

Save As Poetry Competition 2011

Adjudicators Report by Sarah Jackson

Thank you for inviting me to judge the 2011 Save As Poetry Competition. It's been an honour and a pleasure to read the remarkable range of poems submitted this year. The three poems that I have selected for prizes are each very different in form; all three, however, play out a careful balance between movement and stasis, and between language and silence.

3rd Prize

Third Prize is awarded to 'Brontës' by Alan Gleave. Plenty of poems have been inspired by the myth of the Brontë sisters, but I enjoyed the simple and haunting imagery of this one: sisters 'reeling from the baize table' and tip-toeing past 'the untidy black body' of Branwell. While the poem would benefit from some further editing, there is a steady progression through the stanzas, aided by the poet's skilful use of repetition, enjambment and caesura. The most arresting image comes in the final stanza, where the 'sick days closed about [Anne] like stones'; 'closest to silence', the poet tells us, she spoke 'only to mark the end'.

2nd Prize

I've awarded Second Prize to Roger James for 'Gun'. This is a poem of loss: the loss of a family member and the loss of one's own childhood. Deceptively simple, its sense of nostalgia has a beautifully understated quality. Written in quatrains, this carefully controlled poem offers two opposing images. The first is one of strained orderliness as the poet stacks someone else's bills and letters on the lawn; the second offers us something else entirely: at the bottom of a leather case, the poet 'in a cowboy suit, carrying a gun'. Between these two opposing images, this powerful poem carries the weight of grief.

1st Prize

First Prize goes to Marilyn Donovan for 'Meteor Shower, Isère'. This is a lovely poem that captures the breathless anticipation of adolescence, where seventeen year old girls rush their dinner, grab their sweaters to hurry through a village to gaze up at the stars. These girls know all about 'rods and cones, the way / eyes work in dim light'. Here, however, abroad and without parents, they find themselves on the edge of a different sort of knowing. Poised between the hunger for adulthood and the stillness of a dark night on a narrow road, this poem has a real energy. It is full of well-chosen images – from the 'gently-steaming pile of slurry from the milking shed' and the 'shoaling stars' to the 'six careless girls' who 'open' themselves to the dark. Well done, Marilyn. This is an elegant and moving poem.