

Unrhymed Entry

POETRY JUDGE

The presentation is over, the winning poem  
read by its author, congratulations decanted  
with the wine. The literati coalesce in clumps.

Clots enlarge in main arteries around the hall,  
losers stand in their silent howls, raw materials  
engorging their faces, accusatory from any angle.

I'm cut adrift from my kind, only lapels  
and dessert plates between us  
except for my position designated by committee.

Emanations seep out like pus from old cuts.  
I feel sticky where they press it in my palm,  
or ooze it in my ear coded beneath the protocol:

"Who the hell are you to declare  
that tiresome bit of modern mediocrity better  
than my flawless sequence based on Baudelaire!"

More than monetary reward, this night involves  
layers of hide, interference with basic health,  
astrology and God. I've shot down hope, stymied

passages of music, recommendations, altered  
calendars. I concentrate on the winner's joy,  
rattling my ice, the certainty of my decision.

But I, too, have worn the pewter smile of those  
gulping their libations, tucking their volumes  
in brief cases or under damp arms.

I can rhyme with what I read in their eyes.

--Glenna Holloway