

## Judges' Comments on Adult Poetry

### JOINT FIRST

#### Theme 2

##### The Coming of Water

The poem starts gently.

Water, personified and clothed, makes its entrance innocently enough,  
*dress[ed]...with rain/...mizzle souse and patter.*

It quickly gains momentum, growing more threatening as it strides across the land, bringing chaos and destruction:

*run[ning] off/ the camber of rainbows/ in my coat of monsoons/  
mak[ing] aquariums of villages... flooding plains.*

Water's eye travels across the world it is ravaging.  
No living being is safe, no human plea answered.

This is a skilfully constructed poem - the lack of punctuation allows words to tumble and fall like the deluge they describe, and quick-fire couplets list the relentless onslaught:

*my liquid vocables  
in beck gill runnel burn*

*a million fingertips drum  
on barrels gutters window sills*

A bleak vision of a world overwhelmed and powerless.

### JOINT FIRST

#### Theme 2

##### The Feeding

This is a powerful meditation on the restless edge between land and sea and the people whose precarious lives it shapes.

Their relationship with the sea, eternally present yet ever-changing, shapes their sense of time – the human span against the immensity of deep time - all held in fragile balance,  
*Everything in exchange.*

The sea and the wind *feed* and *feast* on the land:  
*The villagers say it's only right the water  
brings change, time itself needs fed...*

*...What's a hundred years to a beach?*

The poem is rooted in a sense of place, where time is marked by memories and stories of past storms, like *...the famous...one in the red frame above the fire...*  
*...Each wave reared up with its own story.*

There is a wealth of striking imagery to support the chosen theme:

*A century of salt has buckled the pier,  
that skinny wrist tied with a bangle of boats.*

...  
*...it was the dead beast brought ashore*

*in a tangle of rope pale as old veins.*

And at the end, the paradox of recognising both the creative power of the sea,  
*Somewhere between the two storms we fuse,  
caught in the moment before the water cracks.*

*That being the inspiration for life, the lust for it.*

and the pathos of being alive:

*the blue ache of the sea....*

*... the big sadness of it all.*

### **THIRD**

#### **THEME 2**

##### **Advancing Waves of Song**

In this poem, a female Gaelic poet and singer is given voice from beyond the grave. She tells of her lifelong struggle to be heard by her clan and taken seriously as a female Bard.

She speaks of her passion for song, her mind

*...flooded/ with surging waves of sound, catching ...tunes out of the sea salted air.*

She sees herself, though *just a woman*, as the chronicler of her people,

*...the voice of love, exile and drowning.*

Her voice is elemental, mythic, at one with the sea, the curlew, *the whispers of winds.*

It rises from a place of deep longing and belonging, and defies all attempts to thwart and silence it:

*I stood up at ceilidhs – they could not stop me -  
and cast my words like herring nets...*

The final verse is a chilling, defiant invitation to approach her grave and to

*...look closer – come, look at me closer.*

The poem rings with vivid images

*...I beachcombed  
poems like salt sieved driftwood.*

*...hummed words like leaping salmon psalms...*

that evoke both the passion of the Bard and the land that so inspired her.

## **HIGHLY COMMENDED**

### **Theme 2**

#### **Going for the Gap**

A poem about the overwhelming power of Nature, felt in the *thrusting lift* of the ocean and the imminent threat of earthquake.

All the action and drama of a kayaking expedition are captured – *the surf's roar ... the thundering wall of water ... paddling hard into exploding surf...*

A sense of danger is never far away as the kayakers *search for a gap,/not knowing if we'll be spat out of the frenzy.*

But the first and last stanzas hint at a deeper sense of impermanence and impending catastrophe – *the unseen danger,/the fault line...beneath the waves.*

And later, the *line of signs* on the shore, improbable instructions on what to do if an earthquake strikes.

## **COMMENDED**

### **Theme 1**

#### **The Autumn Country**

A feeling of melancholy and regret settles on this poem like soft autumn rain.

The poet returns home, now as much a visitor *filling my old space for a little while* as the tourists who *clog[...] up the lanes* like *pink-footed geese*.

There is no judgment, just a weary-eyed acceptance of how things are.

The poem ends on a note of deep sadness.

*There are plans for a spaceport on the moors  
as though salvation must lie anywhere but home.*