

There was a wide range of poetic styles and ideas in the 73 poems offered for selection. All had merit and other judges may well have found the final 10 in any of these. There were poems about relationships, loss, death, the ocean, hope, trees, insects, especially spiders, and historical poems. Some focused on characters. They were written in varying forms: villanelles, free verse, some in set stanzaic patterns, those framed in more traditional structures while others were without capital and punctuation.

It was the lyrical evocations of the natural world and our place within it that appeared as a recurring trope. These were beautifully conceived and delivered, though one in particular shone out because of shorter sentences, harsher sounds and juxtapositions, matter-of-fact tone, its mirroring structure on the page. Many of the poems were reflective and meditative, with a great range of voices: lyrical, meditative, sombre, flippant and ironic. So many poems had the sea and beach as a setting for musing of greater forces in the world and within ourselves, which made it harder for me as I am automatically attracted to these.

Others on short list

- 8      *Hymning* – 2      *green Marble* 4      *ceiling of cloud*
- 44      *Chopin's Water Fountain*      73      *Mind Fish*

Highly Commended

53      *These slow mornings*: a strong piece that captures the morning's ritual and meditates on it till it closes on the pun 'slow mourning of our living'. Excellent control of language, the detail of the breakfast routine

72      *South Beach Moonah* – a wonderful poem about the South Beach and the trees. It is a portrait of a woman in three parts – initially her connection and communion in the natural world, which is disrupted in second canto with sound of chainsaws, and the last in the dry season, where the woman speaks the last lines lamenting time and age, hoping the trees 'endure'. Well crafted with a good voice, especially in the first section.

Third place: 5 *Lost Art of Pastels* – a villanelle that skilfully weaves its narrative within this form. Intriguing piece of writing that may be a metaphor for the artistic process, which starts with a voice, matter-of-fact and instructive ('you are invited to fish ... just a hook, a line') that shifts to more lyrical lines in descriptions of ocean and colour ('workings of turquoise and dream' ... under talc light from far flung moons). It uses the villanelle form to construct repetitions – 'invited to fish', 'five oceans, one lush island') that appear and reappear in different forms to mirror the process of creation.

Really liked this format and the way the poem came together.

Second place: 64 *Ritual*

The top two places were hard to separate – very different styles of writing. I was really taken by this poem. The poem is made of two 15 lines sections. One of the left hand side of page, the other on the right bottom. The first section can be seen as the 'sea is lifting' – a sombre musing on the nature of ocean movements, the shifting tides, the 'machine' within that are the natural forces, the connection between sea and sky. This ocean that is 'a being, eternal'. But there a darkness here -a 'catastrophe,' references to 'graves' and 'white corpse yard'. It connects all the history of life, the ocean from the beginning, and makes for a reading, that you go back to, wishing to read further on the subject. The sentences are short and matter-of-fact, scientific terms where all the past 'intersect to spark motion, perpetual'. The ocean as Machine is captured in the voice, tone, line lengths. A poem you can read over and over and find more.

First place: 51 *silent flights*

A wonderful poem. It operates on many levels allowing a richness of meaning as well as nuanced rendering of the material. Great voice, and tone is controlled skilfully as is the patterns of imagery of flight that connect the personal and public dimensions of the poem. It is meditative in tone, lyrical in approach, threading patterns of imagery of flight – the two wings of blankets folded back, the moth, wings tapping at glass - till we arrive in the world of covid with aeroplanes 'stilled', flight attendants working other jobs, juxtaposed with 'home dreams take flight', to 'die in the night'.

It is a meditation that begins with the image of the bed with 'blankets folded back like two wings' that shifts to a moth at the back door, described in metaphor, 'chrome arrow-head of moth/hieroglyph, on the mortality of things.' The title appears in the first line of the next stanza in anaphoric lines of 'how many secret flights/how many hours had wings.

Images of flight, wings, moth, specific scientific reference to 'Lepidoptera' tying together the couple in bed to dead moth, to the intrusive world of media communications, Instagram and the harsh world outside of Covid. I was moved by this evocation of the relationships between individuals and our relationships with the world around us. A great piece of writing.