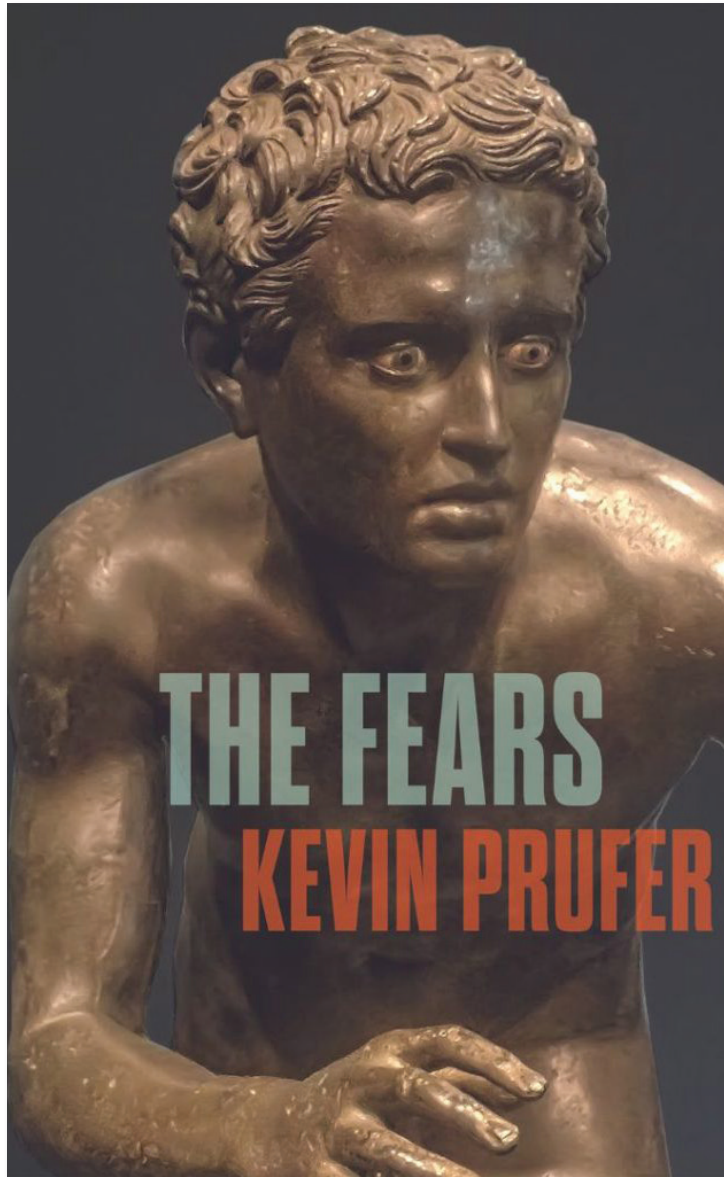


# 2024 UNT RILKE PRIZE

## Kevin Prufer

### *The Fears*

Kevin Prufer's *The Fears* (Copper Canyon Press) has won the 2024 UNT Rilke Prize. The \$10,000 prize recognizes a book written by a mid-career poet and published in the preceding year that demonstrates exceptional artistry and vision. Prufer will visit UNT on October 9th and 10th for a reading and book signing.



In *The Fears*, his ninth collection, Kevin Prufer examines how each of us becomes “a dying animal body,” eventually losing what makes us human to sickness, grief, and even the indifference of the nation state. The poems place the ancient Greeks and Romans alongside vividly rendered portraits of loved ones—a father dying of cancer, for instance—so that the epic, heroic past becomes a lens for meditating on the small, intimate tragedies of the present. And those intimate tragedies in turn yield ways of encountering the larger conflicts of our own historical moment. In lines that slide jaggedly across the page, Prufer moves between what he calls “mundanity” and “vastness,” attempting to understand “the erasure of the self / into vastness” and, beyond that erasure, “the failures of empires.” Bleak, clear-eyed, bracingly unsentimental, and insistent on the necessity of precise, accurate language, *The Fears* asks readers to remain politically engaged, to continue caring about the world. The poet urges us, even though we are mortal and will one day end up like Antigone, “nowhere,” to keep paying attention to the vivid, haunting moments that comprise our lives: the broken finger of a mummy, a frozen bottle of wine, the “little pink tongue” of a lost kitten.

Prufer's other poetry collections are *The Art of Fiction: Poems* (Four Way, 2021), *How He Loved Them* (Four Way, 2018), *Churches* (Four Way, 2014), *In a Beautiful Country* (Four Way, 2011), *National Anthem* (Four Way, 2008), *Fallen From a Chariot* (Carnegie Mellon, 2005), *The Finger Bone* (Carnegie Mellon, 2002), and *Strange Wood* (Winthrop/LSU, 1998). He is also the author of a chapbook, titled *I Had Wanted a Happier Ending* (Sting & Honey, 2021), and a novel, titled *Sleepaway* (Acre, 2024).

Among his many accolades, Prufer has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lannan Foundation, five Pushcart Prizes, three Best American Poetry selections, and was long-listed for the Pulitzer Prize in 2019. He has also won the Julie Suk Award, the Prairie Schooner/Strousse Award, the William Rockhill Nelson Award, as well as numerous others from the Poetry Society of America (including the 2018 Lyric Prize).

Prufer serves as co-curator of the Unsung Masters Series, editor-at-large for *Pleiades: A Journal of New Writing*, and editor for several volumes of poetry. He is currently a professor in the Creative Writing program at the University of Houston and the low-residency MFA at Lesley University.

The judges also selected three finalists for the 2024 UNT Rilke Prize: Timothy Donnelly's *Chariot* (Wave), A. Van Jordan's *When I Waked, I Cried to Dream Again* (W.W. Norton), and Robyn Schiff's *Information Desk* (Penguin Poets).

The UNT Rilke Prize, offered by Creative Writing and the Department of English, was founded in 2011. For more information about the prize and our previous winners, visit [english.unt.edu](https://english.unt.edu).