

Imperfections

The way a Persian woman weaves mistakes
into rugs to shield herself from the wrath
of Allah, a poet might leave a falseness
behind, like the name of a mushroom
unknown to mycologists, a fungus so rare
it cannot live outside the poet's mind.
It isn't a question of fearing God,
of marring a pattern to humble oneself,
but the desire to leave a human trace,
as if by naming something non-existent—
a mushroom that flouts the laws of nature,
whose spores give rise to that wakeful space
no other can enter—she might live on.
A thousand purple gills wash up on shore.

Jane McKinley is a professional oboist and artistic director of the Dryden Ensemble, a Baroque chamber music group based in Princeton. Her life as a poet began in April 2003 when, haunted by an image, she began writing again after a lapse of thirty years. At the 92nd Street Y she has participated in workshops and master classes with Emily Fragos, the late Rachel Wetzsteon, Jane Hirshfield, Mary Jo Salter, and Rosanna Warren, in private tutorials with Grace Schulman, and in a manuscript thesis workshop with Marie Ponsot. Her sonnet "Mud Season" received Carlow University's 2008 Patricia Dobler Award, which included a residency in Ireland. Her manuscript was selected by Robert Fink as the 20th winner of the Walt McDonald First-Book Prize and was published as *Vanitas* by Texas Tech University Press in February, 2011. Featured in the Fall 2010 issue of *The Georgia Review*, her work has also appeared in *Southern Poetry Review*, *2River View*, *U. S. 1 Worksheets*, *The Raintree Review*, *Grey Sparrow*, and the Irish journal *Southword*. She lives in Hopewell, New Jersey.