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## *Cal Poly Undergrad Wins Academy of American Poets Contest*

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly English major Jess Zwicker has been selected as the winner of the university's 2012 Academy of American Poets Contest.

Nationally published poet and Cal Poly lecturer Leslie St. John selected Zwicker's poem "No One Is Lost" because St. John was "haunted by the images." Zwicker, of Thousand Oaks, will receive \$100 from the Academy of American Poets.

Zwicker's poem focuses on a lighthouse that stands as a symbol of hope against a darkened landscape.

St. John was impressed by the poem's "teeter-totter dance between something violent, destructive and something glimmeringly hopeful. The poem evokes images of natural disaster and terrorist attacks while also giving the antidote of workers with their generous, path-illuminating light.

"I appreciate its world and how it makes me respond as a reader," said St. John.

English professor Kevin Clark concurred with St. John's assessment of Zwicker's talent for creating mood with dreamlike imagery. "Jess is only a junior, and while her fiction has won awards in the recent past, her poetry is also proof of her sophisticated way with words," he said. "This poem evokes deep sonorous feeling."

English undergraduate Kate Sugar, from San Diego, and journalism undergraduate Victoria Billings of Atascadero earned honorable mention for their poems "Seasonal Dryad" and "White White White," respectively.

Sugar's poem renders a child's perceptions of objective reality and dreamy imagination. Billings' "Seasonal Dryad" is a carefully scripted poem about transformation," St. John said. "It's not an easy poem to read, it warrants multiple reads."

Clark said, "Jess, Kate and Victoria are testament to their own poetic talents as well as the continually inventive assets of students in the College of Liberal Arts and the university as a whole."

A former poetry editor of The Sycamore Review, St. John is a widely published poet whose lush verse is, according to Clark, both sonically and imagistically dense and persuasive. "Leslie's gorgeous poems depict the inner workings of the mind as it encounters hardship and transformation," he said.

St. John has just published her first volume, "Beauty Like a Rope."

The Academy of American Poets contest is sponsored by the Cal Poly English Department and the New York-based Academy of American Poets, a longstanding advocate for the art of poetry.

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