

# PERIODICAL POETRY.

## ATHENS COUNTY NEWSLETTER FOR THE WRITTEN & SPOKEN ARTS

Athens Poet Laureate Panel

### The Library

STEPHANIE KENDRICK

There is a place in this town  
where seeds are stacked on shelves  
ready to plant again and again, never  
sprouting the same flower twice.

Rays of sunshine hover stratus over  
these seeds, warm beacons readied  
with recommendations and a love  
for information, for people.

Our minds are ever-shifting gardens,  
germination at the crack of spines,  
fingers flick at well-worn pages, words  
we mouth to synthesize.

Each chapter's end satiates—  
lost memories uncovered, visits  
from dog-eared butterflies, a jolt  
of storm to refresh our eyes.

Under each cover, hard and soft  
possibilities pollinate, portals open  
to other worlds and others' dreams,  
and we are left more vibrant than ever.

*Steph Kendrick is the 2023/2024 Athens Poet Laureate. Her laureate project includes celebrating social services through poetry. This issue of Periodical Poetry recognizes our local library system—the important service they provide to their community, and the love that the people have for them.*

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A photo borrowed from the myacpl Instagram page of a new library card design.

## Libraries: Bridges to Healthy Communities

STEPHANIE KENDRICK

I was 5 years old when I had my first library experience—a kindergarten student in Willow Wood, OH I was the oldest of three children to a mother who would soon be raising us alone. Due to living deep in rural Appalachian Ohio with a single mother who worked her tail off to make sure food was on the table and kerosene was in the heater, I spent a lot of my youth fairly isolated. Books instantly became portals through which I could experience worlds that I'd never have the chance to otherwise. Prior to my first library visit, we had a sprinkling of books at home—gifts from grandparents that were mostly the Little Golden Book series. I memorized stories about Oscar the Grouch and giggled at Mercer Mayer creatures. I knew there were more books out there, but I just couldn't get my 5 year old brain to find value in the Danielle Steele collection on Mammaw Claudia's shelves. When I first walked in the library, I slowly twirled in awe, my head on a swivel, marveling at the sheer number of books, the smell of all that paper, and the quiet, which was a stark juxtaposition to the rest of the school, and my home. I had never—and have yet, to this day—fallen in love with a place so quickly. It was at this library that I met my role models (like Pippi Longstocking), learned the value of empowering female friendships (thank you, Ann M. Martin), read books that got me into trouble (my mom wasn't prepared for the questions when I

checked out the graphic comic on Dr. Kevorkian), and overall just showed me that the world was much larger than my hometown. Today, libraries play a much different role for me. I have to admit that gaining a (small) disposable income, a kindle, and full-time access to the internet kept me away from my local libraries for a bit. It was just recently that I trekked back in to one of our local branches, paid my son's late fees and finally got myself a new library card. Just being in a library feels transcendent and calm—like something magical can happen but you get to control the pace. I focus on the books, but in reality our libraries are playing an enormous role in our community and books are only a part of it. On any given day folks can rent a bicycle, gather (literal) seeds for their garden, take a class, join a workshop, see an art exhibit, hear someone play the piano, have a playdate, pick up donated food for their family, see a glorious drag show, experience a sound bath or spend time with their children. This list isn't comprehensive, and just highlights the ways that libraries are touchstones within our community. Everyone gets access to them regardless of who you know, what you have or how long you've been here. Reader, join me in thinking about how you can increase your experience with your local library and its programming. An easy first step: go get that library card! Thank you for reading. Thank you for being here.

## LOCAL POETRY EVENTS

### DESIGNATED SPACE

Donkey Coffee  
Tuesday Nights  
9:00pm-11:30pm

### WORDS & WINE ON WEDNESDAY

Athens Uncorked  
2nd Wednesday of the Month  
6:30pm-8:30pm

### POETRY OUT LOUD

2023 Semifinal  
Stuart's Opera House  
Saturday, November 18th  
5:00pm

## BOOK REVIEW

### “What is our calling, after all, if not to be astonished?”

*Strange Bodies* by Deni Naffziger

BONNIE PROUDFOOT

The initial poem of Deni Naffziger’s second full-length collection of poetry, *Strange Bodies*, can be seen as an introductory prelude. Readers sense a larger project, a way of making meaning that raises profound questions yet refrains from overstatement. “How fortunate for a leaf,” Naffziger writes, “to drop like wisdom/ from the arm of its mother/ to land without foresight or fear having lived only / ever /in the present.” Deftly, the poem moves from leaf to self, from self to consciousness, introducing ideas of wisdom, inheritance, time, awareness, choice, consequences. “How I am learning / that knowing is not real knowing /nor ignorance either / How choosing is a choice I’d rather not make sometimes / How not choosing/ is a choice I don’t know I’m making / How like the leaf I often land/ without intention/ but not without consequence”

*Strange Bodies* is a book that gives poetic voice to exploring what the mind and the self can intuit. Our “strange bodies,” paradoxically, may be (in part) unknown even to ourselves, but they also may be the only way we are able to access awareness. In much the same way that the science of physics broadens out from finite laws to theoretical questions engaging with infinite potential, this rich collection of poetry asks questions that seem at times essential, at times mysterious, and at times Socratic and philosophical invitations to the reader, always an acknowledgement that the questions are important.

The title poem, placed first in the first section, presents this paradox. “What is permitted bynature, or evolutionary biology, / or perhaps by God, are two slight openings/ with which to see everything.” The poet continues this theme, in “Alias,” mentioning that even when looking back at her younger self, “She knew her eyes / were the only place in her body where light refracted. /The rest of her remained in darkness.”

As humans, too often we seek comfort, equilibrium, we may turn to science, religion, the given wisdom of parents or traditions to present predictable answers. Those may not satisfy, and they may not suffice. “Sometimes you are afraid of what you do not know,” Naffziger acknowledges in the second section of the title poem, although this does not stop her from confronting this realm. In “Druthers,” Naffziger writes, “I prefer physics to biology, and quarks to protons, illusive, ethereal clouds of energy / that cannot be measured / like waves of love or grief. / Which is not to say they don’t exist.”

This is echoed in the closing section of “Little Birds,” a poem that begins with her mother’s loss of a “preterm infant” and moves, in the second section to a parallel occurrence for her grown daughter. At first a daughter, then mother, she looks through time to how awareness of the fragility of motherhood began to first awaken in her own consciousness. Naffziger shifts her own point of view. “I look for clarity,/ /for meaning and reassurance, / interpretation (a bit of history,

even) / in the dictionary. All the words are there / or most of the ones I might ever use. Still, / a zebrafish will never know what it’s like to be a monkey.” Drawing on an image of the poet’s visit as a child to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, the poem undermines any sense of ease, “And what about those babies in jars . . / all lined up on a shelf,/ nine jars, one for each month, to illustrate / the development of an embryo? / Where did they come from, / and who decided to put them in jars, / to display them at a museum for young / visitors to study? Even as a child, / I wondered where were their mothers.”

In a prose poem toward the end of the first section, “At the Gallery - House on Crescent” Naffziger uses an ekphrastic approach, poetry responding to and discussing art, which really becomes another way to discuss poetry. Here, she gives the artist the final words, “Question: Why does the sun consist of 3 spheres, each within the another?” [Answer] . . . “Most of us never question [that] the sun will continually rise and set and rise again. Each sun within a sun represents a different stage of life, just as the 3 black circles outlining each one represents its finite nature. The artist wanted to believe in constants, but it is obvious she knew better.”

Intimate and lyrical, using narrative as a springboard but not an end, poems in *Strange Bodies* can be seen, as Seamus Heaney writes in *The Government of the Tongue*, not to define constants, but “with a power to open unexpected and unedited communications between our nature and the nature of the reality we inhabit.”

In the final section, entitled “Still Life,” (accompanied by stunning and meditative photographs by the poet’s husband, the award-winning photographer Mark Hackworth), Naffziger brings this into fullness: “Is it safe to put a pond in a poem? /How about a heron at the shoreline, its leg lifted/ like a mime over unsuspecting carp? Is it safe to slip a snail in a pond in a poem, spilling over with algae? What about a promise? Will it float like hope? Will it glimmer and flash and arouse curiosity or worse? . . . I wonder what a memory would do. /If I tossed it like a stone, would it skip, sink, or swim? Would it drown or dwarf or morph into something more or less / like love, like loss, like regret? . . . And you will ask yourself: How does that kind of consciousness work?”

*Bonnie Proudfoot’s novel, Goshen Road (Swallow Press) was WCONA’s Book of the Year and Long-listed for the 2021 PEN/ Hemingway. Her poetry chapbook, Household Gods, was published by Sheila-Na-Gig Editions. This review previously appeared in the New Ohio Review.*

## LOCAL POET SPOTLIGHT

### Library

TINA MOORE

A place where you can get movies and books with a library card and check them out to take home.

They have Passion Works Studio art in the library, you can also get on the computer there, you can even get on a library app to watch movies for free!

You can even buy books at the library If you want something just ask them at the front desk and they can help you with what you are looking for If they don’t have it there, they can order it for you.

They also do book clubs and events for everyone to come to!

## SUBMIT TO PERIODICAL POETRY!

SEND 1-3 ORIGINAL POEMS TO  
[ATHENSPOETLAUREATE4@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ATHENSPOETLAUREATE4@GMAIL.COM)

### Let’s Write a Poem Together! Haiku

There are 3 basic rules for Haiku:

1. Form
  - a. There are 17 syllables altogether
    - i. 5 in the 1<sup>st</sup> line
    - ii. 7 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> line
    - iii. 5 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> line
2. Season
  - a. Get in touch with nature here
3. Shift
  - a. What’s the “twist” in the poem?

Example:

Hummingbirds have gone  
Bees will vanish overnight  
Ushered out by cold

You can be serious, funny, sad or joyful. Stay in the moment. Describe what’s around you. And share it with your friends!

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Happy writing, Athens.