

**NEW
YORK
PHILHARMONIC**

Jaap van Zweden Music Director

Project 19

The Poets

**19 Commissions To Celebrate the
Centennial of the 19th Amendment**

The New York Philharmonic is marking the centennial of the 19th Amendment through **Project 19**, a multi-season initiative to commission and premiere new works by **19 women composers**, from Pulitzer Prize winners to emerging talents. Launching in February 2020, *Project 19* is the single largest women-only commissioning initiative in history. In addition to the Academy of American Poets, the Philharmonic is partnering with Catalyst, The Juilliard School, Kaufman Music Center's Special Music School High School (M. 859), League of Women Voters of the City of New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the New York Historical Society to extend the reach of *Project 19* and further conversations about representation in classical music and beyond. Learn more at nyphil.org/project19.

For this partnership, the Academy of American Poets commissioned work from 19 nationally recognized women poets, including current and former Academy Chancellors and poets laureate. Poetry has played a significant role in encouraging civic and grassroots engagement, and contributed to public debate and dialogue. The poets in this book offer to celebrate and question what it means to be an American woman writing today with the century-old legacy of the suffrage movement behind them.

Project 19: The Composers

To be premiered in 2019–20: Nina C. Young, Joan La Barbara, Nicole Lizée, Paola Prestini, Tania León, Ellen Reid, Olga Neuwirth, Sarah Kirkland Snider

To be premiered in future seasons: Unsuik Chin, Mary Kouyoumdjian, Caroline Mallonee, Jessie Montgomery, Angélica Negrón, Maria Schneider, Caroline Shaw, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, Joan Tower, Melinda Wagner, Du Yun

Visit nyphil.org/project19 for more info.

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Elizabeth Alexander portrait by Rachel Eliza Griffiths; Ellen Bass by Irene Young; Kimberly Blaeser by Jim Fisher Photography; Mahogany Browne by Curtis Bryant; Claudia Castro Luna by Timothy Aguero; Tina Chang by Tom Callan; Marilyn Chin by Jon Medel; Natalie Diaz by Cybele Knowles; Rita Dove by Sanjay Suchak; Linda Gregerson by Nina Subin; Brenda Hillman by Brett Hall Jones; Joy Ladin by Lisa A. Ross; Ada Limón by Lucas Marquardt; Aimee Nezhukumatathil by Ted Ely; Alicia Ostriker by Miguel Pagliere; Paisley Rekdal by Emily London Portraits; Evie Shockley by Nancy Crampton; Maggie Smith by courtesy Simon and Schuster; Mai Der Vang by Andre Yang.

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Elizabeth Alexander

Elizabeth Alexander is president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, a two-time finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and the author of *Crave Radiance: New and Selected Poems 1990–2010* (Graywolf Press, 2010). Her honors include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. She has formerly been the Thomas E. Donnelley Professor of African American Studies and inaugural Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry at Yale University and the Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University.



The Family Vote

Dora looks back from the dead

Before my people were required to answer impossible questions in order to vote:

How many bubbles in a bar of soap?

How many jellybeans fill up a jar?

Can you prove that your grandfather voted?

There was a time when black men could vote and black women could not, 1870, five years free, and that vote belonged to the family.

Our families had been sold apart and scattered, defiled, burnt, unraveled. We formed anew.

The vote was not personal property.
The vote did not belong to one alone.
There was no “mine”: The family vote.

I’d gather the gun in the folds of my skirt
and walk with my husband to the polling place,
sentry the perimeter so he could cast the vote.

We’d learned to read in secret, make soup
from a stone, infiltrate, a way out of no way,

cut through glass and burn through fog.
Eventually we got the precious vote.
That too was not personal property.

That, too, belonged to the family.
I look back across vast years from this eternal
and testify, and sign my name,

Dora, an emancipated slave



Ellen Bass

Ellen Bass’s ninth book of poetry is *Indigo* (Copper Canyon Press, 2020). She has received fellowships from the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, and is a winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Poetry and Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry. She teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Pacific University and lives in Santa Cruz, California.

The Sound of Their Names

for the Women of the 19th Amendment

Praise their grit and gospel, their glistening brains, their minds on fire. Neurons, numbering the stars.

Praise their bones. Their spines and skulls, the axis, the atlas: *I will not* and *I shall*.

Their mouths, praise. Ridged palates and smart muscular tongues, teeth, sound or pitted, their wit and will. Their nerve,

resolute and founded within the body. Honor now their wombs and hearts, biceps and blood, deep mines of the flesh where passion is tested.

Thank all twenty-six bones of their feet, arches, heels, bunions, sweat,

marching the streets in high buttoned boots. Praise the march. Praise justice.
Though slow and clotted.

Their hands at the press. The grease and clatter, the smell of ink. Feel the sound of their names in our mouths:

Susan B. Anthony

Dr. Mabel Ping-Hua Lee

Marie Louise Bottineau Baldwin

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Wilhelmina Kekelaokalaninui Widemann Dowsett

Praise their eyelids that close
and give rest
at the end of each long day.

Praise the work that goes on.

Kimberly Blaeser

Kimberly Blaeser is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Copper Yearning* (Holy Cow Press, 2019). The recipient of a Wisconsin Arts Board Artist Fellowship, Blaeser is active in several literary and social justice organizations, including the Milwaukee Native American Literary Cooperative. She currently teaches at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is the former poet laureate of Wisconsin.



A Quest for Universal Suffrage

I.

Suffrage:

In late middle English
intercessory prayers,
a series of petitions.

Not the right — but the hope.

Universal:

applicable to all cases —
except those marginalized
and unnamed.

A belief, but not a fact.

II.

In the trombone slide of history
I hear the *suffer* in *suffragette*
the *uni uni uni* in *universal* —
each excluded *ikwe*: women
from five hundred tribal nations
mindimooyenh or matriarchs
of ancient flourishing cultures
still disenfranchised by race,
still *holding our world together*
in the dusky and lawless violence
manifest in colonial america.

Twenty-six million american women
at last granted the right to vote.
Oh, marginal notes in the sweet anthem
of equality, Indigenous non-citizens
turn to the older congress of the sun
seek in the assembled stories of sky
a steady enlightenment — natural laws
(the mathematics of bending trees,
sistering of nutrients — maizebeanssquash,
or wintering wisdom of animal relatives)
each seasonal chorus colored with resilience —
earth voices rising in sacred dream songs.

Even now listen, put on the moon-scored
shell of turtle, wear this ancient armour
of belonging. In the spiral of survivance
again harvest the amber sap of trees
follow the scattered path of manoomin
the *wild and good seed* that grows on water.
Oh water, oh rice, oh women of birch dreams
and baskets, gather. Here reap and reseed
raise brown hands trembling holy with endurance.
Now bead land knowledge into muklaks
sign with the treaty X of exclusion.
Kiss with fingers and lips the inherited
woodland flutes and breathy cedar songs.
Say *yea, eya, and yes*. Here and here cast
your tended nets — oh suffered and sweetly mended
nets of abundance. This year and each to follow
choose, not by paper but by pathway, a legacy:
woman's work — our ageless ballad of continuance.

Mahogany Browne

Mahogany Browne is the author of *Kissing Caskets* (YesYes Books, 2017) and *Black Girl Magic* (Roaring Brook Press, 2018). She is an Arts for Justice grantee and has had fellowships from Air Serenbe, Mellon Research, Cave Canem, and Poets House. An award-winning performance poet, Browne is the founder of Penmanship Books and is currently the interim executive director of Urban Word NYC.



The 19th Amendment & my Mama

I always took it for granted, the right to vote
 She said
 And I knew what my mother meant
 Her voice constricted tightly by the flu A virus
 & a 30-year-relationship
 with Newport 100s
I ain't no chain smoker
 she attempts to silence my concern
only a pack a week. That's good, you know?

My mother survived a husband she didn't want
 and an addiction that loved her more
 than any human needs

I sit to write a poem about the 100 year Anniversary
 of the 19th Amendment
 & my first thought returns to the womb
 & those abortions I did not want at first
 but alas

The thirst of an almost anything
 is a gorge always looking to be
 until the body is filled with more fibroids
 than possibilities

On the 19th hour of the fourth day in a new decade
 I will wake restless from some nightmare
 about a bomb & a man with no backbone
 on a golf course who clicks closed his Motorola phone
 like an exclamation point against his misogynistic stance
 He swings the golf club with each chant
Women let me grab
Women like me
Women vote until I say they don't

In my nightmare he is an infective agent
 In the clear of day
 he is just the same

Every day he breathes is a threat to this country's marrow
 For Ida & Susan & Lucetia & Elizabeth Cady
 & every day he tweets grief
 like a cynical cornball comic's receipts
 like a red light signaling the end of times

The final night of 2019
 & my New Year's Eve plans involves
 anything that will numb the pain
 of a world breaking its own heart

My mother & I have already spoken
 & her lungs are croaking wet
I just want you to know I don't feel well
 & I pause to pull up my stockings beneath my crumpled smile
 On this day I sigh
 I just wanted to dance & drink & forget about the 61.7% votes

My silk dress falls to my knees with the same swiftness
 defiant as the white feminist who said "I'm your ally"
 then voted for the demise of our nation's most ignored
 underpaid, imprisoned & impoverished citizens

Every day there is a telephone near
 I miss my mother
 In the waiting room of the OB/GYN
 Uptown bound on the dirt orange train seat of the subway
 O! How my mother loves the places she can never go
 Her bones swaddled with arthritis & smoke
 So she relies on my daily bemoans

The train smells like yesterday, Ma
They raise the tolls & fix nothing for the people
My landlord refuses to fix my toilet, my bathroom sink, my refrigerator
The city is annoying like an old boyfriend, always buzzing about nothing
& in the way of me making it on time to the polls
This woman didn't say thank you when I held the door
& who does she think she is?

Each time I crack & cap on the everydayness of my day
 My mother laughs as if she can see the flimsy MTA card
 The yellow cabs that refuse to stop for her daughter
 In these moments she can live again
 A whole bodied woman with a full mouth
 to speak it plain

I ask my mother what hurts?
What hurts?
How can I help from here?

3000 miles away
 Alone in a tower between the sea
 & the Mexico borders

My mother sighs a little sigh & says
Nothing
I just wanted to hear your voice



Claudia Castro Luna

Claudia Castro Luna received a BA in anthropology from the University of California, Irvine; an MA in urban planning from the University of California, Los Angeles; and an MFA in poetry from Mills College. She is the author of *Killing Marías* (Two Sylvias Press, 2017) and, in 2019, was named an inaugural Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow. She currently teaches at Seattle University and serves as the poet laureate of Washington State.

Vindication

They signed The Declaration of Sentiments
with nib of rib, the right to suffrage their daring

Called ugly then witch, pretty then weak
to be at once woman and voter, their daring

Hunger, headaches, heartaches, hatred, death
all this, and more, it cost them, their daring

As men are born, with God's grace, so are women
they urged and argued with brains and daring

With firm convictions and hopes of fallen yokes
steadfast they marched nursing dreams of future daring

Sojourner, Dolores, their daughters left behind
now work against voter suppression with daring

There is more work on the horizon, more
yeast to knead into the bread of their daring

Persist Claudia! in mind and body be
not ugly, not pretty, but ablaze with daring.

Tina Chang

Tina Chang is the author of *Hybrida* (W. W. Norton, 2019). She has held residencies at the MacDowell Colony and Vermont Studio Center and has received awards from the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts, and Poets & Writers. She is the poet laureate of Brooklyn and teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.



Sugar

The universe breathed through my mouth
when I read the first chapter of patience.
I held the book away from my body
when the illustrations became life-like:

the kite flew over the grass, a child tumbled
down a hill and landed at the mouth of neon waters.
The fox curled into itself under the tree
and an eagle parted the sky like the last curtains.

I found myself wandering the forest, revising
the stories as I worked the heavens.
I lived inside the candied house
and hung the doors with sweetness.

I devoured the windows and I was greedy.
With all this sugar, I still felt trapped.
I sought to change the moral
so I filled my baskets daily with strawberry,

thorn, and vine, piled my home
with pastries and the charge of regret.
I placed those regrets inside the oven
and watched the pie rise. I wanted

everything in the pie and yearned
all the discarded ingredients.
I kept myself in the kitchen for years.
Everything up in smoke and yet my apron

was pristine, my hair done just right.
You can say it was perfection, a vision
from the past, waving a whisk through a bowl
as if it were a pitchfork. When I left the house

made of confection, that's when I began to live,
for everything I gave up was in that house.
I remember you there. Your fingerprints vaguely
visible in the layer of flour on the table.

Marilyn Chin

Marilyn Chin is the author of five poetry collections, including *A Portrait of the Self As Nation: New and Selected Poems* (W.W. Norton, 2018). She is the recipient of two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as the 2019 Literature Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Chin is professor emerita at San Diego State University.

19th Amendment Ragtime Parade

Birthday, birthday, hurray, hurray
The 19th Amendment was ratified today

Drum rolls, piano rolls, trumpets bray
The 19th Amendment was ratified today

Left hand bounces, right hand strays
Maestro Joplin is leading the parade

Syncopated hashtags, polyrhythmic goose-steps
Ladies march to Pennsylvania Avenue!

Celebrate, ululate, caterwaul, praise
Women's suffrage is all the rage

Sisters! Mothers! Throw off your bustles
Pedal your pushers to the voting booth

Pram it, waltz it, Studebaker roadster it
Drive your horseless carriage into the fray

Prime your cymbals, flute your skirts
One-step, two-step, kick-ball-change

Castlewalk, Turkey Trot, Grizzly Bear waltz
Argentine Tango, flirty and hot

Mommies, grannies, young and old biddies
Temperance ladies sip bathtub gin

Unmuzzle your girl dogs, lowa your demi-hogs
Battle-axe polymaths, gangster moms

Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Lucy Burns and Carrie Chapman Catt

Alice Paul, come one, come all!
Sign the declaration at Seneca Falls!

Dada-faced spinsters, war-bond Prufrocks
Lillian Gish, make a silent wish

Debussy Cakewalk, Rachmaninoff rap
Preternatural hair bobs, hamster wheels

Crescendos, diminuendos, maniacal pianos
Syncopation mad, cut a rug with dad!

Oompa, tuba, majorette girl power
Baton over Spamalot!

Tiny babies, wearing onesies
Raise your bottles, tater-tots!

Accordion nannies, wash-board symphonies
Timpani glissando!
The Great War is over!

Victory, freedom, justice, reason
Pikachu, sunflowers, pussy hats

Toss up your skull caps, wide brim feathers
Throwing shade on the seraphim

Hide your cell phones, raise your megaphones!
Speak truth to power
and vote, vote vote!

WARNING:

Nitwit legislators, gerrymandering fools
Dimwit commissioners, judicial tools
Toxic senators, unholy congressmen
Halitosis ombudsmen, mayoral tricks
Doom calf demagogues, racketeering mules
Whack-a-mole sheriffs, on the take

Fornicator governors, rakehell collaborators
Tweeter impersonators, racist prigs
Postbellum agitators, hooligan aldermen
Profiteering warmongers, Reconstruction dregs

Better run, rascals better pray
We'll vote you out on judgement day!

Better run, rascals better pray
We'll vote you out on election day!



Natalie Diaz

Natalie Diaz is Mojave and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe. She is the author of *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Craywolf Press, 2020) and *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (Copper Canyon Press, 2012). A 2018 MacArthur Fellow, Diaz is Director of the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands and is the Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry at Arizona State University.



lake-loop

, *because there was yet no lake*

into many nights we made the lake
a labor, and its necessary laborings
to find the basin not yet opened
in my body, yet my body — any body
wet or water from the start, to fill a clay
, *start* being what it ever means, a beginning —
the earth's first hand on a vision-quest
wilderer night's skin fields, for touch
like a dark horse made of air
, turned downward in the dusk, opaquing
a hand resembles its ancestors —
the war, or the horse who war made
, *what it means to be made*
to be ruined before becoming — rift
glacial, ablation and breaking
lake-hip sloping, fluvial, then spilled —
I unzip the lake, walk into what I am —
the thermocline, and oxygen
, as is with kills, rivers, seas, the water
is of our own naming
I am wet we call it because it is
a happening, is happening now
imagined light is light's imagination
a lake shape of it
, *the obligatory body*, its dark burning
reminding us back, memory as filter
desire as lagan, a hydrology —
The lake is alone, we say in Mojave
, every story happens because someone's mouth,
a nature dependent — life, universe
Here at the lake, say
, she wanted what she said
to slip down into it
for which a good lake will rise — *Lake*
which once meant, *sacrifice*
which once meant, *I am devoted*

, *Here I am, atmosphere*
sensation, pressure
, the lake is beneath me, pleasure bounded
a *slip space between touch and not*

slip of paper, slip of hand
slip body turning toward slip trouble
, I am who slipped the moorings
I am so red with lack

to loop-knot
or leave the loop beyond the knot
we won't say love because it is
a difference between vertex and vertices —
the number of surfaces we break
enough or many to make the lake
loosened from the rock
one body's dearth is another body's ache
lay it to the earth

, all great lakes are meant to take
sediment, leg, wrist, wrist, the ear
let down and wet with stars, dock lights
distant but wanted deep,
to be held in the well of the eye
woven like water, through itself, in
and inside, how to sate a depression
if not with darkness — if darkness is not
fingers brushing a body, shhhh
, she said, I don't know what the world is

I slip for her, or anything
, like language, new each time
diffusion — remade and organized
and because nothing is enough, waves —
each an emotional museum of water

left light trembles a lake figure on loop
a night-loop
, every story is a story of water
before it is gold and alone
before it is black like a rat snake
I begin at the lake
, clean once, now drained
I am murk — I am not clean
everything has already happened
always the lake is just up ahead in the poem
, my mouth is the moon, *I bring it down*

lay it over the lake of her thighs
warm lamping ax
hewing water's tender shell
slant slip, entering like light, surrounded
into another skin
where there was yet no lake
yet we made it, make it still
to drink and clean ourselves on

Rita Dove

Rita Dove is the former US Poet Laureate, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, and the author of numerous books, including *Thomas and Beulah* (Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1986). Her numerous honors include an NAACP Image Award, the Hurston Wright Legacy Award, the National Medal of Arts, and 28 honorary doctorates. A trained classical cellist and gambist, Dove is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia.

**Girls on the Town, 1946**

[ELVIRA H. D., 1924–2019]

You love a red lip. The dimples are
extra currency, though you take care to keep
powder from caking those charmed valleys.
Mascara: check. Blush? Oh, yes.
And a hat is never wrong
except evenings in the clubs: there
a deeper ruby and smoldering eye
will do the trick, with tiny embellishments —
a ribbon or jewel, perhaps a flower —
if one is feeling especially flirty or sad.

Until Rosie fired up her rivets, flaunting
was a male prerogative; now, you and your girls
have lacquered up and pinned on your tailfeathers,
fit to sally forth and trample each plopped heart
quivering at the tips of your patent-leather
Mary Janes. This is the only power you hold onto,
ripped from the dreams none of you believe
are worth the telling. Instead of mumbling,
why not decorate? Even in dim light
how you glisten, sloe-eyed, your smile in flames.

**Linda Gregerson**

Linda Gregerson is the author of *Prodigal: New and Selected Poems, 1976–2014* (Mariner Books, 2015). Her awards and honors include the Consuelo Ford Award from the Poetry Society of America, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. She is the Caroline Walker Bynum Distinguished University Professor of English at the University of Michigan.

Interior, 1917

The dining hall for instance: open roof beams,
open screens, and yard upon yard
of clean swept hardwood flooring, it
might almost be a family camp.
And likewise in the sleeping room: expanse
of window, paneled wall, and the
warmth implied by sunwash, only softened
here by half-drawn shades. You know
the kind? — dark canvas on a roller, in my
memory the canvas is always green. What I
couldn't have guessed, except for the caption:
the logic behind the double row of well-
made beds. I'd like just once to have seen
his face, the keeper of order who
thought of it first: a prostitute on either side
of each of those women demanding
the vote. And "Negro," to make the point perfectly
clear: *You thought*
your manners and your decent shoes would
keep you safe? He couldn't have known
how much we'd take the lesson to heart.
At the workhouse in Virginia they'd started
the feedings with rubber tubes. Not here.
Or not that we've been told. The men
all dying in trenches in France. A
single system, just as we've been
learning for these hundred years. Empty
of people, the space looks almost benign.



Brenda Hillman

Brenda Hillman's most recent book is *Extra Hidden Life, among the Days* (Wesleyan University Press, 2018). The recipient of awards and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Society of America, she is a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and holds the Olivia C. Filippi Chair in Poetry at St. Mary's College in California.

Lines for the 19th Amendment Centennial

1

The century speeds along
Sound & dust & color & light

Clouds speed over ballgames & wars
Nerves hanging off them Women watch

early election results Stressed-out women
in hats & choirs Women sitting under

suburban stars Women with husbands
or wives Housed or unhoused women

with herbs or guns Women with
friends & cats who are always tired

New medium or old to the world order
Who pull their masks tightly after the fires

2

Over 52,000,000 minutes... ..since the 19th
Amendment,,,,, Over 26,000,000 women voted
after that ;;;;; mostly only white women because
of the poll tax... Now let's just think about that...

There are 53 minutes in a micro-century::
We place extra dots as eyes for extra vision: : :
There are two periods in the 19th Amendment
i place them here . . for women

who want to be women or don't
We were dodging the little zeroes between mystery
& meaning,, history & hope We were walking or
driving i was flying left till my left wing broke

3

Some women vote with armed guards Some
have their forearms stamped The branches

of the oak are breaking off The particle
spirits are being used up There are two

men in amendment There is *gerry* in *gerrymander*
There are eyeless vans from Amazon outside

like hearses carrying the corpse of profit
Some women do not like to vote They think

the revolution will come faster The land
is blighted Muriel Is weather better if you

order on line Is earth's orbit polyethelene
i thought of not voting but there isn't time

4

The great dead teach the living not to hate or
to try to love imperfectly At what point

did voting really begin Wyoming (oddly)
was the first state Some practiced law

but couldn't vote Seneca Falls 1848
Lucy Stone abolitionist could not vote

Impossible to reconcile what you want
with what you are i'm voting extra

with my shoe ✓✓✓ Applying text corrupter
here for how long justice takes 123123

We leafleted in 1968 Come out of your
house & stand now You count too

5

The right of citizens to vote,,," shall not (she'll not)
be denied or abridged /// ;;; ;;;

(i'm adding 46 marks of punctuation for 46
years till 1966 Voting Rights Act)

*by the U*****nited States or by any State*
.....>>>>> & the names will survive

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper,,,,, Hallie
Quinn Brown . . Mary Church Terrell

& Congress shall not remove cage kill & undo
citizens because of age ability gender race

etc. Some vote despite perfectionism
Messy marks in tiny tiny hollow squares

6

i voted first in 1972 tear gas My Lai Weather
Underground mostly voted against things then

Agent Orange the draft had gone
to the trailer park with leaflets We were new to

the Pill nice sex or terrible with skinny stoned boys
Smog in LA We stayed in the dorm burning incense

Can't remember who i voted for ankles showing
under the curtain Metal bar on top

like you were taking a shower Mostly always voted
Just had the habit Once wrote in my friend

The land is blighted Adrienne Absentee ballot
i tear the numbered stub then i mail it in



7

Seatmate on the plane speaks first
older woman taking care of herself dental

assistant from Virginia i suspect she voted for t
Friendly over-60s whiteness is our commons

Our legs stick to fake leather flying over some
cleaned up rivers still adding carbon to the air

Her \$12 cheese plate dwindles We talk We both
love our jobs She puts small instruments in patients'

mouths i use small instruments with patience
She's going to Las Vegas to play black jack Laughs

Our story sails along inside oblivion
Our electrons speed inside oblivion

8

The yellow minutes of our coasts
The saturation of our voices

Centuries of women sick on a ship
Decades of women sick at the office

Women in tents in a marketplace
where the orange canary sings beside

the masterpiece they made At times i hear
the queen of ants At times i feel the great

dead choose for us to keep unreasonable
joy & revolution in the craft we made

We fed refusal to the storm to live
in the dream in revolt in realism

for Adrienne Rich & Muriel Rukeyser
for my granddaughters
for JB, AH, ER, JR



Joy Ladin

Joy Ladin's most recent books are *Fireworks in the Graveyard* (Headmistress Press, 2017) and *The Future Is Trying to Tell Us Something: New and Selected* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2017). She is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, and the American Council of Learned Societies, as well as a Fulbright Scholarship. She teaches at the Stern College of Yeshiva University, where she holds the David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English.

A Bridge on Account of Sex:

A Trans Woman Speaks to Susan B. Anthony
on the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment

We hold these truths to be self-evident... (The Declaration of Independence)

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. (Amendment XIX)

I
In Rochester, New York,
you were buried and I was born,
and both of us voted for the very first time

and we — would you include me in your “we”?
may I include you in mine? —
were both denied and abridged

on account of sex, told our bodies made us less
than who we knew we were
by the same United States

that wrapped us in the privilege
perversely accorded
to the whiteness of our skins.

Unlike me, you didn't take privilege for granted.
At 17, I was doing drugs and hitching
across the country whose injustice

I didn't want to see; you were petitioning
for the end of slavery,
practicing for a lifetime

of opposing institutions
that diminish humanity.
My parents did social work, back

when the social work business was booming;
yours, abolitionists, made money from a cotton factory,
profiting from slavery

until, ruined, they bought a farm in Rochester,
hosting activists on Sundays, including Frederick Douglass,
who became a friend.

A few years later, about the age
I devoted myself to getting tenure at a school
that still doesn't hire black professors

pays women less than men
(I got a bonus for pretending
I was one of them),

continued

you devoted your life to making
the kind of trouble
I spent my life avoiding,

speaking out, getting arrested, refusing to pretend
to be other or less
than the woman you were,

an unabridged citizen
determined to make America as true
as Frederick Douglass and you

to the “We”
that created her.

II

In Rochester, New York,
it was against the law for you to vote,
but still, it wasn't easy

for a white lady like you, well-schooled and well-connected,
to get sent to jail.

First, you had to brave the barbershop

and bully the election inspectors
into registering you.

Hair was being cut, razors stropped,

the beards of patriarchy trimmed.

The boys weren't moved by your citation
of the 14th Amendment and the New York Constitution

until you threatened legal action.

You had a judge behind you, you said.

You did.

Fourteen women altogether
made it onto the rolls, prompting a newspaper to proclaim in
panic:

“Citizenship no more carries the right to vote

than the right to fly to the moon.”

“Well I have been and gone and done it!!”

you wrote your bff, Elizabeth Cady (“Mrs.”) Stanton—

not flown to the moon, but “positively voted”
on the fifth of November, 1872.

A week and a half later, a warrant was issued for your arrest

for voting while female
(maximum penalty: three years imprisonment).

A deputy marshal appeared in your parlor

wearing a beaver hat; said the weather was fine
(not likely, given the beaver hat and Rochester in November)
and invited you (you were a white lady, after all)

to call on the election commissioner.

“Is that the way you arrest men?” you asked. Demanded
to be led out in handcuffs.

You won that argument too.

The embarrassed young man
brought you, you would later say,

to “the same dingy little room where ... fugitive slaves
were examined and returned to their masters.”

A grand jury was impaneled.

You were delighted, hoping to be imprisoned,
and twice refused bail.

No such luck. Your own attorney bailed you out

because, he said, “I could not see a lady I respected
put in jail.” The good news was

the grand jury, twenty men, indicted you

for voting, the charges said,

being then and there, as you well knew,

a person of the female sex,

contrary to the statute

and against the peace

of the United States of America.

In a grey silk dress, white lace collar, and neatly knotted hair,

you spent the months before your trial

giving speeches the prosecutor feared

would persuade every potential juror

to find you innocent. He needn't have worried.

The Supreme Court had been busy

narrowing the 14th Amendment
to preserve the right to discriminate
on the basis of sex. The judge sustained the objection

that you, as a woman, were “not competent” to testify
about your own opinions;
barred you from taking the stand;

read the guilty verdict he'd written
before the trial began.
He didn't let the jurors say a word,

but though he kept trying,
he couldn't stop you from declaring
that you'd been convicted according to laws

written, interpreted and applied
by and for the very same men
who, not long before, had made it a crime,

“punishable with a \$1,000 fine
and six months imprisonment”
to give a fugitive slave

a swallow of water or crust of bread.
“As the slaves who got their freedom,” you said,
“over, or under, or through

the unjust forms of law,
now, must women, to get their right
to a voice in this government, take it.”

Over every objection, you did.

III

In Rochester, New York,
I grew up in the America you insisted had no right
not to exist:

slavery abolished, voting rights
unabridgeable, at least on paper,
on account of race or sex,

child of a card-carrying member
of your descendants, the League of Women Voters. My mother
who thought I was her son

taught me nothing
about how to be a woman,
but she taught me to vote

and how to drive a stick;
stood up for herself in supermarkets,
spoke in a low voice (she'd trained for radio)

and showed me how to live
without being ashamed
of being different. A magazine on her nightstand

taught me the word for what I am,
though it was forty years
before she heard me say it,

a word you never learned,
a word that didn't exist
for a way of being human

you probably couldn't imagine.
I guess I'm not a truth
you'd hold self-evident.

I wonder if you'd think I was created equal,
was created at all, in fact,
or am just another outrage

perpetrated by men. I wonder if you'd see me
refusing to be abridged
and tell me, as my mother did,

“Whatever you look like,
you'll always be my child.”
No. You wouldn't say that.

You didn't have people like me in mind
when you fought your country to redefine
what it means to be a woman,

but here we are
and here I am, abridged, like you, on account of sex, wrapped
in education, money, and whiteness

that have so far kept me from being jailed,
evicted, beaten, burned or tossed in a ditch
as my sisters have

for defying, like you, statute and form
and every decree and argument
that we are created less,

created to hide, created to cringe, created to accept
that we're excluded, by definition,
from the unbridgeable "We"

by whom, for whom,
America was created.
As you said in your suffrage speeches,

I'm not arguing the question.
America needed you to refuse
the unjust forms

you dragged her
over and under and through.
Whether or not you see us

as your daughters,
America needs us too.



Ada Limón

Ada Limón is the author of *The Carrying* (Milkweed Editions, 2018), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, and *Bright Dead Things* (Milkweed Editions, 2015), which was a finalist for the National Book Award and the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. She is on the faculty of both the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center's 24 Pearl Street online writing program and Queens University of Charlotte's low-residency MFA program.

What It Must Have Felt Like

Palm-sized and fledgling, a beak
protruding from the sleeve, I
have kept my birds muted
for so long, I fear they've grown
accustom to a grim quietude.
What chaos could ensue
should a wing get loose?
Come overdue burst, come
flock, swarm, talon, and claw.
Scatter the coop's roost, free
the cygnet and its shadow. Crack
and scratch at the state's cage,
cut through cloud and branch,
no matter the dumb hourglass's
white sand yawning grain by grain.
What cannot be contained
cannot be contained.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Aimee Nezhukumatathil is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *Oceanic* (Copper Canyon Press, 2018). She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing as well as prizes from *The Literary Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *Poetry Northwest*. She is currently a professor of English in the MFA program at the University of Mississippi.



One Vote

After reading a letter from his mother, Harry T. Burn cast the deciding vote to ratify the 19th amendment of the US Constitution

My parents are from countries
where mangoes grow wild and bold
and eagles cry the sky in arcs and dips.
America loved this bird too and made

it clutch olives and arrows. Some think
if an eaglet falls, the mother will swoop
down to catch it. It won't. The eagle must fly
on its own accord by first testing the air-slide

over each pinfeather. Even in a letter of wind,
a mother holds so much power. After the pipping
of the egg, after the branching — an eagle is on
its own. Must make the choice on its own

no matter what it's been taught. Some forget
that pound for pound, eagle feathers are stronger
than an airplane wing. And even one letter, one
vote can make the difference for every bright thing.



Alicia Ostriker

Alicia Ostriker is currently the poet laureate of New York State and a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. Her most recent collection, *Waiting for the Light* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), won the National Jewish Book Award. She is professor emerita of English at Rutgers University, and teaches in the low-residency Poetry MFA program of Drew University.

The Encounter with the Goddess

*There is one story and one story only
That will prove worth your telling
— Robert Graves, "To Juan at the Winter Solstice"*

That one story worth your telling
Is the ancient tale of the encounter
With the goddess
Declares the poet Robert Graves

You can come and see
A sublime bronze avatar of the goddess
Standing in the harbor holding a book and lifting a torch
Among us her name is Liberty

She has many names and she is everywhere
You can also find her easily
Inside yourself —
Don't be afraid —

Just do whatever she tells you to do



Paisley Rekdal

Paisley Rekdal is the author of six volumes of poetry, most recently *Nightingale* (Copper Canyon Press, 2019). She is the recipient of fellowships from the Amy Lowell Trust, Civitella Ranieri, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, among others. An inaugural Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, Rekdal was the Guest Editor for Poem-a-Day in December 2019. She is the poet laureate of Utah and lives in Salt Lake City.

Wild Horses

Seraph Young Ford, Maryland, 1887
First woman to vote in Utah and the modern nation, February 14, 1870.

I am known, if at all, for a moment's
pride: *first American woman*
in the modern nation
to vote though at the time

I wasn't considered American
by all. Not modern, either,
but Mormon, one
the East Coast suffragists had hoped

would vote Utah's scourge of polygamy
out. But plural marriage
was on no ballot

I ever saw. Why would it be,
my mother asked, when men
make laws and shape
their women's choice in freedoms?
And how changeable

those freedoms are
denied or given
certain women, she knew, who saw
a Shoshone woman one day selling ponies

from a stall: watched, amazed,
her pocket all the earnings
without a husband's permission.
I wouldn't be a white girl

for all the horses
in the world, the woman scoffed
at her astonishment: my mother
who never sold an apple

without my father's
say-so. Like my mother,
I married young, to an older man who believed —
like certain, stiff-backed politicians —

to join the union, Utah
must acculturate, scrub off
the oddities and freedoms
of its difference, renounce

some part of politics and faith:

our secrecy and marriage customs,
and then my woman's right to vote. All gone
to make us join

the "modern" state —
And so perhaps I might be known
for what I've lost: a right, a home,
and now my mother, who died

the year we moved back East.
How fragile, indeed, are rights
and hopes, how unstable the powers
to which we grow attached.

My husband now can barely leave his bed.
As he's grown ill, I've watched myself
become the wife
of many men, as all men in the end

become husband
to a congregation of women.
When he dies, I'll move back West
to where my mother's buried

and buy some land with the money
that she left —
To me alone she wrote,
who loved me,

and so for love of her
I'll buy a house
and marble headstone
and fill my land with horses.



Evie Shockley

Evie Shockley's *semiautomatic* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017) was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She has won the Hurston / Wright Legacy Award in Poetry, the Holmes National Poetry Prize, and fellowships from the Radcliffe Institute, Cave Canem, and Macdowell. She teaches African American Literature and Creative Writing at Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

women's voting rights at one hundred (but who's counting?)

*eenie meenie minie moe
catch a voter by her toe
if she hollers then you know
got yourself a real jane crow*

* * *

one vote is an opinion
with a quiet legal force ::
a barely audible beep
in the local traffic, & just
a splashless drop of mercury
in the national thermometer.
but a collectivity of votes
/a flock of votes, a pride of votes,
a murder of votes/ can really
make some noise.

* * *

one vote begets another
if you make a habit of it.
my mother started taking me
to the polls with her when i
was seven :: small, thrilled
to step in the booth, pull
the drab curtain hush-shut
behind us, & flip the levers
beside each name she pointed
to, the Xs clicking into view.
there, she called the shots.

* * *

*rich gal, poor gal
hired girl, thief
teacher, journalist
vote your grief*

* * *

one vote's as good as another
:: still, in 1913, illinois's gentle
suffragists, hearing southern
women would resent spotting
mrs. ida b. wells-barnett amidst

whites marchers, gently kicked
their sister to the curb. but when
the march kicked off, ida got
right into formation, as planned.
the *tribune's* photo showed
her present & accounted for.

* * *

one vote can be hard to keep
an eye on :: but several /a
colony of votes/ can't scuttle
away unnoticed so easily. my
mother, veteran registrar for
our majority black election
district, once found — after
much searching — two bags
of ballots /a *litter of votes/*
stuffed in a janitorial closet.

* * *

*one-mississippi
two-mississippis*

* * *

one vote was all fannie lou
hamer wanted. in 1962, when
her constitutional right was
over forty years old, she tried
to register. all she got for her
trouble was literacy tested, poll
taxed, fired, evicted, & shot
at. a year of grassroots activism
nearly planted her mississippi
freedom democratic party
in the national convention.

* * *

one vote per eligible voter
was all stacy abrams needed.
she nearly won the georgia
governor's race in 2018 :: lost by
50,000 /an *unkindness of votes/*
to the man whose job was ~~put~~
maintaining the voter rolls.
days later, she rolled out plans
for getting voters a fair fight.
it's been two years — & counting.



Maggie Smith

Maggie Smith is the author of *Good Bones* (Tupelo Press, 2017), which won the 2018 Independent Publisher Book Awards Gold Medal in Poetry. She has received fellowships from the Sustainable Arts Foundation, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts, and is an editor at large for the *Kenyon Review*.

Voting-Machine

In 1899, Lenna R. Winslow of Columbus, Ohio, applied for a patent for a "Voting-Machine." He had created a mechanical system that adjusted the ballot the voter would see based on whether that voter was a man or a woman. — David Kindy, Smithsonian.com

When you enter the booth
through the door marked

ladies, listen for the click
and turn — levers and gears

designed to conceal.
Don't trouble yourself,

they say, with the say
you aren't allowed to have,

not yet. Where the partial
precedes the whole,

how not to feel partially
human, not quite

a self? When you enter
the booth, you will hear

years — years clicking
away, the grate of metal

on metal. The whole
is coming. Listen

for the turn.



Mai Der Vang

Mai Der Vang's debut collection, *Afterland* (Graywolf Press, 2017), won the 2016 Walt Whitman Award, was longlisted for the 2017 National Book Award, and was a finalist for the 2018 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. A Kundiman fellow, Vang is a member of the Hmong American Writers' Circle and an assistant professor of English at Fresno State.

That All, Everyone, Each in Being

Decades I have waited
for all of this to
rest and a mark laid
to my worth even
their own little swords,
the song and full
vowel. Everything
making, an infinite
is yet to be faced.
as though I had touched
little did I know,
with which to
the sky, little did I
open for me. All,
in effort of
Five days ago, I stood
shifting between fenced
yard. What could
a fairness of wings, restoring
theirs to have.
steeped myself with
sprouting from the cloud
where the arrow leads,
Until now,

to make sunlight
matter, a mark built to
living. I am sworn
when the scales weep
slanting outside
of soothing to speak each
happens toward its own
becoming from all that
When it seemed
the arm of love,
I had found a door
enter the sky. And to
know, the door would
as it will be, as it should be,
The Great Balance.
under a flight of egrets,
field of mud and factory
they have guessed of stability,
what had always been
Like them, I have
others, for so long my roots
of this fight, daring to follow
until it is my turn.
my turn.

The **New York Philharmonic** connects with up to 50 million people around the world annually through concerts, broadcasts, recordings, education, and free or low-cost performances, including the Concerts in the Parks, Presented by Didi and Oscar Schafer; *Phil the Hall*; Philharmonic Free Fridays; and Young People's Concerts. In the 2019–20 season, the Philharmonic reaffirms its commitments to serving as New York's orchestra and to championing new music through *Project 19*, marking the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment with commissions by 19 women composers; hotspots festival, spotlighting new-music centers Berlin, Reykjavík, and New York; and *Mahler's New York*, examining the composer / conductor who spent time in New York as the Philharmonic's tenth Music Director. The Philharmonic has commissioned and / or premiered works by leading composers from every era since its founding in 1842. Highlights include Dvořák's *New World* Symphony; John Adams's Pulitzer Prize-winning *On the Transmigration of Souls*, dedicated to the victims of 9/11; and Julia Wolfe's *Fire in my mouth*. The New York Philharmonic is the oldest American symphony orchestra and one of the oldest in the world. Jaap van Zweden became Music Director in September 2018, succeeding titans including Bernstein, Toscanini, and Mahler.

nyphil.org

Lead support for *Project 19* is provided by the **Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust** and **Dr. Agnes Hsu-Tang and Mr. Oscar L. Tang**.

Generous support is also provided by **Sheree A. and Gerald L. Friedman**; **The Hauser Foundation**; **The Gerald L. Lennard Foundation**; **Margaret Morgan and Wesley Phoa**; **Kimberly V. Strauss, The Strauss Foundation**; the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**; and an **anonymous donor**.

Project 19 is supported in part by a generous grant from the **American Orchestras' Futures Fund**, a program of the League of American Orchestras made possible by funding from the **Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation**.

academy of american poets

Founded in 1934 in New York City, the **Academy of American Poets** is the nation's leading champion of American poets and poetry, with members in all 50 states. Its mission is to support American poets at all stages of their careers, and to foster the appreciation of contemporary poetry. Each year the charitable organization connects millions of readers to poets' work through its many programs and publications that, in addition to Poets.org, include *Poem-a-Day*, the first place of publication for new poems by 260 poets annually; *National Poetry Month* (April), which the Academy founded in 1996; *American Poets*, the biannual literary journal for members; the *American Poets Prizes*, which provide more than \$200,000 to 150 poets each year; *Poetry & the Creative Mind*, a celebration of poetry's influence on other artists and public leaders held at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall; the *Fall Conversation Series*, which features poets and other artists; and an education program that provides free resources such as lesson plans, the award-winning weekly series *Teach This Poem*, and the *Dear Poet* project for K-12 teachers and students. In addition, the organization coordinates the *Poetry Coalition*, an alliance of more than 20 poetry organizations across the United States.

poets.org