

Winning Poems in 2020 CFCP, Inc., Annual Contest

3. Any Subject, Any Style, Third Place

Poetry Revival

Someone asked if poetry is experiencing a revival,
as if poetry were a backsliding believer
down on his faith, liable to temptation.
Does the altar call come in sedate university reading rooms
stuffed with caged birds who wonder whether they should clap
after each of the visiting poet's delicate bas-relief verses
to demonstrate their appreciation of fine literature---
or sit like the silent bronze busts
looking down their dusty beards from the magazine shelves?
Should they pity, or secretly enjoy,
the poet's post-partum emptiness
as the last line dies of the *ars poetica*
and eyes take nervous skips between
page and gallery, confidence and doubt –
but cannot ask: *What did you think?*
He needs to know if the poem's alive.
He'd love to see them laugh and stamp, applaud and sigh,
shout *Amen*, brother, let's have another.
But this is a library reading room.
Revivals thrive on mutual fire,
on brimstone-rimmed halos
that refuse to shut up until you feel
the nails in your own palms –
on incantations that throw you back in your seat
from the sheer acceleration of their magic words.
When those angels sing,
the bigtop roof is caught away in the clouds,
and hands flutter like rustling wings.
At a revival, everyone knows what to do
when the poem ends.

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