

**Judge: Jeff Worley,**  
**author of *Happy Hour at the Two Keys Tavern* and**  
***The Only Time There Is* and editor of *What Comes Down To Us***

“What a wonderful poem this is! The language is original and evocative and memorable, and from the lovely first line we know we are in the hands of a skillful poet who will make us see and feel in fresh ways. In a poem of praise such as this, it would be easy to slide into sentimentality, but this poet avoids that trap by including the direct details of natural experience and by tapping the whole of nature—its beauty but also its devastating finality (“on the porch, a festival of red/feathers announcing a cat’s// hidden perch”). Too many poems fail to find their best ending, the final strong click of the lid of the box. This poem finds its right ending with a death, but one that is nourishing and hopeful. The technique that forms and drives the poem is anaphora—the word “praise” beginning eight sentences artfully broken into poetic lines. This smart choice automatically brings to the ear of the experienced reader echoes of writers from Shakespeare to Whitman and Dickens to Martin Luther King Jr., all of whom employed anaphora as a driving rhetorical technique. This poem wouldn’t at all be out of place in a book by Mary Oliver, which is the highest praise I could give it.”

## To Sing and Sing Again

Marianne Worthington

“In all the world there is nothing so brave as the heart of a singing bird. Can you think what it means to be so small and so beautiful in a world full of guns and traps, of cats and hawks, of crafty snakes and crows and squirrels and bluejays, all whom rob the nest—and yet to sing and sing again that all nature is good, is good!”

—Emma Bell Miles, *Our Southern Birds*, 1919

The sky is feathered with pewter  
like the tail-wings of the bluejay  
at the feeder. His magnificent scream  
pierced the quiet of morning.

Praise his siren song, beckoning  
a swirl of blue to the feeder. Come  
and be fed: soon wrens bob and peck  
around the jays in harmony.

Praise be the squirrel who bosses  
this feeder—sly chameleon  
vanishing into the bare maple  
limbs, reappearing in time

to battle a half-dozen crows,  
those robed magistrates  
of greed. Praise their black  
surging and sassing on takeoff.

Praise the red-footed mourning  
doves, man and wife, who bring  
their young in at dusk, accept  
the remains discarded by others.

Praise their meager ways,  
the sad flutter of their leaving.  
Praise the watchful redbird  
who feeds first, alone, then

the females who feed together.  
Praise mother and child I find  
on the porch, a festival of red  
feathers announcing a cat's

hidden perch. Praise the shovel  
I use to lift them up. Praise their  
rotting bodies nourishing the  
woody earth, the pines full of nests.

*Marianne Worthington is cofounder and poetry editor for the online literary journal Still: The Journal, poetry editor for Now & Then: The Appalachian Magazine, and editor of the Motif anthology series from MotesBooks. She lives in Williamsburg, Kentucky.*

