

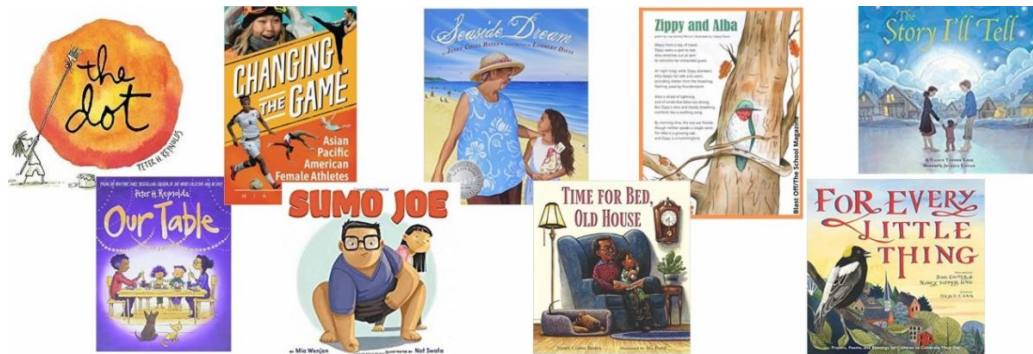


Boston Authors Club

April 2022 News Poetry Spotlight Issue

- Children's Book Writing: IN-PERSON EVENT on 4/25
- Celebrating Poetry Month with Featured BAC Poets Helen Marie Casey and Daniel Tobin
- Yesteryear: Poet Samuel Walter Foss, On the Wall and In Our Pockets
- President's Note: April Musings

EVENT: So You Want to Write a Children's Book?



Join the Boston Authors Club panel moderator Tracy Miller Geary and authors Mia Wenjen, Janet Costa Bates, Nancy Tupper Ling, Lisa V. Perron (our 2021 Discovery Award Winner) and our host, Peter H. Reynolds, for a lively and informative discussion on writing, publishing, and breaking into the world of children's literature.

IN PERSON at The Blue Bunny Bookstore 577 High Street, Dedham, MA on Monday, April 25th starting at 7:00pm (www.bluebunnybooks.com)

Free with online registration. Space is limited. Please register in advance at <https://facebook.com/events/s/so-you-want-to-write-a-childre/318220673627031/>

Celebrating April with BAC Poets

I asked Helen Marie Casey and Daniel Tobin about the poets and poems they have read (or re-read)

this year, about recent themes in their own writing, and the role of poetry in challenging times.

Many thanks to both for their thoughtful responses and their original poems below!

Mary J Cronin



From Helen:

Poets and poems you are reading

I always enjoy reading Moira Linehan's poetry and I am fond of the work of poets Seamus Heaney and Carolyn Forché. Perhaps I favor these poets because they are philosophical, often dark, and exhibit a leaning toward irony as well as a deep knowledge of the poetry canon.

Themes and topics in your recent writing

In the past year, my own poetry has continued to mine philosophical questions, often centered on death, particularly suicide, and has focused on observations such as this one from my chapbook, *You Kept Your Secrets* (Finishing Line Press):

***One waits. Sometimes
that is enough. Sometimes that is everything
there is.***

Poetry in challenging times

Yes, I do think poetry has a huge role to play in times of challenge, both for individuals reading poetry in their own homes and in communal settings where the spoken word can often speak so directly to us and our concerns. I am always grateful to groups who support such readings as, in the fall and summer, occur at Old Frog Pond. I am also grateful for my own poetry circle that has been meeting every other week for years.

From Daniel:

Poets and poems you are reading

I teach a course called "Ideas of Order: Signing and Sensibility," and we're reading Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, Philip Larkin, and Seamus Heaney"—terrific poets all so it's a rich trove of poems. I'm also reading Agha Shahid Ali and Betty Adcock, for my workshop course. I try to let my enjoyment in the art shape the teaching, needless to say. Other poets are R.S. Thomas, Gjertrude Schnakenberg, Ryan Wilson, Natasha Trethewey, and Derek Mahon, though I'm always delving into poems and poets I admire or come to discover, so this list is needfully brief.



Themes and topics in your recent writing

I have been working for the most part on completing a trilogy of book-length poems, *The Mansions*. The first of these, "From Nothing," gratefully, won the Julia Ward Howe prize

in 2016. “This Broken Symmetry” (on the life of Simone Weil) and “At the Grave of Teilhard de Chardin” complete the design—ninety-nine “cantos” of eight tercets each with an interleaving hundredth in six couplets running around and between the books. The topics running through *The Mansions* are historical, scientific, philosophical, and theological in nature, I suppose, but the book is informed, inevitably, by the events and profound stresses in our own moment.

Poetry in challenging times

Elizabeth Bishop called poetry, famously, “a self-forgetful perfectly useless concentration.” Philip Larkin believed the impulse “to preserve” lies at the bottom of all art, and what desires to be preserved is the beauty of the experience (though the experience may be anything but beautiful, and more often than not isn’t in Larkin’s poems).

While I agree with both of these perspectives (a somewhat contradictory claim, I realize), I tend to think poems can exert a positive action upon consciousness, but the efficacy of that action depends more on an aesthetic concentration that enjoins the reader than any direct political, social, or ideological appeal. That said, aesthetics and politics, like uselessness and preservation, are not mutually exclusive. To fold them wholly together, however, comes dangerously close to establishing art as merely a kind of utility, or eliding artfulness altogether. I see poetry’s action, by contrast, as an action analogous to prayer, which should have its core impetus in compassion and what is now popularly called mindfulness rather than the immediate realization of an aim. Of course, that’s hard to accomplish perfectly, but then again so is great art.

DANCE OF WIND AND RIVERS

by Helen Marie Casey

*Raven. Chinook. SteelHead. Scowberry. Sage.
What do we become when we cease to be
who we were? Heart of the black bear, branches
crushed under foot, how do we learn to dance
with wind? Our shadow seeks the shadows of all
we love. Fox follows our steps. Lightly. Lightly.
Alder. Cedar. Fir. Mighty Sequoia. Birch.*

*How much do we hear when we are called
by name, when we pray and there is barely
a whispered response handing somewhere
in the air? The Long Tom listens, flows on, sun
riding the ripples, spirit of the Kalapuya,
beside the banks, enigmatic as night song,
Gray wolf. Bobcat. Bald eagle. Rattlers.*

HUNTER GATHERERS

by Daniel Tobin

*All this late morning in the newly winnowed trees
squirrels are chirring, as though each one inside
had a miniature fan rotating urgently,
the impossibly rapid rpms of their language.*

*I can almost see through the thinned-out screen
of leaves a few tails waving like metronomes—
the wind lifting them? Or are they plumes, the nibs
of scribes at their appointed work, glossing*

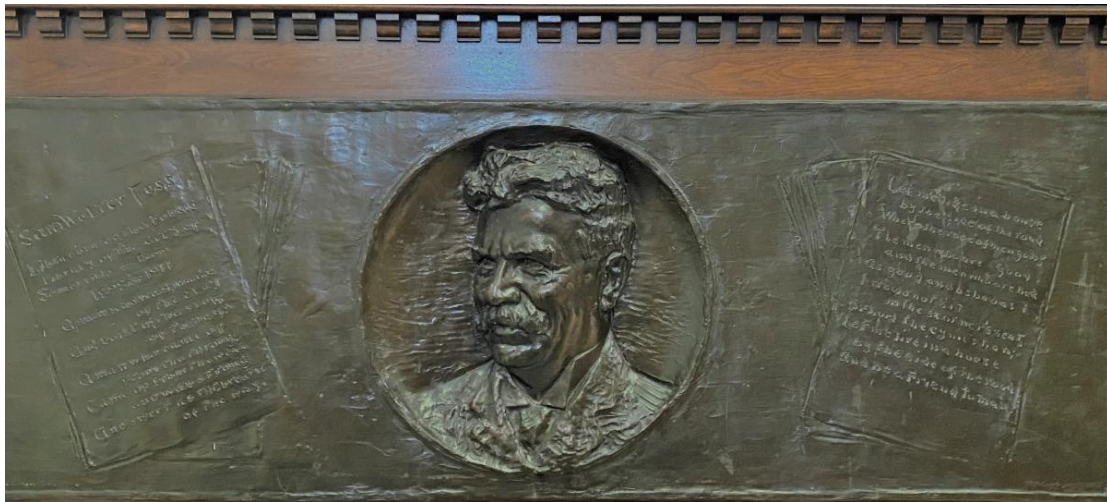
*the margins, fearful the raiders will come again?
One, I watch him from my deck with the cats,
flies in a wild prodigious leap to the pole
(Be careful of the power box!) to tightrope across*

*this unsteady stave of lines to where they thread
under the eave. And up he hoists himself now
into the gutter, into the hole he’s probably chewed
into the frame, into the attic, to set by his store.*

*If they could the cats would have him, each perched
below on the rail, easy regression, paws quieted,
sly on savanna grass. Who is that nearby, beside
the umbrella thorn, newly upright with the rest,*

*ready to fan out like the branches above them,
getting ready with their flints to dis-limb the world?
Ripples like invisible arrows flit across the plain.
Is now the setting out? Where are we all going?*

Yesteryear: Sam Walter Foss Put Poetry on the Wall and into Our Pockets



Boston poet Sam Walter Foss (1858 – 1911) joined the Boston Authors Club shortly after its founding. During Foss's lifetime, his wildly popular poems were characterized as the kind “that men cut out and carry about in their pockets.”

I'm not sure if this is a compliment or an insult but there are any number of questions it brings to mind.

What was the poem cut out of? Are other kinds of poems well suited to line men's shoes? Do women cut out different types poems?



This is not the only puzzling recognition that Foss received over the years. His name appears on the ceremonial mace of his alma mater, Brown University. Lines of his poems are inscribed on a granite wall at the United States Air Force Academy, the Rocky Mountain trophy, and the south façade of an office building in Sacramento. Soul singer Lamya Al-Mugheiry and rapper MC 900 Ft. Jesus have both included Foss text in their songs. He is featured on road marker 114 in New Hampshire. And baseball announcer Ernie Harwell channeled Foss's most famous poem, *The House by the Side of the Road*, to describe a batter taking a called third strike: "He stood there like the house by the side of the road and watched it go by." For those who don't have a copy in their pocket, here's a 2007 reading and visual interpretation of the poem. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w6ZofUV2n8>

In addition to being a prolific poet, Foss was the head librarian of the Somerville Public Library from 1898 to 1911. In her history of the Boston Authors Club, the ever-diligent Mildred Flagg writes, "Nearly five years after his death a bronze memorial tablet was placed in the Somerville Public Library. It consists of a life-size figure of Mr. Foss surrounded by loose sheets of manuscript."

Your occasionally diligent *Yesteryear* columnist contacted the Somerville Library to see if the bronze tablet commemorating Foss was still on display. Reference Librarian ShanTil Yell assured me that Sam is still on the wall in Wellington Hall of the library's Central Location. Moreover, she was kind enough to send along the picture which graces the top of this column.

Like many poets of his day and our own, Foss started his working life as a journalist. True to his deadline-driven roots, it is said that he wrote a poem every day. Various reviewers refer to his poems as cheery, optimistic, humorous, and poems for the common man. As with finding his poems in men's

pockets, it isn't clear, at least to me, if these assessments are complimentary or otherwise.

The last stanza of his last poem written roughly two months before his death strikes a more serious, and perhaps long-lasting note:

*And lo, a strange boatman is here with his bark,
And he takes me and rows away, silent and dumb;
But my trumpets! my trumpets! they peal through the dark,
The trumpets are calling — I come.*

By Scott B. Guthery



BAC President -- April Notes

As our communities are starting to recall what “normalcy” is – at least temporarily – the BAC is, too. Thanks to the planning efforts of BAC Board member Nancy Tupper Ling and the generous hosting of BAC Board member Peter Reynolds, we’re planning our first in-person event at the end of this month! (See flyer and information elsewhere in this issue.) While writing and reading (and Zoom) have continued to connect us during the pandemic, we know that there’s nothing quite like an in-person event to build community.

And speaking of community, I want to remind everyone to please pay your membership dues. We’ve tried to make this as easy as possible – here’s the link: <https://bostonauthorsclub.org/renew>

We depend on our membership dollars to help pay our expenses, like fees on the mailing program that’s getting you this newsletter.

Wishing you all a wonder-filled spring and the thought of upcoming summer with time to read all those books stacked up on your night table!

Julie Dobrow
BAC President

authors!
AUTHORS!

The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month except for the summer months. Please send news about your upcoming events, awards, and new books to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by 4/28/22 for publication in the May issue.

Happy Spring! Your BAC Membership for 2022

BAC membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online any time 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:

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