

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2021 Winner

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Your Sister Brings Me An Orchard **By: Elizabeth Wilson**

Each day after class we sit
on steps together and she pulls

apples from her purple backpack.
We talk about impact, the body

in relation to space in relation to
the body. Or the body in relation

to itself. The body in relation
to another body. I talk circles

like rings inside a tree, suggesting
growth, but I am going nowhere.

I suggest things. I do not indicate
my need directly. I am more

ashamed than afraid of judgment.
I think about baptism. I would drown

for you. I would deny
my body to protect you.

I crouch, walk with bad posture
because I am afraid of taking

too much space. I'm afraid
my body will speak ahead of me.

Nights I sleep with you
I bend and crease myself

into the sheets the way I cover
this paper with my hand.

Judge's commentary

Poet Lee Ann Roripaugh, the judge of the 2021 Dobler Award, wrote this about Wilson's poem:

"Your Sister Brings Me an Orchard" is a poem that articulates a poetics of space, both emotional and physical. Using second-person direct address, the speaker circles around a beloved in forms both organic (the spiraling rings of a tree) and processed (a creased piece of paper). The poem moves gracefully and transformatively from the gift of apples (which grow in trees) to concentric tree rings, to creased paper (which is made from trees). These circumnavigations make space for a beloved whose presence is rendered all the more palpable through absence. The speaker's perseverating postures create a human shield around the beloved in stances that seem alternately greedy, shy, and protective. In the end, this is a complex and powerful love poem that explores themes of forbidden fruit, secret knowledge, and privacy—a poem that hoards its own sweetness until the reader, too, is consumed by a longing for sweetness.

About the author

Elizabeth Wilson is a tap dance enthusiast, chronic illness advocate, and Rising Voices of Narcolepsy speaker living in the North Carolina mountains. Her poems have appeared in "13th Moon", "Asheville Poetry Review", "Clementine Unbound", "ONE ART: a journal of poetry", "Trouvaille Review", and others. She received her MFA from Hunter College and is currently working on her first manuscript.

About the judge

Lee Ann Roripaugh's fifth volume of poetry, *tsunami vs. the fukushima 50* (Milkweed Editions, 2019), was named a "Best Book of 2019" by the New York Public Library, selected as a poetry Finalist in the 2020 Lambda Literary Awards, cited as a Society of Midland Authors 2020 Honoree in Poetry, and was named one of the "50 Must-Read Poetry Collections in 2019" by Book Riot. She is the author of four other volumes of poetry: *Dandarians* (Milkweed, Editions, 2014), *On the Cusp of a Dangerous Year* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), *Year of the Snake* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), and *Beyond Heart Mountain* (Penguin, 1999). She was named winner of the Association of Asian American Studies Book Award in Poetry/Prose for 2004 and a 1998 winner of the National Poetry Series. The South Dakota State Poet Laureate from 2015-2019, Roripaugh is a Professor of English at the University of South Dakota, where she serves as Director of Creative Writing and Editor-in-Chief of *South Dakota Review*. Roripaugh served as one of the jurors for the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and

has been appointed as the Mary Rogers Field and Marion Field-McKenna Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at DePauw University for spring 2022.

Honorable mentions

- "Trash Talk", Lisa Caloro from Hurleyville, Ny
- "Counting", Sandra Vrana from Mechanicsburg, Pa
- "Penitent", Elizabeth Wilson from Sugar Grove, Nc