk blood flower. Risk voice. (Like you, it too was often just storm not knowing why.) Risk is why you remain, bud like an opening hand, sprouting your mere devastation of tight aroma, why you'll strut thorn, sink flytrap canines into bland satin, into a landscape of concrete, unloosing the notion of grass. What a tight-clenched jubilation you are, what a plump thirsting bud, remaining unswerved in your reach for any sky. If your aim was to unfurl, terrify, sparkle with damage, you'll do that and more.

Risk lurks in every inch of soil as frost or scorch, and it's painful the way soil can stunt the upward it insists upon. You're more than when you were just a whimpering mistake beneath the dirt, the *Camellia* clawing for first breath. Risk that breathlessness. Risk day, risk slap of sun, risk yawning wide, risk the itch and choke of it, the damned wheel of days, growth and all the dirty water it took. Then be that quaint explosive. Growl out with howling, red vibrato, and own everything weather has done to you. Bellow, girl. Blossom.



Ruth Awad

Ruth Awad is a Lebanese American poet, a 2021 National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellow, and the author of *Outside the Joy* and *Set to Music a Wildfire*, winner of the 2016 Michael Waters Poetry Prize and the 2018 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. Alongside Rachel Mennies, she is the co-editor of *The Familiar Wild: On Dogs & Poetry*. She is the recipient of a 2020 and 2016 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Poem-a-Day*, *AGNI*, *The Believer*, the *New Republic*, the *Kenyon Review*, *Pleiades*, the *Missouri Review*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. She lives in Columbus, Ohio.

REASONS TO LIVE

Because if you can survive the
violet night, you can survive

the next, and the fig tree will ache with
sweetness for you in sunlight that arrives

first at your window, quietly pawing
even when you can't stand it,

and you'll heavy the whining floorboards
of the house you filled with animals

as hurt and lost as you, and the bearded irises will form
fully in their roots, their golden manes

swaying with the want of spring—
live, live, live, live!—

one day you'll put your hands in the earth
and understand an afterlife isn't promised,

but the spray of scorpion grass keeps growing,
and the dogs will sing their whole bodies

in praise of you, and the redbuds will lay
down their pink crowns, and the rivers

will set their stones and ribbons
at your door if only

you'll let the world soften
you with its touching.