

# THE FESTIVAL REVIEW

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*poetry • fiction • nonfiction • translation*

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*Translated from Italian by Laura Valeri*

# Three Poems

BY PATRICK SWANEY

## Waiting to Win the Lottery

I'm sure I will be a better person  
when I win the lottery. For instance,  
a thing like inadvertently bumping  
into the door frame while bringing you  
a small bowl of chickpeas and stewed tomatoes,  
because that's part of what we're having for dinner,  
and then spilling, with comic accuracy,  
the contents of that bowl onto a displayed  
typewriter in the corner of the room, the chunks  
and slop of skins and broth tangled  
into the keys and hammers and carriage—  
a thing like this, as a lottery winner,  
will not send me into a spasm of seething,  
self-directed rage at my clumsy incompetence. No,  
my good fortune, I'm certain, will fund  
a newfound nonchalance, an expanded ability  
to see beyond myself, beyond these everyday  
mishaps, and while I go about tidying up  
this untidiness, with the efficiency and  
clarity of a calm mind, I will be struck  
with appreciation anew for the design and manual  
beauty of the typewriter, and I will think,  
this is a worthy endeavor, this caretaking  
for a functioning piece of the past. In my prosperity  
I will be more generous, of course,  
but also a man of action, so when I come up with  
an idea for an after-school program that is part

typewriter repair and part writing workshop,  
I will move decisively to get the project up  
and running; there will be scholarships and success  
stories and transformative testimonials  
from graduates who have told their story and  
worked with their hands and found  
purpose in a redefined life path and  
in interviews I will recount with charming  
self-deprecation the origin story that spurred  
my passion—all this out of that little mess,  
I might say, with an inward chuckle. Yes,  
all of this. The jackpot is some hundreds  
of millions again, more than enough,  
or at least enough to think so.



*Photo by Eduardo Vázquez*

# John

BY DIANE FORMAN

As usual, I saw John today, guitar and body perched on an overturned, industrial-sized paint pail. From the distance I heard his voice first — the soft, off-key, but familiar John Denver words mixed with the howling winds: “Almost Heaven...West Virginia...” His entire repertoire is this song, plus two others, which he plucks over and over again with blackened fingers in black fingerless gloves.

Usually, I stand for a moment and listen or hum a few bars, then drop a dollar or two in his open guitar case, littered with a few other coins and bills. Sometimes I buy him a coffee from Dunkin’ Donuts — light, two sugars, though he prefers cash. Sometimes I talk to him — he listens, though he prefers to sing or drum.

It’s mid-January now, and the gray skies and usual freeze are here. Our colonial brick sidewalks are nearly empty, slippery from the patina of overnight ice. In the summer, tourists crowd the bricks, carrying colored bags with magnets and mugs and other souvenirs, filling our shops and cafes and riverside boardwalk. They mill to the side and half-listen to our John. But they’re gone now, in the midst of the biting wind and icy sky. Most locals pay him no attention, especially now, hastening on (still careful of the ice), in their dark uniforms of zipped puffy coats and tight wooly hats. Their faces lack expression, obscured by the coverings. I’ve almost forgotten what people look like, hidden behind these coats, woolens, and masks.

I asked him his name a few years ago, this guitar player, who sometimes doubles as a drummer banging on a few paint pails, one of which doubles as a chair. He told me he goes by John. A regular name, he said. It’s funny that my name is John, he added, just like

# Interview with Catherynne M. Valente

BY RACHEL FINSTON

Catherynne M. Valente is the author of an awe-inspiring catalog of fiction, which runs the gamut from the best-selling *Fairyland* children's books to *Deathless*, Russian-derived folklore for adult readers. She has been nominated for countless awards, and won many, including the Locus, Tiptree and Hugo awards. Valente has also been a finalist for the Nebula and World Fantasy Awards. Over the years, she has lived in many places, but she currently calls Maine home, where she lives with her husband, son, and pets.

Catherynne and I were able to speak over Zoom, with regular interruptions by our respective cats. She was kind enough to ignore me shooing mine away from plants, while we discussed her oeuvre and her life as a writer.

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**You publish with your middle initial — under the name Catherynne M. Valente — are there other Catherynnes who spell it the same, who are also Valente?**

No, there are no other Catherynnes who spell it my way, as far as I'm aware. I don't know, why do people use middle initials? Because it sounds cool. [*Laughs*] So, there is a reason, my mom went through a hardcore New Age phase when I was younger. She was super into numerology, and the name is luckier with the "M."



Do I believe in this stuff? Not really. Was I way too young to have critical thinking about it, and therefore kind of took it on board and can't fully escape? Yes. Did I once work full-time as a fortune teller? Yes, I did. It's complicated, but why take your chances? And, it's been a lucky name.

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### **What are the qualifications for working as a fortune teller?**

Be good enough at it that, when you read the cards of the person who owns the shop, they cry. As far as I know, that's how you get the job. The thing is, reading tarot cards, it's the same skill-set as a novelist. You are telling a fifteen minute piece of flash fiction where the prompt is the person in front of you and the pictures that you put down, so I learned a lot about quick character work.

I always try to demystify it a little bit, talk about what exactly the cards mean in what positions they are in, so it doesn't seem like I'm "communing with the other plane," or something like that — that felt deceitful to me. It's actually very formulaic, and then you improv the story out of it. So, it was actually the last full-time job I had before I became a full-time writer, so it was good training.

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### **So did that influence *Palimpsest* at all?**

Yeah, it absolutely did. I also wrote a book of poetry called *Oracles*. I had just graduated from college when I was working that job, and I majored in classics. I went to the Oracle at Delphi, and I had been thinking about oracles so much, and then I was one, all of the sudden. [Laughs] It's less cool to be the oracle at Newport, Rhode Island. It really did affect a lot of my early work.

# The Dragonflies

BY FRANCESCA DIANO

*Translated from Italian by Laura Valeri*

They were four in the family.

Four siblings, spinsters and bachelors between 50 and 60 years of age. Two sisters and two brothers.

Their house was wedged in an alley slightly wider than the others, thus entitled to boast the name “Corso d’Italia.”

On the other side of the street, paved in beautiful grey stone, Palace Della Gatta flaunted its royal coats of arms on its front gate.

The Della Gatta family, owners of the imposing mansion since time immemorial, gave the country lawyers and magistrates, and back in the age of the Bourbons, even an admiral. For that reason, a magnificent brigantine with masts unfurled appeared above the coat of arms — a female cat rampant against a starry backdrop, flanked by the pilasters and curly friezes that adorned the baroque portal.

But the palace obstructed the sea view, and this was cause for resentment for the four siblings.

A few years earlier, they had tried to raise the house one level, just enough to see the coastline from the windows, trusting in their older brother’s connections, who was a lance corporal in the Carabinieri force, to obtain — or, if necessary, to circumvent — the required building permits. But the meanness and envy of their neighbors quickly leveled down the walls that had already begun to rise.

The four siblings had no doubt that behind it all was the hand of the last descendant of the Della Gatta, who furthermore lived in the north and spent only summers in town. In any case, how were they to prove what they knew to be the incontrovertible truth? Donna Eleonora always wore a great smile on her face when she met them. She stretched her lips and offered a big greeting with a voice both husky and strident, for certain, a sign of her duplicitous nature. Predators and despots her ancestors, predator and despot herself.

Permits to turn her palace inside out like a sock had not been denied to her, the siblings bitterly pondered.

From then on, their rapport with the noblewoman had turned cold and formal. Only *good day* and *good evening*.

Neither Santo, nor Gabriele, nor Giovannella, nor Isabella had ever been married, nor for that matter engaged. At least not officially, which is the only type of engagement that counts.

Everyone knows, people with assets whose home and bank account are built on a bit of inheritance and a lot of hard work need to find a reputable party. But did they ever find one worthy of their level?

They certainly had not resigned themselves to being single, God forbid. But they could not deny that with each passing season, their opportunities grew ever more meager.

They resembled each other a lot. Not very tall, with soft, even child-like features, few wrinkles, and hair mostly dark — except for Salvo, who had a hint of red for his habit of touching up the silver strands — the siblings were especially similar in their considerable roundness. But to different degrees.

Santo was the slimmest. He stalked the 100 kilos mark like a bullfighter circling his bull, while Gabriele had firmly embraced that weight

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