

Sing what is well made

WB YEATS SOCIETY OF NY

2024 Yeats Poetry Prizes

REPORT OF THE JUDGE

It has been my great pleasure to judge the 2024 Yeats Poetry Prize. Not only did I see a cross-section of poetry from a broad swath of poets and writers, but I also read what today’s poets are truly connected to and concerned with in their work—I am seeing our obsessions and complications at this moment in history.

The submissions for this year’s prize, nearly 1,000 entries from around the world, spanned various poetic forms and subjects, from elegies to epics. Whenever I hear critics moan about the (perceived) demise of poetry, I am reminded of its continuing power, as evidenced by these submissions, to bridge divides, cross borders, recognize struggles, and celebrate joys. I am most thankful for poetry’s ability to create empathy. Being immersed in this universal art means being aware of both absence and presence in our lives. Poetry acknowledges our past, reflects our present, and gazes into our future. How lucky am I to play a small role in preserving this legacy.

This year’s first place winner is Carlos Andrés Gómez for his amazing poem, “Double Golden Shovel Sonnet Found on the Q Train.” I was dumbstruck by Gómez’s use of a relatively new form, the Golden Shovel *, while giving a nod to the American Sonnet and referencing Ezra Pound’s classic poem “In a Station of the Metro.” Pound’s original 14 words: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd: Petals on a wet black bough.” Gómez’s poem is both clever and poignant. Mind blown.

“The held-tight scowl familiar as loss, as though the apparition across from me is an old mirror: apparition

of the ghost who haunts my many masks. I’m made of these postures and poses--wide-chested, cloaked--these

faces trained toward sneer or absence. A baby makes faces in between me and the man now clutching my gaze. ...”

I also want to acknowledge our second place winner, Sean Nevin, and his poem, “Kapuśniak,” which reminds us of how something as simple as a traditional soup can lead us to a larger knowledge of what we know is true. It reads, in part:

“Let the smell remind us that we’re not that far from the deep belch

and thunder of tanks
convoyed-up and burning
through a heavy cloud
of gun powder and diesel
in a snowbound
pine forest in Poland.”

Honorable mentions this year went to three worthy poets: Caroline King, whose poem “Orlando” is full of wordplay; Punam Nimchonok whose poem “Prayer wing” brought out the mom in me; and Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach, whose “I always thought I’d marry a Sasha” had me riveted to the very end. Thanks to all who graced us with their words and wisdom.

January Gill O’Neil

* A golden shovel is a poetic form in which the last word of each line forms a second, pre-existing poem (or section thereof) to which the poet is paying homage. The form was created by Terrance Hayes, whose poem “Golden Shovel” from his 2010 collection “Lighthouse” is based on Gwendolyn Brooks’s “We Real Cool,” which begins with an epigraph that includes the phrase “Golden Shovel.” Hayes used the entirety of Brooks’s poem to achieve the length of the poem he wanted. —“The Golden Shovel” by Terrance Hayes; Poetry Foundation

FIRST PLACE

Double Golden Shovel Sonnet Found on the Q Train
After Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”

by Carlos Andrés Gómez, Atlanta, Georgia

The held-tight scowl familiar as loss, as though the apparition across from me is an old mirror: apparition of the ghost who haunts my many masks. I’m made of these postures and poses—wide-chested, cloaked—these

faces trained toward sneer or absence. A baby makes faces in between me and the man now clutching my gaze. In the slowed moment our subway car’s air shifts, I feel the crowd retract. Seats change. A street vendor in the crowd

peddles single roses, a dollar each. He drops petals on the ground beside the elderly man singing “*Te Amaré*” on a falsetto climb to the top of the chorus. He transports me. A wet grief pulls my eyes. The old mirror is suddenly close: wet,

black eyes before me. Music has opened us both. A black bough made young: *You dropped this*, he offers, with a bow.

SECOND PLACE

Kapuśniak

by Sean Nevin, Madison, New Jersey

First, cleave the wilted globe
of head cabbage in half,
then shred everything
into a brine of sour kraut
with a fattened pork bone
and a fist full of barley.

Next, stir a slurry of white
flour into the sautéed onions
to thicken the steaming pot
already at its boiling
point. It will discharge,
unapologetically, an odor

that will skulk up the stairwell
and down a quiet hall
breaching, room by room,

the unwary house.

It may appear gradually
at first, familiar, even benign—
not unlike the slow boiling
of a frog, or it may arrive
sudden as an assault

to the senses, vulgar
as a slur blurted out
from the puckered mouth
of a politician then echoed
by demonstrators
behind the sawhorse
barricades of a police line.

Let the smell remind us
that we’re not that far
from the deep belch
and thunder of tanks
convoyed-up and burning

through a heavy cloud
of gunpowder and diesel
in a snowbound
pine forest in Poland.

Let the smell remind us,
that we’re not that far
from the vegetal musk
lifting from a Soviet
soldier’s trench-footed
leather boots

as The Red Army
slogged westward
past the Pinsk Marshlands
toward Warsaw.

Let the smell remind us,
that cabbage soup,
like history, repeats itself

and that we’re never that far
from the putsch

in Washington D.C.
or Kyiv or the beer halls
in Munich, where
the National Workers' Party
ignited, like that,

into Brownshirts who
kicked-in unlocked doors
behind which, innocent
families broke
only the heels
from their black bread
to better sop kapuśniak's
holy broth up.

(The above poem exceeded its original 42 lines when formatted to fit this column width.)

HONORABLE MENTION

Prayer wing

by Punam Mony Nimchonok, Toronto, Ontario

Icarus's mom would have
made sure those wings had stayed on.
She would have DIY'd the shit out those wings:
Gorilla glue, cement glue, glue gun, staples &
lacquer to gloss it up.
Melted wax? Hell no, there would have been
three trial flights, two tutors and a safety net
for the safety net. She would have
made sure those wings had "room to grow into"
like mittens, and that Icarus
had memorized his home address and her cell #--just in case.
She would have slipped an air tag into one stack of feathers
and a granola bar into another.
She would have enrolled him in flight camp and
made him take flying lessons.
Still, would it have mattered?
Icarus pulling out the staples, eating half the bar and
losing the air tag; making a mess of it,
failing at flying, and flying after all.

HONORABLE MENTION

Orlando

by Caroline King, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Lately, I've been turning metaphors
into résumés. 1. *Tell me about yourself.*
In English the subjunctive isn't a tense,
but a mood. When I talk about myself,
Kant thickens my tongue with what I can't
know. The first one in my class to start
puberty, I've stopped trying to name
my happenings. 2. *Why here?* Just as a river
is never the same river twice, the *I* in my voice
keeps moving, what is fiction but a revolution
of my tongue in different rooms? 3. *How
do you handle multiple tasks?* I timestamp
my sunrise and its suspension. 4. *How
do you work in teams?* To be alone is to be
timeless, but I'll put kindness before critique.
5. *Can you tell us about this [embarrassing
inconsistency]?* I wrote it in the sand
before a wave. 6. *Are you willing to relocate?*
I am always with a suitcase filled with water.
7. *What are your future goals?* To change
my forms, any one of them, and not to grieve.

HONORABLE MENTION

I always thought I'd marry a Sasha

by Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach, Columbus, Ohio

or Dima or maybe a Grigori who goes
by Greg with most but always Grisha
with his love. We would speak proper
English when alone or among friends, loud
Russian with our children & their grandparents
& hush Cyrillic in each other's ears
among strangers. We would hunger
for our shared Ukrainian soil and light
Hanukkah candles & stutter through
the Hebrew blessing neither one of us
were taught—Jewish only by blood & face,
name & ritual, immigration—history.
Jewish by our shared dead whose names
we give our children. And each New Year's,

he'd cut me a fresh spruce, gather our families—
big & loud & always foreign—to ring in
the coming in the Soviet ways we left behind—
all potatoes & herring & horseradish—all
starved nostalgia so we eat & eat until
the sun comes up or the children wake
to open their gifts at midnight while Alla sings of eating
watermelon on trains & a million
roses & all the men she's loved and lost.
And he would sing along, not well, not beautiful
but full of longing for what is ours. But I
didn't marry him. Not Oleg or Simon or Alon,
not Misha, didn't kiss their kosher mouths,
taste the salt we'd pass between us, teeth
& tears. I married you. In spite your name,
your lack of dead under the tongue—perhaps
I married you because of them, their letters
comfortable along my jaw like hard-
boiled eggs. I'm famous for my deviled ones
you claimed were better than your Midwest
mother's, would eat them by the dozen & breath
of mustard yolk, you'd cling onto my lips.
We don't need them, you said, the last family
meal already full of domestic US staples. Sasha,
I thought, would have dragged the table
from the garage to make room, would have
unbuttoned his jeans, put his arm around
my father, poured him another shot, vodka
of course, & eaten every unhatched
bite. *I'd let my belly burst before I let a good thing
go to waste*, the Slavic saying we were raised with
slipping—like a vow—off his tongue.



The Yeats Poetry Prize is open to members and nonmembers of the Society of any age from any locality worldwide. **First prize \$1,000, second \$500, honorable mentions.** Winners and honorable mentions receive plaques and two-year memberships in the Society and are honored at a public award ceremony in New York in April. Entry fee is \$15 for first, \$12 each additional. Poems in English up to 60 lines, on any subject, unpublished at submission, may be entered... at Yeats.Submittable.com/Submit between September 1 and January 31...or mail to address above to be received by the January 31 deadline. Do not include author information in the poems themselves, but enter name, address, phone, email address and a short bio in the *Submittable* entry form, or name and contact info on an attached 3x5 card with mailed entries (check made out to WB Yeats Society of NY). No entry form necessary. Authors retain rights, but grant us the right to publish winning entries in a competition report like this one, and on our website. Winning poems accepted for publication elsewhere *after* submission may require permission from the publishing outlet For information on our other programs, and on membership, please visit YeatsSociety.nyc or write to us.