

I was delighted to be asked judge this year's competition and it was a pleasure as always to read the submissions. I know from Luigi that poems come from all over the UK and overseas, but it is gratifying to know there are quite a number of Kent-based poets who support the Save As Writers competition and help make it a success. I know Luigi works tirelessly on this and other ventures and we are fortunate to have him scurrying away behind the scenes.

The starting point for any poem is its title (or in some cases lack of one) which has to grab you right from the outset - it can make or break a poem. In Emily Berry's *Dear Boy* (Faber 2013) the reader is spoilt by the intriguing and beautiful titles: *The Incredible History of Patient M.*, *My Perpendicular Daughter* and *Hermann's Travelling Heart* – all absolutely wonderful.

From the entries we had *Recipe for a Sea Worth Watching*, *The Poker Song* and *Mrs Bagnall Explains Magnesium*, all hooking the reader from the start.

The standard of the poems was high which meant umpteen readings to ensure the right ones won a place in the shortlist. The range of subjects and styles was broad, from passionate love poems, war poems, poems about loss, abuse, the very modern technological world and nineteenth century pastiches. A number of ekphrastic poems focused on the work of Monet, Joseph Wright and installations at various galleries including the Tate Modern.

The first read through of any competition highlights the very weak and leaves a long list of other poems to consider. The rejected poems on this first reading are those with overly-poetic language, clichéd phrases, typos and spelling mistakes or in a style that suggest the poet hasn't read any contemporary poetry. It's easy to criticise these poems for their faults, but the poets have taken a chance in entering the competition suggesting they enjoy their craft, are passionate about poetry, not afraid to take a gamble or deal with rejection as part of the submission process, and proving they take their writing seriously.

A winning poem stands out because it is complete in its structure, sound and imagery. It has surprise, imagination, technical ability and is often written by a poet who is prepared to take risks. The seven short listed poems tick many of these boxes with the top three ticking all of them.

I am grateful to all the poets who took the time to enter and support the Save As Writers' competition which each year goes from strength to strength.

The Highly Commended poems are in no particular order:

In the Rose Garden – Clifford Liles
Origami – Margaret Beston
Cuban Soul – Maggie Yaxley Smith
Ravenna – Roger James
Fever Ship – Derek Sellen

Now to the winners.

Third Prize:

Coat Hangers – Victoria Field

Through the grimy gauze of November Snow, /I make the mistake of catching her eye - what wonderful and intriguing opening lines. It sets a sinister tone that is realised in the shocking final line. This poet has really pushed her imagination and carefully crafted each line: women are *hunched like hens... flogging a tin of peas, a shawl,/tools gone to rust*. It has a potency that engulfed me - the poet moves with ease, unravels her story and its horror.

Second Prize:

Slackwater Blues – Jo Field

What is especially effective in this poem is the repetition of the line *Another man done gone* juxtaposed with the stunning imagery which seems to have tumbled effortlessly from this poet's pen. Lines that take your breath away are *Beyond blues on the radio/ a silence of gulls is lapping in her head*, later there's a *scorched back-hint of salt/ and faintly fishy twang of martime mown grass* and *the slow slopping of flesh*. The poem is full of gorgeous language and imagery.

First Prize:

Classification: *Ursus consolativus* – Nancy Charley

This poem always found itself at the top. Working as an archivist I was immediately drawn to it. What I like is the way it takes us from the mundane to the magical, from the laborious task of researching information to discovering the *mussy hibernation, fur's reek* and watching as

when she *wraps arms/ around defined muscle* and her *toes wriggle down femurs* and the way
the title neatly finds its resolution in the final line.