



PEACH PRESERVES

MARCH 2026
ISSUE 202603

Georgia Poetry Society Newsletter



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

In Macon Georgia, my hometown, winter seems to have slipped quietly into hiding. February teased us with temperatures in the 70's, reminding us March is just around the corner. And with it comes the city's - International Cherry Blossom Festival.

March 20-29, 2026, Macon transforms into a pink paradise, celebrating more than 350,00 Yoshino cherry trees in bloom. The festival even features a haiku contest. I confess, I have not entered; this poetic form continues to elude me.

As March unfolds, poetry societies everywhere begin preparing for National Poetry Month in April. Last year I enjoyed reading at local libraries and sharing poems at the third Friday Gallery Opening at the Middle Georgia Art Association. I hope to repeat and expand these outreach efforts this year. Members, what are your plans for April?

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**"Spring is the time of plans and projects."
— Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina**

How to Choose Contests That Fit Your Voice

Submitting to contests can feel unpredictable, but poets can improve their chances by choosing contests that genuinely match their style and themes. A good fit doesn't guarantee a win, but it does ensure your work is read by people more likely to appreciate it.

1. Read past winning poems

This is the clearest indicator of whether your work belongs in a particular contest. Notice the tone, style, and subject matter. If you feel a natural connection to the winning pieces, that's a strong sign your poems may resonate there too.

2. Look at the contest's mission

Some contests favor innovation, others prefer traditional forms, narrative clarity, or social engagement. A quick scan of their guidelines or website can tell you a lot about what they value.

3. Research the judge

Judges are human, and their tastes shape their choices.

Reading a few of their poems or interviews can help you understand whether your voice might speak to them.

4. Match the poem to the contest

Instead of writing for a contest, choose contests that naturally align with the poems you've already written. This keeps your voice authentic and prevents you from forcing your work into a mold that doesn't suit it.

5. Trust your instincts

If a contest feels like a mismatch — too experimental, too political, too formal, too broad — trust that feeling. Your intuition is part of your artistic intelligence.

Choosing contests thoughtfully isn't about strategy alone — it's about honoring your voice. When you submit to places that resonate with your style and spirit, you give your poems the best chance to be truly seen.

*Choosing contests thoughtfully isn't about strategy alone —
it's about honoring your voice.*

Spotlight

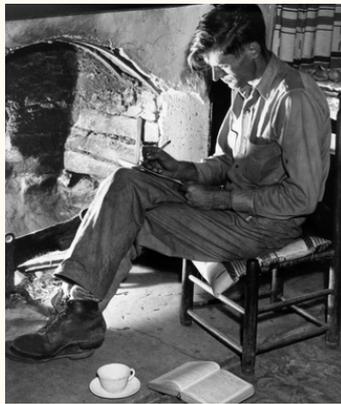
Byron Herbert Reece: A Georgia Voice Endures

Byron Herbert Reece (1917–1958) remains one of Georgia’s most distinctive literary voices. A poet and novelist shaped by the rhythms of the North Georgia mountains, Reece wrote with a clarity and musicality that continue to resonate across generations.

Raised on a subsistence farm in Union County, Reece developed his literary gifts without formal degrees. His education came from the land, the Bible, and the ballads of Appalachia, yet his talent carried him into national recognition.

During the early 1950s, he taught at Young Harris College. Although she did not know him personally, our GPS President, Barbara Barry-Nishanian, was in her final year at Young Harris when Reece died.

Reece’s work earned significant honors, including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Poetry Society of America’s Shelley Memorial Award, and the Georgia Writers Association Literary Achievement Award.



Byron Herbert Reece

His poems appeared in major national publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Saturday Review*.

His published works include four volumes of poetry—*Ballad of the Bones*, *Bow Down in Jericho*, and *A Song of Joy* among them—and two novels, *The Season of Flesh* and *Better a Dinner of Herbs*.

His writing blends plainspoken imagery with spiritual depth, often exploring nature, hardship, and the quiet dignity of rural life.

One of his most quoted lines comes from “*I Go by Ways of Rust and Flame*”:
“*I go by ways of rust and flame
Beneath the bent and
lonely sky...*”

Today, the Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center in Blairsville preserves his legacy. As we highlight the new *Reach of Song* webpage this month, it feels fitting to honor the poet whose work continues to shape Georgia’s literary identity.

Link: [Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center](#)

How GPS Chose Reece as the Inspiration for *The Reach of Song*

The Georgia Poetry Society established *The Reach of Song* anthology in 1981, naming it in honor of Byron Herbert Reece, whose work helped shape Georgia’s poetic identity. The title comes from Reece’s 1952 collection and reflects his belief that poetry reaches outward—across time, land-scape, and community. By choosing his words, GPS rooted the anthology in Georgia’s literary heritage and affirmed its commitment to nurturing poetry that continues that reach. Link: [Reach of Song](#)

**NFSPS ANNUAL POETRY CONTESTS NOW OPEN
SUBMIT BY MARCH 15**

Each year, the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS) hosts one of the largest open poetry competitions in the country, featuring more than 50 individual contests spanning every imaginable theme, form, and style. Submissions are open January 1 through March 15, and poets may enter as many contests as they wish. Full guidelines, prize details, and electronic submission links are available on the NFSPS website. Explore the complete contest list [here](#).

2026 NFSPS Contest Overview

(All deadlines: March 15. Full rules online.)

Founders Award

Open theme & form; top prize \$1,000.

Brecht Poetry Award

Poems expressing a yearning for a society free from human oppression.

The Margo Award

Theme: "Wind Eyes."

Donald Stodghill Memorial Award (Members Only)

Open theme & form.

Word Smiths Award

Theme: the art of poetry.

Virginia Corrie-Cozart Memorial Award

Theme: secret happiness.

Mildred Vorpahl Baass Remembrance Award (Members Only)

Theme: cats – their beauty, intelligence, and habits.

League of Minnesota Poets Award

Theme: humor; free verse.

Miriam S. Strauss Memorial Award (Members Only)

Humorous Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnet.

Ohio Award

Open theme & form.

How to Enter

All contests use the same submission window: January 1 – March 15, 2026

Electronic submission is available for all categories.

Full rules, prize amounts, line limits, and entry fees are available at:

<https://www.nfsp.com/contests>

January Quarterly Meeting Highlights

Not even a winter storm could stop our first meeting of 2026. President Barbara Nishanian opened the Zoom session with a warm welcome to visitors before addressing the morning's program.

Updates & Announcements

Vice President Michelle Alderman shared that the *Reach of Song* webpage is now live on the GPS website, complete with a submission portal for entries to this year's anthology. Submissions are open through March 15, and details are available [here](#). She also highlighted the redesign of the GPS newsletter to provide relevant information and resources for members.

Barbara reminded members that membership dues increased from \$20 to \$35 beginning February 1.

Member News

Kit Schmeiser, a longtime GPS member and active participant in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS), shared updates about *Poets for Peace: Sunflowers Rising*. Kit, along with Barbara, Jennifer Smith, and several other Georgia poets, contributed to the 2025 publication. Proceeds from the anthology support medical needs in Ukrainian orphanages. Read more about the anthology [here](#). Kit is currently serving as the NFSPS Stevens Poetry Manuscript Competition Chairperson.

GPS Secretary Alice Johnson briefly shared a few updates from recent poetry events in Augusta, including Open Mic events at the Jessye Norman School of the Arts.

Adjournment

Barbara closed the updates by sharing that recent poetry readings at the Macon Museum of Arts and Sciences were a success. The meeting adjourned with a strong sense of collaboration and momentum toward a productive year ahead.

April Poetry Month Preview

April is just around the corner, and GPS will be celebrating National Poetry Month with statewide opportunities, prompts, and community engagement. Look for a special April issue with ways to participate, share your work, and connect with poets across Georgia.

President's Corner, continued

While details appear elsewhere in this newsletter, I want to remind you to please send in your poems for the *Reach of Song* Anthology. Contributors are members of our community of poets, united by our love of language. It never ceases to amaze me that words strung together can touch someone's heart, mind, or memory—conveying stories of heartache, joy, and hope. Your voice matters!

Not a member yet? We warmly invite you to join the Georgia Poetry Society and help support our nonprofit mission to promote poets and poetry in Georgia and surrounding communities.

And please mark your calendars - Our next GPS Open Mic Night will be Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 7:00 pm. We welcome members and guests alike. Come share a poem ... or simply come listen.

With anticipation for a blooming March,

Barbara Barry -Nishanian
President, Georgia Poetry Society

“The open mic is the heartbeat of a poetry community — it's where we test our truths out loud.” — Buddy Wakefield



GEORGIA POETRY SOCIETY

OPEN MIC

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026
Hosted on Zoom • 7:00 PM

Join us for an evening of poetry, community, and connection. All are welcome—whether you'd like to read, listen, or simply enjoy the company of fellow writers.

Hosted by:
Barbara Barry Nishanian
President,
Georgia Poetry Society

Bring a poem to share, or come to enjoy the voices of our GPS community,
ZoomLink: <https://tinyurl.com/MarchOpenMic26>
Link: [Georgia Poetry Society](https://www.georgiapoetrysociety.org)

March Open Mic Guest

We are pleased to share that **Oleisia Johnson**, recipient of the 2025 Alike Perroti and Seth Frank Most Promising Young Poet Award, will be joining us for the March Open Mic.

Ms. Johnson's award-winning poem, *The Weight She Gives Me*, is a beautiful work that explores themes of identity and belonging.

Oleisia is a Computer Science major at Spelman College, where she blends her interests in design, community, and creative storytelling.

We look forward to welcoming her into the GPS community.

Follow Georgia Poetry Society On:



Book Fairs and Festivals in Georgia

As winter melts and Spring emerges, warmer weather calls us from hibernation to seek creative sustenance. If words are a writer's stimulation, then books are their lifeblood, and festivals are the feast. The following book festivals are being held in Georgia this spring:

Dahlonega Literary Festival. March 7, 2026; Dahlonega.
Carrollton BookFest. March 27-28, 2026; Carrollton.
Conyers Book Festival. April 11, 2026; Conyers.

Poetry captures emotion, thought, and beauty, offering a bridge between the inner world and the universal human experience.

Poetry Events Around Georgia

Oglethorpe Out Loud – March 19, Oglethorpe University hosts a public reading with award winning poet Jericho Brown.

\$1000 Poetry Competition - Sun, Mar 22, 7 PM, A high-stakes slam hosted by @IamTheCulture, at Rose Bistro & Champagne Bar in Atlanta. Link: \$1,000 Poetry Competition Hosted by @IamTheCulture

Emory Fellows Reading – March 2, Emory's Creative Writing Program features fellows in poetry, playwriting, and screenwriting at PAIS 290.

Atlanta Writing Workshop – March 28 includes specialized sessions like "Rhyme Without the Rules" for rhythmic and metrical writing.

Art Amok Slam – March 22, InTune Studio, Atlanta, 2nd and 4th Fridays (March 13 & 27)

Tongue Open Mic – March 3 & 17, Sentient Bean, 13 East Park Avenue, Savannah, Open Mic 1st and 3rd Tuesdays.

Major Poetry & Writing Conferences in Georgia

Poetry@Tech Symposium

April 9-10 Atlanta (GA Tech)

Features international poetry, translation panels, and readings.

Atlanta Writers Conference

May 1-2 Atlanta

Networking with agents, editors; includes poetry manuscript critiques.