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Announcing the Winners and Finalists of Our  
1<sup>st</sup> Annual National and Regional Poetry Competition

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*National Winner*

*Dirge for the White Birds Standing in a Marsh, Seen Through  
a Train Window on the Day after My Thirty-Fifth Birthday*

Sam Witt  
Walla Walla, Washington



*Regional Winner*

*Onions*

Nancy K. Pearson  
Wellfleet, Massachusetts



*Runners Up*

*Santa Maria de Jesús* by Lorraine Healy, Freeland, WA  
*Today or Tomorrow* by Chloë Joan López, Cambridge, MA



*Finalists*

*Prayer Beads* by Charles Atkinson (CA)

*The Old Road to Bayfield* by J. Lorraine Brown (Mashpee, MA)  
*Poverty* by Christopher Buckley (CA)  
*Blackberries* by Deirdre Callanan (West Harwich, MA)  
*While Grief Floats* by Deirdre Callanan (West Harwich, MA)  
Untitled “*It’s not every day that you fall asleep*” by Gedalya Chinn (MD)  
*The Poem* by Roger Craik (OH)  
*Heron* by Roger Craik (OH)  
*Hell’s Gates* by Joanie DiMartino (CT)  
*Holding On* by Jeannine Dobbs (NH)  
*Mouse* by Cathryn Essinger (OH)  
*The Foamy Brine* by Brian Feil (MI)  
*Gestation* by Kathline Fitch (CT)  
*A Song for Mary Egan* by Lorraine Healy (WA)  
*The King of Newark* by Barry Hellman (Eastham, MA)  
*Blackberry (Homage)* by Christina Hutchins (CA)  
*Spice Cake* by Megan E. Kaesshaefer (PA)  
*The Head Is a Canvas* by Dana Elizabeth Koster (NY)  
*Scrap* by BettyAnn Lauria (Yarmouth Port, MA)  
*Critique by Tiger* by Chloë Joan López (Cambridge, MA)  
*Wintersea* by Lisa Nickerson (Cotuit, MA)  
*News Item, New York Times: Golden Retriever Abandoned in Field*  
by William Orem (Waltham, MA)  
*A Slice of Martha’s Vineyard* by Mary Ellen Redmond (South Dennis, MA)  
*Marine Life* by Emily Scudder (Cambridge, MA)  
*January 8<sup>th</sup> Grade* by Stephanie Silvia (CA)  
*Study of Family with Buckets* by Jennifer Sweeney (CA)  
*White October* by Jennifer Sweeney (CA)  
*Queen of Carthage* by Abbey Winant (Boston, MA)  
*Know How* by Scott Withiam (Wareham, MA)  
*Desert Lost (A Reporter’s Journal)* by Michael Warr (CA)  
*To Get My Tulips Out* by Scott Withiam (Wareham, MA)



*Sam Witt*

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Graduate of University of Virginia and Iowa Writers’ Workshop  
*Everlasting Quail* won the Katherine Nason Bakeless First Book Prize, 2000  
Fulbright Fellow, 2001

Published in, among other journals, *Virginia Quarterly*, *Harvard Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *New England Review*... and in *The New Young Poets* and the *Iowa Anthology of New American Poetries*

Faculty at University of Iowa, Harvard University, University of Missouri  
*Sunflower Brother* won the Cleveland State University Press Open Book Competition for 2006 and was published in 2007

Sam is currently on faculty at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA.



*Nancy Pearson*

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Published in *The Iowa Review*, *The Cimarron review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Margie*, and *The Black Warrior Review*

Her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Award, twice, and the Walt Whitman Award, among others.

Nancy is currently the second year poetry fellow at The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA



*Lorraine Healy*

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Pushcart nominee in 2004

MFA in Poetry from New England College

Published in the *Seattle Review*, *Kimera*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Concrete Wolf*, and *Walyx*, where she was the 2007 winner of the Lois Cranston Prize

Her chapbook, *The Farthest South*, was published by New American Press  
Her second, *The Archipelago*, was published by Finishing Line Press



*Chloë Joan López*

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M.A. from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University

Finalist for 2006-07 Writing Fellowship from the Fine Arts Work Center in  
Provincetown, MA, the 2006 Ahsahta Press Sawtooth Poetry Book Prize,  
and the 2006 *Arts and Letters* Rumi Poetry Prize  
Honorable Mention from 2007 *Southwest Review* Morton Marr Prize  
Published in *can we have our ball back?* and *GSU Review* (now *New South*)



Sam Witt

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Dirge for the White Birds Standing in a Marsh, Seen Through a Train Window on the  
Day after My Thirty-Fifth Birthday

*after Hank Williams*

One of them stood so still in the water,  
it was clear: *I* was the one who was moving,  
though I sat perfectly still on the train,  
& the woman across the aisle from me,  
stretched out across the seat, asleep,  
her bare knees pressed one against another in hard sunlight,  
she was moving too.  
Each time I closed my eyes,  
I could feel the sunlight pressing my temples,  
some part of me on long stalk-like legs  
wading away through the water.  
Each time I closed my eyes & thought, *what if I killed myself*, in rapid succession,  
I would hear him, singing back:  
*& if I didn't go, I believe I'd blow my stack.*  
I knew there were stars I couldn't see through the blue sky,  
the water within me was reflecting them,  
the water down below, in the tidelands, on the other side of the window,  
white birds standing pious & still in that marsh,  
long gray stalks drawing the water from within me.  
One of them stepping down slowly into the water as we passed.  
I wanted her to dip her beak into it,  
out of all that paralyzed grace within me,  
& lift a small piece of silver out,  
but there wasn't time; she just flapped her heavy wings once

& was lifting herself, quite lazily from the surface,  
when the frame of the windowpane flashed her away  
into 3 or 4 merely still,  
white monuments to what those birds were,  
& they too passed quickly into the room in my brain where the sunlight goes,  
left behind a faint reflection of my face,  
which felt suddenly quite small, the pressure was so great,  
& I curled up into it, on the seat.  
I wanted to excuse myself, just for second,  
from the water, bare human legs, thin stalks lifting into the air,  
from my temples, & even from the sunlight  
that was making the stars invisible,  
the sunlight, that's a kind of tenseness as I write this now,  
a pressure that builds slowly from within;  
the sunlight in fact hurt just then,  
& the train was some kind of transport tube,  
what the Pentagon is calling coffins these days,  
we howled into a tunnel & I stared into the dark muffled underglow  
of my startled, animal face,  
not so much the underling, a forgotten moment,  
as a case of the mask having stuck to that constricted part of me,  
& grown through it until I'd disappeared within:  
*sometimes it's hard, but you gotta understand...*  
it looked like the sunlight had gone away from me for good,  
discarding a bright, useless tangle, caught in the tree branches  
once we'd emerged, like a tag attached to a big toe,  
& there it was, reflected in frame after frame, along the dull rails.  
Each time the tube was sucked into glisteny, cellophane darkness,  
I could see it in my own reflected face,  
in the face of the sleeping one, across the aisle,  
in the blank expression of the one walking the length of the car  
to face my own, somewhat muted, slightly bored,  
in the process of being forgotten, face,  
even as he asked me for the ticket to my sleep.  
I hated the leaves then when he punched it,  
all of them in the process of being cancelled,  
leaving a damp memory of ferns to touch my knees,  
& the sunlight to press its thumbs against my temples,  
having swallowed its stars,  
that's how cold the invisible light was apart from me,

not even a baptism in the water below,  
that's how quickly the leaves  
were moving toward my destination, so desperately  
that I'd forgotten what temples were for,  
to lift the echo of human voices out of nowhere.  
I had time to see that before they flicked away,  
& I was lost again.

The problems are so simple.

The problems have to do with health & money, the government,  
women & too much time,  
where to lay your head, how to talk to strangers, & white birds,  
lifting themselves out of water, suddenly gone.

We know that much from the old songs.

I know it from what the autistic man had been saying,  
on another train, on the day of my birthday, in the city;  
he'd claimed that the man beside him  
was his brother & everybody had laughed at him, even me.

Then he'd looked at the woman across the aisle, that stranger,  
& said, without joking,

"Hiya mom." The problem was not  
that his brother kept shaking his head,  
nor that the woman who would have been his mother  
sat there in embarrassed silence, having turned away,  
as if to say, who are my brethren?

The problem was that he believed it, loudly.

I wanted to wake the sleeper across the aisle from me,  
& tell her, as he'd said it: "we're all family on this train, gotta go now,"  
then dart out through the open doors of the subway car, as he'd done.

But there were no such doors on that train through which to escape.

The reason I kept closing my eyes, on my birthday,

& the day after it, with its snowy egrets,  
its invisible, reflected stars,

was not related to that man, nor his brother,  
nor to the water with which I'd have gladly washed anybody's feet  
to make this feeling pass:

*& if I didn't go, I believe I'd blow my stack.*

Are you a child of the temple? Do you have a family?

Were you born of water? Are you at your father's work?

Are you fishers of men?

Are you lost to the water & unreflectable

as I am, despite my face & all the stars it contains,  
dark amid the white birds stepping gracefully across shallows?  
Close your huge, absorbent eyes for good, silent one, little marsh,  
hunting in your own reflection, the one with a very long neck,  
& *if I didn't go*, she'd only spread her wings & lift me  
into a measure longer than my wingspan:  
*I love you baby, but you gotta understand*  
*when the Lord made me, He made those white birds land.*



Nancy K. Pearson

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## ONIONS

1.

Moving quietly in the neon light  
you pull open flaps within flaps, spill white meat  
onto the cutting board,

slicing onions for soup.  
We talk about sensitivity of dark and light  
eyes, yours waterless, solid as soil,

mine emptying as I watch  
your lean arms, the engagement of gliding tendons,  
the elbow holding its soft cup

of veins. Forgive me for picturing  
another life, the same blue crease gripping a needle  
of junk, the flushing face,

the heavy, pink nod, the blood  
suddenly floating in free-fall behind the weighted lap bar  
of bones. I roll back

my burning eyes. From a distance,

it is beautiful, the field of limp green shoots    falling slowly  
before their white hearts are lifted    from the mud.

2.

I love your fingertips  
curled away from the knife,  
the heart and palate    working together,

holding the onion tightly  
to prevent crushing.  
I do not remember my first. In Georgia

my grandmother eating like apples.  
A history of onions: thin cells  
leave little trace. Cavities left in the soil  
tell us more  
of hardship. The bare gums  
of a farmer or addict, everyone in my family.

You understand why I cry here so far  
North, settling,    the days quickly flattening  
against my ears, the collapsed eyes

of pumpkins everywhere. To feel better, we watch  
the Series, eat hot dogs with pickles  
and onions.    In the South, fat Vidalias roll

on conveyor belts, their paper skins  
blow from the empty crates like snow  
my family never sees. How seriously you take my blues

and cooking. How your slicing  
is a keyhole, a precise instrument opening—  
on the other side,    a smaller, sharper light.