

# BOYDEN LIBRARY POETRY MADNESS 2022

Limon

Wilbur

Akbar

Smith

Kunitz

Clifton

Glück

Collins

CHAMPION

Student Name:

## The Carrying

Ada Limón

The sky's white with November's teeth,  
and the air is ash and woodsmoke.  
A flush of color from the dying tree,  
a cargo train speeding through, and there,  
that's me, standing in the wintering  
grass watching the dog suffer the cold  
leaves. I'm not large from this distance,  
just a fence post, a hedge of holly.  
Wider still, beyond the rumble of overpass,  
mares look for what's left of green  
in the pasture, a few weanlings kick  
out, and theirs is the same sky, white  
like a calm flag of surrender pulled taut.  
A few farms over, there's our mare,  
her belly barrel-round with foal, or idea  
of foal. It's Kentucky, late fall, and any  
mare worth her salt is carrying the next  
potential stake's winner. Ours, her coat  
thicker with the season's muck, leans against  
the black fence and this image is heavy  
within me. How my own body, empty,  
clean of secrets, knows how to carry her,  
knows we were all meant for something.

## Wild Pear Tree

Kaveh Akbar

it's been January for months in both directions    frost  
over grass like pale fungus like  
mothdust    the branches of the pear tree are pickling  
in ice white as the long white line running from me  
to the smooth whales frozen in chunks of ocean  
from their vast bobbing to the blackwhite  
stars flowering into heaven    the hungry cat gnaws  
on a sliver of mirror and I have been chewing  
out my stitches wondering which  
warm names we should try singing  
*wild thyme cowslip blacksnake*    all the days  
in a year line up at the door and I deflect each saying *no*  
*you will not be needed* one by one they skulk off  
into the cold    the cat hates this place more than he loves  
me he cannot remember the spring when I fed him  
warm duck fat daily nor the kitchen vase filled with musky blue  
roses nor the pear tree which was so eager to toss its fruit so sweet  
it made us sleepy    I stacked the pears on the mantle  
until I ran out of room and began filling them into  
the bathtub    one evening I slid in as if into a mound  
of jewels    now ghost finches leave footprints  
on our snowy windowsills    the cat paces  
through the night listening for their chirps  
have frosted over    ages ago we guzzled  
all the rosewater in the vase still we check for it  
nightly    I have forgotten even  
the easy prayer I was supposed to use    our memories  
in emergencies    something something I was not  
born here I was not born here I was not

## First Snow in Alsace

Richard Wilbur

The snow came down last night like moths  
Burned on the moon; it fell till dawn,  
Covered the town with simple cloths.

Absolute snow lies rumpled on  
What shellbursts scattered and deranged,  
Entangled railings, crevassed lawn.

As if it did not know they'd changed,  
Snow smoothly clasps the roofs of homes  
Fear-gutted, trustless and estranged.

The ration stacks are milky domes;  
Across the ammunition pile  
The snow has climbed in sparkling combs.

You think: beyond the town a mile  
Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes  
Of soldiers dead a little while.

Persons and persons in disguise,  
Walking the new air white and fine,  
Trade glances quick with shared surprise.

At children's windows, heaped, benign,  
As always, winter shines the most,  
And frost makes marvelous designs.

The night guard coming from his post,  
Ten first-snows back in thought, walks slow  
And warms him with a boyish boast:

He was the first to see the snow.

## Undetectable

Danez Smith

soundless, it crosses a line, quiets into a seed  
& then whatever makes a seed. almost like gone  
but not gone. the air kept its shape. not antimatter  
but the memory of matter. or of it mattering. it doesn't  
cross my mind now that it whispers so soft it's almost  
silence. but it's not. someone dragged the screaming boy  
so deep into the woods he sounds like the trees now.  
gone enough. almost never here. daily, swallowed  
within a certain window, a pale-green trail on the tongue  
the pale-green pill makes before it's divvied among  
the ghettos of blood, dissolves & absolves  
my scarlet brand. ritual & proof. surely science  
& witchcraft have the same face. my mother  
praises god for this & surely it is his face too.  
regimen, you are my miracle. this swallowing  
my muscular cult. i am not faithful to much.  
i am less a genius of worship than i let on.  
but the pill, emerald dialect singing the malady  
away. not away. far enough. for now.  
i am the most important species in my body.  
but one dead boy makes the whole forest  
a grave. & he's in there, in me, in the middle  
of all that green. you probably thought  
he was fruit.

## Halley's Comet

Stanley Kunitz

Miss Murphy in first grade  
wrote its name in chalk  
across the board and told us  
it was roaring down the stormtracks  
of the Milky Way at frightful speed  
and if it wandered off its course  
and smashed into the earth  
there'd be no school tomorrow.  
A red-bearded preacher from the hills  
with a wild look in his eyes  
stood in the public square  
at the playground's edge  
proclaiming he was sent by God  
to save every one of us,  
even the little children.  
"Repent, ye sinners!" he shouted,  
waving his hand-lettered sign.  
At supper I felt sad to think  
that it was probably  
the last meal I'd share  
with my mother and my sisters;  
but I felt excited too  
and scarcely touched my plate.  
So mother scolded me  
and sent me early to my room.  
The whole family's asleep  
except for me. They never heard me steal  
into the stairwell hall and climb  
the ladder to the fresh night air.

Look for me, Father, on the roof  
of the red brick building  
at the foot of Green Street—  
that's where we live, you know, on the top floor.  
I'm the boy in the white flannel gown  
sprawled on this coarse gravel bed  
searching the starry sky,  
waiting for the world to end.

## Nostos

Louise Glück

There was an apple tree in the yard—  
this would have been  
forty years ago—behind,  
only meadows. Drifts  
of crocus in the damp grass.  
I stood at that window:  
late April. Spring  
flowers in the neighbor's yard.  
How many times, really, did the tree  
flower on my birthday,  
the exact day, not  
before, not after? Substitution  
of the immutable  
for the shifting, the evolving.  
Substitution of the image  
for relentless earth. What  
do I know of this place,  
the role of the tree for decades  
taken by a bonsai, voices  
rising from the tennis courts—  
Fields. Smell of the tall grass, new cut.  
As one expects of a lyric poet.  
We look at the world once, in childhood.  
The rest is memory.

## blessing the boats

Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide  
that is entering even now  
the lip of our understanding  
carry you out  
beyond the face of fear  
may you kiss  
the wind then turn from it  
certain that it will  
love your back may you  
open your eyes to water  
water waving forever  
and may you in your innocence  
sail through this to that

## Days

Billy Collins

Each one is a gift, no doubt,  
mysteriously placed in your waking hand  
or set upon your forehead  
moments before you open your eyes.

Today begins cold and bright,  
the ground heavy with snow  
and the thick masonry of ice,  
the sun glinting off the turrets of clouds.

Through the calm eye of the window  
everything is in its place  
but so precariously  
this day might be resting somehow

on the one before it,  
all the days of the past stacked high  
like the impossible tower of dishes  
entertainers used to build on stage.

No wonder you find yourself  
perched on the top of a tall ladder  
hoping to add one more.  
Just another Wednesday

you whisper,  
then holding your breath,  
place this cup on yesterday's saucer  
without the slightest clink.