

Judge Leza Lowitz's Comments (visit her at [www.lezalowitz.com](http://www.lezalowitz.com)):

Judging the 2016 Judd's Hill Poetry Contest was a difficult process, as some very good poems came in by talented writers. I was struck by the variety in approach and depth of craft in so many of the submissions. How wonderful that many fine poets are writing odes to wine! Congratulations to all those who submitted such great work. Ultimately I chose these two poems, for the following reasons.

### Winner

The winning poem impressed me with its originality. The author employed creative rhymes and expertly used the pantoum form, which gave the verse a lovely structure, almost mimicking the action of pouring glass after glass of wine. The poem's often surprising imagery and the humor of the last line sealed the deal. Well done!

### **FIDELITY**

by Katharyn Howd Machan

Hello. How are you? I am doing fine.  
You say your tongue is caught upon a star?  
Well, join me and we'll pour a glass of wine.

Love falters. Friendship lags. Pearls suffer swine.  
Moths make their way into the tightest jar.  
Hello. How are you? I am doing fine.

Why does faith prosper only to decline?  
A promise is a rabbit smeared with tar.  
Come join me and we'll share a glass of wine.

I count to three. I multiply to nine.  
I'm saint. I'm whore. Robed queen and naked czar.  
Hello. How are you? I am doing fine.

I try to wear the face that's truly mine.  
Are you sure you are who you say you are?  
Come join me and I'll watch you drink your wine.

Who is the fox? And who the curling vine?  
I watch the crows until they fly too far.  
Hello. How are you? I am doing fine.  
If only I can find a glass of wine.

## Runner Up

This was an unusual ode to the wine-making process, honoring those who grow and deliver the wine. The metaphor of coming-going kept me guessing, and I loved that the speaker became the wine itself by the end of the poem, completing the journey home.

## Homecoming/going

by Anahit Moumjian

it reminds me of a very specific test question  
for comprehension  
we read out loud in class  
what did it mean, that the boy went with his dad  
delivering grapes in a great big truck?

it meant the road and fermenting as you get there  
leaving home to harvest your thoughts  
not a going but a sprinting

going was new, and terrifying  
yellow-grey dustbowls on either side  
but some stretches were green  
and some were s p r a w l i n g  
and there were cows too

oh no, he said, the coyotes  
what do they want?  
to ruin orchards and collectivity  
but maybe the kings of this desert

just needed a drink

it's not long before windmills and wonder  
the glass city image from *we*  
and after some time in a barrel  
this process flips

i come out of the nozzle now flowing red  
and swirling clockwise  
i leave home again but now it's going, rather

by Katharyn Howd Machan:

**DRINKING MUCH WINE FROM THE GLASS MY EX-LOVER**

gave me when I married  
someone else a wrong man  
gone now leaving me  
alone this cold November night  
in a room of books  
where words blur together  
like flavors in soup

he was a writer  
his stories like mirrors  
his hair early silver  
like a fox  
so well I remember  
the moment I told him  
I thought I was falling in love

blue lake of Chicago  
rose edge of horizon  
snow bright music beneath our boots  
*how many grapes does it take  
to make a vine too heavy?*  
he always said to me  
*you ask such interesting questions*

tonight the questions hang  
heavy on my heart like fruit  
too ripe to handle in the spring  
I will travel to another lake  
where young poets will ask me  
questions *do they matter?*  
*all these words like tangled vines?*

## **WHITE WINE**

by Katharyn Howd Machan

Your mother won't notice it isn't clear,  
or she'll think she poured rose instead.  
Come, sweet wife, tip that poison right here;  
we'll have all her money when she's dead.

Oh, you're so clever, husband dear,  
and I've always enjoyed you in our bed.  
But let's pause a moment and have some beer.  
No, your lager doesn't look too red.

## **Honey**

by Anahit Moumjian

she tasted honey first  
thinks there is some ancient power in bees  
she drinks the wine later  
and swears she's introduced a sensation

to taste a civilization in my skin through tangles of...  
in my bed through millions of whys  
why wait till late summer for something pretty in November?

i can't find a reason for her other than the harvest  
brings mulled wine and soft starts  
and she is both in a knit sweater

she is called fire, she is called rain  
she will soak in my tub and order the driest red  
and demand my affections, commandeer my  
attention, and i am ready to be loved  
without a label

it's not just something i sip when I'm alone  
i take big gulps when I'm with her  
we are two women alone with each other  
two hearts convinced of one another  
and mouths obsessed with a red river

we take it white in the middle of the night  
we know we're right about ourselves  
it was good of my heart to let me love you

but lately i don't taste the same

i taste like the day in December  
when she said human nature changed  
i used to taste like an ancient lyric  
but my history is gone and my meter is off

over the slushing of a merlot i hear her friend say  
isn't that the girl who begged you please stay?  
i think of you and feel a crisp white sigh in my head  
i think of you in my bed and i don't ask why  
i hear you say yes, honey

## **Joy**

by Dana Beardsley Crotwell

Your smile starts my smile

the way you "stick your nose in" the glass

lightly, after swirling your wine

and you sip, hold it on your tongue

for a moment

and you get this contemplative look

because your mind is working

and your tongue is deciding

You swallow and I wait, lingering-

-that moment-

Does he like it? Are there tannins?

Sour cherries? Tobacco? Jammy blackberries?

And your smile

of pleasure, with eye crinkle

fills me up.

## **Ode to the Grape**

by Dana Beardsley Crotwell

First, he'd say uva, of course,  
explain the colors  
the sweetness – dulce –  
the flavor of the fruit  
then, he'd crush the grapes  
with his own feet  
just like the farmers  
because he's the poet of the people  
and he'll get his toes dirty.

He may say something  
clever about vintage  
and how it doesn't matter –  
just make sure the food  
is good – that is what makes wine  
taste better anyway.

In his explanation  
he wouldn't say "terra"  
but he'd describe the dry dirt  
where the vine was planted -  
then he'd talk about

the sturdy bottle the  
wine was in – how it  
stood straight - tall  
until you tipped it into your glass

And of course he'd mention  
the buxom woman he  
was planning to bed later,  
and make allusions to her bouquet  
perhaps even talk about  
her skin in grape terms  
I'll check your tannins –  
no – he'd never be that  
gauche – but even if he  
were to make tacky  
references they would  
sound so much cooler in Spanish

He could get you hot  
talking about ladybugs or cornhusks  
or a tree with hanging branches  
or sugar –  
azucar – point made –  
I wonder how many  
people asked Pablo for  
some azucar  
and how many people

he gave it to --  
poet of the people  
can mean so many things.

### **Like Old Vines**

by Dana Beardsley Crotwell

“Our strength grows out of our weakness.” --Ralph Waldo Emerson

Like old vines  
that stress  
to absorb every nutrient  
from tired soil  
I connect to you  
and take, inhale,  
hold on to  
emotional fruit  
ripened in warmth  
and sun joy  
sopping up rain  
‘til bursting with juices  
ready to blend  
sweetness and  
pain spice  
with sour notes  
of unripeness and insecurity  
time ages us

and out of unrestrained vulnerability

comes love.

### **retsina**

by Adrian Robert Ford

pale Greek wine  
flavored with the resin of a pine  
drops hand grenades of scent  
unto a needle carpet  
in a chapel Orthodox  
an isle of trees  
where pine boughs lift just slightly  
in the breeze  
and the Aegean pounds the silver  
rocks

### **after the bar**

by Adrian Robert Ford

this poem  
crumpled, thrown  
into the wastebasket  
that man never known  
too strange too young too fine  
no opening line  
from either me or muse--  
would another wine  
have given me reach  
to smooth out each crease  
and scan the awkward silence  
into rhyme?

### **Wine**

by Jill Fairhurst Hall

Wine  
born of the earth,  
caressed by the fire of the sun,  
the gentle tears fall softly  
into the soil.

For as in life and the vineyard  
lie moments of joy and sorrow-  
inseparable,  
fermented,  
the taste of the soul.

Wine  
grapes nurtured by callused hands,  
the alchemy of the harvest,  
the power in the union,  
nature and spirit.  
Glasses raised,  
celebration and remembrance,  
the vines entwine  
people to their stories,  
the sacred vintage of life.

## **Dum Vivimus, Vivamus**

*Epicurean Latin motto*

by Dennis Maulsby

I have drunk the sparkling wine  
to the bottom of the cup. There have  
been old friends to revel with —

new friends to delight us with their stories.  
In poetry, dance and song we have  
celebrated with those we love. Our bodies

and spirits have been nourished.  
Set in long jeweled memories, we will  
cherish this last night as unique in its fullness.

O' God, "While we live, let us live."

## SOMETHING MORE THAN WINE

by Sarah Kohrs

*Plant no tree sooner than the vine.*

-Alcaeus, Greek poet (c.620-580 BCE)

Sheets billow like sails, clipped by pins on lines  
where laundry dries. Nearby a gravel road, whose  
deep ribs resemble cirrus clouds, meanders  
through a valley where ancient apple orchards  
yield their morels and creeping vines effloresce  
along crudely-cut stone walls. The silhouetted  
crescents ring fields of sheep or cows, ell and  
when the mists rise from warmer river water.

Under an ebon sky, constellations shimmer  
overhead. On the one hand, they resemble  
rows of orbs whispering about life somewhere  
out there; on the other hand, they're more like  
chips of ice broken randomly from something  
greater. Piqued by possibility, by the something  
more, hands plant vines in rows—their own orbs  
soon to appear and whisper of some- thing more.

There's something evocative about wine.  
It captures a moment—the scent, the sounds,  
the company, the conversation, even the presence  
of scintillating lightning bugs (when they're there)—  
and bottles it up, so that the next uncorking, you  
add to the layers of remembering and forgetting, too.  
Those moments string together like pearly beads  
you clasp behind your neck or grasp with solemn fingers.

Solemn fingers hold glass goblets, pearlized  
like teardrops that fell from the forgetting.  
Uncorking you, there, in the presence of wine  
the sounds, the scents are something more.  
Something more like somewhere that resembles  
shimmering water, wine-dark. Silhouetted  
orchards effloresce while the road meanders

in lines where memories form into

billowed sails.

### **Vintage**

by Michael Waterson

January clouds ride the Jetstream  
in from Japan, drop  
mustard bursts among  
gnarled, bare vines, wizened kanji  
blazoning *Joy* and *Bounty*

Marching Sol  
wields sharpened light.  
pruning afternoon shadows,  
quilling new leaves of  
an old story.

Jejune green translates  
to august purple –  
Bejeweled valley,  
a golden cup,  
brims with promise.

October spells ferment –  
expressions, chthonic, empyreal,  
mouthed by oak;  
glass-bound odes for  
a library of moments.

### **Tasting Notes**

by Michael Waterson

Of all the senses stirred by wine  
I find that some are not so fine.  
My choice will always be to pass  
On tar and asphalt in a glass.

And granite doesn't make my list  
Of tasty treats not to be missed.  
Nor do the other kinds of rock  
Or mineral, graphite or chalk.

Of all impressions I might get

I pray that none is saddle sweat.  
No vineyard ancient, no grand cru  
Can lure me with old tennis shoe.

A nose suggestive of the farm  
Will lack for me the slightest charm.

Yes, I confess I think it's nasty,  
When I catch a whiff of cat's pee.

Suffice to say there is no way  
I'll ever make sommelier.

### **Bottled Poetry**

*... and the wine is bottled poetry.* – Robert Louis Stevenson

by Michael Waterson

O, for a draught of vintage Keats  
cooled in deep-delved intelligence;  
or a measure full of Amherst Belle,  
each crystal rhyme chiming *Cheers!*

Pour a sparkling cava flute  
of Neruda's verse,  
dry and bright as Atacama air;  
immerse each sense in

Whitman's American terroir or  
inhale Shelly's mellifluence;  
enjoy early Frost  
with a glass by the fire.

But imbibe the Bard by the barrel –  
one sip imbues unquenchable thirst.

### **A Taste of Place**

by Jake Young

The ancient Chinese

believed that poetry

was wine distilled

from the mind.

Years before Li Po

drowned, embracing

the moon's reflection

on the Yellow River,

people floated wine cups

down streams, and composed

formal poems, drunk

on the language of the land.

Tonight, I read poems

about California,

Wyoming, New York,

while I drink a Pinot Noir

from Windy Oaks,

a winery not far

from here. I can taste

the earthy terroir:

damp leaves after a rain,

dew clinging to the tips

of pine needles,

mushrooms that push

past the soil, and

beneath it all, a shifting base  
of decomposing granite.

**September**  
by Jake Young

It's the hottest month of the year,  
summer nearly over,  
the withered husks in the garden  
a reminder that fall is upon us.  
Harvested last week,  
this year's first grapes  
ferment in the cellar,  
and last year's Chardonnay  
has just been bottled.  
I take a sip, and recognize green apple,  
lemon zest, lime blossom.  
I can taste the fog settling  
over Bald Mountain.  
I can smell American oak,  
sense the presence of acid,  
limestone and sandy loam.  
I can taste chalk dust

on a slate board,  
and a hint of graphite,  
like wetting a pencil on my tongue.

This wine has body,  
a weightiness that lingers,  
a finish that leaves me salivating,  
giddy, a bumblebee  
that's found the last flower  
among the withered husks  
at the garden's end.