

## *Sing what is well made*

W.B. YEATS SOCIETY OF N.Y.

### **2011 Poetry Competition**

REPORT OF THE JUDGE, SAMUEL MENASHE:

*Mr. Menashe fell ill just after selecting winners of the 2011 the Yeats Poetry Prize and was unable to write the short essay that traditionally leads off our formal report of the competition. But from a hospital bed, he dictated the following.*

The first- and second-prize-winning poems brought to mind something said in the first review of my poetry, which appeared in *Commonweal* magazine in the early 1960s: Some of these poems make me feel like a soldier who thinks he has been grazed by a bullet when in fact he has been mortally wounded.

And he offered this poem:

Now

spring has come,

no one knows how.

– *Samuel Menashe*

FIRST PRIZE

#### **Pilgrim at Glastonbury**

*by Ned Condini, Etowah NC*

I

Another day plodding through rigid winter,  
heavy snow falling, the solstice of the world.  
There's not a goldfinch pecking at red berries  
on the green holly, no ermine scooting by,  
nor silver fox under a silver moon.

Nothing but ice around us, inches thick,  
a lashing storm that no one can restrain.

Demeaned, we beg as poorer people do:  
how long before the welcome cries of cranes,  
advancing light, the chiming, floating fields–

embers to warm the chill of harder trials.  
For often in our sleep, pain that cannot  
forget falls drop by drop upon the heart,  
& in our own despair, against our will,  
comes His appalling grace to rescue still.

II

Father, would you could journey back from death  
& recognize in my effort a shadow  
of yourself to be proud of. I go to  
the garden that saw you tan on the evil  
anvil of summer suns, your fault by baring

husky muscles and back to scorching air.  
Then the face flayed by lupus, almost black,  
& through the years, to no purpose, a prayer.  
Maybe that Dantesque limbo is this bleak  
blindness befallen on those left behind.

III

“But you do not want to be blind: so what  
you love the most no one will take away.  
Forget yourself—that will be more than wise,”  
a steady voice advised from paradise.  
“Get down to work; feed the world's famished heart.”

There is an abbey in England where King Arthur  
prayed with good Joseph of Arimathea.  
Walk patiently through the heather to ruins.  
Dig there, and drink. In Glastonbury's silence  
the bush will speak with its cascade of red.

IV

And then a sword is pulled out of a rock,  
Perceval swoons, Galahad is struck down,  
again an island emerges from the sea,  
a gleaming castle blooms, a table's laid,

a monk is dragged and hanged in the abbey tower,  
a thorn-bush in the darkness spreads its fire.

SECOND PRIZE

#### **(Woman's) hair**

*by Catherine Saterson, Brooklyn NY*

We turn men to stone  
struck with desire  
to coil their fingers  
round us, sink noses  
into us. We hiss,  
writhe in wind that whips  
through us. We slither  
through their stiff fingers.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

#### **Fireside**

*by Daniel Cleary, Chicago IL*

History can probably tell us when  
Our ancestors first gathered round a fire  
To meet and converse, and, when first began  
Those songs accompanied by flute and lyre  
That helped to keep the threatening night at bay  
And bring those gathered even closer yet.  
Much in the same way it goes on today.

No matter how brilliant or advanced we get,  
Something inside us, still, keeps calling back  
To when we gathered round those winter nights  
And watched the flames, and kept ourselves awake  
With songs and stories; content, by our lights,  
With simple pleasures—glad to have lit a spark,  
However small, against the crowding dark!

#### **The Way Things Go**

*by Lucas Carpenter, Conyers GA*

The Rottweiler from the farm next door,  
killed Art Church's skinny black Maine Coon cat.

He saw it leave the mess of bloody bones and fur in his barn  
before loping off across a hay field towards home,  
tongue trailing from its mouth like a pink rubber ribbon.  
Afraid for his other two fatter blacker ones,  
he put a hit out on the dog, called a guy he knew  
who'd told him once over beers at the pool hall  
about shooting a dog that'd killed a chicken  
because once a dog kills a chicken  
it'll never stop, so you have to shoot it.  
Same with cats, he supposed. It'd be a hundred bucks.  
He uses a deer rifle with a telescopic sight.

Now Art knows nature's red teeth and claws  
and has an old shotgun I've seen him use,  
but the hit man could do it from a distance,  
avoiding detection and what passes for law out here.  
"They let it run free," Art said. "No blame."  
We're in opposing rockers on his screened porch,  
gazing past each other from shade to sun,  
held hostage by our higher primate minds.  
We are for the moment no longer.  
Chains are tightening, doors are closing.  
Imagine our conversation before the shot.

**Pink Sky for Margaret Drabble**  
*by William Leo Coakley, New York NY*

Darkness descends on the pink corpse in the snow—  
the dead don't bleed: it is their stiff last tactic.  
The pink sky's pink transfusion floods the snow;  
the courtyard fills with pink unearthly light.

The mannequin, the woman, swollen pink,  
hugs her lost knowledge, what the pink world told:  
the rate of falling bodies never falls;  
the heart earns nothing that it cannot lose.

The shadow drops upon her, cutthroat's blade;  
her stopped blood thickens to its cold black center.  
The faces in the silent windows shutter.  
The war-god Mars shines pink in the loathsome west.

Now, in the east, the horned moon struggles higher.  
The dog howls murder; then the cats come out:  
they purr and stare, their pink eyes thick with pity  
for themselves only—like the other watchers.

The murderer comes out, his hands are pink.  
Her hacked feet stalk through corridors of pink  
in his pink mind: pink, pink, pink, he works his evil—  
the sirens' outcry rouses him; he falters

back to the shadows: nothing pink can feed him.  
Doctor and police bend to their duty;  
they prod this cloth, this flesh, this carrion mystery.  
The several madmen in the courtyard clamour.

The scavengers of health and order paw:  
her legs lie fat and pink in the camera's flash;  
a blanket covers what her body knows—  
the cats lie down upon its pink rough warmth.

The body-bag, that pink devouring vulture,  
cries for its food: it eats, and is forgiven.  
There ought to be a rhyme against such weather.  
There ought to be a charm, an answer, a law.

**Urbanite**  
*by James Desiato, Port Jefferson Station NY*

He'd never learned the name of flowers nor  
of birds nor trees, for on those city streets  
he'd made his universe there weren't any.

How could they thrive, those tender miracles,  
in concrete thoroughfares, in gas-spooked air,  
in flimsy boxes nailed to window sills,  
in wooden tubs in front of neighborhood stores  
where passersby would drop discarded scraps?

But once he watched a joyous bride toss out  
to bridesmaids roses plucked from her bouquet,  
and ever since he knew that flower by  
its name and all the loveliness of it.

And when from out the rows of tenements,

congested alleys where the ashcans lay,  
the constant croak of horns, the traffic jams,  
the day-long rumble of a crosstown trolley,  
Love, one day, swooped down upon him, blinding  
as the smog that always hovered near,  
he was transported wholly, sustained its throes,  
as city dwellers all the clamorous crush,  
and thought that she was beautiful as dawn  
upon the neighborhood before it wakens,  
or as the very incarnation of  
the thing that blooms, whose name he knew—the rose.

**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 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 2011 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](http://YeatsSociety.org) around March 31. First prize \$500, second prize \$250. 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 2011 competition is 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](http://YeatsSociety.org) or write to us.

