

THE GEOFFREY DEARMER PRIZE 2010

JUDGE: FRED D'AGUIAR

An impressive range of form in collusion with content typifies this batch of thirty eligible poems. I began by looking for obvious politics/ current affairs. 'Wittgenstein's Football Tactics' by Tim Hopkins is a funny conceit centred on reading the World Cup through the lens of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Scott Christopher Ripley's prose poem and critical elegy for Ian Tomlinson, who died as a result of policing during Iraq anti-war protests in London, describes the confused loyalties that inform political action and the oddities of chance and proximity which govern the eye-witness account. Aviva Dautch's 'Jonah's Prayer' seems familiar but quickly descends into unpredictable darkness. Form and content work in harmony in keeping with Olson's dictum (that form is an extension of content). She creates an asymmetry between utterance and discovery by presenting the two as diametrically opposed. In 'Starlings', Sam Willetts takes one image of a flock and riffs with it into big ideas about how we perceive and connect 'out there' to our bodies, and thus makes sense of the sensory. A similar epistemological bravura governs Dominic McLoughlin's 'The Problem of Identity', a fine meditation in the form of allegory aimed at disturbing our constructs of group belonging and what counts as reality, for an alternative invested in phenomena and what is imagined. (Does this argue against Lowell's poetic desiderata of something real not imagined?) History breaks in quirkily on the same turf in 'Phineas Survives' by James Midgley. He takes a real incident (Phineas Gage, 1823-1860, who survived an accident that left an iron rod lodged through his head), spins a circumspect yarn of how the world must seem to a mind unhinged, and makes it resemble the mind of a poet, since Phineas becomes a stranger to himself in intriguing ways. Nadia Al Fazil-Kareem's haiku, 'To My Adulterous Husband' cannot be paraphrased.

My top three are by Liz Berry ('In The Steam Room') and Kim Moore ('Tuesday At Wetherspoons' and 'The Wolf'). Liz Berry celebrates the body by erasing the usual delineations between one person and another in the relative anonymity afforded by a public steam room. Hers is all sensuous delight and names for hidden parts unveiled by her prying eyes and hands. She is an equal opportunity writer of body parts, making a nostril as inviting as an arsehole or cunt. Kim Moore's 'The Wolf', firmly in Angela Carter's mythic territory, invites the reader to take a risk with the imagination disguised as a narrative about coupling whose payoff is death and imaginative rebirth. She uses repetition with cumulative menace. Her linear tripartite argument of thesis, antithesis and synthesis belies the circular time of her lyric's holistic approach. 'Tuesday At Wetherspoons' places a woman novice with a critical eye in the middle of her apprenticeship to male oppression, except that the males are bundling and helpless and the powerful women limit themselves to serving these unworthy men in a cycle resembling one of the lower rings of Dante's Hell. Her politics of discovery is tempered by a poetics of recovery; while the former probes the intricacies of gender identity, the latter eases the wounds of awareness. A fine achievement. A deserving winner.



Fred D'Aguiar's sixth collection, *Continental Shelf* (Carcenet, 2009) was a PBS Choice. He teaches at Virginia Tech.

Tuesday At Wetherspoons

All the men have comb-overs,
bellies like cakes just baked,
risen to roundness. The women tilt
on their chairs, laughter faked,

like mugs about to fall, cheekbones
sharp as sadness. When the men
stand together, head for the bar
like cattle, I don't understand

why a woman reaches across, unfolds
his napkin, arranges his knife and fork
to either side of his plate. They're all
doing it, arranging, organising, all talk

stopped until the men, oblivious,
return. My feet slide towards a man
with one hand between his thighs,
patience in his eyes, who says *you can*

learn to love me, ketchup
on the hand that cups my chin,
ketchup around his mouth,
now hardening on my skin.

Walney Channel

There's a door frame in the channel,
made of thin black twisted wood.

When the tide is in, it leads to water.
When the tide is out, it leads to mud

and the beginning of the old road
across the channel. Listen at dusk

for the shouts of those who walked
that channel years ago. This was just

a crossing, the only way, before the bridge
was built. Each morning you'll hear

the shipyard siren calling men to work.
Wait and watch the path appear

like the spine of some forgotten animal
turning in its sleep before you come

to find me. Wear boots, or go barefoot.
Don't stop, and if you hear them

calling, don't turn around. You'll see
barnacles and seaweed on my causeway

and a blue boat waiting at the shore.

This Geoffrey Dearmer 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 Fred D'Aguiar.

Kim Moore works as a full-time brass teacher for Cumbria Music Service and has been writing for about four years. She is in the third year of a part time MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Met. In 2010 she was long-listed for an Eric Gregory and published in the *TLS*, *Poetry Review*, *Staple* and *Mslexia*. She was a guest poet for the 'Carol Ann Duffy and Friends' readings at the Royal Exchange in Manchester last year and is due to read there again in May.