



2019 poetry contest

# passager

## GOOD TIMING

Better to be early than late,  
so early,  
I'm at the calm prelude,

before the Big Bang  
woke up the cosmos,  
and various matters of history

streaked out into the future.  
I want to arrive  
before minute and second hands

began sweeping us  
ahead, ahead, into the pile-up  
of the present,

and if I can't see the curtain  
rise on creation,  
let me be there

when my father in GI khakis  
glanced at my German mother  
for the first time

as she stepped over  
Munich rubble  
and glanced back.

*Robert Lowes*

## GRAMMA, RULES

He was a verb  
Go run march  
She was an adverb  
Slowly carefully gently  
Their sentence was short.

He was a noun  
Man man man  
She was an adjective  
Small tiny timid  
Big Mistake.

She was a run-on sentence  
He was punctuation  
He tried to restrict her  
She wanted to be free.

Not everyone wants to live by the rules.

*Fay Ashby*

## CACOPHONY IN CONCERT

On stage, we were no ensemble,  
filling the chairs like we were  
and percussing under our breath.

A row of violence fiddled;  
*oompah-pah* farted the tube  
as the harpy was coming unstrung.

The oboys were back in the corner,  
texting the saxes on phones  
that some brassy strumpet was hot.

Offkeys of the keyboard were hammered;  
notes of their discords kept time  
to the bass jello's case of the shakes.

Outdinned by the clash of simples,  
dums de-dumming offbeat,  
I played the lead buffoon.

The conductor waved his baton,  
so we waved back to him.  
None of us knew the score;  
tone-deaf to the chorus of boos.

*Ted Charnley*

## ART CLASS FOR ADULTS

My husband is drawing his shoes. He learned  
in class about cubes and cones,  
spheres, and shadows. Now aglets, laces, insole, heel appear –  
meticulous, solid, suspended mid-air  
on his easel.

We're not accustomed to aging. Past decades  
went by with such cheerful,  
inconsequential waves. Now my friends  
have bad bones, canes, sick spouses,  
and my own has turned introspective  
as a tulip tight-wrapped

around darkness. Or graphite:  
the black dust he draws  
over textured paper then feathers  
with a thumb, shaping shadow and light  
till images emerge, like photographs rising  
from a chemical bath.

I think of Venus on her half-shell, but Whitman  
is more apt, bequeathing himself  
to the dirt he loved. *Look for me under your boot-soles*,  
he said. Now he waits  
under the second shoe, the one  
my husband hasn't finished yet.

*Ruth Hoberman*

A black and white photograph of a man, Gilbert Arzola, standing in a desert landscape. He is wearing a dark jacket with a light-colored hood, light-colored pants, and sunglasses. He is holding a small object in his right hand. The background features a rocky hillside and dense desert vegetation. The text "2019 Passenger Poet" is overlaid in the upper right corner.

2019 Passenger Poet

Gilbert Arzola



## INTRODUCTIONS

I should tell you who I am.  
Show you pictures of me before there were things to hide.  
I should offer me up like butter and bread.  
    As easy as pie.  
    As calm as a sin.

I don't know another way.  
I keep me sane and that's enough.  
I push at the air and paint up my face  
so the Mexican boy will stay in his place  
and not make a fuss.

I should tell you what I think, lead you into some  
discussion of me. Because there are Angels I think and some sort of God  
that offers enough, but only enough.  
I know, don't think I don't know.  
Don't think I don't see.  
    This God of yours playing cards  
    with my soul.  
I'll never come clean. I'll never come clean.

Trying to remember the prayer for all this:  
    You can pluck out my eyes and still I will see.



## MARCH 2015

Almost sixty  
a dozen years a widow  
shoveling snow  
when a great presence sweeps

out of the forest  
sails across the yard  
tilts and  
disappears into a bank of trees.

Without a word  
without a sound  
that snowy owl  
taught me

Death can surprise us only once  
but life?  
Again and again.

*Julie Cadwallader Staub*

Irene Apostoleris, Gilbert Arzola, Fay Ashby, Adrienne Asher, Dianne Woods  
Ashley, Merry Benezra, Judith Bernal, Christopher Buckley, Kathleen S. Burgess,  
Phyllis Carito, Ted Charnley, Jeanne Cook, Mark Defoe, Jerome Gagnon, Gene  
James Gilbert, John Glowney, Judith Goedeke, Ruth Goring, Charles Grosel,  
Ruth Hoberman, Guy Hollyday, Betty Ann Howard, Joanne Jagoda, Christine  
Jones, Judy Kaber, Jen Karetnick, Ruth Moon Kempfer, Leatha Kendrick, Lynne  
Knight, Iris Lee, Michael H. Levin, Robert Lowes, Peter Lucas, Kathleen Lynch,  
Katharyn Howd Machan, Chuck Madansky, Sheryl Massaro, John McGill,  
S. B. Mellow, Michael Miller, Margaret Lunden-Molinari, Beth Morris, Anne  
Mugler, Sheila A. Murphy, Bonnie Naradzay, Edward Nudelman, Miriam O'Neal,  
Scudder Parker, Kimberly Peterson, Alan Reese, Rebekah Remington, John Ridland,  
Sophia Rivkin, Alida Rol, Marian Shapiro, Annette Sisson, Judith Slater, Jim Smith,  
Constance Snyder, Julie Cadwallader Staub, Ann Struthers, Bonnie Thurston,  
Memye Curtis Tucker, Lee Varon, Viviane Vives, Gerald Wagoner, Doris Watts,  
Kathi Wolfe, Rachelle Woods, John L. Wright, James Zimmerman, Patricia Zylius

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