

VOLUME 3/3

**POEMS
FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT**

SEPTEMBER 6-9, 2017
BEREA, KENTUCKY

**MARIANNE
WORTHINGTON**

VOLUME 3/3

**POEMS
FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT**

SEPTEMBER 6-9, 2017
BEREA, KENTUCKY

**MARIANNE
WORTHINGTON**

Roll Call

Goldfinch: The Acrobat

yellow charms flicker as heartbeats
around the thistle-sock trapeze
flying circus for just a blink

Cowbird: The Malefactor

gimcrack work-shy thieving outlaw
vengeance teeming jagged raucous
dark-eyed homewrecker on the draw

Tufted Titmouse: The Constable

top-knotted pee-wee high sheriff
homeguard of the pignut hickory
whistleblower chirrup! chirrup!

Mourning Dove: The Saint

red-footed peaceniks murmuring
lamentations for us pleading
squabs of mercy interceding

Bluejay: The Mercenary

belted down in pewter and smart
cobalt vesture crested marauder
warehousing swag lookout guarding

Mockingbird: The Ballad Collector

sings by ear polyglot preacher
moonlit dancer fierce tune jumper
thrice-turned phrases old song catcher

Killdeer: The Player

chattering plover broken-wing
acts as double-cross marooning
on dry land hit the ground running

Crow: The Trickster

hollering gang of lousy kids
snooping club-footed delinquents
coursing the roads charges dismissed

Opening Words for Artists

the full moon
hard won
in kitchens & yards
in living rooms
Irony has
something
my neck
revival
wilderness road
concentric circles
isolation
discovered time
story collection
archiving
listening

O harvest
and terrible
mission time
who's in the room?
always been
heavy around
what do you want?
whipsaw
ebony
rubric, rubric, rubric
tear that shit down
harness & hope
a matrix
golden circles
listening

The Full Corn Moon
September 6, 2017

They say those birthed during its fullness
are charmed. While we admire Fruit Moon,
Corn Moon, Barley Moon—the names

for its roundness this September night—
another side of the world celebrates
Worm Moon, Lenten Moon, Crow

Moon, Sugar Moon, Chaste Moon.
The charms of the moon, I cannot fathom—
how its face is lit in full sun when our paths

are dark; how the full moon and sun pool
their gravitational magic to make spring high
tides, no matter the season, how the moon

circles us but hides its far side; how the full
moon rises tonight and washes the trees
with shadows. *Dulisdi*, Nut Moon, say

the Cherokee. Pawpaw Moon, say the Shawnee.
Moon When the Plums Are Scarlet, Moon
When the Deer Paw the Earth, Moon

When the Calves Grow Hair, say those
in The Plains. Tonight in Kentucky, a phase
of bounty, of winnowing and reaping.

***Ashley Minner Leads a Group Discussion on Arts Advocacy
(and holds our feet to the fire by posing the hard questions)***

There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about. —Margaret J. Wheatley

Why is the American Indian Center empty of American Indians? How does our place impact us as artists? What is the relation between art and gentrification?

What are the responsibilities of artists in a neighborhood? How do we make art and artists matter in the community? How can artists pressure government leaders?

How do we think about public art after the Confederate statues are removed?

Poem for the Luthiers

A boy in Kentucky hears
his uncle fiddle

through his nights. Gypsy
tunes and Irish reels riff

in his mind and stick.
The uncle gifts him a mandolin.

He fingers the neck,
takes the open fifths

into the choir of his heart.
He learns the strings, first

strumming and plucking
then brushing and picking.

They vibrate, then ring,
sing back to the camp fires

in Romania, back to suppers
of lamb and mint, back

to the baby dozing
as her father unwraps

a cobza and casts out
a tune for the rising moon.

The Girl Singer

How hard it was to hold my body against
defeat and come to be known as just a girl

singer by those men who said we're doing
you a big favor, honey. Once, I sang the lonely

songs I loved. The A minor chord on my black
Gibson hummed lonesome as a grave. I strummed

right through their promises Crying O!
the dreadful wind and the rain. On stage I was

one notch below the gapped-toothed hayseed
in his checkered jacket and short pants clowning

around with me as his side kick and we'd laugh
and laugh. I dug on your grave the better

part of last night. Too sorrowful, they said. The bosses
heard enough about sick-hearted boys chasing

aggravating beauties, poor orphan children dropping
and dying in the snow. War was over. They said

be old-fashioned but not too much. How hard
it was to fetch my voice for chirpier songs.

Oh the coo-coo she never hollers coo-coo. I wore
down. I mourned the women killed in all the murder

ballads I knew—bludgeoned stabbed drowned floating
downstream to the miller's cove. He made fiddle screws

from her little finger bones. I had to quit singing our songs.
Her clothes all wet and muddy they laid her on a plank.

Bus Ride Home: Heading West on the Daniel Boone Parkway

“There’s a darkness here that has nothing to do with the sudden rise of the mountains or the plunging gloom of the hollers. . . . I carry it inside me like an everlasting salt block: no matter how much I lick it, it never goes away.” Lonormi Manuel, *An Unmarked Grave*

“There is no level land.” Lucy Furman, *Mothering on Perilous* (1913)

It’s a lonesome old ride. To leave from the Settlement School in Knott County is to journey away with words ringing on the edges of recollection. The words are lonesome. The words are

homesick. The words are gray as squirrels in winter landscape. Lucy Furman. Albert Stewart. Ann Cobb. James Still. The writers who lived the lonesome in Knott County. Their words plague me as I leave.

It’s my burden, my blessing. On up Highway 80 into Perry County I think about Roscoe Holcomb’s banjo. When he played “Roll On, Buddy,” it sounded like hornets fighting. Precise. Stinging. When he sang,

the stripped mountains cried out from the pure shock of his voice. The High Lonesome. The Antecedent. Out again into the lonesome, we roll through the dark and bloody into Leslie County, where spring

blushes in redbud bloom and the gloom can lift for a bit. But today it is full summer. Lush. Kudzu. Verdant. The green swishes by like a home movie and I carry it inside me. I carry those words.

I carry that banjo player with the haunted voice. Finally, we cross through Clay County (Warrior’s Path, Goose Creek, Red Bird River) then Laurel County, where the landscape opens up to broad roads

and schools and churches and fast food. It’s a lonesome old ride. The bus rolls on and on, and I get heartsick as I do every time I make this ride out of the scarps of eastern Kentucky. To leave; to stay.

***James Brown performs “Cold Sweat”
on American Bandstand, 1968***

We were practicing our splits, perfecting our slides
across the basement floor on one foot, impossible
to beat the hardest working man in show business
even as we cheated in our sock feet. Upstairs,
our grandmother hurled her wrecking-ball voice
at us before we finished miming the first verse—

I don't care *ha!* about your past
I just want *ow!* our love to last *huh!*

We knew she wasn't really hollering about the TV blaring
or that we'd skipped our Saturday housework chores.
She wasn't really cross that we dragged her white
chenille bedspread downstairs so we'd have a royal
robe to throw off at the end of the song. We twisted
against the timbre of her rage, while we mimicked Soul
Brother No. 1 cloaked by Danny Ray then coaxed
off the stage exhausted only to revive, abandon
the cape, grab that microphone and whirl
and gyrate and split
us one more time.

Sewing Notions

The association of “notion” with one’s personal ideas or whims led to “notion” being used to mean “bright idea” or “clever invention,” which in turn led to the word “notions” being used in late 18th century America to mean “cheap, useful articles” sold in shops. By the 19th century, “notions” in this sense had narrowed to items having to do with sewing.

—The Word Detective

Jaybirds near her window were pure
aggravation. She sent my cousins
scrambling up sugar maples to tear
down their nests, a nickel a piece.
Who could fathom her riotous days?
Noise, like a vapor, overwhelmed
her. Hush, she’d say. Hush now.
She ordered quiet to locate
one unflawed pearl button inside
her rusting button can, the matching
thread, her seam ripper, hooks and eyes.

In the Beginning

The child dreams her mother as angel, cherub featured,
broad-faced, wide eyes, ginger curls— A nightlight

in the nursery brands shadows on the ceiling. Mother-
angel glides back and forth over the dreaming

child's crib singing coos and cradlesong. The child
cannot hear the tune the child never forgets

the dream the dream converts to myth the myth stirs
the holy spit and glue of memory benevolent
and dreadful as an angel.

BIOGRAPHY

Marianne Worthington is a poet, editor, and co-founder of *Still: The Journal*, an online literary magazine, publishing literary, visual, and musical artists with ties to the Appalachian region since 2009. She received the Al Smith Fellowship from the Kentucky Arts Council and the Appalachian Book of the Year Award for her poetry collection, *Larger Bodies Than Mine*. She was awarded grants from the Kentucky Foundation for Women and the Appalachian Sound Archives Fellowship at Berea College. She has edited four literary anthologies, most recently, *Piano in a Sycamore: Writing Lessons from the Appalachian Writers' Workshop*, co-edited with Silas House. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Oxford American*, *CALYX*, *Grist*, *Shenandoah*, *The Louisville Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Southern Poetry Anthology*, and *Vinegar and Char: Southern Food in Verse*, among other places. She lives, writes, and teaches in southeast Kentucky.

VOLUME 3/3

POEMS
FROM THE FIRST ANNUAL
ARTISTS THRIVE SUMMIT

MARIANNE WORTHINGTON

**ARTISTS
THRIVE**