

SENTINEL LITERARY QUARTERLY JANUARY 2022 POETRY COMPETITION JUDGE'S REPORT AND RESULT

It was certainly a challenge to select twelve poems from a pile of 373. It was a privilege to read the unique thoughts of so many people. There was a huge variety of subjects. As well as nature in its many forms, love, ageing, death and grief, there were inevitably some about the pandemic, and several about our environmental crises.

I read them all twice before starting to make any decisions. Some poems I felt were not ambitious enough, others were too ambitious. Some started well but faded by the end. A few used rhyme and poetic forms, with more or less success. Some were clearly written out of deep emotion but didn't succeed as poems for me. Some were marred by spelling mistakes and inconsistent punctuation. There were some that, even after several readings, I didn't understand. I apologise if I've missed some subtle brilliance.

The pile gradually got smaller. By the time I was down to sixty or so, rejecting poems became hard. Many good ones, inevitably, failed to make the final cut.

I tried to judge as objectively as possible while acknowledging the inevitability of personal preferences influencing me. If I did it again, I suspect that some of my decisions would have been different. But, insofar as choosing the 'best' from so many varied poems is a worthwhile thing to attempt, here are my choices.

SPECIAL MENTION

Eleanor Walsh - *Lockdown*

Of several poems dealing with the subject, this one captured the surreal nature of the experience with quirky and amusing details; 'I play a plastic recorder through my nose'.

Chloe Orrock - *My mother introduces me to winter*

A subtle and intriguing updating of the Persephone myth, in which a daughter finds out 'what pomegranate seeds could do'.

Martin William Rieser - *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*

After Hokusai woodcut 1814

A story of creatures who "search my body / for lost pearls", which adds new layers of dark eroticism to an already strange and sexy work of art.

COMMENDED

Chloe Orrock - *divination*

One side of an overheard phone conversation is at the heart of a poem with striking images; 'the sun is staring drunkenly through the train window'. The vivid details help the reader create a story out of what isn't spelt out.

Mary Gilonne - *Ghosting the Rabbit Hour*

Intriguing, full of unexpected words and startling phrases. A non-human narrator 'fletch[es] / every leaf-line with feathers of light', but who are they addressing?

Maggie Wadey - *Girl in a Landscape*

An assured and affectionate portrait in words of the girl 'half faun, half Goth', with a delightful twist at the end.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Mary Gilonne - *Day Job on the Edge*

Brilliantly uses the specialist language of roofing, 'square saw battens', 'tile ripper', 'old tingles', to construct a poem which actually seems to be about so much more.

Perla Kantarjian - *my daughter is an oasis and*

Full of imaginative language, a subtle poem that tenderly evokes the relationship between a mother and her daughter who 'looks into me lucent, her eyes voice / chimeras into mine'.

Christopher M James - *Traces*

A deftly observed poem, describing a landscape where 'A hand / has wiped leftover pigments / on a cloth of sky', which shifts neatly into a poignant memory of the time when 'you tattooed the ready earth'.

THIRD PRIZE

Maggie Wadey - *My Lover's Cat*

Just eleven lines long, this poem somehow crept up on me until it found itself in the top three. I love the delightful detail of 'mysterious, / misshapen gourds', the musicality of the cat's 'whispered / sniggers of whisker-twitching lust', and the tour de force ending which reinforces my feeling that the poem isn't ultimately about the cat at all.

SECOND PRIZE

Alan Coombe - *The Glider*

Lanyon askance

I'm not usually drawn to ekphrastic poems, but this was one of two to make it onto the list. Its energetic use of language made it stand out from the start; 'kittiwake cumuli', 'the involution of sky grasps grey seas', 'The land blows like tossed corn becoming

sky'. I read the poem, checked out the painting and read the poem again; words and image complemented each other brilliantly.

FIRST PRIZE.

Chloe Orrock - *Among the stars*

This poem stood out through what it didn't say as much as what it did. There are some wonderful images; the heat 'softening our thoughts to sponge in the treacle air', the shoes, heartbreakingly, 'holding each other close in the dark / like lovers'. The words suggest much more than they say. The poet encourages the reader to fill in the gaps to complete a story. A poem so clever and moving had to rise to the top.

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