Twenty-Sixth Annual Jo-Anne Hirshfield Memorial Poetry Awards

Sunday, April 25, 2004   2 p.m.
Evanston Public Library
Community Meeting Room

Program

Welcome:    Neal J. Ney, Library Director

Introductory Remarks:    John R. Sagan, Library Board President

Remarks by 2004 Poetry    Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti

Presentation of the 2004 Awards and Prize Money

Elementary Age Students
High School Students
Unpublished Adults

Poetry Reading    Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti

Meet the Award Winners
Refreshments Immediately Following the Program

Past Judges

1979  Eloise Fink
      Lisel Mueller
1980  Mark Perlberg
1981  Mark Perlberg
1982  Daryl Hine
1983  Eleanor Gordon
1984  Mark Perlberg
1985  Dennis Brutus
1986  Lisel Mueller
1987  John Dickson
1988  Eloise Fink
1989  Gertrude Rubin
1990  Reginald Gibbons

1991  Angela Jackson
1992  Richard W. Calish
1993  Beatriz Badikian
1994  Maxine Chernoff
1995  Martha Modena Vertreace
1996  Effie Mihopoulos
1997  Mark Turcotte
1998  Mark Turcotte
1999  Allison Joseph
2000  Sterling Plumpp
2001  Richard Jones
2002  Susan Hahn
2003  Julie Parson-Nesbitt
Elementary Age Students

First Place
By Robin Saywitz
Haven Middle School, Seventh grade

Untitled
The meadow is an ocean of green
Dotted with islands of flowers
The bees are the sailors.
Flying from flower to flower
Rowing from island to island.

Second Place
Emmy Jones
Haven Middle School, Eighth grade

Future
If you close the door
on imagination
and dreams
you too will become
just an image in a book
or a word on a page
or a pebble in a stream
or a drop in an ocean
and nothing more

so open the door
of your mind
to dreams
and imagine
a future
for yourself
**Third Place**
**Carly Callans**
St. Athanasius School, Third grade

**Socks**
Oh the cotton on my toes
Brings such odor to my nose
Black and white blue and red
Where is your buddy another said
Lost in the hamper, under my bed,
In the wash or caught in the bedspread
Tumbling and turning in a mound
Now the little lost sock is found

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**High School Students**

**First Place**
**Jaclyn Cwick**
Buffalo Grove High School

**Saturdays**
Remember Saturdays and how they used to crunch your toes with rigid black soles?
The days when you had no wardrobe underneath needle stuck name tags that nobody read.
The black ribbon-tied apron that wrapped your waist like green and red bows and
waited for the manager to call:
*Merry Christmas.* 9:00.
It came every Saturday but never all at once. Always creeping from the distance like faint silver bells until the digital letters would sweetly jingle nine. Like determining the first weightless snowflake to fall and touch without melting to air far before the weatherman puts on his winter boots and fuzzy red hat to report delayed plows and interview the cold.
I’d watch you unwrap in a march to your car. I envisioned the sugarplums dancing around your smile and could hear your mind sigh beneath the slam of tall wooden doors. And then I’d slowly clock out hitting each key like fragile xylophone notes. I’d pick up the office phone crossing my fingers and the corners of my eyes. Listening to rings that I can’t hear well anymore. Maybe Mom will be on the other end. Her voice will be soft and I will already understand. Dad’s gone again. Off to see a world through thick snow with no ride for me. It’s the kind of snow that doesn’t come to touch the top of your hat but deliberately hits at the side to gouge at open eyes along with the wind. I hold the phone in my left and untie tired shoes with the right. All I can think is that it can’t be his fault, but the blinding snow.

Second Place
Erin Diamond
Wheeling High School

Pocks
i can’t stop scratching
my whole body itches
and I feel like I’m in kindergarten again
i feel like I’m five and I’m covered with itchy, red scabs
but I’m not
i’m not five
and I have no chick pocks—no rash
just an overwhelming feeling of being unclean

Jeff Downey huffs and puffs as he fiddles with the buttons on my jeans he fantically sucks at my neck and grabs at my chest as if he’s afraid this will end he’s afraid that we’ll stop forgetting who we are and realize that this is all too weird i stare at his hands as they slide down my underwear when did he become a man?

i know those hands
those hands drew chalk people on my driveway
two bumps on the chest to show they were girls
two bumps on the arms to show they were boys
those hands left red marks on my back
he always gave the best five stars
i know those hands

he closes his eyes and bites down on his lip and I stare up at him
i try to remember what he looked like at seven—what i looked like at seven
all I can remember are our hands when we counted the chicken pocks on my legs

Third Place
Amy Farnsworth
Buffalo Grove High School

Afterlife
Vacancy insisted we stay
to watch lightning climb up telephone poles
and rearrange letters on neon signs promising paradise,
but I saw no ocean view
from this opaque window
only road kill
on the night when headlights collided with antlers
and suddenly I thought maybe we should have stopped
back in St. Louis
for a sense of direction.

When I entered the narrow hallway
I rang the service bell as my fingers tapped against
the front desk waiting for luxury
but no bell hop helped me
carry my baggage
to room 412
where a man would touch the door knob with nubby fingers
the same fingers that discovered narcotics in the night stand drawer
that replaced a priest’s daily sermon.
“I stopped believing in God today,” I said.
And you worried
so you apologized when they didn’t put mints on my pillow
and muttered “sorry” when the rattling of the ice machine
kept me up all night
when cubes were forced to commit soft drink suicide.

He told me it was paradise
but maybe concussions lead to lies
that make us believe in good looks like
the air brushed Tyra Banks
that promotes cleavage
enhanced by a black push up bra
as her skin gleams light
on the middle of the highway
only to see more signs that make us purchase
the fresh brewed Folgers
and make us listen to
the local radio station
that plays the top twenty hits
only to drive us to distraction
when we turn the radio dial
and change the song
that forces us to
believe in life, before room service.

Honorable Mention
Avery Ucker
Evanston Township High School

Hot Night
When the night air is your generously sized Aunt Martha
squashing you between her breasts
and you climb between those crisp white sheets only to find
that they have melted
somehow,
you know it’s going to be a while
before your lids are glued for the night.

Soon the freshly brushed mass of brown
becomes a damp tangle pressed against your flushed cheek,
the arm beneath your pillow spasms
every muscle bursting to relax.
Frustrated.
the blanket pillow has transformed so that
somehow
you’re trapped in the middle of it, and now it’s concrete,
and you can’t move anymore.

You can only lie there
and let your blood rimmed eyes
watch the wall
and watch

and watch
ADULTS

First Place  
Patricia McMillen  
Oak Park

He who has ears

I.

Once upon a time all the world spoke and the whole earth was of one language,  
that daily, mundane, abused, that ill-prized medium,
of once speech,

that instrument of deception and revelation—

used the same (Or: few) words—

that material thing, that knife, rag, boat/

Then “Come,” they said to one another, “come,” they said, Go to,
reed become pipe/tree trunk become drum/

Let us bake bricks, and let us burn them thoroughly

mud become clay flute/

Let us build a tower whose top may reach up unto heaven

conch shell become summons to freedom/

and YHWH said “Here they are, one people with a single language,

that old, material utensil,

and this they begin to do. Now nothing will be impossible for them.

What poetry is made of,

Let us go down then and confound their language.”

What poetry is

Therefore is its name called Babel,

What poetry is made of is so old

[that is Babylon].

so familiar, that it’s easy to forget

because the Lord there confounded the language of the world

it’s not just the words

II.

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven,

not just the words,

like the rush of strong wind,

but sounds,

and there appeared tongues as of fire. And they began to speak in other tongues,

sounds, speech in its first endeavors

as the Spirit gave them utterance. At this crowds gathered,

(every poem breaks silence that had to be overcome)
bewildered as each one heard them in his own language
Melancholy Girl

-- Chapungu Sculpture Exhibit, Chicago Botanic Garden

You turn your face to hide
behind the curtain of your hair,
close your eyes against the sun
that has no right to shine.
It rains inside your soul.

You have been melancholy a long time,
sadness ingrained in your opal stone
before the spirit of the carver
took up his handmade tools,
before the gardeners made a spot
among the ferns for you.

Melancholy Girl, are you sad
because your sisters leave the well
with jugs empty as air?
Because young ears ignore the elders
who teach your ancient culture?
Or do you fear the eagle-god
shelters the last egg between his talons?

Maybe melancholy runs through your veins
intrinsic as blood,
casts a shadow deep within your stone,
a shadow as large as the one that falls
from the sun today,
the one in which I take comfort.

Third Place
Patricia McMillen
Oak Park

Allori’s ‘Judith With the Head of Holofernes’

Filling a Medici commission, love-sick Cristofano fits his oval face
on Holofernes’ head, on Judith’s lips

his lover’s pout. That aged nurse who peers
from canvas right with dumb concern is meant,
no doubt, to be me, centuries later—

mere witness to the sheen of satin robes
rose-glow of flesh, music of light and dark—
but I’d be Judith here, and you, my Love,

my painter-prey. Think if I could but learn,
from looking, how it feels to love Woman!
--is it like being dangled by the hair,

one more humiliated general
whose downfall will inspire his enemies
to victory over his beloved King?

Or may I not shudder along with you
as day after day, from my desktop, cool
Judith gazes in postcard-sized triumph,

Allori’s swollen eyes, even reduced,
dark with misery— not share with you this
self-portrait as decapitated head?

Honorable Mention
Wendy Anderson
Highland Park

Blossoming

A hunter found her suit
in some leaves, way back in the woods.
This was many months after she went missing minutes from home, in broad daylight.
She was sixteen, and blonde,
on her way for a swim.
He’d walked by the suit before, but thought nothing—
kids had gone to the pond for years
to skinny-dip, maybe drink a bit, or hang with friends.
Then he heard the one she was wearing that day
was blue, and told someone.

Teams from miles around
set to work with dogs.
An anxious blue-tick hound,
good at his job,
found her leg bone.

Her parents, on television, cried.
Her mother said she was both
deeply sad and relieved.
You could see in her soft, plump face
that she was still a good person
who grocery-shopped and carried on.
She still loved her husband
and the child she had left.
She wasn’t quite real anymore,
but she was kind.

That happened in Massachusetts,
far enough away.
But they never caught who did it.
They found her pieces,
but not the whole, freaky awfulness of him.

This morning, my girl,
eleven, and blonde,
asked to ride her bike to school
She had to be there early,
earlier than most kids
would be walking.
As she lifted her face,
still blossoming into who she might be,
my heart lurched.
I don’t know how I’d stand it, I thought.
I’d have to be drugged forever
or taken behind the barn and shot.
When a bomb falls in a war zone,
a mother lifts her arms
to cover her child—
the instinct is always there.
This crime disallowed instinct.
And not the immense arms of husband and family
and the thousand comforting arms of friends,
could ever dim that worst and final grief:
I couldn’t protect her; I wasn’t there.

This morning, anyway,
I drove my girl to school.

Poetry Judge

Dr. Haki R. Madhubuti is founder and publisher of Third World Press, a well-respected, 35 year old independent publishing house dedicated primarily to Black thought and literature. Dr. Madhubuti, poet, educator, essayist and editor, has written Don’t Cry, Scream and Groundwork: New And Selected Poems Don L. Lee / Haki R. Madhubuti from 1966 - 1996, and many other works. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Book Award and the Gwendolyn Brooks Distinguished Poets Award.

Acknowledgements

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The prizes in poetry this year are awarded in remembrance of:

Robert C. Busch
Brian Garrick
Jules Echelman
Melva and Merle Kingman
Contributions

Contributions to the Jo-Anne Hirshfield Memorial Poetry Fund are welcomed, and will enable this program to continue.

Gifts may be forwarded to:
Library Director
Evanston Public Library
1703 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60201

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In loving memory of

Jo-Anne Hirshfield
who found pleasure and delight in poetry

Her family has dedicated funds entrusted to the Evanston Public Library
to award prizes for outstanding new poetry writing.

It is our hope that poets of all ages
will be inspired and encouraged,
and that the funds will serve
to reward excellence in poetry writing
as a memorial to Jo-Anne.

Dr. and Mrs. Hyman Hirshfield
daughters, Laura, Leslie, and Deborah,
and grandson Justin Garrick