

SEÁN DUNNE POETRY AWARD 2024 - LAFCADIO HEARN JAPANESE GARDENS TRAMORE

FIRST PRIZE

1. GIADA GELLI

(Poem: Seeds are not Numbers)

Giada Gelli is a librarian living in Co. na Midhe with her family, a cat and three hens. Besides her Italian debut collection 'Sfumazioni: Poesie' (2004), her poems have featured on *Smithereens*, *Pendemic*, *Poetry of the Wild Flowers* and *Dlúthpháirtíocht*. She is an Italian who came to Ireland as an Erasmus Scholar circa 20 years ago.

Seeds are not numbers.

*(To the memory of poet and professor Dr. Refaat Alareer and his family,
all of whom are still buried under the rubble in Gaza)*

By Giada Gelli

Kind Refaat,
lend us your courage
in this very dark hour of sorrow.
The sunbirds observe - in disbelief,
the bombing, the carnage, the burning
of your precious strawberry fields.

Kind Refaat,
lend us your strength
to never give up on justice and peace.
Please gift us that rare commodity called HUMANITY.
'Gaza Stay Human', Arrigoni would say, 'Restiamo umani'.
Rachel believed in it too.

Kind Refaat,
lend us your knowledge
of context and history, of poetry and literature,
of how power oft strives to be rid of the likes of us,
but forgets that we are seeds and sure enough,
seeds will always sprout back.

SECOND PRIZE

2. ANN LEAHY

(Poem: Lady Luck)

Ann Leahy lives in Drumcondra. Her poems have been widely published. Her collection, 'The Woman who Lived her Life Backwards' (Arlen House), won the Patrick Kavanagh Award. Individual poems have also won awards and have twice been commended in the British National Poetry Competition.

Lady Luck

By Ann Leahy

Greyhounds, like stars of the silver screen, had two names.
So dogs called Tan or Fan or Sall at home were also known
by racing names that held the dreams of doggy men:
He's-a-Champion; Speed Machine; Talk of the Town.

Ours got theirs in ways we could not always parse.
Did Moll become *Mona Lisa* for some sweet
sadness only he detected in her glance?
Was Meg *Witch-hunt* because he always feared

that all her hurtling energy would go awry?
Who else would choose *Cú Gorm* for a champ-to-be
(named for the colour of his coat - that beautiful blue boy)?
Last, came a series in which there were three:

the first (named for dessert) was *Belle Helene*,
and after her came *Bellwether*, then *Bell Boy*.
A race-card miss-print coincided with the end.
He read aloud, and our mother rolled her eyes.

But he smiled, then laughed at being put down
as owner of *Belly Boy*, a runner in the eighth.
For him, it seems, the day was won
when life was forced to mock you to your face.

I like to picture that wry smile (had he known then as he raced
towards his flickering dreams) turned to the full force of the future
that was to come speeding, leaping over years, to catch him, square,
in the heart: *Smash Hit; Scene Stealer; Curtain Closer.*

3RD PRIZE

3. VIRGINIA KEANE

(Poem: Memories for their Mother)

Memories for their Mother

By Virginia Keane

1

A jungle surrounds them; it's hard to see the leaves.
Smoke from a thousand turf fires blacken backgrounds.

Two little girls dressed in long, muslin dresses,
hair scrapped back, centre partings.

The bigger girl's arm around her sister. She's in control.
The baby's face unguarded, fat cheeks, slight smile.

Blue sash and slippers for the big one. Red sash and slippers for the baby.
Low bodices off their shoulders, puff sleeves, white skin.

No brown skinned people in this picture a brown man painted.
Foreign flowers at their feet, palm trees on distant hills.

No elephants, monkeys, snakes, just two good little English girls.
Memories for their mother when they've gone on an English ship,

far away from tropical diseases to grandparents
in a big stone house among oak, ash and weeping willow trees,

white nannies, grooms and butlers. Did they remember
how brown skinned nannies held them in strong arms?

A pony each, a chilly church on Sundays, small green leaves in spring.

2.

Each day my four year old self sat opposite their painting in a dark house
in a Wexford river valley, a good girl at a wide mahogany Table.

My aunt Ann at one end. My uncle Charlie at the other, Liz a smelly
Poodle, a good dog in her basket. My mother far away in London.

I knew the children's story, loved them as much as any sisters,
Never knew their names, my great, great aunts from long ago.

3.

Decades later on a rainy winter evening, driving home from teaching little children in a London school, stuck in a jam on Fulham road,

I saw a painting in a window; parked on the pavement, left the engine running, ran into the antique shop, babbled about copies of a picture.

A tired bald man said the picture came that week from Wexford. Five hundred pounds for my girls. Broke and newly married. No hope.

In our third floor rented flat in Queens Gate Place, I poured out my story. He'd heard all about them. My love sold a film bought me my girls.

Hanging in our small kitchen, they held my Irish past for me, moved with us to our own sunny north London flat. Greeted us when we came home.

Years later when love failed they travelled back with me to my solitary Irish life. They wait for me on starry winter mornings.

HIGHLY COMMENDED POEMS

LEO SMYTH

(Poem: Sand Sculpturing)

Leo Smyth has contributed several times to *Sunday Miscellany*. He is a member of the Ploughed Field Collective in Gort, Co Galway and an active participant in the *Circling the Square* festival, Thurles. He works at UCG.

Sand Sculpturing

Leo Smyth

A final stroke and the kayak glides on to the beach.
Alone, for a few hours I can call this Island mine.
I hope, my dear, that you can see as I begin to sculpt the sand,
this row of houses here— that number 52 was ours
and where I place the coloured seaweed was our apple tree.
Here I put two oyster shells, no pearls— but they were diamonds.
Here where I place the driftwood is our second house,
so beautiful, it took so long to recognise
it was a transit lounge; and the lines I'm drawing here
were runways at right angles to each other.
This book-shaped stone's a dictionary of words I never had
and you could never understand. No matter. Will you sit with me
and summon up a blessing for the sand with which we built our lives?
Yes, of course you'd sculpt it differently, my dear,
but there's no finished history here, just longing;
and in another hour the tide will wipe it clear.

DAVID MURPHY

(Poem: In Green)

David Murphy's prize-winning poetry featured in his first collection *Drowning in the Desert* (Revival Press, 2020). Previous books include a novel, two novellas, a short story collection, two chapbooks and a work of non-fiction.

IN GREEN

By David Murphy

The scarf he bought in Stuttgart hangs thin,
adorned on one side with his country's name.
Two years later the scarf declaring *Italia 90*
lay singular and slender around his neck.
How to wear both at the same time bothered him.

He had never worked a needle before
but sewed them together like a re-born tailor.
When home from Italy he took to the thread
big-time, adding souvenir cloth badges:
Cagliari, Palermo, Genoa, Roma.

To conserve space in the campaigns that followed,
he turned to small metal badges:
the cherry blossoms of Japan,
the shipyards of Gdansk,
the ever-reaching Eiffel Tower.

Over time the scarf accumulated stains:
Spanish wine, Dutch lager, Hungarian beer,
the hot thirsty sweat of Orlando,
the cold fever of twenty
manic minutes against Armenia.

The scarf was also soiled with
a little blood and other bodily fluids.
His wife washed it once without asking him.
He took the scarf back gracefully but said nothing
beyond a vague understated, Thanks.

The scarf sits heavily in warm weather.
He wears it regardless of match conditions except
for those depressing years when the scarf lay limp
and abandoned, on life support, in a wardrobe.
The dictatorship era he called it.

Now he wears it proudly again,
a flak jacket for battles to come.
He looks forward to at least
one more finals tournament
where he will find new beers to investigate,

fresh stains to accumulate,
foreign streets to trod on,
faraway terraces to stand and shout on,
to sing and cheer and dream
of impossible triumphs.

ROISÍN BROWNE

(Poem: Flight)

Roisín Browne lives in Rush Co. Dublin and writes poetry. Her work has appeared in The Galway Review, Flare, The Bangor Literary Journal, Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, The Stony Thursday Book, The Black Nore Review & Mnemotope.

Flight

By Roisin Browne

We will shortly be entering Israeli airspace. During this time it will not be permitted to use the toilets. Return to your seats and fasten your seat belts.

We clack ourselves into place, sit upright, gaze ahead.
The cabin chatter ceases.
I touch the flight path icon on the screen in front of me.

A digital landscape with a pixelated coastline appears.
A compass indicates we are heading East.
To the right of center, a red dot marks *Gaza*.

To the left, a red dot marks *Tel Aviv*.
The white nose of our plane cuts through the middle,
inches forward over graphic beaches.

I feel my arms rigid on the arm rest.
The small of my back braces the curve of the seat.
My stockinged feet half-lie on the complimentary pillow.

My heels tip the thin carpet.
I breathe out. I breathe in.
Right below me, people

are being silenced, slaughtered,
in real life, in non-digital time
and I sit here, suspended.

Is it 20,000 feet, 27,000 feet, 35,000 feet
above my fellow human beings?

Is it less, is it more?
Is it more, is it less?

Does the distance matter?
The distance does not matter.

Does the distance matter?
The distance does not matter.

NOELLE LYNSKEY

(Poem: Happiness and Other Stories)

Noelle Lynskey completed her MA (Creative Writing) in UL (2022). Selected as Strokestown's Poet Laureate in 2021 she is widely published. A community pharmacist in Portumna, she facilitates Portumna Pen Pushers writing group and is artistic adviser to Shorelines Festival.

Happiness & Other Stories

By Noelle Lynskey

After Mary Lavin

That January day the judge stamps my divorce,
my perennial brother, who had walked me up the aisle
all those years ago, hands me a gift as we file out
of Phoenix House, a court as clinical as a morgue.

He has chosen carefully. A book by Mary Lavin. A girl
in bare feet on its cover, holding a bouquet of daffodils
behind her back. Just like my wedding day flowers
trumpeting the altar, my quiet brother by my side.

Even the surprise snow of that March day could not quell
my happiness. Reeling into the reception, I strummed and sang
Top of the World at the top of my voice, suffused by harmony.

On the train home from court, I peruse the stories.
I read from the first page: *sorrow is an ingredient of happiness*.
How fitting a gift on my day of loss.

SIOBHÁN FLYNN

(Poem: Unsuccessful Dates No.2 – the Counsellor)

Siobhán Flynn is from Dublin. She was selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions 2023 and won the Cúirt New Writing Prize for poetry in 2022. Her work has appeared in The Irish Times, The Poetry Bus, Skylight 47 and others.

Unsuccessful dates #2-The Counsellor

By *Siobhan Flynn*

I go for coffee with the counsellor.
He counsels me unasked, he can't help
himself, I ask *Do you have any advice*

for your coffee? He replies; *We can only
encourage the coffee to decide what's best.*
He likes displaying his forbearance,

brandishes it like a weapon
in the face of my impatience.
He sips his latte in tiny little sips

like a thorazined hummingbird,
my espresso is gone in one swallow.
I tell him things because I'm bored,

mostly things I make up or stuff
that happened to people in books,
so I will appear interesting.

He has plans, he knows I'll like them,
we can take it from there,
he is grandiose with compassion.

He is pleased with this woman,
the one I made up for him,
he can do something with her.

COMMENDED POEMS

THOMAS BREZING

(Poem: Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan in a Café in Paris)

Thomas Brezing is a poet and visual artist. His debut collection *Anvil Dust* was published by Scotus Press in 2022 and won the John Richardson French Residency Award & his 2nd collection *Scaffold* will be published this year.

Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan in a Café in Paris

By Tom Brezing

They are in the furthest corner.
You wouldn't know you could enter
a café so deep. You may have to cut
your way through standing smoke
to reach them under the black ceiling.
You'd barely make out his hand, weak
over her wrist, how he eats her wax-like lips,
asking for her love potion –
two more cups of tears.
She dips fingertips from the potion
into her mouth. He loves her strange body,
her long pale arms, her sealed handwriting
on the serviette – *erklär mir Liebe*.
His voice is barbed, tied to itself.
She swims in his kaleidoscopic eyes
knowing they are out of time.
His fingers dip into a cup and draw
with tiny drops. Now a heart lies on the tablecloth.
He wants her hands on his neck and under his shirt,
where the knife slit past, wants them to
be at the centre of their mistake.
She will swallow a hundred tablets a day,
tremble in joy, go up in burning river flames.
He will go down, eyes circling like insects
in the slow flowing Seine –
leaving nothing but memory and poetry,
then just poetry.

CRÓNA GALLAGHER

(Poem: Christmas Eve in Manorhamilton)

Cróna Gallagher is based in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim and is a practitioner of both the literary and visual arts. Short fiction and poetry have been published in quality Journals and Anthologies both nationally and internationally.

Christmas Eve, Manorhamilton

By Crona Gallagher

The nut of this night is dark as a plum
and the old chestnut of this year
chars its own bones by the grate.
Houses huddle shoulder to shoulder
and smoke to keep warm.
It curls from their nostrils
in a slow furling drawl
that lends a peaty tang
to this Crombie coated
collared up town.

They are sleeping dragons
these puffing houses.
Smoke from sap rich logs
flumes quietly in firesides
and rises in tall steeples
to fill cold air with the scent of
frankincense and amber
as they reach ever upward.
Chimneys become brass thuribles,
rocking sacred smoke over this winter town
so that we seem a chapel on this mountain
moated by mist.

Later now,

I step down the nave of this town
to the alter of the old market place
that is as quiet as a sacristy.
I look above to a genuflection of stars.
They bend down to meet me
and the moon cups a yellow ear
to listen for the ghosts of Christmas past
coming down from the workhouse, with faces,
as pale as the milk of the mistletoe.

One by one they shuffle forth,
in famine pit clothing and with blight blackened eyes,
and the fever-wards coursing through each perished hand
holding bowls full of wishes for this next hopeful year.

DANIEL DUNNE

(Poem: The Pride of August)

Daniel is a writer and historian from Mullingar. I have written a number of books on Local History as well as poetry. I have published two Novels, *The Spindle Tree* 2018 and *The Road to Bethany*, 2023

The Pride of August

By Daniel Dunne

The wildflowers have gone to seed, but
lady luck shines on the caterpillar flowers
of Lythrum Solicaria. In days of old
wisdom, créachtach, a herb for wounds.

It cured quincy or a scrofulous throat, old
purple grass or stray by the lough, long purples
thought to guide Ophelia in her floating song
of death, but experts claim that the great bard

meant it was orchids from the riverbank, which guided
her song. Loosestrife-the pride of August, laughing on the
wayside, bathed by silver moonlight on colder
nights, a latecomer to the hedgerow, She rises high

above the waving sedge grass and
willow herb. The bees still have nectar late in the
season, within the waterlogged margins of a
pond, or wandering lazy stream. The purple

changes as the days shorten, but with
colder times to come, she bids farewell,
as the evenings close in, and the consuming
darkness draws us into warmer fires.

ARISHA ALI

(Poem: Looking for you on Pearse Street)

Arisha is an Indian-Pakistani-Irish Engineer, Poet and Writer, armed with a BSc & ME in Biomedical Engineering from University College Dublin. Beyond her professional endeavours, Arisha is an advocate for human rights and a fervent supporter of sustainable fashion.

Looking for you on Pearse Street

By Arista Ali

I know these streets
Like the back of my hand
Though I lack a sense of direction,
My legs carry me,
Because they simply know the way home
The trains come,
And they go,
The cyclists scurry past their narrow lanes,
The buses and the people
Fearless
My eyes look for you,
Even now,
And I realize,
That you were not to be found here
You were never here,
Despite how wanted,
How needed,
How desired you were.

JUSTIN MCDERMOTT

(Poem: Chasing Kites in Misrata)

Justin McDermott is a poet based from Gort Co Galway, the home of Lady Gregory and WB Yeats. He is a founding member of the Ploughed Field Poetry Collective, and is editor of the annual Ploughed Field Review poetry pamphlet.

Chasing kites in Misrata

Justin T McDermott

The soft cheap material is my barrier between the swirling spring and the sunset.
Cracks in the pavement upset my joints with the dampness in them.

I was told by an old young man that if you focus heat to your core, the body adapts.

So I sacrifice my hands and feet the streets.

But I keep safe my rib and bone as a chest full of memory.

Visions of kites made of plastic bags,

fluttering high in the early evening breeze,

that blows north to south through the port of Misrata.

Mothers beauty and her delicious sweet Asida on return from Friday prayers.

I can taste the memory,

I am awakened from remembering by the cold metallic hum,

Gears and leavers of the clearing machines and men with heavy boots

My fingers, numb now, touch the thin wet material wall of my tent.

But I feel nothing,

And so I become a plastic bag, fluttering.