

THE GEOFFREY DEARMER PRIZE 2009

This prize is given annually for the best *Poetry Review* poem written by a poet who doesn't yet have a book. It's funded through the generosity of the family in honour of the poet Geoffrey Dearmer, who was a Poetry Society member. This year's judge is Glyn Maxwell, whose own poem can be found on pp.8-9, and will be awarded by him at a magazine launch and reading at the British Library on April 7th.

Glyn Maxwell

The winner of this year's Geoffrey Dearmer Prize is 'Visitation' by Maitreyabandhu (*PR* 99:3). This plangent sob of a poem is about the indent that something – 'you' – makes upon the speaker's consciousness. The shape of that indent defines, or forlornly seeks to define, what exactly has visited. I don't know what has; I don't know what *you* is. None of this vagueness is a problem for me: it is extremely hard to capture this kind of sensation. The humble and provisional phrasing – "that you should come / like that", "in the mess of things", "But even that's too bright" – quietly but absolutely persuades us of the presence of a mind steadied and paused by light. At moments like this the mind does not – as ninety-nine in a hundred poets would – spin off into the brilliantly inventive, immobilizing us with metaphor; it inhales and holds, and gently – inadequate simile by slightly less inadequate simile – builds a case for this experience in the language until language has done its utmost. How honest and deft it is to ponder greyness for a whole stanza and then, having confidently bestrode the stanza-break, to settle – a bit aghast – for saying: "Grey". To quote the poet, most poetry is too 'world-we're-busy-in': here is a brief encounter with the ineffable, and a reminder that poetry is more honoured by sounding the limits of language than by pretending there are none.

Also commended are Jeri Onitskansky for 'The Distinct' and Fani Papageorgiou for 'Caramel'.

Maitreyabandhu
Visitation

Strange that you should come
like that, without any form at all,
carrying no symbolic implements,
without smile or frown
or any commotion,
as if you had been there all the time,
like a pair of gloves left in a pocket.

As if I had been looking that way,
into the wide blue yonder, and you were
beside me, enduring my hard luck stories
with infinite patience. Not even waiting –
the tree outside my window
doesn't wait, nor the ocean-wedge
with its new, precise horizon – just there
like the shadow of a church

or a quiet brother.
And how I saw you, in the mess of things,
was as a slant of grey,
the perfect grey of house dust,
an absolute neutral, with no weaving,
no shimmer of cobalt
and light-years away from Byzantium.

Grey. And I want to add, like light,
as if a skylight opened in my skull,
and into the darkness fell
a diagonal of pure Bodmin Moor.
But even that's too bright,
too world-we're-busy-in.
Call it 'dust' then, or the bloom
of leaf-smoke from an autumn fire.