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Poet's First Submission Selected by North Carolina Poet Laureate for the James Applewhite Poetry Prize

Despite COVID-19, 93 poets submitted 328 poems to the 2020 James Applewhite Poetry Prize competition. *NCLR* Editor Margaret Bauer reports that this year's participation beats all but last year's record, which was just over 100 poets and almost 350 poems.

Final judge Jaki Shelton Green selected "Abundance" by Keely Hendricks as the winner of the 2020 prize. Hendricks will receive \$250, and her poem will be published in the *North Carolina Literary Review (NCLR)* in 2021, which will be the 30th annual print issue. Green, who is North Carolina's Poet Laureate, characterizes the winning poem as "atmospherically rich with a delicate musicality. It is resplendent in masterful imagery. In small moments and places, the poet locates precise vision, voice, and the insistence of truthful language that is accessible." When he included this poem among the 14 finalists he selected for publication and the final judge's consideration, Poetry Editor Jeffrey Franklin said, "This poem lives up to its title! Abundant, lush, gorgeous."

A native of Nashville, TN, Keely Hendricks is a recent graduate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she earned a BA in French and English, with a concentration in creative writing. She looks forward to teaching at Nashville's Jewish Middle School this fall and teaching English in Senegal with the Fulbright program starting in January. This was Hendricks's first time to enter *NCLR*'s poetry competition. "In fact," says Bauer, "this is her first time to submit her poetry for publication consideration. And she won the prize!" Hendricks reports that she took her first poetry writing class her last semester at UNC, with the poet Gaby Calvocoressi, whom she calls "a force and inspiration."

Final judge Jaki Shelton Green was appointed in 2018 by Governor Roy Cooper as the ninth North Carolina Poet Laureate and was named an Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow in 2019 by the Academy of American Poets. Her numerous other honors include the North Carolina Award for Literature in 2003, induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame in 2004, the R. Hunt Parker Award for significant contributions to North Carolina literature in 2018, and the John Tyler Caldwell Award in the Humanities in 2019. Her most recent book is *I Want to Undie You*, reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2019, and she has just released a spoken word collection, *The River Speaks of Thirst*.

Green also picked “kwansaba crown” by Gideon Young of Chapel Hill for second place, and “She, Being Holy Ghost” by David E. Poston of Gastonia for third place. From the remaining finalists, Franklin selected two for honorable mention: “At the Grey Dog in Chelsea” by Jodi Barnes and “After Perfecting a Coconut Cream Pie, I Fail” by Terri Greco. All of these poems will also be published in the 2021 print issue next summer. *NCLR* applied for a North Carolina Arts Council grant, which would provide honoraria for all of the honorees. (Funding decisions await the General Assembly’s approved state budget.)

Fifth-time Applewhite finalist J.S. Absher had two poems make it to the final round, so “The Newsy” will appear in the 2021 print issue, and “Weeding” in the online issue. The other finalists are “Keeper” by Richard Betz (a sixth-time finalist), “Grace” by Janet Ford, “Hypnopompic hallucination of you and your ex in a horse pasture five miles outside of Greensboro” by Shari Crane Fox, “Bardo” by Janis Harrington, “Promised Land” by Maura High, “leftover women” by Lisa Pursely, and “Solastagia” by Christopher Shipman. These finalists will be published in *NCLR Online*, which is released in late January.

A two-year subscription to *NCLR* will include the 2021 issue, featuring the 2020 contest honorees, and the recently published 2020 issue, with the honorees from last year’s contest. Find subscription information [here](#).

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