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RESEARCH FOUNDATION
ROYAL VICTORIA
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The Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital
and
The Research Foundation

are proud to present the
Winning and Commended Poems for the

'Making Time for Poetry'
Poetry Competition

In celebration of Poetry Day Ireland 2020

Teen Category

Theme 'Time' or 'The Body'

Judge: Summer Meline



Supported by Poetry Ireland for Poetry Day Ireland 2020

There Will
Be Time



I would like to thank all of the writers who submitted poems to the Teen Category. I was amazed and delighted at the many different ways that these poems addressed the themes of 'Time' or 'The Body' (or both!).

There were poems about grandparents, clocks, trees, sea swimming, ghosts, unrequited love, body image, and Covid-19. There were poems with rhyme schemes and stanzas, free verse poems with energetic voices, and submissions that gave a nod to other, well-known poems.

Some poems were prophetic, a few were layered with concern, and many were hopeful. But all of the poems were a pleasure to read. Keep writing!

FIRST PLACE: At Peace, In Pieces

I chose this for first place because it skilfully weaves together all the components of an excellent poem: the theme is consistent throughout, the form has been carefully controlled; the rhyming is subtle and doesn't interrupt the excellent imagery; the use of formative language is very effective. I especially like the fact that the poem is open to a number of different interpretations.

This is an assured poetic voice, with just the right balance of linguistic confidence and emotional detachment to create an unforgettable poem. I look forward to reading more from this poet in the future. Well done!

SECOND PLACE: Sea Salt

This poem astounded me with its mature and observant voice. There is a constant energy running throughout the poem, which relentlessly makes use of body imagery. The vivid phrases are full of sensory pleasures and displeasures, and the mother – daughter relationship ebbs and flows in the unsteadiness of the free verse form. There is an addictive interplay between darkness and light, and I encourage the writer to continue exploring this fascinating poetic voice. Wonderful work.

THIRD PLACE: The Rooster

With many fabulous poems to choose from, I found myself continually coming back to The Rooster. This is a poem that makes me smile, even though it deals with the inevitability of age; it contains some wise and weighty universal truths. But it succeeds by using simple language and imagery to convey quite complex, layered ideas: the way we change over time, the way we harden and take an immutable form, like the clay. The overall consensus, however, is that our hardened forms are OK. I am awed by the depth and wisdom of this poem, and its simplicity is delightful. Excellent work.

HIGHLY COMMENDED POEMS

Vinyl in the Attic

This is a wonderful poem and the theme of time is managed with skill. The imagery is handled well, with snapshots of the many memories usually boxed away. I was absorbed by the sensory detail in the poem, and the empathy of a younger person toward parents. The form is perfect for the subject material – clipped phrases, no unnecessary words – a deft linguistic recreation of sorting through dusty memories.

Milestones

I commend this poem for its skilful weaving of time through the stanzas and through the anchor of the stone wall. This is a poet who understands how to convey an idea poetically and also tell a story along the way. I would encourage this poet to continue working in the stanza form and keep using these recurrent images to weave concepts together. Wonderful work.

It's Time

I was absolutely delighted to read this poem in quintains with a rhyme scheme of A-B-C-C-A. This form serves the poem exceptionally well: the rhymes don't interfere with the imagery of the poem, and the five-line stanzas give each section extra energy. I also enjoy the narrative voice – as a god who decides that he/she has had enough of controlling everything – and it beautifully conveys the joys and the sorrows of being all-powerful. I encourage this writer to continue writing poetry and using form, in particular. In the right hands, it is a skill that can transform a poem from good to exceptional. Well done.

The Trees

I commend this poem 'The Trees' for its simple language, controlled imagery, and focussed stanzas. I love the anchoring image of the trees running throughout, and the slight variation in the final line of each stanza. The poet has an understanding of figurative language that serves the poem perfectly. There are no more words than necessary. The final effect is mesmerising in its simplicity. Well done.

60% Water

I commend this poem, '60% Water' for its beautiful sensory imagery and the effective use of stanzas and rhyme, which never sound overwrought. This poet uses figurative language with great skill, for example, the wonderful line 'My feet are pale, / A blank page painted by / My veins'. Line breaks are carefully considered, and no word is out of place. This writer is observant and I highly encourage him / her to continue using this skill by writing poetry. Beautiful work.

Summer Meline,

April 2020

At Peace, In Pieces

Your eyelids fluttered to a gentle close
As I laid you down to sleep.

Like a mighty oak striking the forest floor,
You sank into the mattress, deep.

Heavy as an ancient river,
Your breath flowed out into the air

And came towards me,
Running tender tendrils through my hair.

As I hugged my head into your chest,
I felt your pulse hum through your skin.

It beat itself into my cheek,
A wooden spoon in a copper tin.

I resisted,
Planted like a rock
Against your siren spell,

For I knew that,
If I fell in,
I'd never leave that tempting well.

Sarah Little

1st Place, Teen Category

Sea Salt

I want you to tell me again how rice swells after rain and weddings melt away like milk teeth, how the moon grows in the belly, and how a young Chinese mother holds guilt in the cup of her outstretched hands like table salt or an offering. tell me all that you know about salt, how language can be a kind of untenable thirst. my mother cannot name the colour of salt, nor the tint my eyes turn underwater. she says the ocean has sting, and to prove it she submerges a tiny dune of salt until it petrifies to bone, she that says venus surfaced from the spit of sea salt, she says, she says, she says. my mother has a dream and will not tell me how it ends, but the children drown in miles of sand. she holds my head at both ears. the first time our mother sat at the sea's open door she was eight months pregnant, with us bobbing inside of her. she dreams of sea lions nursing dark, doe-eyed pups, chews on fish and spits up the bones. in the dark I reimagine her belly bursting with floodwater in the birthing pool, her mouth full of soft vowels all running together and packed in like feathers or fish meat and I cannot figure out the breathing spaces in between. the water offers an unwrinkled hand. in the bath, the water sucks at my ear lobes, the gills come naturally, the dead sea percolating through my throat. I sing the children out of the cove like disorientated baby turtles, I silver my fingers. this is what all good daughters transform into. these days I find her in small moments like this

and increments of bone, the ridge off a porcelain spine,
in apothecary bottles of perfumed salts. the radio counts
backwards from the sea. and this is how all mothers
begin and end: thighs glistening scallop-white and
streaked with salt and amnion.

Anya Trofimova

2nd Place, Teen Category

The Rooster

I was younger once.

That is not to say that I am old

But it is to say that I was something that I am now not, nor ever will be.

During recent times,

My mind's eye has turned green

Upon the rumination over memories of the previous person that I was.

An incomparable complacency,

A general lovable laxity in my approach to life.

I acknowledge, with reverence, the wisdom I had attained with ignorance.

I loved clay, in my preadolescence.

I could make a race car, a rooster, a rocket ship, anything!

There's something beautiful about being able to create anything.

But although I am not yet old,

I no longer love playing with clay.

And one day, my time of youth will be over and I will harden and set into my way of life.

I'll be like the rooster.

The one who cannot squawk.

But although the rooster may look like a rooster. It's nothing more than clay.

It can never be anything but clay.

It will always still be clay.

And that's ok.

Shane Gilligan

3rd Place, Teen Category

Vinyl in the attic

The slight tingling of skin

A response to

The gently floating

Dull glitter

An accumulation

On top of

Soft cardboard

And the toughness

That once wasn't

Of childhood toys

And memories.

Almost no sight

Lit by a bare bulb

That buzzed and burned

In a bland yellow glow.

The quiet mutterings

Of night butterflies,

Of a Halloween stereotype,

Of something feared,

But where we lived, harmless.

The thickness of the air

Constricted

Movement, prompting

The expulsion at speed

Of old, tainted air

And the stinging

Of crocodile tears

Next to a once-loved plush

Of the same name.

The smooth perfection
Even after those years
Of the discs which spun a story
Back in '84
While you slept softly
To the sound
Of that seven-minute Queen single
You played until
You didn't anymore.

Woven, printed, worn
Tour shirts from
The bands you saw together
While young people in young love.
Bon Jovi.
'Euro Crush 2000'
It reads.

I wear it now
After the use of the excuse
"It's too small"
By both of you
Although it hangs off of me
Like it once did you.

And the vinyls
Are back in the attic
In a country we left
Half a life ago
With the scent of old paper
And once worn perfume

And the memories

Of a life

Where the only me that existed

Was a young, loving couple's hope

Of a future baby.

Caragh Vought

Highly Commended, Teen Category

Milestones

The baby crawls across the floor for the first time

Her mother watches her in awe and cheers her on each pull

She touches the wall feeling its stoney crevices for the first time

She's hoisted into the air, tossed around the room receiving infinite kisses

The toddler walks to the wall for the first time

Her mother is cheering her on every step of the way

She feels the walls stoney crevices once again, different this time

She is raised so high into the sky and receives infinite hugs

The teenager leans against the wall in a huff

Her mother stares at her daughter, wondering how it all changed

She feels the cold wall against her long blonde hair

She looks back at her mother, rolls her eyes and storms away

The woman walks towards the wall reminiscing

She sees the markings from each time that wall was touched

She walks away and into the room, empty for the first time in hours

She sees her mother, lifeless yet full of words, wishing she could watch her one last time.

Amber Sweeney

Highly Commended, Teen Category

It's Time

I'm getting old. Didn't think I would,
Back when I built this cosmos,
When I could destroy planets before thinking
And create creatures before sinking
Into the pride of doing something good.

But now I indulge in it, aware
That I'll have to destroy it all again.
The guilt's like barbed wire
And it sets my insides on fire
And I wish, I wish I didn't care.

I've healed wounds, I've put crying to rest,
I've also caused them both.
I've made dust from blazing stars,
I've torn family and friends apart,
Can I be forgiven, if I thought it was for the best?

Civilisations advance because of me,
And because of me some are forgotten.
I create illusions about the past
I make changes that can't last,
People suffer, all because of me.

This morning I stilled an old man's breath,
He tried to fight against me in vain.
I proved too strong, no surprise,
But upon hearing his family's cries,
I'd had enough of controlling life and death.

Into my skin and bones and teeth I feel the tiredness seep,
I wanted to, needed to, stop and end it all.
Every watch will face be still,
Nothing created, but nothing killed,
Perhaps it's time for me to go to sleep.

Agnetha Kamath

Highly Commended, Teen Category

The Trees

My mother showed me the window,
And told me about the trees,
They were newly sprung and just begun,
I was told they were just like me.

Years later I saw the window,
And gazed at the magnificent trees,
They were big and strong and full of life,
I remembered they're just like me.

Now as I look out the window,
I see a single tree,
It's old and frail and ready to fail,
I'm reminded it's just like me.

Rachel Fletcher

Highly Commended, Teen Category

60% Water

Despite age passing
As light through the years,
Your strength endures
The hurtling from piers.

Drop, splash, weightless hang,
My legs belong to timeless art,
And I admire them through
Stinging eyes: I must restart

The clock. I thrust my arm
Above the wave-crest,
Swelling, mirrored
Lung inside my chest.

Like butterfly wings,
Bruises dance and dapple
With each beat, as hands
Search seaweed, grapple

Slimy strands and grist
Of rock to find the rail.
Displaced in new air
My feet are pale,

A blank page painted by
My veins, and I recall
The pride when doctors
Couldn't find a drop to draw

From my porcelain arm
Moulding never complete
I shrivelled in perfection
Dreaming of the sea.

Sinéad O'Reilly

Highly Commended, Teen Category