The theme ‘A Momentary Darkness’ evoked substantial responses from around the country. There were as many interpretations of what the theme could mean as there were modes of communicating those interpretations in verse. All reflections on what ‘momentary’ and ‘darkness’ might suggest were thoughtful. Some writers read the terms in relation to Christian belief. Some linked them with the sacred but not in a conventionally or specifically religious sense. Then again, some connected the terms with secular apprehensions of lived experience—for instance, of happily commonplace routines, of comforting or disturbing transience, of life-altering events (life-altering for good, perhaps, or for ill). No less interestingly varied were the poets’ strategies of communication. Some experimented with traditional forms of lyric, showing their immediate relevance as ways to engage with the world’s impact on us and ours on it. Others responded by recreating modes of verse that were initiated, in the second half of last century, by American poets who had wearied of Modernism and sought to voice post-modern perspectives through a post-modern art. Yet others sought to shape forms of their own. It was challenging, in the end, to decide which poets had most inventively seized upon the competition’s theme and most persuasively conveyed their insights.

Nevertheless, close study of the poems led me to the following decisions.

First, that the winning poem is, ‘Framework’.
Without drawing attention to its artistry, this religious poem deftly and almost anecdotally—in other words, much like a parable—opens onto different ways of

knowing religious truth: different ways of making it ours and of bringing it to others. Alluding to 2 Corinthians 1: 20, the poem tells of a preacher who, amid preparing his sermon, unexpectedly witnesses an encounter in the street that reminds him of the ‘road to Emmaus’ story. His moment of inspired and enriching insight empowers him to reframe his communicating of religious experience and truth to others.

Second, that the runners-up are: ‘A Morning’s Mercy’ and ‘A Feather Falls’.
In their own ways, the two poems celebrate deliverance. ‘A Morning’s Mercy’ portrays what it can mean to be a woman seeking then discovering refuge, that is, needing and being granted deliverance (by a woman well able to empathise) from fear, want and violence. It honours women’s compassion and dignity, in the process vividly creating its own latter-day version of a heroic simile and persuasively unfolding, at its climax, a brief autobiographical speech. ‘A Feather Falls’ also captures an instant of personal deliverance. With delicacy and assurance it relates what might be mistaken for a slight, commonplace event but clearly is not. Here, an intimately private deliverance is captured in subtly modulated rhythms and concisely fashioned details as we follow an interplay of trajectories that ends with the ascent of a woman’s thoughts to the sacred.

Finally, that highly commended are: ‘’Demolition’; ‘An Unkindness or Conspiracy of Ravens’; ‘Farewell’; ‘Execution’.
‘Demolition’ muses on the destruction of a small, domestic space with all its accumulated stories and emotions: a moving but unsentimental picturing of loss.
‘An Unkindness or Conspiracy of Ravens’, by contrast, images a family of birds withstanding the threat from predators and surviving in their very small domestic

space—to the relief of the poem's speaker. A dramatic but understated narrative (and, in that way, successful like 'Demolition').

'Farewell' is an elegy for a deceased friend; it offers at once exploration of the speaker's own grieving and appreciation of, admiration for, the life of the deceased.

'Execution' takes us back to the pattern-poems from the time of George Herbert and his contemporaries. To good effect, in the shape of a St Andrew's cross, it brings together the Old and New Testaments, centring on deaths that link them but moving beyond those deaths, onwards and outwards, to deliverances born of them.