Judge’s Report

'This obviously proved to be a popular topic for the competition, and attracted some high quality entries.  The top three, however, stand proudly as of the first order.'

First Prize

**To entry 90. ‘Raskolnikov’**. This poem stands above the rest of the entries. It has a depth and sophistication about it, the other poems lack. There is also a mystery about the poem, which is not mawkish or cod-mystical, but genuinely uncanny, and even menacing. The poem has the atmosphere, tone and sensibility of Mandelstam, and Pasternak, so the poem has the reach and expanse of some of the great Russian poetry of the 20th Century. The organization and shape of the poem into long un-rhymed (occasionally half-rhymed), irregular couplets give the poem a conversational, yet also terse, measured address of the reader. There are startling image complexes here, which veer from the Surreal to something more Expressionist to the unnerving final line: ‘All else is a fever of the sun’. A triumph of a poem.

Second Prize

**To entry 20. ‘Is sixteen’** is a strong poem, which is subtle in its use of traditional forms. The poem is anchored in many ways, which helps to keep the voice at a high level of dramatic tension across lines and through stanzas. The way the poem is very specifically focused in time and history really helps the poem to achieve a precision of voice and sustains its level of address from the beginning of the poem to the end. The use of full rhyme and half rhyme is maintained throughout the poem, quite a feat in a poem of this length, where that sound effect can too often end up sounding trite or forced or tired. There is a dense texture to the language, and at the same time a heightening of the language towards song. This situates the poem between the worlds of Geoffrey Hill and R.F. Langley.

Third Prize

**To entry 96. ‘Military Road’.** This is another poem with a strong sense of place and location. There is an attention to language here, which is precise and sustained, and lends the poem the clarity and a kind of austerity of light, not far away from Dutch painting or even Corot – all entirely fitting for the subject and argument of the poem. The preoccupation of the poem with the etymologies and the precisions of naming, help to maintain the pace of its unfolding, and give the lines a wiry strength.

Other poems to the short list: 82, 88, 2, 25, 34.