



Southern Indiana Review

2026 Michael Waters Poetry Prize

Southern Indiana Review is pleased to announce that Carl Phillips has selected Jenna Johnson of Wilmington, North Carolina, as the recipient of the 2026 Michael Waters Poetry Prize. Johnson's prize-winning collection, *New Stranger*, will appear fall 2027.



Jenna Johnson received her MFA in Creative Writing from New York University and her bachelor's in Creative Writing and English Literature from the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *The Idaho Review*, *Colorado Review*, *The Penn Review*, *SurfGirl* magazine, *Rainy Day* magazine, and *Spectrum Literary Journal*, among others.

"You are alone in a field, and I / am trying to reach you"—these opening lines of *New Stranger* in many ways sum up both the collective situation and the psychological gesture of the poems that follow. The poems circle estrangement and hauntedness simultaneously, as they look for what is lost and, paradoxically, what never leaves or can be escaped from, thanks to memory: 'I am possessed / more than I'd like to be.' What does it mean to look back and hardly recognize the self we once were, and what to do with how, each morning, we're slightly different than we were the day before—that much older, more experienced, a new stranger to ourselves? I am captivated by these enigmatic miniatures, their hovering questions, their blur of tenses, and their quiet yet steady, sturdy 'articulations of love / in the dim light.'"

—Carl Phillips

Finalists

Megan Blankenship: *Glad Wild Stock*

Samuel Cheney: *Believers*

Matty Glasgow: *the feraling*

Trevor Ketner: *vanitas still life with green apricots, chimera, and glass*

John Kneisley: *Along the Shore of Death and Dreaming*

Maja Lukic: *Last Call*

Elizabeth Robinson: *Begin Anywhere*

Felicity Sheehy: *Trust Not the Nights*

Issam Zineh: *From the Mouth of This Water*