

2006 Poetry Competition

REPORT OF THE JUDGE, MARIE PONSOT:

What a refreshment it has been, to read the manuscripts entered in this contest. Page after page, I enjoyed the dexterity of their true gestures in the forum of literature, made with grace and intensity across a broad range of techniques, motifs, and themes. Finally, I've chosen five, drawn by their respect for the real and their gift of transfiguring the random into the beautifully intelligible.

First prize goes to "I Thought Only and Finally of Sound." It is a poignant urban elegy, with a richly developed sestina-like music. Its images are up-looking; they move through wings and constellations to call up a sense of flight and rest, a sense of what we may keep, what we must lose.

Second prize goes to "Country Song." Its quick descriptions are observed, felt, and thought through, so we are in place for the last stanza which speeds us to the moment, intimate and visionary, of the last couplet.

There are 3 honorable mentions, each irresistible. "Blue Heron" is a little stunner that does perfectly the great things poems can do: liberate. It takes us out of ourselves, so we are beside ourselves with joy. "Albayzin"'s two characters, entwined in a vivid anecdote, enact a silent drama and evoke a great question. "Nymph, Dun, and Spinner" delectates in the language of fly-tying while it evokes the deep satisfaction of teaching on behalf of tradition.

Beyond the varied music of these poems, I discern a commonality. They are moving and touching because they are all—in their many guises and voices—love poems. The glory of their attention to the evidence of the given world lifts up our hearts. Yeats is justified. He was and his poems are great with love. These poems have his ardent spirit; his love of the work of poetry, love of others, love of a time, of a place, and love of the wretched and blessed human condition here and now.

FIRST PRIZE

I Thought Only And Finally of Sound

by Mary Legato Brownell, Jenkintown PA

(after Joseph Cornell's *Aviary Boxes*, Chicago Art Institute)

Never was I afraid of the city. It was the sound
of flight being let go of, and whenever I turned to the coming
height of its stones, as sparrow and finch—and to the wind, the wind
taking my face—

stars would draw me to their degrees, and I would night by night
be Auriga's whitened thoughts—the man holding
the goat and her two across my back. Never had I wanted to

be an instant of will, to
tender about the city as a grey wing sound
dividing and crossing, or a word of wood or stone holding
shape in my hands, believing in form compassionate coming
to make safety of us all—all night
as we walked, all day as we dreamed. I understood the face

of the city as they saw its shimmering haste, its attention, the face
of its common offerings arched to the stone that held all other stones to
their roots, rain falling to the streets, slipping the night
of its shadows. And it was neither the city nor what they loved of it—
the sound

of will or of sudden steps—that brought me to the aviaries, but the idea
that coming
flight was not the work of wing, feather, adjustment, height holding

stone, wood, weight, feel. And in my first dovecote, pigeon was holding
her tapped fingertips against a worn clip latched to a metal rod. I
saw her press her face

close to the lathe leveled edge of a frame, to a spun handle, to a nail.

And in that coming
moment, in her pause and in her aim to
court what staying was, I heard the sound
of clay pipes, glass rings, memories, of lead shavings fitted against a
night

dowel. And before she left, I hoped that in a night
of stars untimed, she would turn to happiness, holding
in the changing age of city, motion, sound,

the near touch of golden owl's lift, his tempered will against mine, and
in his face,
not that pull of flight or stay—tree bark; golls; lichen to
stiffen the oval perch of his claws; moss. So I held to his coming

as if it were the return of a name, a word of will coming
against it all, and I made a box so fine and full of watching night,
that even your absence was radiant. Even your rest, taken. And you
would rise to
it—the city still; time held close, its holding
like the envelope of wind you knew, like light falling across your face.
I thought only and finally of sound.

Let the sound of their coming wings rise, go by. We lose nothing. Let
their
faces be bird-thin and shining. Let night remain. And may God forgive
us as they move past—we
who are holding, to our stiffened chests, everything they had to offer.

SECOND PRIZE

Country Song

by Mike Hammer, Philadelphia PA

Signs and signifiers be gone. The cow
reveals everything. An abandoned plough
hums a rusted version of a crop song,
winnowing and dying out, no better
testament to time and its arrangements.
Clouds return shaking the rain from their backs.

Meanwhile, deep in a furrow, a field mouse
hunkers down, taking a place in history,
and the wind in the slender leaves of corn
is a premonition, a prophecy.

Everywhere I look and especially
where I won't are found great revelations
of life's mysteries, so I cultivate
a habit of looking and not looking,
and I see what I could not see before
when I see you stepping through the door.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Blue Heron

by Nan Becker, Newton NJ

A blue heron stands poised in the river,
opening its wings to become a shadow canopy
over a knot of eels. Its dagger bill
strikes, hurling an eel up into the air,
to catch it and swallow it, head first.
The heron steps forward then, neck upstretched,
and cries out a piercing tremulous call,
over and over. After a silent while,
it collects itself and takes to the sky,
soaring, in no time at all, out of sight.

Albayzín

by M. Schoofs, Berkeley CA

Scabbed and bloodshot he
rises from the step as she
thrusts the iron strutted portal
closed but for an instant face
to face they lean the addict
and the sister white
gauze veil drawn back to latch
the oaken doors in ice-caked light
and he to raise an
arm too high for alms

Bulging winter-watered gaze
meets lids fault-lined
from age a tight-lipped
tortoise lifting keys in spotless
robes a drooling cormorant
tar-clogged swaying
to touch her breast

The bolt clicks shut she
glides he lurches the face
of Man diaphanous or
ravenous in laundered

hoar or fulvid crust which
one is God the one
who locks the church at two
or picks the vomit from
his beard to guard the stoop
with still farewells still trailing
from his eyes

Nymph, Dun, and Spinner

by Dolores Hzyden, Guilford CT

We fabricate culture, pass it on
from generation to generation in winter,
talking of silk and fur and feathers

as we drive to shops in distant strip malls,
buy our mink underfluff and peacock herl,
our deer hair, seal fur, and black bear hair.

We knot the nymph, dun, and spinner, wind
the small unsinkable bodies, jerk the hairs
into the muddlers, add the hooks. It takes

years of experience to calculate
a hook, judge the length, consider the weight,
know how ephemeroptera touch down

on water, how trout thrash and lunge.
We celebrate artifice, we factor panic,
hunger is not the same as pride

for man, woman, or fish. It is all practice,
no theory, tying the knots tightly,
knowing they will hold. Father and daughter,

our river runs between granite shores
where gaunt men once sharpened scissors
and knives, shivering in noisy factories.

The town runs on waders and canoes now,
on February Reds and March Browns,
rapids and whirlpools, stars leaning into dawn.

We murmur the names, Parachute Adams,

McMurray Ant, Barret's Bane, Cahill.
We could be two monks chanting a litany

as we guide novices to water and hills,
mark the hours, demand miracles,
Goddard's Last Hope, Dambuster.

The skill in the tying, the skill with the rod,
the need to endure, my father speaks--
and of course, I listen. It is not pleasant,

far from my down-filled comforter, my thighs
deep in the rush of the hard river. I respect
his thousand facts of angling, I mark

the lure of his stories—R. S. Austin
tied a female spinner of fine yellow wool
from ram's testicles in 1900. After he died,

his daughter sold "Tup's Indispensable"
for twenty years. Like her, I'm second generation.
From my father, I learned birth,

mid-life, and passing--the agile nymph,
the olive dun, the drowning red spinner.
When I place my feet in the freezing river,

I map the geography of patience.
When I hurl a winged impersonator concocted
of blue cock hackle and red seal fur into the dawn,

I write fiction. Pass it on.

The W.B. Yeats Society of New York poetry competition is open to members and nonmembers of any age, from any locality. Poems in English up to 60 lines, not previously published, on any subject may be submitted. Each poem (judged separately) typed on an 8½ x 11-inch sheet without author's name; attach 3x5 card with name, address, phone, e-mail. Entry fee \$8 for first poem, \$7 each additional. Mail to 2007 Poetry Competition, WB Yeats Society of NY, National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S, NY NY 10003. Include SASE to receive the report like this one. List of winners is posted on YeatsSociety.org around March 31. First prize \$250, second prize \$100. Winners and honorable mentions receive 1-year memberships in the Society and are honored at an event in New York in April. Authors retain rights, but grant us the right to publish winning entries. These are complete guidelines; no entry form necessary. Deadline for 2007 competition February 1. For information on our other programs, or on membership, visit YeatsSociety.org or write to us.

