

P O E T R Y



F O U N D A T I O N

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Billy Collins and Samuel Menashe Win Major New Prizes for American Poets

FIRST PEGASUS AWARDS GIVEN AT CHICAGO'S MILLENNIUM PARK

CHICAGO — The Poetry Foundation announced that Samuel Menashe and former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins are the winners of its first Pegasus Awards. The announcement was made at a dinner ceremony last night on the new Pritzker Stage at Millennium Park in Chicago. The prizes honor achievements not already acknowledged by other awards.

The Neglected Masters Award of \$50,000 was presented to Samuel Menashe of New York City. Designed to bring renewed critical attention to the work of an under-recognized, significant American Poet, the Award includes publication of a volume of Menashe's selected poems by the Library of America. In presenting the award, John Barr, president of The Poetry Foundation, said, "Samuel Menashe is an American original. Amazingly, he has not until now been recognized, picked up, praised, or adopted by the institutions of contemporary poetry. He is the perfect first recipient for our Neglected Masters Award."

Billy Collins received the "Mark Twain Poetry Award" of \$25,000, recognizing a poet's contribution to humor in American poetry. The Award is given in the belief that humorous poetry can also be seriously good poetry, and in the hope that American poetry will in time produce its own Mark Twain. Barr noted "Billy Collins has brought laughter back to a melancholy art. He shows us that good poetry need not always be somber poetry. And he has done American poetry a great service. His readings have filled concert halls from coast to coast, and many of those filling the seats are discovering poetry for the first time."

Both prizes are given for a lifetime's work. No applications or unsolicited nominations are accepted. The Poetry Foundation believes that targeted prizes can help redress underappreciated accomplishments, diversify the kinds of poetry being written, as well as widen the audience for the art form. With this in mind it intends to create additional prizes in the years ahead.

BILLY COLLINS

Born in New York City in 1941, Billy Collins is the author of eight collections of poetry, most recently *Nine Horses* (2002) and *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems* (2001), both from Random House. Edward Hirsch selected his *Questions About Angels* for the National Poetry Series in 1991. *The Best Cigarette*, a CD recording of his poetry, was issued in 1997. He has received fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He served as United States Poet Laureate from 2001 to 2003, during which time he launched the Poetry 180 Website—a different poem for every day of the school year—which encouraged students to experience poetry for enjoyment without the threat of being quizzed about it. He edited the related anthology *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry* (Random House, 2003).

Billy Collins attended Holy Cross College and took his doctorate at the University of California (Riverside) in 1971. Since then, he has taught composition and literature at CUNY's Lehman College in the Bronx, and as writer at Sarah Lawrence College.

He has appeared regularly on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion." In praising his work, John Updike has said: "Billy Collins writes lovely poems. Limpid, gently and consistently startling, more serious than they seem, they describe all the worlds that are and were and some others besides."

SAMUEL MENASHE

Writing in his preface to *The Niche Narrows: New and Selected Poems*, Dana Gioia observes, "the public career of Samuel Menashe demonstrates how a serious poet of singular talent, power, and originality can be largely overlooked in our literary culture."

Samuel Menashe was born in New York City in 1925 and has lived in the same West Village apartment for nearly five decades. He went through infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia and served in World War II, surviving the German offensive later known as the Battle of the Bulge. After the war he took his Bachelor's degree at Queens's College in 1947 and earned a Doctorat d'Université at the Sorbonne in 1950.

His first collection, *The Many Named Beloved*, with an introduction by Kathleen Raine, was rejected by several American houses before being published by Victor Gollancz in England in 1961. *No Jerusalem But This* appeared in 1971, followed by *Fringe of Fire* in 1973. Viking brought out *To Open* in 1974 and his *Collected Poems* appeared from the University of Maine in 1986. He was included in the Penguin Modern Poets anthology in 1996. *The Niche Narrows* was released by Talisman House in 2000.

His poems have appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *The Yale Review*, among other literary magazines. In 1957 or 1958, he received the Longview Foundation Award of \$300.

POEMS BY THE PEGASUS AWARD WINNERS

BILLY COLLINS

Litany

*You are the bread and the knife,
The crystal goblet and the wine ...*
—Jacques Crickillon

You are the bread and the knife,
the crystal goblet and the wine.
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white apron of the baker
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
the plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.
And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.
There is just no way you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,
but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show
that you are neither the boots in the corner
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,
the evening paper blowing down an alley,
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees
and the blind woman's tea cup.
But don't worry, I am not the bread and the knife.
You are still the bread and the knife.
You will always be the bread and the knife,
not to mention the crystal goblet and—somehow—
the wine.

SAMUEL MENASHE

Here

Ghost I house
In this old flat—
Your outpost—
My aftermath

Rue

For what I did
And did not do
And do without
In my old age
Rue, not rage
Against that night
We go into,
Sets me straight
On what to do
Before I die—
Sit in the shade,
Look at the sky

The Stars Are

The stars are
Although I do not sing
About them—
The sky and the trees
Are indifferent
To whom they please
The rose is unmoved
By my nose
And the garland in your hair
Although your eyes be lakes, dies
Why sigh for a star
Better bay at the moon
Better bay at the moon ...
Oh moon, moon, moon

*“Here” first appeared in the April 2004 issue of Poetry.
“Rue” and “The Stars Are” appeared in the September 2004 issue of Poetry.
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The Poetry Foundation is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audiences. In the coming year, the Foundation will sponsor a recitation contest in the schools, a major new poetry website, and an unprecedented study to understand poetry's place in American culture.

Each year The Poetry Foundation brings a major poet to Chicago to read from his or her work on Poetry Day. This year newly appointed U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser will read November 16th in Chicago on the 50th Anniversary of Poetry Day. Inaugurated by Robert Frost in 1955, Poetry Day is now the most distinguished poetry reading series in the country, having presented T.S. Eliot, Elizabeth Bishop, Carl Sandburg, W.H. Auden, Anne Sexton, John Ashbery, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rita Dove, and Seamus Heaney. U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins appeared at Poetry Day 2002 in celebration of Poetry's 90th Anniversary.

Founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912, *Poetry* is the oldest monthly devoted to verse in the English-speaking world. Harriet Monroe's "Open Door" policy, set forth in Volume 1 of the magazine, remains the most succinct statement of *Poetry*'s mission: to print the best poetry written today, in whatever style, genre, or approach. The magazine established its reputation early by publishing the first important poems of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, H.D., William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, and other now-classic authors. In succeeding decades it has presented—often for the first time—works by virtually every significant poet of the 20th century.

Poetry has always been independent, unaffiliated with any institution or university—or with any single poetic or critical movement or aesthetic school. It continues to print the major English-speaking poets, while presenting emerging talents, in all their variety. In recent years, between a quarter and a third of the authors published in the magazine have been young writers appearing for the first time. On average, the magazine receives over 90,000 submissions per year, from around the world. A *Writer's Digest* author poll has ranked *Poetry* "number one" among journals poets would "most like to see their bylines in." *Poetry* is distributed throughout all 50 States and in 45 foreign countries.