

Sing what is well made

W.B. YEATS SOCIETY OF N.Y.

2009 Poetry Competition

REPORT OF THE JUDGE, ALICE QUINN:

My thanks to the Yeats Society and the members and nonmembers who entered their poems in this competition. It was a delight reading and rereading the submissions. I see that the moon captivated me in both the first- and second-prize-winning poems. A sure sign of interest in the way a poem is made, of falling under its spell, really, is to stop, pause, and reread before coming to the end, the earlier the better. I remember pausing to take in the artistry at work in “Basho Solo” at the sentence that begins “Well fed/moon, stooping under the horse chesnut tree,/mad to get out of the rain...” I’d never experienced the moon personified in that way, actively, even furiously, wanting to shift its position. Later in the poem, the moon is handled in another marvelous, surprising way,

“moon down on all fours, searching rushes
and scouring reeds...”

I’ve read many poems inspired by and about Basho. This beautifully evocative poem is one I’ll enjoy reading again and again. Second place goes to “Los Lunas,” a drama of desperation and lonely struggle. “The moon cannot calm her.” “Dogs in the distance howl at her intrusion.” Limpid, surefooted language mirrors the steps the subject is taking one by one, and the phrasing at the close is unforgettable. We are left with a touching, intimate glimpse of a woman’s body after childbirth (“the remains of her petals”) and a riveting description of the start of her child’s journey “in corridors,/in fluorescent lighting, his small flowering/soft as cartilage..”

Honorable Mention is due to “Bronx Zoo.” Why does this composition afford so much delight every time I enter it? There is no one way to enjoy this poem. Wherever the eye alights and darts is certain to afford a surprising and lively experience. Bravo! Honorable mention to “Near Deadwood: A Day Before the Family Reunion.” Natural splendor is honored here with great tenderness and family feeling, and the ending is quietly forceful, impressive, and memorable.

FIRST PRIZE

Basho Solo

by Steve Lautermilch, Kill Devil Hills NC

Thirty years in a monk’s
hut, island hermitage of an artist’s boat cottage;
wayfarer rain and wandering storm,
now and then a cloud, a gathering mist
for a hiking companion.
Visitors,
the haze and fog that sidle in,
sun at their back, burning them away, ghosts
in steaming rags and tatters.

Syllables, whispering silence,
dissolving phrases, watery dregs of tea.
Language that floats and fades,
shuffles down a path, hedges and back roads
out of mind. In the one door and out the window.

Home.

Creaky gate where walk
leads to raft, river to plunge. Well fed
moon, stooping under the horse chestnut tree,
mad to get out of the rain –
leaves dripping or falling, streams that puddle
under your feet –
robe, mantle, sleeves
wet as your cheeks – every bone and sinew
in your skin bag aching or preparing.
Cloak like a rice sack torn open,
knots and threads catching on branches and thorns.
Bird neck craning this way that, trying to escape.

Basho.

Porous cup, fire cracked clay, fingers and palms
of a child always grasping, begging for more.

Trying to read the map.

Eyes, bleary and going blind, do you know, did you ever know
what you saw. Where you stand. Porch step. Deck.
Wobbling bottom of a leaky boat.

Deer’s cry, bleating, water’s ripple, chanting,
moon down on all fours, searching rushes
and scouring reeds, ears snatching at scraps of song,
hints and traces of notes lost in the bamboo –

Her hand, brushing the hair out of her eyes,
your fingers along her lips, a strand of her hair
caught on your tongue, the sudden spill of her breath
touching your face, reminding you, forcing you
to remember to breathe –

Rhythms and tones of a woods that always keeps changing,
always keeps time – the rise and fall of limbs
beyond hearing, beyond time,
beyond words –

Basho.

Tree leaves. Water leaves. Leaves.

SECOND PRIZE

Los Lunas

by L. Noelle Sullivan, West Yellowstone MT

Her heart is made of iron filings, strange needles from dirt.
She eats red clay, damp with the motion within her,
sick with sour June smells of Old Town grease
and night skies dimmed by traffic lights, twin beams.
Her bag is packed, expectant.

In this full moon, she is ready to end it.

Her contractions begin in radiant heat
stored by the desert peneplain. She drives south
hunting for relief, past a sprawled telescope
aimed at our big bang in space.

The moon cannot calm her, though it floats and she doesn’t.

She pulls the Nissan through a concrete underpass
and parks, intending to cut the child from her womb
where rodents pull at seeds and waxy yuccas
tilt at shadows with their spears.

Dogs in the distance howl at her intrusion.

Her own violence echoes, its suspect rustles like kangaroo rats
in the blinking haze of distant stars. They pause
at the pale cactus lilies, fragrant rush,
and test hooked tips beneath the sky.

Perfect, excreting blossoms surround her.

On their plastic beauty, she palpates
the stringy fibers, crushed milky and limp
in her palm, body weepy as if fevered,
easily destroyed. Fragility drives her home.

At dawn, her own water breaks, her son born dry as loam.

He is healthy, unaware of cyclical pulls
and lunar ambits. He is welcome inside, in corridors,
in fluorescent lighting, his small flowering
soft as cartilage and the remains of her petals.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Bronx Zoo

by Grant Osborn, South Bend IN

as children we left fairy bluebirds, red
behind Wild Asia's pandas, monorail,
our slender fingers in a fist of siblings,
interlocked, confused twinned. two-by-two
skimmed beneath cut-out letters, on our
the gold *Bronx Zoo's* backs, pantomime sun.
the gate's copper tropical palms, posed
green 2D animals, in a silhouette jungle
that rattles exotic feathers, reptiles.
with our tongues on we strayed, parents
in a corral of street artists that sketched
performers, jugglers, caricatures of us
riding a bike, a clown, face painted,
tossing baseballs. in a khaki overcoat
repeatedly signaled his fingers fluttering
to come to him, a Polaroid, flashing Fonzie
thumbs. scrutinize his nose,
I let go my sister, laughter soliciting
me, a child a balloon animal
the time, dangling over his wrist

Near Deadwood: A Day Before the Family Reunion

by Mary Pinard, Roslindale MA

Circular hay bales, perfectly spaced, undarken
in dawn light just outside Interior, South Dakota,
and before this exposed spine of Badland buttes—
closest to ground, mud-dark folds of Pierre Shale

hold tracteries, faint ridges of clamshells and ammonites
left 70 million years ago by a retreating inland sea.
Then the gray-green haystack hills of the Chadron
Formation, river flooding that wove this mammal

fossil frieze—alligators, titanotheres, saber-toothed
cats—lodging it under rose layers of the Brule,
26 to 32 million years here, but eroding to yellow
escarpments, near the much higher Rockyford Ash,

a ledgy crumbling rock rumpling over it all
like a slight but sure expression of doubt. Slow goings
in the later Eocene Epoch left walls that vanish an inch
each year alongside clastic dikes, slumps, so many sod

tables, caprocks and hoodoos, pebble-coated mud balls
scattered across the dry washes. My great-grandfather
came around 1870, raised 7 children: one, father
of my father, and so on, down to us, the living.

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 2010 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 2010 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.