

Statement from the University of Arizona Poetry Center:

This spring the University of Arizona Poetry Center partnered with AzRISE to present a Solar Poetry Contest in celebration of the University's participation in the U.S. Department of Energy Solar Decathlon. The Poetry Center invited UA students and staff to submit an original sonnet about the sun in one of three categories: Shakespearean, Petrarchan or non-traditional. Creative Writing professor Alison Hawthorne Deming, the author of numerous poetry books and essay collections exploring the connections between science and the humanities, anonymously read the entries and selected the winning poems.

The Poetry Center was pleased to join its literary expertise and passions with the solar energy work of AzRISE. According to executive director Gail Browne, "Inspired global change is always reflected in and ignited by literature and art. While the sonnet may not nearly be as timeless at the sun, it is a literary form that has inspired writers and readers from the 14th century to the present. Solar energy and poetry both seek to re-envision a way of life."

Judge's Statement:

My choices for the Solar Poetry Contest include two aubades — poems greeting the dawn. Of course, this is what we might expect with "sun" poems. These particular aubades are so opposite in mood that they make an interesting set.

Melissa Lamberton's Petrarchan sonnet, "Aubade," is the more traditional love song evoking daybreak. The poem moves wonderfully through domestic imagery, rendering the sun in the fierce intimacy of "this electric skin and loving volt" and then jumping scale to the remote "appointments made with China, Belgium, Spain," and the suitor's big promises.

The Shakespearean sonnet by Sarah Kortemeier, also entitled "Aubade," might be considered an anti-aubade. It speaks of the sun's absence and does so in the voice of a spurned lover ("You left me yesterd—") unwilling to welcome the return of the sun — or even to speak the name of day. The language here is tense, packed, and riveting.

For the non-traditional sonnet, I've chosen Maureen McHugh's "Still Life with Sun and Riverbed." This poem opens the sonnet form wonderfully to gaps of thought and feeling as the words score across the page just as sunlight plays through branches in the poem. I love how the last line links the intimate with the metaphysical through the figure of the sun.

In all cases these poems are written with wonderful formal precision that shows the poets have taken pleasure in the sonnet's challenge. I congratulate them all on the fine work.

—Alison Hawthorne Deming

Professor of Creative Writing