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Zoo Press Presents Paris Review Prize

Poetry Contest for New Manuscripts

Elizabeth Michaelson

Poets generally don't make much money, but with the help of Neil Azevedo's

Zoo Press, the winner of the newly inaugurated Paris Review Prize in Poetry will be published—not to mention \$5000 richer.

The prize will be awarded annually to the author of the best unpublished book of poems. Because, as Azevedo puts it, "With a little bit of financial help and a lot of moral support, I started Zoo with the mission to publish emerging poets at the rate of four to six manuscripts a year if we could possibly do so."

Azevedo, 30, is a 1998 graduate of Columbia University's M.F.A. program in poetry, and, as he explains, "Zoo Press was born out of my days at Columbia University Press, where, as associate editor, I was acquiring for the Literary Reference division. We acquired a lot of anthologies and a lot of guides to literature to supplement that. And it seemed natural for me—having done my MFA at Columbia, and being a poet—to start a poetry series of individual volumes and award a poetry prize. The idea was that they would be folded into the larger full text of *The Columbia Granger's Index to Poetry*."

Links to Paris Review

Unfortunately, the project did not go ahead. Azevedo's plan was put on the backburner.

This all changed in April, when Azevedo and his family returned to Nebraska, where he'd grown up, to join the staff of iUniverse.com as an editorial coordinator. In Lincoln, Azevedo got the *Paris Review* on board.

"We have an open submissions policy. We are very serious about reading all of our manuscripts!"

--Neil Azevedo

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His first contact with the legendary literary journal came several years ago when, as a grad student, he served as an intern and later an editorial assistant there. In May, Azevedo broached the idea of a *Paris Review* -affiliated prize to his former colleague, managing editor Brigid Hughes. "I kind of hit her up with the idea, because she had talked about getting the old Paris Review Press going again," Azevedo offered. "She was kind of excited about it; she talked to George [Plimpton, the *Paris Review* editor]." Azevedo has other contacts at the *Review*. "I happen to have a very close relationship with Richard Howard, the *Paris Review* poetry editor. And I hit him up with the idea, and he was extremely enthusiastic and supportive, and said that he would judge the prize and he would talk to George and maybe waive the fee—it was terrific. So between Richard and Brigid, they got George signed on, and that's how we started to launch Zoo with the Paris Review Prize in poetry!"

Board Full of Luminaries

Zoo started with an anonymous donation of \$5000, which with Azevedo bought a computer and a laser printer. Zoo Press boasts a small amount of capital and a determined editor-in-chief in Azevedo, who diligently pursued an advisory board made up of such luminaries as poet Jonathan Galassi, chairman of the board of The Academy of American Poets and publisher, editor-in-chief, and executive vice president of Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Alice Quinn, poetry editor at *The New Yorker*; Pulitzer Prize-winner Anthony Hecht, and poet David Lehman, series editor for *Scribner's Best American Poetry* anthologies to raise the profile of the fledgling press and perhaps get leads on potential Zoo Press authors. Azevedo seems surprised at the results of his labor of love: "We sent out a lot of letters, and I got a ninety percent response!"

Azevedo adds that Zoo Press may ink similar deals with the *Kenyon Review* and *Parnassus Poetry Review*.

In promoting the prize, says Azevedo, "We put a couple of ads in *Poets and Writers* and the *American Poetry Review*, but we're trying to save our nickels and dimes and do things at a grassroots level. Along with my two assistants, I have been painstakingly pulling email addresses off Yahoo so that we can do a press release as cheaply as possible!"

Submissions carry a \$25 entry fee, some of which will go towards the prize money, while leftover funds will help subsidize other acquisitions. "We're looking for a single slim volume, fifty to one-hundred pages. And if all goes well, the prize will be awarded annually," says Azevedo. "We really hope to glean some of the four to six volumes a year from the pool of applicants. We also have a stellar advisory board to recommend people."

The actual publication is date for the winning volume is still undetermined: "Whether we launch this spring or next fall is still up in the air—it depends on how much money I can raise and the financial outlook. It looks pretty good for Spring 2001 now."

Future Zoo Press authors could be culled from the Paris Review Prize submissions pool, too. "We have an open

submissions policy," Azevedo says firmly. "We are very serious about reading all of our manuscripts!"

Submissions (including the \$25 entry fee) can be sent to
The Paris Review Prize in Poetry
c/o Zoo Press
Post Office 22990
Lincoln, Nebraska 68542
The prize closes this October 31th. Azevedo expects to
notify the winner in March 2001.

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