

**14 International Younger Poets**  
Edited by Philip Nikolayev  
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*Review by Dennis Daly*

Poets practice their profession as solitaries, with the time spans often lengthy, and the intensity profound. They hear voices and often respond with cursive arcs or, more commonly, by tapping computer keys. The disabling isolation demanded by this profession fosters envy, grandiose pretensions, and bitterness. Not exactly a healthy atmosphere for bardic lads and lasses coming into their own.

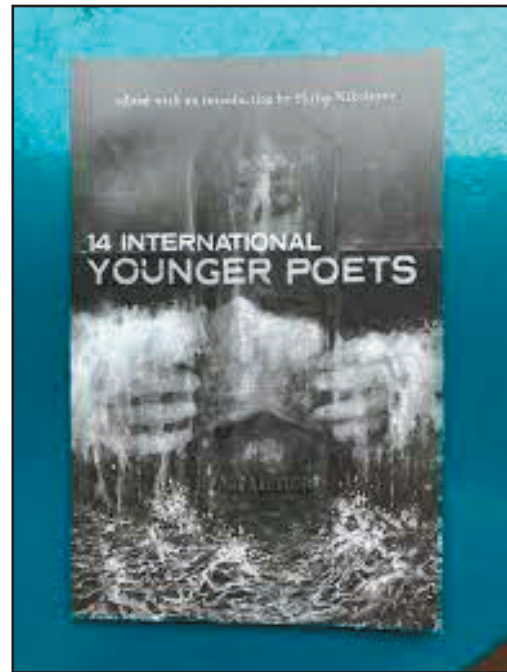
But when these young and, presumably, talented versifiers do break through, watch out: a tectonic shift in our cultural bearings may be in the offing. *14 International Younger poets*, edited by Philip Nikolayev, may embed one of these singular and potentially seminal events. Nikolayev's chosen poets do not project an ism or a thematic school like Ezra Pound's Imagist Poets or Allen Tate's *The Fugitive Poets* or Robert Creeley's *Black Mountain Poets*. They seem more brash and more original like the Yale Younger Poets (chosen one per year). Consider, for instance, the eye-opening newness from that Yale group of Alan Dugan or Michael Casey.

Between the ages of 24 and 35, all fourteen of these poets reside in either the United States (albeit with different ethnic backgrounds) or India. The editor happily includes a large selection from each poet. Their techniques and their themes are diverse. Before the publication of this collection, they connected in virtual chat rooms and read together on Zoom. Here's betting that those connections strengthened their poetic health.

Avinab Datta-Areng, from Kodaikanal, a scenic hill town in southern India, opens this artistic array with a series of fervent meditations. In his piece entitled *Mongoose with Prey*, Datta-Areng intervenes in a drama by just being there. As most physicists will attest, the existence of an observer changes everything. The poet delivers his details,

*I hear the canal gushing louder than usual,  
Muffled screams from the narrow lane.*

*A coconut falls on the grass,  
Startling us both,  
He looks up and sees me.*



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*Our hunger now  
Indistinguishable.*

*This has to end.*

*He knows this before me,  
Lets go of his prey, disappears  
Into the thicket, leaving me—*

Notice, no decision is ever made here. Observation effectuates both climax and ending.

A poet on edge demands notice. Raquel Balboni, who recently published her first book of poems, *XXX Poems*, powers through life's obstructions with a vengeance. In *Twin Cars* she says,

*A strong current through the country drives me home  
through skull blade and a 10 gallon headache  
and what happened to living in sin together?  
Two cars, a house and two devils.  
Two cars standing on edge.  
On their noses and their driving.*

*In my dopamine castle  
All is well in my dopamine shell  
All is fine in the nightmare hours  
When the head, I think, shrinks*

Some truths are more relevant to our lives than others. Marbleheader Justin Burnett, in his poem *Flat-Earther*, sees the limits of the human condition (and maybe poetics) clearly,

*The world for all intents  
And purposes is flat,*

*Speaking empirically,  
Taking only my existence  
As truth. Yes, I know how to see  
The curve of the earth*

*At the beach—an inverse  
Heat-off-the-pavement effect,*

*If you ask me (and it is  
An optical illusion), suggestive*

*Only of equations  
As relevant as metaphysics*

*To my life...*

For those aficionados of formal poetry Blake Campbell is your guy. His poems are mature and well-wrought. His craft belies the moniker of

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“younger poets.” Within Campbell’s chosen forms he utilizes both impressive tonal and thematic ranges. In the poem *After the Blizzard* one can feel the remnants of the gale’s force as Campbell’s perceptions build and change directions,

*The gusts that take the reins instead  
Already court another storm.*

*You check the urge to count the blows  
The wind delivers in its haste—  
The dead leaves lifted from repose,  
The footprints of a fox erased—*

A translator of literary works from Rajasthani into English and a resident of New Delhi,, Sumit Chaudhary imbues his eye-popping sonnet entitled *The Jealous Lover Shaming The Moon* with memorable slant rhymes. The opening stanzas pin the moon on the interrogator’s sexual tapestry,

*Tell me moon, without feeling ashamed  
how many before me have had their gaze  
returned with playful curvets in and out  
of clouds, how many have doused*

*crude hungers with your silver fire  
(how freely lent)? Was there arousal  
as by my touch or did some higher  
catch you in your hormonal carousel?*

Paul Rowe, a Massachusetts North Shore denizen, stuns with his splendid, yet empathetic study, *Cerebral Palsy*. Regard this powerful denouement,

*... We wait*

*for the voice from the sea to call forth, the light from the tower  
To lead him back out—yet the waves push him back*

*To this shore, this body, this beach, this shell—The reef  
Without language pulls us in—binds us together in blinding night*

Some poetic images truly awe, but others literally usurp space in one’s mind and they won’t let go. Andreea Julia Scridon, a Romanian-American writer, delivers one of the latter types in her poem, *The Old Lady in the Attic*. Here is the heart of the poem and the image,

*When she turned the light on,  
her celestial head  
with its white hair  
lit up  
like a light bulb.*

*Sometimes she would wave  
toward my window,*

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*and I, who looked like Peter Pan,  
would wave back to her.*

Kamayani Sharma's poem *Within Urdu* celebrates and laments the history, sounds, and raw emotions held close within this Hindustani language. Sharma delivers her perceptions in an elegant ghazal. Pay attention to these closing lines and their current associations,

*These days smuggled into names and addresses  
Is a contraband of pain within Urdu.*

*Cities rechristened at night like girls "post marriage;"  
Their past never to surface again within Urdu.*

*On the news we hear guttural cries of dying men.  
Alas they dwelled—all those slain—within Urdu.*

Space prohibits this reviewer from presenting more than this brief sampling of eight poems and should not suggest any diminishment of the remaining six poets and their impressive work. These pieces simply jumped out and grabbed me (as other pieces will grab you). The remaining poets—Zainab Ummer Farook, Emily Grochowski, Chandramohan S., Susmit Panda, Shruti Krishna Sareen, and Samuel Wronoski equally need to be read. The immediate purchase of this remarkable collection by you, dear reader, will solve this problem.