

SENTINEL LITERARY QUARTERLY APRIL/MAY 2015

POETRY COMPETITION

ADJUDICATION REPORT

BY

MARK TOTTERDELL

I found judging this batch of 227 poems a difficult but enjoyable task. The sheer variety of styles and subjects reminded me of what a huge and diverse thing poetry is. There were, inevitably, poems about love, bereavement, war and nature. There were several about the indignities of ageing. There were some desperately sad poems about relationships, there were wildly inventive flights of fancy across time and space. There were some that read like chopped up prose, others that set themselves formal challenges of structure and rhyme which they met to a greater or lesser extent. There were some richly-worded poems, which, even after I'd read twice, I didn't understand. It's possible I've missed some subtle brilliance, but I felt I'd given them a fair chance. Even though there were many which didn't have the necessary qualities to make them contenders, I enjoyed the experience, each time I read one, of entering the unique imagination of another human being.

I was drawn towards poems that I wished I'd written myself, but did my best to be open towards those whose style and subject matter were very different from those I favour. I could say I was looking for freshness, originality, memorability, cleverness, honesty, control, confidence or any number of specific elements. But more accurately I was hoping for, and occasionally finding, that undefinable combination of factors that wowed me and made a poem impossible to ignore.

Many poems let themselves down through carelessness; typos, spelling mistakes, rogue apostrophes. These flaws weren't necessarily fatal in themselves, but these poems then had to have other merits to win me

over. I was particularly annoyed by lack of punctuation. There is a case to be made sometimes for writing a poem with no punctuation at all; I've done so myself. But often it merely leads to ambiguity, and not the good kind that enriches a poem. And maybe it's just me, but I want consistency; if you're using commas in the middle of a sentence, I want a full stop at the end, even when it's also the end of a line.

I began by reading every poem, marking it on the back as a yes, a no or an undecided. Then I read them all again, marking them again, without referring to my original mark, and not allowing myself the luxury of indecision this time. This was to allow any subtle merits of poems to come through that I might have missed the first time.

If it was hard to produce a longlist, it was even harder to thin these out to the final nine, and then to pick between them. I tried to be as objective as I could (which is to say, not completely) but ultimately these poems were so various in style and subject that it was like comparing apples with cheese, or chalk with oranges. On another day, some other poems might have made it to the top nine and the final order may have been different.

There were memorable phrases in poems that didn't make it. I loved "horse manure / that has the fresh lustre / of black puddings"; "A portcullis of blue benevolent rain"; "you turned up dripping at my door / wearing petrichor like cologne"; "cinnamon orgasms"; "billiard ball Earth / on glittered black cloth"; " the wets and pulps / and rots of life"; "In the kingdom of otherwise". And there were many more.

There were some really good poems that just failed to make the final list. I want to give a mention to three that came very close; **Dimitri's Boots** told a wartime story vividly and wittily. **Burnt Toast** dealt deftly with relationships between food and people. **In a Mood** had an amusingly unexpected ending to its single long sentence.

COMMENDED

Calling Collie

This poem uses language unusually; it confuses singulars and plurals, misses out articles, making it strange and memorable; "The path to quarry is rounded / because collie wants world to curve." It reminded me a little of Ted Hughes, a little of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Minor Poet Meets Lesser Panda

A poem about writing poetry, something which is hard to do successfully. I enjoyed the parallels between poet and panda, and I think many poets will appreciate with a smile the way the poet "feels his own watching is special".

Variations on the Wild Plum

A series of beautifully described and evocative sketches, full of lines I wish I'd written myself; "a flashmob of bees appear all at once in its precincts".

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Haribo

Very naughty and clever. A sordid tale, wittily told, which seems to be saying something sadly profound about our society beneath its wickedly rhyming exterior; "But it's no life for a youngster, / shagging a middle aged couple old enough to be her // parents."

Phenomenology

Fourteen lines about the writing of a sonnet, wittily mocking a philosophical movement, and namechecking Heidegger, not that specialist knowledge was needed for it to make me laugh. "The poem

shrank as he hollowed out / each draft until it resembled a skeleton.”
Loose rhymes tighten as it reaches its absurd but logical conclusion.

Seaspeech

It satisfyingly maintains the metaphor of its title throughout as it describes “Moon stuttering its many small words on water”, creating an intensely visual image using words carefully chosen for both sound and sense.

THIRD PRIZE

Rainbow Girl

A poem partly about itself that could very easily have come across as self-indulgent, but it works for me because of its confidence, its control, and its distinctive and attractive voice. Three full stops in the first line, four in the last. A failed sonnet which acknowledges its failure and manages to be funny and moving in thirteen lines. “No idea where / this poem is going”? I don’t believe it for a moment.

SECOND PRIZE

A2 96 33 12

From the bravado of its title, to the boldness of its soundscape; this one leapt out at me from the start. Just ten lines, but it’s doing a lot. It has an authority which invites a close reading of every word, and such a reading is rewarded. The first word “Numbed” seems to be a subtle pun on the number in the title; by the end the narrator once more has a “name”. I love the way the sounds of the words enhance the metaphor in “the scalpel a parasol”; and how much work “welling” is doing in the

final line, both as part of a series of sounds and with its various connotations of meaning.

FIRST PRIZE

Winnats Pass.

This rich evocation of time and place was in contention from the beginning, but only at the very end did it nose ahead. Here there are teeth, tongues, eyes, jaws and shoulders, but also a vivid sense of a specific rocky landscape. "Rocks have a trick, here, of sloughing off / solidity", yes, but so does this poem. Time, land, body; the relationships are subtle and sometimes ambiguous but always satisfying. The wind, the rocks, the land are all personified but also precisely physical, and throughout there is an acute sense of the immensity of deep time.

The Results

POETRY

The poetry judge felt moved by these poems and gave them Special Mentions: *Dimitri's Boots* by Ron Jones. *Burnt Toast* by Natalie Ann Holborow and *In a Mood* by Lesley Burt.

Commended

Gram Joel Davies - *Calling Collie*

David Duncombe - *Minor Poet Meets Lesser Panda*

Anthony Watts - *Variations on the Wild Plum*

Highly Commended

Al Mcclimens – *Haribo*

Al Mcclimens – *Phenomenology*

Angela Arnold – *Seaspeech*

Third Prize

Richard W. Halpertin – *Rainbow Girl*

Second Prize

Peter Wallis - *A2 96 33 12*

First Prize

Julian Dobson - *Winnats Pass.*

SENTINEL LITERARY QUARTERLY SHORT STORY COMPETITION (APRIL/MAY 2015)

ADJUDICATION REPORT

BY

BRINDLEY HALLAM DENNIS

I'm not sure how appropriate it is to talk about judging short stories, or any form of art. What we're really doing is noting to what extent they resonate with our own sensitivities at any particular time. That's one good reason for not getting too downhearted when your stories don't make the prize-winners lists! - and one for not getting too puffed up when they do!

The Sentinel competition isn't filtered. The judge gets to read all the entries. This means that Judges' idiosyncrasies, if you know them, make good targets for the aspiring winner.

I like a story to be told, and to know I've been told it, by a narrator, who, however unreliable or omniscient, overt or hidden, knows, or thinks he

or she knows, why the story is worth telling, and why it's worth telling to me. (The author of course, knows all these things too, perhaps)

As to form and content, from a reading perspective it's rare that how a story is written trumps what it's about, though the form is what makes the content accessible. But it's the content that makes the effort of producing the form worthwhile.

There was something to like in all the stories submitted. They tackled a wide variety of subjects, from inside and out. Yet there are always those submissions that seem more like reports than stories, or like notes for stories not yet written, or accounts of stories that might have been or might yet be told elsewhere. One or two seemed to be the wrong stories to be told in the voices they were told in, and perhaps also, wrong for the audiences they implied. Sometimes you sense what a story is reaching for, though it hasn't grasped it. Sometimes you know exactly what it has grasped, but can't see why. Sometimes you like an approach, but miss the destination.

COMMENDED

Three I Commend are *One Saturday Afternoon*, *Syndactyly*, and *Headphones*.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

I found three other stories to Highly Commend. In no particular order, these included *Theophilus Wall Is Dead*, which posed some interesting questions about name and identity.

There was *This Is Jean, Happy* which captured a life in moments of reflection, reaching for a past that questioned the present it had once been.

The story *In the Smog* strove to communicate the mind of a character striving to communicate.

In traditional order, though, my 3 prizewinners were as follows:

THIRD PRIZE

The Adventure - A third person narrative, told over the shoulder of a four year old boy caught up in a very gowned up series of events.

SECOND PRIZE

Hazel Eyes From Beyond The Veil – This story pierced more than one veil, being told from a cultural perspective distant from my own, yet communicating powerfully its universal truths.

FIRST PRIZE

Rosettenville Kid & The Bookseller – This was another story that crossed cultural, and national boundaries, drawing on what we share as followers of reading, and writing. I liked it not only for that, but also for the conviction with which the narrator told me his story. I believed in that narration, and in the voice in which it was cast.

The results

SHORT STORIES

Commended

Ian Larkin – *Headphones*

Anna Joseph – *One Saturday Afternoon*

Dianne Bown-Wilson – *Syndactyly*

Highly Commended

Ren Watson – *Theophilus Wall is Dead*

Ren Watson – *This is Jean, Happy.*

Catherine Edmunds – *In the Smog*

Third Prize

Jasmine Louise Fisher – *The Adventure*

Second Prize

Beau Rikefe - *Hazel Eyes From Beyond The Veil*

First Prize

Tom Serengeti - *Rosettenville Kid & The Bookseller*

Now accepting entries:

SENTINEL LITERARY QUARTERLY POETRY COMPETITION

AUGUST 2015 | Closing Date: 31-August-2015

For original, previously unpublished poems in English Language, on any subject, in any style, up to 50 lines long (excluding title).

Prizes: £200 (1st), £100 (2nd), £50 (3rd), £20 x 3 (Highly Commended), £10 x 3 (Commended) + publication in Sentinel Literary Quarterly.

Entry fees: £4/1, £7/2, £9/3, £11/4, £12/5, £16/7, £22/10

Judge: Mandy Pannett author of *All the Invisibles* and Poetry Editor, *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*.

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