

Sing what is well made

W.B. YEATS SOCIETY OF N.Y.

2008 Poetry Competition

REPORT OF THE JUDGE, MARIE PONSOT:

First, let me proclaim that every entry is a winner. To make a poem and to put it out among us in its true social place are winning acts - good for each poet and stunningly good for the abused propaganda-torn words of the world we live in. I thank and congratulate all participants for the delight I took in reading them.

Here are a few thoughts about the work of our official winners.

“Gaia’s Song” (first prize) is deeply and thoroughly imagined, and realized concretely on a breath-taking visionary scale. Our earth tells her history; by Stanza 10 she opens her theme toward voice, toward naming, toward language in its haunting power to identify. A subtle music carries images out to us.

The “I” of the poem is Gaia herself, a modest eloquent omnipresence.

“I want to move things with my mind” (second prize) reminds us how the infant cry of “I want!” echoes through us always, in a tumbling rush of energy. We can picture its eager ambitions, because the amplified naming of wants beautifully displays how language in action creates a virtual reality between speaker and reader.

In the wonderful “Rising in the Dead of Winter” (honorable mention) we find yet another use of “I” – and by no means an easy one to achieve. This “I” captures one of us, triumphantly. Here is an ordinary soul, not mythic yet never prosaic. This “I” speaks as “we” go about our dailyness. A cold dawn at a mall sale is transfigured just enough by the narrator, so that we sigh with huge relief at the end of the elegantly managed couplets, when “warm breath merges.../and rises.”

“The clothes in the bottom of the drawer” (honorable mention) also has a speaker we are close to at once. She meditates, in a musing, internal voice, as she organizes her household while sorting old clothes. They spill memories as she unfold them;

lives and loss and joys come to us in vivid dress. Time becomes timelessness as she proceeds.

FIRST PRIZE

Gaia’s Song

by Steve Lautermilch, Kill Devil Hills NC

When I was young
water taught me how to speak.

Once I spoke, reed and stone and canyon wall
taught me to pause and listen and hear.

But light and shade and hazel leaves
broke that dream and brought me to my feet.

In a round of standing stones on holy ground I watched
the sun dawn and magnify in seed.

Grasses and flowers heavy with dew, dancing
long-haired corn rose and burned like children loose in a field.

Bearded rain, darkening earth, mountains like bears
asleep with snow, each of these took turns to lay me down to sleep,

bedding me away like the dragonfly in amber
the needled forest floor and rainbowed desert plain, the seep

of sand and rising mist, slip of fog clasping my hands
until my closed palms opened and were free.

Walking fish and swimming, diving birds took me
to the shore where every breath I breathed

joined everything that breathes.
Now a face looks back in every shape I see.

I hear a voice
on the lips of bud and berry, salmon and scree.

In the storm that whispers and in tongues of fire
a name is calling on every wave and tide. Who are you, easy

and hard in your ways, who come to talk but like a breeze
turn and die away.

Many you are named, and savage.
And sweet.

SECOND PRIZE

I want to move things with my mind

by Char Sundust, Seattle WA

I want to move things with my mind like your orange blossom face
between
my blue hands
the delphinium embrace of equinox cradling her white tears
new beginnings.

I want to sing you back to yourself in English or French
or yellow hypericum

I want to move things with my mind
like you, like dark marello cherries from the ripe fall
trees

warm skinned, and deep with Spanish sun
and stain your mouth with dark purple
spirits.

I want to move things with my mind
like my heart

like oak trees surging up from below the ground, like the color dark,
my fingers brown
strong in the earth. Divining you your realness
I want to move something larger than the god’s honest truth, and
smaller than a safety pin

broken

or orion’s sash—open swaying
freely from the brightest red star

I want to make you plant cedars
and passion flower vines throughout my body
to apex my bow with wonder

I want to make you plant blood orange seeds
and bella donna on my mouth with your skin
when you smile dark

and tilt your head, I want to
slide you across the table so fast—you’ll spill into my arms and forget
there was ever a
time before I moved you.

I want to feel the stone of you heavy in my hand and wear away
all but is the earth of you

I want to spin the leaf of you with the motion of my air and the deep
watering of you

so you’ll grow crazy brambles of wild roses
instead of hair

I want to move you with my mind and crawl on my knees through thick undergrowth
until I find—your spine in my palm
and the dye of forget-me-nots blue on your skin

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Rising Early in the Dead of Winter

by Michael Colonnese, Fayetteville NC

Rising early in the dead of winter
to queue in pre-dawn bitterness, we long for the unlocking
of Upstate Discount Furnishings,

earthly home of E-Z credit, and a One-Day-Only-Clearance Sale
on the birthday of George Washington.
No firestorms, no earthquakes,

no archangels blowing riffs. Only the store manager
pacing the icy sidewalk with a bullhorn
as I assemble with the others on a Monday in February

to wait for the opening of doors.
Huge savings draw a crowd to every entrance.
Floor samples. Carpet remnants.

Four mismatched washer-dryer sets. Six scratch-n-dent TVs.
Personally, I'm after broadloom at \$4.99 a yard,
a discontinued line, but I'm ready to cover everything,

to create a sound-proof writing cell, a tomb.
We're quite a horde—retirees with frozen noses
red-veined as tulip bulbs, young handymen with hardened eyes

who look like they want carpet too,
want carpet more than anything,
would kill for carpet,

and welfare moms with dirty-diapered kids
who know that they don't stand a snowball's chance
against those old-world grannies in babushkas.

It's sales final. No returns.
And yet we yearn away our lives
as if our commerce here will never end.

We stamp our feet, complain about the cold,
but watch transfixed as warm breath slowly leaves us,
merges with the white exhaust from cars, and rises.

The clothes in the bottom of the drawer

by Margot Zucker Mindich, New York City

those you are supposed to throw out
because the rule of organization
is, if you haven't worn it
in the past three years
you're not going to wear it again
those are the magic garments
used to make connections to past lives.
a pair of white kid gloves
elbow length, and the dress
it went with, a bright magenta taffetta,
the only dress like it at my cousin's wedding.
the skirt size 6
my father sent me from Paris
when I was in full pregnant bloom
unable to reach down to tie my shoelaces.
a shimmery blouse
I wore to my son's bar-mitzvah
woven of colors and dreams.
and my mother's clothes
that still have her scent
an amalgam of perfume and powder.
her down coat, a must, should she realize
she made a mistake
dying and decides to return.
a pair of shoes my father wore
black leather with intricate tooling.
expensive, but they would last longer
he said and they did so that when he was ill
and couldn't sit still in a shoe store
didn't know what a shoe was
we managed.

The W.B. Yeats Society of New York poetry competition is open to mem-bers 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 8.5 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 2009 Poetry Competition, WB Yeats Society of NY, National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S, New York NY 10003. Include S.A.S.E. 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 2-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 2009 competition February 1. We reserve the right to hold late submissions to following year. For information on our other programs, or on membership, visit *YeatsSociety.org* or write to us.