

# We Who Rise from Saltwater, Let's Sing!

*A Heroic Sonnet Crown for Mayor Daniella Levine Cava  
and the Residents of Miami-Dade County*

**by 28 Miami-Dade (and neighboring area) poets**

**Edited by Maureen Seaton and Nicole Tallman**

## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this Heroic Crown came to me in May 2021 after attending a *Reading Queer* Zoom craft talk and poetry workshop with long-time collaborators Denise Duhamel and Maureen Seaton on “The Wild Third Voice.” As Maureen will tell you, I’d been “bitten” by the collaboration bug during that workshop...so much so that a few days later, I reached out to ask if she would be willing to work with me on a larger collaborative project involving a group of Miami-Dade poets. I couldn’t believe my luck when she graciously agreed, especially after having only met me the prior weekend.

After a bit of discussion, we decided that a non-traditional sonnet, with no particular rhyme scheme or syllable count, would be a fun form for our first collaborative experiment together. We decided to embrace an additional challenge by tackling a Heroic Crown (15 sonnets by 28 paired-up poets). The beauty of a Heroic Crown is that each poem builds on the previous poem before it—creating a beautiful chain linking all 15 poems together.

Maureen and I compiled a slate of potential collaborators—both established and emerging poets from diverse backgrounds—and then sent out a call to those we thought would be game to participate in the first (that we know of) Miami-Dade Heroic Sonnet Crown that we would ultimately present to Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. Some of the poets we reached out to had poet-partners in mind, and others were open to a surprise pairing.

To allow poet-pairs the freedom to create a sonnet that spoke to them, there were very few structure rules imposed for this project. We simply asked that each poet-pair be prepared to write a 14-line sonnet that was Miami-Dade themed, celebratory/positive in tone, used no foul language or hate speech, and maintained the integrity of the collaborative chain by starting with the last line from the previous poet-pair’s sonnet, or a play on that line.

To get the ball rolling, I wrote the first line of Sonnet I and sent it to Maureen via email. Maureen responded with the second line via email, and we continued to send lines back and forth to each other over the next few days until we reached 14 lines. We then passed the last line of our sonnet on to the next poet-pair in the chain, Denise Duhamel and Julie Marie Wade.

From there, each poet-pair had no more than 7 days to work on their sonnet and return it to Maureen and me via email. We would then pass the last line of that sonnet on to the next poet-pair, starting the clock for the next collaboration. This exercise continued week by week over the summer, with prompts sent out each Tuesday morning. When Maureen and I received Sonnet XIV, we took a few days to collaborate on the Mastersonnet: the 15<sup>th</sup> poem in the Crown, crafted from lines from the previous 14 sonnets.

Outside of writing poems with Maureen, who was the most enthusiastic, generous, loving and supportive collaborator I could have ever hoped for, one of the most rewarding aspects of this project was watching poets work their magic together and witnessing the joy in their collaboration. When poets returned sonnets to Maureen and me, more often than not, “We had so much fun!” was among the positive feedback we received. And that is important to note.

It goes without saying that 2020 was a rough year for our community due to the COVID pandemic, and this difficult time was magnified on June 24, 2021, when Champlain Towers South in Surfside collapsed. Poets Jen Karetnick and Catherine Esposito Prescott rose to the challenge of the moment and showed true Miami resilience with their crafting of Sonnet V, which was written between June 22 and June 28.

As you read this Heroic Crown, you’ll notice that many of these poems are, in essence, poems of joy and resilience. And I could think of no better-fitting title for this collection than “We Who Rise from Saltwater, Let’s Sing!” which is a play on a line from Sonnet XIV by Yaddyra Peralta and Leslie Sainz.

In closing, this Heroic Crown (15 sonnets by 28 Miami-Dade and neighboring poets) is a tribute to our first Madame Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, and it is a tribute to the strength and resilience of Miami-Dade County. Maureen and I hope you enjoy it.

Thank you so much for reading.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nicole Tallman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Nicole Tallman  
Poetry Ambassador for Miami-Dade County  
October 26, 2021

# I

Salted stars, summer nocturne, scarlet ginger—the joy of breath  
so close to sea there's nothing to stop us from going under  
except the spell of promise, or tomorrow, binding like gold  
in the night heron's eye or the way sunrise startles  
at the most unexpected moment. A firefly flies out of fire,  
a seastar constellates the warm nocturnal sea, and we  
celebrate the magic of living among this whimsical wonder-  
land's undersea castles and rainbow skyscrapers.

In the deep hours of the city's sleep, we start the slowdown,  
steal quiet among colossal palms and cosmic banyans,  
the blood moon lighting the cicadas' final serenade.  
If we had the chance to write our lives into any dream (or city)  
we would wake to find ourselves right here each time  
caught between the world and the bewitching blue sea.

(Maureen Seaton & Nicole Tallman)

## II

Caught between the world and the bewitching blue sea,  
pink drawbridges and flame-struck Poinciana trees,  
we peddle our Schwinn's, baskets full of plantains,  
to the Dania pier. No finer place to picnic than here

on the sand sliver, the Atlantic pounding  
barnacled stilts and coco plum shore.  
Fisherpeople dip their poles, bait buckets at their feet,  
as pelican bellies skim the crests of waves.

Despite erosion, despite hurricanes, we celebrate  
brief, clement spells along Pangaea's ruptured seam.  
Bananas, empanadas, salted caramel cupcakes  
from the vegan place our out-of-town friends doubt

will live up to the hype. What a feast! Sweet  
with a kick, like a warm breeze whipping up the heat.

(Denise Duhamel & Julie Marie Wade)

### III

With a kick, like a warm breeze whipping up the heat  
a peacock hops onto the hood of a parked car.  
From a nearby living room, the driver sees it—  
a firework of eyeballs, each pupil a dead star—  
and like a botanist, who suddenly understands  
the mechanism of the blossom and finds it no less  
baffling, she walks out into the Miami  
of her own making, encased by the land,  
its familiar heat, weight. She approaches, stops,  
the tapping of claws on steel summoning  
her back into her body. She feels the key's  
teeth in her palm. Here it comes, a dinosaur  
untethered, larger and lighter than she expects  
more fearsome, more beautiful, too blue.

(P. Scott Cunningham & Cherry Pickman)

#### IV

Miami—more fearsome, more beautiful, too blue. You spit into my palm for good luck  
and bless the bodies that say yes—yes to el pasado, yes to la frontera,  
yes to every Papá-shaped door ever knocked on.

City of Versace's Casa Casuarina and Ana Mendieta's Ceiba tree.  
City that owned a tower called Freedom and sold it to a family named Mas.  
City where Elian lost his mother, Ricky lost his records, and Celia lost her carnival.

Bless your \$250 dry-aged, bone-in Tomahawk steak and the ten-dollar completa from Teresita's.  
Bless your \$1,000 baliage in Aventura and your hand-woven box braids at el pulgero.  
Bless your \$3,000 bottle service and your busted sewer lines.

Miami, bless the kids with toothpick pantorillas, feeding cups of ice to stray dogs.  
Bless the 15-year-old Quinceñero coming out to his parents in Kendalandia,  
Bless La Caridad del Cobre in the corner spinning him a gown of gold chiffon.

Miami, more fearsome, more beautiful, too blue.  
How long must the ocean churn for you to notice her?

(Mia Leonin & Caridad Moro-Gronlier)

V

How long must the ocean churn for you to notice her?  
She mumbles the contents of unopened glass bottles,  
her teeth viridescent on dreams that won't settle,  
muscled mermen lost in her vast body, her waves further

inland every full moon, flooding the foundations  
of manmade structures, stretching herself across the land  
so crusted with salt the rebar can no longer stand.  
With great hunger, she swallows buildings. Without oblations

or obligations, without altar or artifice,  
without sacrament or sacrifice, she reclaims all  
she helped birth, that once belonged to her, big and small.  
She gathers it in her arms, a watery abyss.

She doesn't mean to leave wreckage in her wake and wane,  
but her millennial longing cannot be contained.

(Jen Karetnick & Catherine Esposito Prescott)



VI

Millennials! Boomers! You end-lettered ages!

We all long for green, don't we? For plantains

drum-beaten into mofongo. Doritos pounded

into a billion fractured sunz. You snuck up

on a stingray sending telegrams to spiny lizards.

For real. On the knife-edge of all the bling worth

sweating for, where turquoise and teal meet

papaya and possibility. There you were—

swimming in your impossible Filas

wondering if there's enough time to quell

the storm or the crowds carrying your throne. Queen

conchs set high on their thrones, right beyond your

cravings. Bleached coral begging us to hit the brakes.

Before the sailboat crashes into us making out on the beach.

(Jubi Arriola-Headley & Neil de la Flor)

## VII

Before the kiss kills us under the crash. Before the beach.

Before the dune makes us into salt. Before the out.

I went out to shore, to bury that brush of face against surging current.

I stood cheek to cheek with a dam. Only to part cobalt.

There are colts everywhere, in this farm, where someone stole the horse, broke open the sky.

The mare hailed us at the door. Wished us better luck in molding sandcastles.

Our mare palace: separated by sand walls. I constructed a bridge we skip, to roll into each other.

Striped teal towels shapeshift into kites. The nylon lifting. See: *fly on the wall*.

When I found “wallflower”, I wanted that unseen observer. I drew polka-dots in air.

Named for the dance. The tide only asks you to carry it when you’re ready.

A white horse drags a lone pole along.

After the kiss kills us under the crash. After the salt.

After we tie ourselves to this palace. After the dam.

I hoped we would sink in the same boat, but instead we danced in half.

(Clayre Benzadón & Melissa Gomez)

## VIII

I hoped we would sink in the same boat, but instead we danced in half.

We sat in awe at the Biscayne Bay skyline.

Ocean waves lap; saltwater, salt skin—a cleansing of where we've been.

Dade County submerged in tiled roofs, sinking my heart deeper in love with her imperfect beauty.

A distant cruise ship whistle hums like a deep bass voice of an outdoor opera.

The Port stayed silent, observing boats come and go—gently rocking, algae-brimmed bottoms.

The silent slow pace of long humid days, trees evergreen, always blooming into spring.

The birds chirp night and day, despite the direction the boat may sway—

And the MacArthur Causeway, a slippery slide where toy cars play...

Yet here on the bay, if you follow the green path to the Everglades,

you'll discover Great Egrets wading in the shallow waters.

As night falls upon the city, the skyline shines, lights reflecting on the low, curious clouds.

A faint Latin music vibrates through the town, where neon lights announce tacos on salsa nights.

Vegetables gleaned on southern farmland—a kitten wobbling downtown, grazing off memories of Miami.

(Oscar Fuentes & Catalina Rose Otero)

IX

A kitten wobbling downtown, grazing off memories of Miami  
whose backchannel tunnel exhumes a cache of shell & bone

like coquina along the sidewalk at Coconut Grove's newest castle.  
I stumble glad with morning in my pockets, holes everywhere,

dozens of them, holes hewn into bedrock still littered with night,  
where a feline paw goes sprinkling padded thuds of mischief

as introduced species sometimes do. I blaze in Greynolds Park,  
some old hippie with a Frisbee & flute, I think he's talking to me,

*Miami wears her epochs in her chameleons, citizens of sun and  
stillness, in drumming Deb Cotillions & Quinceañeras, from*

*deerskin to python chinchilla, before sea glass & bottle caps, this  
shark's jaw gouged canoes. His Frisbee flies, his beaded flute rises*

on a sky-gilded lyric over Freedom Tower, over Surfside, melody  
butterflies east while sunburnt trees drop tips round a busker's cap.

(Lenny DellaRocca & Michael Mackin O'Mara)

X

Butterflies east while sunburnt trees drop tips round a busker's cap.  
Old men in straw fedoras lean sideways at small tables, dominos unplayed  
while they sleep. Old women nap in the shade of green awnings.  
Hip-hop beats from a passing car. City of heat and light and of all that is right  
with the world at this moment. City of the barely remembered, those who lived  
at the mouth of the river, built the mounds, then were gone. City of milkweed  
tickseed, canna lilies, coneflower. Women strolling slowly in floral halter dresses.

Waterline and skyline indivisible, shoals and shallows in the bay, hue of Jacaranda blossom.  
Parrot flocks overhead and below, boat hulls tug at their anchors, pull on their lines, bob at the harbor.  
At midday tables, under shade umbrellas, in kitchens and boardrooms, yucca drenched in Meyer lemon,  
tostones nestle up to yellow rice and black beans and nearby waits dainty flan, with her dance partner  
foaming Café con Leche. Under Miami moonlight, a carved limestone door, swings open for the lost love of a girl,  
swings open and closes. No hinge, no pulley. This City hinge swings wide to welcome hearts and minds yearning  
to be free, to be. And beneath curtains of inevitable summer downpour, lychee for sale at roadside stands.

(Judy Ireland & Susannah Simpson)

## XI

And beneath curtains of inevitable summer downpour, lychee for sale  
at roadside stands. The sky glossed with rubies, quarters passed from palm  
to palm dispersing tiny halos of light. In the mist, mothers and daughters eating  
bits of horizon. And do we all not feast on fruit to survive? Banyan trees vein  
the knotted sky along Old Cutler where Tequesta once walked, burial mounds  
beyond coral walls. For centuries, always the women who must find the tenderness  
inside the husk. The sweet pulp of antiquity nursed from bone into blossom.

A mile up and another roadside stand with orchids for sale, bending their ovarian  
faces to all who pass. An egret hunting a lizard on the traffic island. Julia Tuttle  
was Miami's mother, only woman to found a major city, claim a final frontier—husk  
paradise from wilderness. She knew frost could not pale the surrounding river  
of grass, unending in corpuscular light. Acres of water commingling with sand  
and reed and sky. Miami, herself a mother. A sacred ibis, first to accept and survive  
the downpour—as does the sun, a gargantuan yolk punctured at moonrise.

(Chloé Firetto-Toomey & Susan L. Leary)

## XII

The sun, a gargantuan yolk punctured at moonrise,  
spreads life, like a mother's womb ruptured at birth.  
Let the fronds do the cleaning, the holding, the swaying.  
Let the waves lift the bookbags and heal all the scrapes.

There are two sands: the island and the peninsula. Both  
trickle from her hand. A drip castle. A new harbor. An old  
one. The paddle board frees her to hover. She is herself,  
before bibs and hunger, a renewed custodian of the sea.

Hide & seek mangroves and sidewalk chalk galleries,  
freshwater dives and lighthouse riddles, bare galaxies  
of a political unknown. A mixture of roots and Floridian  
starships. Children wait for us to decide with open palms,

peeking sunsets, buckets. A city, this city, is a threshold.  
Anticipation. *El compás*. Green, coral, brown, the sea.

(Nicole Hospital-Medina & Carolina Hospital)

### XIII

Anticipation. El compás. Green, coral, brown, see  
Biscayne, see Freedom and Hadid, bright as  
A tap tap or sports car or dolphin's back.  
We grillin'—snook and flat, da' enamel  
A type of fishbone; skin here, is-like conch  
Salad, snapper, and oxtails.  
Juke-anoo-it,  
Rumba and kuduro, a wouj Columbine.  
This city's sprawling synapses alive,  
Salinity, feverish and valiant—and firing up!  
...roots of mangrove, tropical crinolines.  
Hurricanes like the little thimbles of gods—  
Indefatigable pulse and pattern,  
City made of sinews and saltwater.

(Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello & Damara Christine Martin)



XIV

City made of sinews and saltwater,  
your humid limestone avenues, buoyant  
yet sinking in the sun. How are we here?  
What luck has led us to this survival?  
We praise the seasons weathered within us.  
New rain—a fruiting on the other side  
of this migrant life. Bay shores come and go  
like shy mosquitoes. Everything here bites  
or makes of itself a prized nectar. Drink  
the trade winds, the strip malls, the vibrant strains  
of Spanish nourishing our motley air.  
Breathe. Though some call this paradise, there are  
no miracles we have not made ourselves.  
We who rose from saltwater, let's sing, more.

(Yaddyra Peralta & Leslie Sainz)

XV

Salted stars, summer nocturne, scarlet ginger—the joy of breath  
Caught between the world and the bewitching blue sea.

With a kick, like a warm breeze whipping up the heat:  
Miami—more fearsome, more beautiful, too blue.

How long must the ocean churn for you to notice her?  
Millennials! Boomers! You end-lettered ages!

Before the kiss kills us under the crash. Before the beach.  
I hoped we would sink in the same boat, but instead we danced,

Grazing off memories of Miami  
While sunburnt trees drop tips round a busker's cap.

And beneath curtains of inevitable summer downpour:  
The sun, a gargantuan yolk punctured at moonrise.

Anticipation. El compás. Green, coral, brown.  
City made of sinews. We who rise from saltwater, let's sing!

(28 Miami-Dade & Neighbor Poets)

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jubi Arriola-Headley** (he/they) is a Blacqueer poet & storyteller, a first-generation United Statesian, and author of [original kink](#) (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2020). He holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Miami and lives with his husband in South Florida.

**Clayre Benzádon** is an MFA graduate alumnus at the University of Miami, *Split Lip* poetry reader, and Broadsided Press's Instagram editor. Her chapbook, *Liminal Zenith*, was published by SurVision Books. She's been published in *14poems*, *SWWIM*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *ANMLY*, and *Grist Journal*. Find more about her here: [clayrebenzadon.com](http://clayrebenzadon.com).

**Marci Calabretta Cancio-Bello** is the author of *Hour of the Ox* (Pitt Poetry Series), which won the Donald Hall Prize, and co-translator of *The World's Lightest Motorcycle* by Yi Won (Zephyr Press). Her work has appeared in *Catapult*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *The New York Times*, and more.

**P. Scott Cunningham** is the author of *Ya Te Veo* (University of Arkansas, 2018), selected by Billy Collins for the Miller Williams Poetry Series, and the founder and executive director of O, Miami.

**Neil de la Flor** is a writer, educator, and Executive Director of Reading Queer, a Knight-funded organization dedicated to promoting queer literary culture in South Florida. He is the author of three solo collections of poetry, including *The Ars Magna for the Manifold Dimensions of z* (JackLeg Press, 2021), *An Elephant's Memory of Blizzards* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2013), and *Almost Dorothy* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2010).

**Lenny DellaRocca** is founder and co-publisher of *South Florida Poetry Journal (SoFloPoJo)*. A Pushcart nominee, he is author of four collections of poetry. His work has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Seattle Review*, *Sun Dog*, and others. His chapbook, *Things I See in the Fire*, won the 2017 Yellow Jacket chapbook contest.

**Denise Duhamel's** most recent book of poetry is *Second Story* (Pittsburgh, 2021). Her other titles include *Scald; Blowout; Ka-Ching!; Two and Two; Queen for a Day: Selected and New Poems; The Star-Spangled Banner; and Kinky*. She is a Distinguished University Professor in the MFA program at Florida International University.

**Catherine Esposito Prescott** is the author of *Maria Sings* and *The Living Ruin*. Recent poems appear in *Green Mountains Review*, *NELLE*, *Pleiades*, *Verse Daily*, and *Grabbed*. Prescott earned an MFA from NYU. Co-founder and editor in chief of *SWWIM Every Day*, she teaches poetry workshops, vinyasa yoga, and yoga philosophy.

**Chloé Firetto-Toomey** is a British-American poet and essayist living in Miami Beach, FL. She has an MFA from Florida International University and serves as an Author Assistant at InnerLasting Lit Arts. Her chapbook *Little Cauliflower* was published by Dancing Girl Press in 2019. Find her work in the *SWWIM Everyday Series*, [poets.org](http://poets.org), *Cosmonauts Avenue*, among others. Learn more at [chloefirettotoomey.com](http://chloefirettotoomey.com).

**Oscar Fuentes**, aka The Biscayne Poet, is a multidisciplinary artist based in Miami. He is the author of four books of poetry and prose: *Beautiful Women Will Never Know* (2013), *4 Nights With Betsy* (2014), *Vagabond: Selected Poems, Short Stories, and Plays* (2015), *Welcome Home* (2019) and *Body Furnace* (2021).

**Melissa Gomez** is a queer Cuban-American producer and photographer based in Miami, FL. She serves as Production Coordinator and Digital Storyteller for O, Miami. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys discovering new R&B, watching documentaries, and finding solace at the nearest Flanigan's restaurant.

**Carolina Hospital** authored *Key West Nights and Other Aftershocks*; *The Child of Exile: A Poetry Memoir*; *Myth America*, a collaboration with Maureen Seaton, Holly Iglesias, Nicole Hospital-Medina; and the novel *A Little Love*, under the pen name C. C. Medina. She edited *Los Atrevidos: Cuban American Writers* and *A Century of Cuban Writers in Florida*.

**Nicole Hospital-Medina** instructs writing at the University of Miami. Her poems are featured in *Poems from the Lockdown*, *Feminine Rising: Power and Invisibility*, *Women Write Resistance: Resist Gender Violence*, *The Miami Herald*, and more. She collaborated with poets Carolina Hospital, Maureen Seaton and Holly Iglesias to publish *Myth America*.

**Judy Ireland's** poems have appeared in *Hotel Amerika*, *Calyx*, *Saranac Review*, *Eclipse*, *Cold Mountain*, and other journals. Her book, *Cement Shoes*, won the 2013 Sinclair Poetry Prize. She is Executive Director at DePorres Place Literacy Center, Co-Director for Performance Poets of the Palm Beaches, an Editor for *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and teaches at Palm Beach State.

**Jen Karetnick's** fourth full-length book is *The Burning Where Breath Used to Be* (David Robert Books, September 2020), a CIPA EVVY winner. Co-founder/managing editor of *SWWIM Every Day*, she has received awards from the Tiferet Writing Contest for Poetry, Split Rock Review Chapbook Competition, Hart Crane Memorial Prize, and Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize. See [jkaretnick.com](http://jkaretnick.com).

**Susan L. Leary** is the author of *Contraband Paradise* (Main Street Rag, 2021) and the chapbook, *This Girl, Your Disciple* (Finishing Line Press, 2019). Her poetry has appeared in such places as *Arcturus* (*Chicago Review of Books*), *Whale Road Review*, and *Pithead Chapel*. She teaches English Composition at the University of Miami.

**Mia Leonin** is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Fable of the Pack-Saddle Child* (BkMk Press) and a memoir, *Havana and Other Missing Fathers* (University of Arizona Press). Leonin teaches creative writing at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida.

**Michael Mackin O'Mara**, queer, long-term POZ thriver, was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and lives in West Palm Beach. They are managing editor and co-publisher of *SoFloPoJo* (the *South Florida Poetry Journal*) and have been published in a number of online and print anthologies and journals. Find them on social media @minwpb.

**Damara (Dee) Martin** is a lyric essayist among many other things.

**Caridad Moro-Gronlier** is the author of *Tortillera* (TRP, 2021) and *Visionware* (FLP, 2009). She is the recipient of an Elizabeth George Foundation Grant and a Florida Artist Poetry Fellowship and an Associate Editor for *SWWIM Every Day*. She has taught English in Miami-Dade County for the past 30 years.

### **Catalina Rose Otero**

**Yaddyra Peralta's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Grist*, *Sink Review*, *SWWIM*, *Miami Rail*, *Ploughshares*, *The Miami Herald*, *Eight Miami Poets* (Jai Alai Books, 2015), and *The Breakbeat Poets, Vol. 4: LatiNext* (Haymarket Books, 2020). Yaddyra is Director of People Development at Mango Publishing in Coral Gables, FL.

**Cherry Pickman** is the author of *Theory of Tides*, winner of Poetry Society of America's Chapbook Fellowship. Her work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Bennington Review*, *Boston Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *PEN*. A selection of her poems is included in Jai-Alai Books' anthology, *Eight Miami Poets*.

**Leslie Sainz** is the recipient of a 2021 National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and her work has appeared in *New England Review*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *AGNI*, *jubilat*, *Narrative* and elsewhere. She's received support from CantoMundo, The Miami Writers Institute, *The Adroit Journal*, and The Stadler Center for Poetry & Literary Arts.

**Maureen Seaton's** recent solo collections are *Undersea* (JackLeg, 2021) and *Sweet World* (CavanKerry, 2019), winner of the Florida Book Award. Honors include Lambda Literary Awards for Lesbian Poetry and Lesbian Memoir, the Audre Lorde Award, NEA, and Pushcart. She was voted Miami's Best Poet 2020 by *The Miami New Times*.

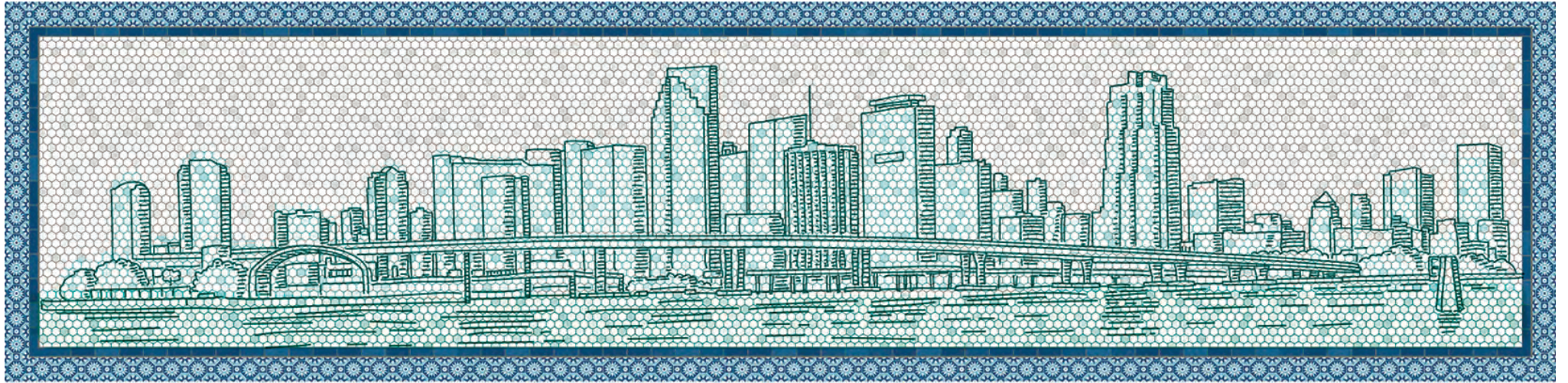
**Susannah W. Simpson** is Co-Director of the Performance Poets of the Palm Beaches. Her work has been published in: *North American Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *POET*, *Nimrod International*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, and *Xavier Review* among others. Her collection *Geography of Love & Exile* was published by Cervena Barva Press, 2016.

**Nicole Tallman** is the Poetry Ambassador for Miami-Dade County, Associate Editor for *South Florida Poetry Journal* and Interviews Editor for *The Blue Mountain Review*. Her debut chapbook, *Something Kindred*, is forthcoming from The Southern Collective Experience (SCE) Press. Find her on Instagram and Twitter @natallman and at [nicoletallman.com](http://nicoletallman.com).

**Julie Marie Wade** is the author of 13 collections of poetry, prose, and hybrid forms, including *Wishbone: A Memoir in Fractures*, *When I Was Straight*, and *Just an Ordinary Woman Breathing*. With Denise Duhamel, she authored *The Unrhymables: Collaborations in Prose*, and with Brenda Miller, *Telephone: Essays in Two Voices*. Julie teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University.

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