 

Ledbury Poetry Competition

Adult Winners, 2016

First Prize:

Miller Oberman

Miller Oberman’s first book, a collection of poems and translations titled *The Unstill Ones* is due out from Princeton University Press in fall 2017. A former Ruth Lilly Fellow and 92Y Discovery Prize winner, he has published poems and translations in *Poetry, London Review of Books, The Nation, Boston Review, Tin House, berfrois,* and *Harvard Review.* Miller is a teaching fellow at the University of Connecticut, and lives in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, with his wife, rock singer Louisa Solomon of The Shondes.

**On Fishing**

There was too much of my father last night.

He kept me, through every brown hour,

awake. Usually my fear is forgetting him.

His particulars. His expressions. Afraid

of his face becoming a statue. But last

night I said stop that. Stop being so

realistic, reminding me you were only

eight years older than I am now when

your heart fisted itself in the kitchen.

We were making peach butter.

There is too much kitchen now.

Too many pots and carrots and tiles.

The stovetop with electric burners

he used to flick ground coffee on

so I could watch it flare, is flaring again.

I wish it would stop.

He stopped short as a line

caught in a fish’s cheek.

There are too many fish now.

My bed is full of scales and blood

sinkers and bobbers and boats.

All this tackle in my sheets

is distraction from fear.

Dumb fish, I’m swimming at the lure.

How embarrassing to be a person.

Afraid to die. Afraid to sleep.

I used to sleep in my clothes.

He forbid it. I said why.

He said you cannot sleep in your clothes.

I said why.

He said you cannot sleep in your clothes.

I said why.

He said it’s just not done.

He didn’t know why.

We fought many nights

on the stairs.

He was kind, I see that now.

Not to say sleeping

in your clothes

will not make you ready.

Second Prize:

Richard Evans

Richard Evans grew up in the Staffordshire Moorlands and attended Leicester then Bristol University, where he wrote dissertations on the poetry of Tony Harrison and Simon Armitage. He teaches English and Creative Writing in Kent. He has been selected as one of the leading teachers of Creative Writing by the Poetry Society.

The origins of 'Icari' were in that lurching moment for a parent when a child does something brave, dangerous and, most worrying of all, beyond you. At the time of writing my daughter was obsessed by mermaids, especially the unsettling tale by Hans Christian Anderson, which the poem on some levels 'flips'.

**Icari**

I.

When you were still pretty small I hauled you

off to the coast one day, because it was summer

and because your mother needed time

to gather herself. I suppose you still

don’t remember: that strange car smell as

you sat small on the back seat; ice creams

awkwardly eaten; the climb, then the drop

to the beach. You have never mentioned it since.

For a long time you sat quiet on the sand,

struck by the cliffs shrugging up from the beach,

where teenagers - young men - wearing nothing

but jeans, and no doubt drunk, leapt from sea cliffs

for an impossible, wordless second,

torsos tight as Saint Sebastian shot,

until they pierced the water like stone.

II.

Was it you or I who wanted to go

closer? Did I drag you, or you drag me,

up and across the dry brown earth of the

car park, where the leapers were already

calling it a day. Did you wait for me

to turn, or just run? Steps, tiny, swift,

intense: black stones dislodged as you leapt.

Do you remember the silence, all the

way home; the hot tyres shushing like a

like a tap left running. Finally, as the car

drew up on your drive, a voice insistent,

child-like: *When I was under, I could see*

*two kinds of light; like looking through a green*

*or white window. I wanted to stay there,*

*but I came back. And you were waiting. Weren’t you?*

III.

Maybe you recall this only in dreams,

found down in the darkness, as a diver

finds shells: but never forget that you

chose to come back, and carry that like a charm,

like a blessing.

Third Prize

Paul Nash

Paul Nash was born in London of Anglo-Irish parents, moved to Limerick at age 8 and has subsequently lived in London and Dublin.

He holds an MA and PhD from Trinity College, Dublin. He taught there, at Ireland's National College of Art and Design, at Maynoooth College of the National University and in East London comprehensive schools. He now works for a Dublin IT company.

He has published poems in various magazines and also composes music and songs under the name Alphasun, available on iTunes, Spotify and Bandcamp. He is married with three children.

**AUGUST BLOSSOM**

Two surprises – first the apple-tree bore

One new blossom among galactic fruit

As if the tree remembered Spring and wore

Something grafted from a youthful shoot;

Then you in that brief top, all joyous flowers

Until rejected for the usual white

Embroidered with the ghosts of warmer hours,

Their lost colours folded back into night.

Encouraging to see the ancient boughs

So heavy-laden that were bare last year,

But even more the late bloom, and that blouse

Clinging to you, now distant, once so near

That I could touch the petals, and just then

Before you changed back, thought I would again.