

Cherise A. Pollard, PhD  
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AWP #22 Bookfair Event Outline  
Donald Justice Prize Reading

Welcome to The Donald Justice Prize: Celebrating Fifteen Years of Excellence. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Cherise Pollard, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Good Afternoon, Everyone! My name is Cherise Pollard. I am the director of the WCU Poetry Center. I am the moderator and organizer of this panel, a poetry reading and discussion. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the WCU Poetry Center's Donald Justice Prize Reading, spotlighting four of the most recent winners of the Donald Justice Prize whose masterful approach to form and craft make impressive contributions to contemporary American formal verse. Since 2006, The Justice Prize has been awarded to a book-length collection of formal poetry. The prize is named after the distinguished American poet Donald Justice who is recognized as one of the finest poets of the late twentieth century. The recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, Bollingen Prize, and numerous honors for his verse, Justice was a masterful and exacting craftsman, traits that define the prize named in his honor.

The prize is made possible through the generosity of the Iris N. Spencer Poetry Award. The Justice Prize welcomes unpublished, original book-length collections of poems that pay attention to form for consideration in the competition. The winner of the competition receives \$1,500, and their manuscript published by Autumn House Press, a nonprofit publisher registered in the state of Pennsylvania whose mission is to publish and promote poetry and other fine literature. For the

past five years, The WCU Poetry Center has enjoyed a rich collaborative experience with Autumn House Press.

This panel features the work of four diverse poets whose masterful approach to form and craft make impressive contributions to contemporary American formal verse: Chad Abushnab, Katharine Barrett Swett, John Foy and Alexis Sears. The 2022 winner will be announced in just a few weeks at the WCU CRAFT Festival, April 6-9. Our theme is Breakthrough, and we are happy to announce that our keynote speaker is Cornelius Eady.

This afternoon, I will introduce each reader. We will invite questions and discussion at the end of the reading.

- ❖ Chad Abushanab's debut collection *The Last Visit* (Autumn House Press 2019) won the 2018 Donald Justice Poetry Prize. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Bemidji State University and lives in Bemidj, MN. Chad will read a selection from his debut collection of poems, *The Last Visit* (winner of the 2018 Justice Prize, Autumn House Press, 2019) that explore addiction, violence, and masculinity, and the ways in which they intersect. He will also read a set of new poems about hauntings in America.
- ❖ Katherine Barrett Swett lives in New York City. Her poems have been published in various journals including, *The Evergreen Review*, *Rattle*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *The Raintown Review*, *Orbis (U.K)* *Softblow*, and *Measure*. Erica Dawson selected Swett's collection, *Voice Message*, (Autumn House Press 2020) for the 2019 Donald Justice Poetry Prize. Her chapbook, *Twenty-One*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2016.

Katherine will read the crown of sonnets, "Vermeer's Daughters" from her debut collection, *Voice Message* (winner of the 2019 Justice Prize, Autumn House Press, 2020). The crown looks at the death of the speaker's daughter through the lens of Vermeer's paintings of young women. As this sequence is ekphrastic—each sonnet responds to a particular painting by Vermeer—she will also show slides of the relevant painting as she reads each poem.

- ❖ John Foy's books of poems include *Techne's Clearinghouse* (Zoo Press) and *Night Vision*, which won the 2016 New Criterion Poetry Prize (St. Augustine's Press). His first book is *Techne's Clearinghouse* and his second book, *Night Vision* won the New Criterion Poetry Prize. His work has

appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, and *The New Criterion*, in addition to other journals and anthologies. He holds an MFA from Columbia university and lives with his family in New York.

John will read a selection of poems from his third book of poems, *No One Leaves the World Unhurt* (winner of the 2020 Justice Prize, Autumn House Press, 2021). He will choose pieces from the collection that interrogate the work of war, the joys and absurdities of contemporary pop culture, and the strange fact of being a poet.

- ❖ Alexis Sears is a graduate of the MFA program in poetry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and she earned her Bachelor's degree from Johns Hopkins University, where she majored in Writing Seminars. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Cortland Review*, *Hopkins Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. She was a 2019 Sewanee Writers' Conference MFA scholar, and she was a finalist for the Vassar Miller and *New Criterion* poetry prizes. Currently, she lives in northern California, where she teaches sixth grade English

Alexis will read a selection of poems from her debut collection, *Out of Order* (winner of the 2021 Justice Prize, published in February by Autumn House Press, 2022). In her book, a biracial 20- something speaker seeks joy and healing in the wake of a traumatic event. The poems are both formal and free verse, and they discuss race, grief and mental illness, friendship, womanhood and its looming dangers, the search for companionship, and pop culture, primarily 80s and 90s rock stars. Despite its oftentimes heavy themes, the book is a tale of hope, strength, and ultimately, resilience. Alexis reads.

- ❖ Chad Abushnab

“Halloween”

“Dead Town”

“Small Funeral”

“A Voice from the Wreck”

“First Snow”

“Here on Earth”

“For Something”

“On the Dred Ranch Road Just Off 283”

❖ Katharine Barrett Swett (PDF attached)

She will read the crown of sonnets, “Vermeer’s Daughters” without additional comments between each poem. It takes her about 13-14 minutes to read it. She will introduce it simply by saying: “This is a crown of sonnets about looking at Vermeer’s paintings after my daughter died from a skiing accident in 2010.”

❖ John Foy (PDF attached)

“The Payment Plan”

“Alan Kurdi”

“Into the Mountains”

“Cup”

“The Haunted Mansion”

“Bile”

“I Entertained a Thought”

❖ Alexis Sears (PDF attached.)

“Daughters”

“Golden Years”

“Hair Sestina”

“How to Forget that Night”

“The Wedding Gown”

“September”

❖ CLOSING REMARKS: Thank you, Chad, Katherine, John and Alexis for that amazing reading! Books will be on sale at the Autumn House table as well as at the WCU Poetry Center table. We look forward to seeing you at our Spring 22 CRAFT Fest: West Chester University Poetry Center’s Poetry and Creative Arts Festival, April 6-9, 2022. Please look for our announcements regarding Fall 22 events, Annie Finch will be our Poet-in-Residence and our third annual Poetry and Pedagogy Conference will be held in October 2022. I will now ask the following questions.

❖ MODERATOR QUESTIONS: (These may be revised.)

1) I would like to start with a discussion about form. How would each of you describe your process in relation to working with form? Do you start with the form, or does a particular work evolve into a particular form?

- 2) Which forms do you find most appealing or interesting?
- 3) What do you see as the future of form in contemporary American poetry?
- 4) What do you see as the poet's role in contemporary culture? (Or the influence of poetry in our culture?)

