

# Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2020 Winner

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## Juxtaposing the Black Girl & the Abuse\*

By: Shirley Jones Luke

one is stone & the other is moss

one connects & the other is connecting

one is a force & the other is a flower

with petals, wilting & dropping

one's whole life is a timeline

both are trying to find someone who will listen

home is a battlefield

both are the subject of conversation

some want to restrain them/some want them to use restraint

& not let the bruises show

\*based on a poem by Danez Smith

## Judge's commentary

Poet Jan Beatty, the judge of the 2020 Dobler Award, wrote this about Luke's poem:

"In a group of 1541 poems, this poem stands out for so many reasons. The risks taken with voice, form, and metaphor create a stunning and powerful experience. The authority of this voice begins with the very clear title and continues throughout. The interaction of the title, Juxtaposing the Black Girl & the Abuse, and the first line, one is stone & the other is moss, creates a powerful space in which the reader knows that this will not be an ordinary poem. The title defines and names, calling the reader to attention. And yet, the use of lower-case and the more "quiet" imagery of stone and moss—surprises. This masterful juxtaposition of both content and craft energizes and drives the poem. The metaphors add immediate psychic depth to a very intense subject, as in lines 3 and 4: one is a force & the other is a flower/with petals, wilting & dropping. The dropping petals bring forward the sadness that runs beneath the poem. The move from these petals to the strong voice of stanza 2: one's whole life is a timeline, brings the reader back to this dynamic juxtaposition. This speaker breaks our heart and teaches us at the same time.

As the poem continues, the use of white space with double-spacing, indentation, and multiple stanzas in a short poem—all support the largeness of this voice and the depth of emotion. A pivotal moment occurs in line 9 with the use of a slash: some want to restrain them/some want them to use restraint. This line contains the world of tension of the title's juxtaposition, and holds us for a moment in balance, embodying restraint. Then, we see the masterful use of the floating last line, beginning with the ampersand: & not let the bruises show. Here, we are given the body's truth, starting with the seemingly casual ampersand, but delivering the brutality of abuse. An impactful and necessary poem."

## About the author

Shirley Jones Luke is a poet and writer living in Boston, MA. She received an MA in English from the University of Massachusetts Boston and an MFA in creative writing from Emerson College. Her work focuses on Blackness and how it intersects with womanhood, culture and society. Luke's work has appeared in Longleaf Review, MAYDAY, Barren Magazine, Adanna, BlazeVOX, Deluge, Vox Poetica, Boston Accent Lit, Porridge, Fire Poetry and Willawaw, and other journals. She was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize for the poem "Drumming Season," published in WORDPEACE. A graduate of The Watering Hole Poetry Retreat, Luke has attended workshops across the country and around the world, including Bread Loaf, the Cambridge Writers' Workshop Paris Writing Retreat, Tin House and VONA (Voices of Our Nations). She has also attended workshops on Martha's Vineyard and at Open Mouth in Arkansas. Luke is currently working on her poetry manuscript.

## About the judge

Jan Beatty's sixth book, *The Body Wars*, was published in 2020 by the University of Pittsburgh Press. She is the winner of the Red Hen Nonfiction Award for her memoir, *American Bastard*, forthcoming in 2021. Books include *Jackknife: New and Collected Poems* (2018 Paterson Prize), named by Sandra Cisneros on LitHub as her favorite book of 2019. *The Switching/Yard* was named one of "...30 New Books That Will Help You Rediscover Poetry" by Library Journal. The Huffington Post named her as one of ten women writers for "required reading." Her poem, "Shooter," was featured in a paper delivered in Paris by scholar Mary Kate Azcuy: "Jan Beatty's 'Shooter,' A Controversy for Feminist & Gender Politics." Other books include *Red Sugar*; *Boneshaker*, finalist, Milton Kessler Award; *Mad River*, Agnes Lynch

Starrett Prize—all published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. A limited-edition chapbook, *Ravage*, was published by Lefty Blondie Press in 2012, and her chapbook, *Ravenous*, won the 1995 State Street Prize.

Other awards include the \$15,000 Creative Achievement Award in Literature from the Heinz Foundation, a \$10,000 Artists Grant from The Pittsburgh Foundation, Discovery/The Nation Prize finalist, the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, and two fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Beatty's work was included in *Best American Poetry 2013*, and she was featured at the 2018 and the 2014 Geraldine R. Dodge Festival and at the 2016 Split This Rock Poetry Festival. Her essays on writing have appeared in anthologies by Autumn House Press, Creative Nonfiction, and The State University of New York Press.

Beatty worked as a waitress for fifteen years, and as a welfare caseworker, an abortion counselor, and a social worker and teacher in maximum-security prisons. She is the managing editor of MadBooks, a small press that has published a series of books and chapbooks by women writers. For the past twenty-five years, Beatty has hosted and produced *Prosody*, a public radio show on NPR affiliate WESA-FM featuring the work of national writers. She has lectured in writing workshops across the country and has taught at the university level for over twenty-five years at the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and Carlow University. Beatty directs the creative writing program at Carlow University, where she runs the Madwomen in the Attic writing workshops and is Distinguished Writer in Residence for the MFA program.