

Judge's Report and Results, Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (November 2017)

It has been a pleasure to read all these poems – just over 300 of them, and each had its own vitality. Those that reached the shortlist were ones that were read over and over, and each time revealed a little more, as if the reader was delicately unpeeling petals from a rose bud.

All of these poems worked well on the page, but it was the Highly Commended and the top three that had the most heightened linguistic patterning, read beautifully aloud, and did not have one unnecessary word. In some of the other shortlisted poems I felt a little closer editing would have tightened them - removing some extraneous words and in one or two cases finishing on a stronger earlier stanza would have lifted them to the top of the pile.

It was really difficult to settle on the order of the top three poems, they were all well-edited, publishable prize-winning poems, but I chose *Dreamland* because it was so jam-packed with imagery I wanted to read it over and over again for its beauty and craftsmanship. It is a poem that goes on giving and never lets you down.

Dreamland

This is a brilliantly constructed poem packed with well-observed detail, with references and images that ring true and are accurate. The poet, in a breathless list, mentions many of the things related to a seaside town in general and Margate in particular, and does so with a keen eye for the minutia and a true poet's skill. It is her/his specificity and well-developed images that startle:

“...you expect to be leaning on
flaky blue railings, blotched with rust
like cigarette burns, but still as bright
as the memory of the summer skies
in all those glossy deckle-edged postcards.”

The poet is not content with giving the reader simple images, s/he pushes each one beyond the ordinary, much to the reader's delight.

Extremities

This poem plays with the extremes of life - male climber juxtaposed with the woman giving birth and how both can be life-threatening. There is a good sense of the risk with both – the climber caught in a blizzard determined to reach the summit and the domestic danger. There are so many beautiful images:

“I imagine a scattering of climbers
blurred like birds on a cliffside”

“They shed extremities, while I gain

ten carabiner toes dabbed dry
in a white towel's snowstorm”

Another beautifully observed piece that was only just pipped to the post.

Negotiating slugs

Right from its clever title (negotiating as well as coming to terms with) this poet has crammed the poem with fantastic imagery. The narrator has a dilemma with destroying or preserving slugs – this predicament weaves through the entire poem as s/he anthropomorphises these gastropods. The slugs are discovered “heads down at a saucepan/ chummy as rootling hogs” and the poet extends the imagery and thought pattern and as the poem progresses they become babies, cats, kittens. The slugs take on a universality for all creatures, whether human or animal. Super poem.

Highly Commended:

These poems have powerful images, neat, tight structures and wonderful observation. Each touches the reader with a physical response – in *Grave Marker*, *Whitby Abbey* the reader is struck by the mason knowing the route through stone and how centuries later “you strain to place your fingerprint/ to fix a dream blade’s dance.” In *Of One Matter* the poet very cleverly throws in the most unexpected and shocking penultimate line “I thought of the novice who’d hidden a stillborn in her cell” which is so arresting that it adds significant power to the poem. *A Place to Call Home* has a shock opening, all metaphorical, imposing homelessness as an ideal and the following single line means the reader looks at it explicitly. As the poem proceeds there is hope to remedy the situation, but no direct route to it. All these poems have left a part of themselves on me.

- **Abigail Morley**

The results

Special Mentions:

Answering Julia Copus - Sandra Galton (London)

Machine - Martin Wildman (Kingsteignton)

Commended:

The Call - Audrey Ardern-Jones (Epsom)

The Return - Lyn Thornton (Oxford)

Sometimes, in the snow, I think I see - Gabriel Griffin (Orta, Italy)

Highly Commended:

Grave Marker, Whitby Abbey - Michael Brown (Middlesbrough)

Of One Matter - Derek Sellen (Canterbury)

A Place to Call Home - Jude Neale (Bowen Island, Canada)

Third Prize:

Negotiating slugs - A C Clarke (Glasgow)

Second Prize:

Extremities - Claire Williamson (Chepstow)

First Prize:

Dreamland - Mary Anne Smith (Canterbury)

Many thanks to Abegail for judging and selecting these poems from 308 entries this quarter. It is heart-warming to see some previous Sentinel Champions on this list including Derek Sellen whose poem *Standing with Oliver in Oliver's Garden* won second prize in the Sentinel Annual Poetry Competition 2010. A C Clarke's *In the Walled Garden* was highly commended in the Sentinel Annual Poetry Competition 2015, and Vanitas by Gabriel Griffin won third prize in the Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition (August 2017). Jude Neale, one of the highly commended poets this quarter is the author of *Splendid in its Silence* – second prize winner in the SPM Publications Poetry Book Competition (2016) and *A Blooming* (SPM Publications – forthcoming May 2018).

These poems will be published in print and online on 31st January 2018 in Sentinel Literary Quarterly magazine.

Congratulations all.

Nnorom Azuonye
Administrator