

## *Sing what is well made*

W.B. YEATS SOCIETY OF N.Y.

### **2010 Poetry Competition**

#### REPORT OF THE JUDGE

The five poems selected for this year's Yeats Society competition all bear the mark of straightforward and strong feeling. The first-place winner, the poem entitled "Joe Williams," is addressed to a Vietnam veteran by his friend and probable partner. It begins, "I didn't think I'd like you," a line repeated at the end of the first stanza and lending a ballad air to the start of the poem. There is no gainsaying the centrality of his wartime experience in the life of this man, and the speaker allows the reader to feel how powerful a presence it has been in her life, too. The election of the present tense in the last line of the poem—instead of "until the last of your brothers was gone" we have "until the last of your brothers is gone"—somehow makes the end more poignant. I don't know why and am content not to know. It is the poet's stroke, which I salute.

Second place goes to the poem that opens "I have a passing acquaintance with Death," which naturally summons up a number of classic American poems that dive into their kindred subjects as forthrightly—among them, "Because I could not stop for Death—" by Emily Dickinson and "Acquainted with the Night" by Robert Frost. This poem pivots on the conceit of being prepared with respect to being properly attired for the meeting. The speaker "didn't merit a nod," but his beloved friend did. Had the speaker not been present to witness the nab, "It would have been an ordinary nab (whatever that means)." The parenthesis accounts for some of the afterglow one experiences coming to the end of this touching poem.

"The Ocean at Dusk, to a Child" is an excellent poem of childhood, lighting up the gulf between the solitary fears suffered by the imaginative seven-and-a-half year old and her

father, who "sits, peacefully unaware of what is about to happen." The details are handled deftly, and the confident diction makes vivid how the memory burns in the poet's mind.

"Teacher of the Year" brings to mind the light verse which enjoyed such popularity from the 1920s through the 1950s in our country. Handling a grim subject with a light touch hasn't proved to be easy in our time, but this poet knows how to do it.

"At the Intercontinental" is also grim in subject but is handled more cinematically. The rhyme is sharp and successful, the scene indelibly rendered.

My thanks to the Yeats Society for the pleasure of reading this year's entries and selecting these good poems for praise.

*Alice Quinn*

*Executive Director, Poetry Society of America*

#### FIRST PRIZE

**Joe Williams**

*by Cecille D. Brant, Newark DE*

I didn't think I'd like you,  
so tall and black and bitter you were,  
and me so short, so white, so soft.  
I didn't think I'd like you.

When I was three and playing in my tub,  
you were sloshing hip deep  
in the muck of Vietnam,  
grumbling under your breath  
about a lost shot at pro ball.  
When I was six  
and crying about Candyland,  
you were stopped by a claymore,  
sobbing in the mud and blood filled moments  
before salvation.

When I was twelve  
and playing with Barbie and G.I. Joe,  
you were in a VA hospital,  
learning to shoot insulin  
and heroin.

But snickering fate has placed us here now,  
and I talk to you about the war,  
how when I was a kid,  
I didn't even know there was a war,  
much less that its shadow  
would loom large  
until the last of your brothers is gone.

#### SECOND PRIZE

**I Have a Passing Acquaintance With Death**

*by Arlene Stern, Newtown PA*

I have a passing acquaintance with Death,  
Though we've yet to be formally introduced.  
What does one wear?

I was casually dressed that evening in the emergency room  
When Death first came to see you.  
You were wrapped so chicly in a green-striped gown:  
I didn't merit a nod.

But you!  
Death sat on the gurney,  
Held your hand, observed the monitor  
With a practiced eye.....  
Nodding now and then  
Before moving to the next bed.

Later, had I not seen Death  
In outré metrosexual garb  
Lift you and do his deliquescent trick,  
Not seen you shudder as your soul shimmied away,  
It would have been an ordinary day (whatever that means).

And now we are at the cemetery.  
Everything is enshrouded in fog,  
Excuse the pun,  
In this Eden of interrupted dreams—  
How did it happen and when,  
That our plans evanesced  
Along with your beautiful soul  
And I am left with a bouquet of dried flowers?

#### HONORABLE MENTIONS

##### **Teacher of the Year**

*by John Grab, South Pasadena CA*

Old bitter Mr. Carper wants to quit  
He's learned he doesn't care for kids at all  
He sticks them in the corner or the hall  
And mutters "stupid ass" or "little shit"

But if he can hang on for one more year  
His pension will increase by ten percent  
Just compensation for the time he's spent  
In rooms shut up where students scoff and sneer

And as he stumbles through each aching day  
So like a marriage too far gone to fix  
He sometimes wonders, as the big hand clicks,  
How all that passion could just melt away  
To leave an odorous pallor in the room  
Like spinsters' dresses faint with stale perfume

##### **The Ocean at Dusk, to a Child**

*by Ginna Wilkerson, Tampa FL*

I am seven and a half, standing at water's edge  
Just after sunset.  
Sunburned skin was expected then, in 1963.

Dad sits relaxing higher up the shore, watching.

The green-gray water, seemingly alive,

Is rolling and roiling, churning like my stomach as I watch.  
My head is full of wild imaginings and half-real dreams.  
The ocean fascinates, beckons,  
And chills to the bone with fear.

I saw a colossal Sea-God arise and stand  
among the angry rushing waves  
At a Saturday morning flick just days ago.

I know it was only make-believe,  
But I am one who believes in stories.

Soon Neptune will rise up, God-like and glaring  
As I watch in stifled silence.  
And mortal dads are not suited to fight evil sea-creatures.

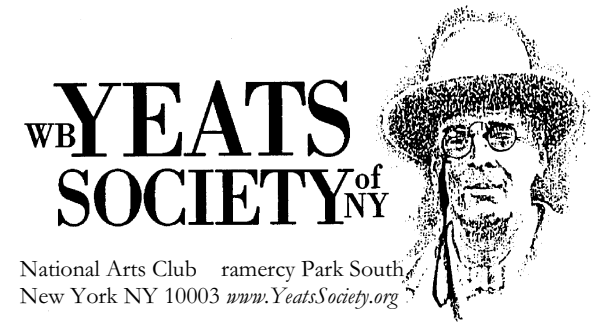
My dad still sits, peacefully unaware of what is about to happen.

I stand and stare,  
shivering in my sunburn,  
unable to look away.

##### **At the Intercontinental**

*by Daniel Cleary, Chicago IL*

Our bedside candles almost guttered out  
After a long nocturnal argument  
That left us, here at last without a doubt,  
If not defeated, well & truly spent----  
You've said all that it was you had to say  
While I have countered almost tit for tat  
In spite of which, as dawn breaks cold and grey  
We've not grown one bit wiser for all that.  
Again, as with such tussles in the past  
We feel as if the whole thing's up for grabs:  
We look around & all we see is waste;  
It's time to leave at once, take separate cabs  
Into a future neither of us wants----  
I swing myself out of bed, put on my pants.



**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* 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* or write to us.