



Boston Authors Club

April 2021 Newsletter

In This Issue

- **Currently Reading Interviews Susan Bernhard**
- **April 23 Performance Poetry Event with Phil Kaye**
- **President's Note: Celebrating With Poetry**
- **Yesteryear: Spoken Word Poetry circa 1924**

CURRENTLY READING: Susan Bernhard

*Susan Bernhard is a Massachusetts Cultural Council fellowship recipient, a graduate of the GrubStreet Novel Incubator program, and a 2019 Tennessee Williams Scholar to the Sewanee Writers Conference. Her debut novel **Winter Loon** is an Amazon Bestseller and BAC Julia Ward Howe Fiction Prize winner. Susan was born and raised in the Bitterroot Valley of western Montana, is a graduate of the University of Maryland, and lives near Boston where she is currently at work on her next novel.*



1) What are you reading right now?

I'm reading **Great Circle** by Maggie Shipstead. It releases on May 4 and I'm absolutely in love with this book. In fact, I'm reading it for the second time.

2) What inspired you to pick up this title?

I'd just finished reading Katherine Sherbrooke's *Leaving Coy's Hill* (also releasing May 4), which is an incredible, deeply moving novel of abolitionist and suffragist Lucy Stone, who was, of course, a contemporary of Julia Ward Howe. So rule-breaking women were very much on my mind when I picked up *Great Circle*. It's the story of two women living generations apart. The first is Marian Graves, a daredevil aviator whose life story we follow from her near-death as a baby on a sinking ocean liner in 1914 to her disappearance while attempting to circumnavigate the globe pole-to-pole. The second, Hadley Baxter, is a Hollywood starlet whose comeback role, after making several public missteps, is Marian's biopic. I was sucked in by the premise, sold because it was set in my home state of Montana (though it moves gloriously around the whole world), and swept away by the immersive storytelling. As a novelist, I tried to imagine what it would take to tackle this kind of story. What a feat! The timeline spans a century and several continents; the backdrops are spectacularly varied, including rural Montana, the Alaskan tundra, war-torn London, the Ross Ice Shelf of Antarctica, and glittering Hollywood; and the supporting cast includes bootleggers, gamblers, philanthropists, artists, and lovers. For me it brought to mind Jess Walters' *Beautiful Ruins*, Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*, and *Angle of Repose* by Wallace Stegner.

3) What is your impression of the book so far?

Well, I'm on my second read and I'm having a hard time believing this won't be one of my very favorite novels of 2021, if not ever. It's literary, romantic, and transportive; a huge bite of a book and I adore it.

4) Please feel free to give us a star rating from 1-5 (5 being the best).

Five shining stars for *Great Circle*, ten if you count another five for the second read, fifteen if you count five for *Leaving Coy's Hill* which launched what I hope will be a year of reading about strong women.

Interview by Kate Farrell

Performance Poetry Event by Phil Kaye on April 23



In celebration of poetry month, you are invited to a free performance of spoken word poetry by Phil Kaye, hosted on Zoom by [Write the World](#) at 7PM EDT on Friday evening, April 23.

Phil Kaye is a Japanese-American artist. His original work has been featured in settings ranging from [The New Yorker](#) to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, viewed millions of times online, and performed twenty countries. Phil is the co-director of [Project VOICE](#), an organization that partners with schools to bring poetry to the classroom. He is a National Poetry Slam finalist, and the two-time recipient of the National College Poetry Slam (CUPS!) award for "Pushing the Art Forward", given

for outstanding innovation in the art of performance poetry.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

You will receive a confirmation email with a link to the zoom meeting.



For inclusion in the MAY Newsletter, send your events, news, and publications by 4/29/21 to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com

President's Note

April Musings -- Celebrating With Poetry

April is National Poetry Month, so this month I'm thinking about the role of poetry in my life.

Many of us wouldn't call ourselves poets but still write the occasional (or more than occasional) verse. My grandfather, who was a physician by training, always saw fit to mark special occasions with finely crafted, often sly, verse. Under his pen name and alter ego of *Iatros*, he made sure that birthdays, graduations and anniversaries were commemorated in sophisticated rhyme.

That was my father's father. My mother's father also wrote poetry, as did my grandmother, and then my mother. So of course, I have carried on this family tradition, writing long poems to mark special birthdays, weddings and anniversaries. It was clearly in my genes. Both of my brothers do the same.

There is something about a special occasion that demands a special kind of literary marking. I wouldn't think about doing the types of writing I most often do to denote a birthday – it just has to be a poem. I have a whole file on my computer of family poems I've written; the file grows each year.



Sometimes I write in the style of someone else. It's not high art, but it's a lot of fun. For my dad's 90th birthday, I wrote something in the style of Dr. Seuss; for one of my brother's weddings my other brother and I collaborated on a poem that was an ode to "Casey at the Bat." My 30th wedding anniversary got marked with a poem with nods to the lyrics of Bock and Harnick, a lá "Tradition" from "Fiddler on the Roof."

When I step back and think about why it is – other than family tradition – that I must write poetry for special occasions, I think it's because there is just something about poetry that makes it a highly creative endeavor. Poets use words sparsely, deliberately. They play with meter, rhythm, tone in ways those of us who write prose don't often allow ourselves to do. For me this is part of what makes poetry something that I like to read, and sometimes, like to write.

So my fellow BAC members, I encourage you to spend some time this month with poetry. As for me, well, my mom's 85th birthday is coming up later this month so I'll get crafting soon!

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

Yesteryear by Scott Guthery: Spoken Word Poetry by a Young Girl circa 1924

*Yesteryear's modest contribution to celebrating National Poetry Month is inspired, as usual, by the brief published biographies of past Boston Authors Club members. This column features a long-forgotten mother and daughter poetry team, namely Grace Hazard Conkling (a "minor American poet" according to **Boston Authors Then and Now**), and her daughter, Hilda Conkling, who practiced last century's version of spoken word poetry.*

Grace joined the Boston Authors Club in 1921. I don't find Hilda's name in our registry. Both mother and daughter have Wikipedia pages, however.

Grace lectured on contemporary poetry and was Assistant Professor of English at Smith College and so may have been more of a poetry critic than a working bard. Hilda, on the other hand, seems to have focused on creating poems ... even before she could write them down. At the age of four Hilda started talking in poetry. What would a loving mother who was herself a poetry maven and who could recognize a good poem when she heard one do? She transcribed her daughter's spoken poems and sent them off for publication, of course. Hilda made her literary debut in *Poetry* at the age of six. This was followed quickly by appearances in house and home magazines such as *The Delineator* and *Good Housekeeping* and then three collections. Then nada. A ten-year poetry career from age 4 to 14 and then on to other things.

I could find only one book of poems by Grace, *Ships Logs and Other Poems*, published by Knopf in 1924. The most famous of Hilda's three books is her first one, *Poems by a Little Girl*, published in 1920 which featured an introduction by Amy Lowell. There are 107 poems in the collection, organized by the age of the poet: Four to Five Years Old, Five to Six Years Old, etc. Hilda's second and third books of poetry were *Shoes of the Wind* (1922) and *Silverhorn* (1924), both published by Frederick A. Stokes.

Of Hilda's method of creating poetry, Amy Lowell in her introduction to *Poems by a Little Girl* writes the following: "Hilda tells her poems, and the method of it is this: They come out in the course of conversation, and Mrs. Conkling is so often engaged in writing that there is nothing to be remarked if she scribbles absently while talking to the little girl. But this scribbling is really a complete draft of the poem." Later on she adds, "The little girl is quite untroubled by any questions of technique. She takes what is to her the obvious always, and in these copied pieces it is, naturally, less her own peculiar obvious than in the nature of poems." Obvious always. Nice turn of phrase.

Lowell is quite taken with Hilda's delight in nature. Lowell writes: "It is pleasant to watch her with the artist's eagerness intrigued by the sounds of words, for instance: '—silvery lonesome lapping of the long wave.'" Now I admit that my taste in poetry runs more to gingham dogs and calico cats than to fairies and flowers in field, but in the few of Hilda's poems that I read I sensed flashes of a darker of sense humor: "Little brown field-mouse/Hiding when the plough goes by ..." Shades of the Bass-o-Matic. With a dash of Robert Burns?



**POEMS BY A
LITTLE GIRL**
Hilda Conkling



MORE To Celebrate: Indie Bookstore Day

-INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE DAY-



THE LAST SATURDAY IN APRIL

Independent Bookstore day is happening on Saturday, April 24. Mark your calendar to buy a book, attend an online event, and generally celebrate your local indie bookstore this month and every month.

NOTE: The BAC News welcomes virtual event listings from Boston-area independent bookstores. Send MAY-JUNE author event highlights and registration information to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com

Become a member for 2021!

Membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:

**Nancy Tupper Ling
Boston Authors Club
1600 Providence Highway #247
Walpole MA 02081**

| BOSTON AUTHORS CLUB | bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com |

STAY CONNECTED



Boston Authors Club