Judge's Report 2025

Judging a poetry competition is like being forced to choose your favourite child. When you have just one it is easy, but when you have 221 you face an enormous challenge – no one ever wants 'Sophie's Choice' question - all 221 of these 'children' contain special qualities and unique features making each one so valuable and precious.

So, how to choose? What is it that allows some poems to resonate, to reverberate and then return long after they have been read? What allows some poems to speak so strongly that re-reading reveals ever deeper messages, greater insights and richer rewards? In these poems we feel the power of images, the creativity of ideas, the originality of words, the precise weight of rhythm, the strength of a final line and the soaring originality within a moment of life. These poems lead us deep inside and far beyond what we already know, opening doors to richer worlds and other ways of seeing those we love, relationships we treasure and the beliefs we hold about this one precious life. These poems examine the smallest things and hold the largest revelations. Mary Oliver, the great American poet, captured this essence in her poem…

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean —
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? The poems in this collection explore so many rich possibilities. These poems are gifts for the heart, and the soul.

Paul Grover
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