

W.B. YEATS SOCIETY OF N.Y.

2007 Poetry Competition

REPORT OF THE JUDGE, MARIE PONSOT:

Over and over, entries for this contest made me catch my breath with pleasure and surprise. You'll see at once, in each of the winners, how accomplished Yeats-Society poets are.

First prize goes to "Song for Rana" for its inventive formal deliciousness and for its poetic power to freshen our deep connection to our planet. It's wonderfully accessible and open. It deploys written and oral tradition, old tales and witty repetition; it has lovely vagrant rhymes and tunes. It sings us awake.

Second prize is for "Guarneri Quartet", a four-voiced drama that's a jewel of wit. The interplay of voices quickly and lightly lifts the music of the moment to listen for the music of the spheres, by engaging great philosophic questions. It finds words ready to reclaim music's gift of felt transcendence.

Both Honorable Mention winners explore loss and death, each differently. "Roxie Margaret Mouths the Words" is a poignant, developed portrait of a mother lost to death. It tells us, using spots of the time from girlhood to the final "disconnect", of an ordinary life in all its uniqueness. The tale is embraced and underlined by snatches of old song.

"Looking toward the Sea" is the second Honorable Mention. The speaker addresses a small child snatched by a riptide and lost, yet still vividly present, unforgettably alive, in the remembering parent. The tune and tone are kept carefully quiet and steady, as the reader takes in the full sense of its elegant eloquence.

All four of these poems offer themselves frankly, admitting both clarity and knotty singularity, unafraid of trusting the reader to take them in. and be moved by both qualities. Bare description is less than just; all four are poems to be spoken and read and kept in mind.

FIRST PRIZE

Song for Rana

by Charlotte Muse, Menlo Park CA

Epigraph: The frog (Rana; of the family Ranidae) is disappearing all over the world.

Come back to our dreams with your cold and warty skin
your sideways eyes
your splayed hands clothespin-fingered,
the litheness of your open thighs
ballooning of your singing throat
alarming,
alarming

We knew before the forests came
and went that you were magic.
We'll look past your crude disguise,
we told you. Fetch the golden ball
and you shall sleep upon our pillows singing
buttercup
buttercup

We wove you in, we made you songs,
mm-hmm, mm-hmm,
We thought you were unpleasant but we did,
mm-hmm,
A prince of a fellow, all in all,
we listened for you spring and fall
mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm

*When it was midnight, I held my breath
and kissed him handsome.
He waltzed me to my room.
Kick you shoes off, do not fear,
bring that bottle over here,
he sang, and I did. Outside ,
under a black and silver sky
the voices of a thousand frogs
rang like muffled bells.*

But who needs the frog
when the prince is underneath?
we asked ourselves,

netting frogs from their dank ponds
by the thousands. We'd hand one,
pickled in formaldehyde,
limp as a potholder,
to any biology student
who'd mine for the gible heart,
the intestines rolled neatly as socks in a suitcase.

Such uses they found
for your body, Rana!
We've seen what makes you tick.
We know what makes you croak.

And now you answer
with an awful silence.

Please. Don't go.
We want you back.
We see now what we've broken.
We didn't mean to break it
break it break it. We didn't
mean to break it.

SECOND PRIZE

Guarneri Quartet

by J. Michael Parish, Oradell NJ

[See last page]

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Roxie Margaret Mouths the Words

by M. Lee Alexander, Williamsburg VA

I was born where prairie and horizon meet!
I said my mother,
Kansas bred. They came out to the fields to tell my great uncles
It's a girl, they said what'd they name her? Roxie Margaret?
That's a horse's name!
They sang her to sleep with a counting song:

*I'll sing you four-O, green grow the rushes-O,
What is your four-O? Four for the Gospel makers...*

Her deputy-sheriff father shot when she was eleven
At his funeral they paraded the tartan and bagpipes,
and when my mother, the only child, stood tall and sang out
*Land of my high endeavor, Land of the shining river,
Land of my heart forever, Scotland the Brave!*
Here mother said "Hush, Roxie Margaret, everyone can hear you!"

Farmed out as the poor cousin while her mother sought work in Topeka,
She rode the milk cow while the children of the manor jumped their ponies
Undaunted by the sharp spine of the cow, she took wild rides
through deep and waving prairie grasses taller than her head, singing

*I'll sing you three-O, green grow the rushes-O,
What is your three-O? Three, three the rivals...*

At the Osage County Fair my mother's class sang for the mayor,
The stood beneath the banner and right before they sang her favorite song,
Beulah Land," her teacher said, "Roxie Margaret, you just mouth the words!"
She went behind the tent as her cousins sneered "Roxie Margaret mouths the
words!"
Ripped field grass from the earth and sobbed "Some say God give me a
daughter
I can sing with! I'll never tell her not to sing."

My mother told that story every time we sang folksongs in the car, hymns in
church,
scat along with Ella Fitzgerald records, the school anthem at the college where
we both
taught. She said "I'm like Garrison Keillor's mother, I like it when you sing
with me."

*I'll sing you two-O, green grow the rushes-O,
What is your two-O? Two, two the lily-white boys, clothed in green-O...*

Before the surgeons wheel you into the theater to face that final operation
(not even a Kansan constitution lasts forever), to build your courage we sing

*"There once was a union maid, who never was afraid,
She jumped on the table just as quick as she was able,
And this is what she said, Oh you can't scare me!"*

But the operation didn't go well.
When they tell me you won't be coming home I bring prairie grasses
to the hospice room. The doctors yell "Get those weeds our of here!"
and toss dried Queen Anne's Lace and Milkweed to the bin.
You say never mind, the Prairie grows inside me now.

*I'll sing you one-O, green grow the rushes-O,
What is your one-O? One is one and all alone
And ever more shall be so*

Finally when it's time you look up at me and mouth your final words.
Quoting your much-loved Jackie Gleason you squeeze my hand and say:
"A little traveling music, please."
So as they do the disconnect, I sing for both of us:

*"I've got a home in Beulah Land and you've got one too,
I've got a home in Beulah Land and you've got one too.
I've got a home in Beulah Land and you've got one too,
Look away beyond the blue—horizon...*

Looking toward the Sea

by Maureen Waters, New Paltz NY

I had just turned the umbrella around
to set it more firmly in the sand
when you were gone, running toward the sea.
I caught a glimpse of you slipping beneath
the wave—red hair rippling the surface.
Face to face in the bright salt air
you grinned, neither alarmed nor breathless,
confident, age 3, that I would find you..

You were a solitary swimmer, lured
by the bristling splendor of open sea,
striking out swift and strong
toward nameless horizons.
Until the rip tide caught you.
Like another flouter of boundaries,
Icarus, torn between joy and blindness,
your fabulous gift was not enough.

I still see you waiting calmly at the
bottom of ponds, oceans, rivers overflowing
with rain. Plunging in again
and again, I carry you toward the shore.
but you vanish in the wheeling current
of death's obscurities.
Like yourself, I cannot grasp
the obvious.

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 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 2008 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 2008 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.

Soyer	Resonance and range—"My Yiddische mantra." First, learn how to count. Learn it right the first time through.
Cello	Take your time and rest takes care of itself. As you will see if you relax and forget where you are.
Steinhardt	Relax? How can I relax! Is that what you want to talk about? Relax how? I should relax? We should relax? I don't know.
1 st violin	Clarity and precision maybe. The meaning of virtuosity? That problem we were talking about before. Love and hate. Something with some meat. Relax is for another time, when there isn't so much to do. Yes or no?
Dalley	in a composition: this is the maxim—the order of introduction of instruments is of the prime concern. Argument personified is entertainment, to repeat a point my friend has already made, but disputes over dominance are settled more easily if attention is paid first where it first belongs, to the beginning, where it does the most good.
2 nd violin	
Tree	What lies in this nest of intrigue we have such a need to make? What lies here? What is this we've conspired on? What does it look like? What will it do, this conception we've made from the web that holds it, the membrane around it. What is it we have? Is it good or not? Alive or dead? Does it grow or wane like the dying... the dying anything; all things die and live the same. And live the same. What lies in this dissecting we're doing, this digging, this weaving and unweaving, this looking inside what we see in front of us for the soul? where is the truth in the middle of this music? And how do we think we know?
Viola	