



CLPE Poetry Prize 2012

Article Author:

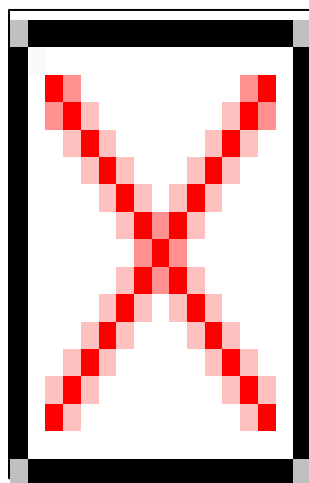
[Fiona Waters](#) [1]

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Byline:

Fiona Waters comments on this year's winners.

CLPE Poetry Prize 2012



The judges for the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) Poetry Prize 2012 (Philip Gross, Morag Styles, Fiona Waters and Chair, Julia Eccleshare) anticipated yet again a sadly small pile of books to sift through but when the submissions came in, they came pouring in. Not only were there plenty of books to read and choose from, but the standard was very high. The resulting discussions were lively and wide ranging, the views diverse and fascinating. **Fiona Waters** reports on 'a vintage year for poetry?.'

Which UK publishers are publishing poetry for children? Amongst the submissions were titles from Macmillan (and just what would children's poetry publishing have done without this constant publisher over the years?) Their clever decision to ask Jacqueline Wilson to put together a highly personal collection of poems for girls (**Green Glass Beads**) was the subject of long and passionate debate by the judges. A&C Black was there and this growing list is one to watch; their standard of poet is very high. Walker Books was there with another fascinating collection from John Agard and Grace Nichols. Bloomsbury, Andersen and Frances Lincoln were there with individual books of great delight. But it was the new kids on the block, Janetta Otter-Barry under the wing of Frances Lincoln and Salt Publishing who provided close to a third of the total submissions, and indeed all the shortlisted titles. And that shortlist was the result of outstandingly good poetry.

Publishing worth its salt

Right from the start when she launched her new list, Otter-Barry promised two new poetry titles a season and delighted poets everywhere by saying she would make one of the two an established poet while the other would be a new name. As she said at the time, 'We have many wonderful children's poets in the UK whose voices are not being heard, other than in anthologies. I want to give children the chance to experience the full range of a poet's work in an individual collection.'

Someone else has already dreamt up the headline 'Publishing worth its Salt' so I can't claim originality but I will claim total agreement. In a very short space of time Salt Publishing, a small press (can it really be that small?) has established

a most impressive children's poetry list which has already gained many plaudits. There are fifteen titles so far and three new planned by the end of the year, an outstanding achievement especially when compared to some very large and reputable children's lists which no longer have any poetry at all.

There were nine anthologies and fourteen single poet collections on the submission list this year, welcome news for those who champion the single poet collection. The judges were delighted to see several publishers showcasing experienced writers, well known from anthologies, in single-author collections, offering young readers an important part of the poetry experience – a chance to appreciate not just the content of the poems but the voice, the way of seeing and the take on life that lies behind them. At the same time, there were good anthologies that address a subject and others that welcome in new young readers.

For our winner and runners-up our main consideration was that they bring something fresh to the conversation that is poetry – something confidently itself and yet aware to whom it is speaking.

A vintage year for poetry

At the CLPE Poetry Award ceremony in July, Rachel Rooney spoke of the huge influence her Father, apparently much given to quoting appropriate chunks of verse at the breakfast table or on walks or at bedtime, had been in shaping her love of poetry. And it is just such a wonderfully liberated approach to poetry that will inculcate in children the notion that poetry is for them and it is of everyday life. It should not be regarded as something to be afraid of and certainly not spoken in a special 'poetry' voice that is somehow alienating. My own awakening to poetry was hearing an utterly spell binding reading on the radio by Gabriel Woolf of **The Lady of Shalott** when I was a small child; I was hooked for life.

A vintage year for poetry then. And at a time when the picture had seemed to be so very gloomy with cuts all round, especially funding for children's poetry projects and the likes of the Poetry Book Society. The market remains challenging with school and library sales of physical books in sharp decline as white boards and devices and tablets take the place of paper and ink, but we are promised more money for the Arts once the Olympics are over and there is a discussion taking place about whether to put children's poetry into the Poems on the Underground scheme. Children's Poetry is alive and well: 'Rumours of its death have been greatly exaggerated' to misappropriate Mark Twain.

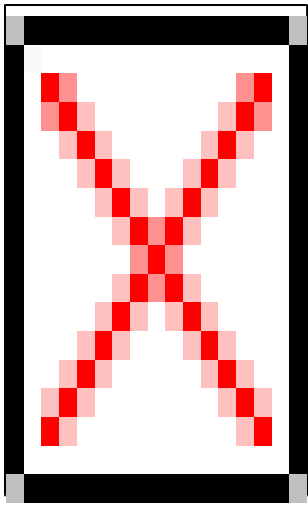
Winner

The Language of Cat by Rachel Rooney

Rachel Rooney's poems have a subtle distinctive speaking voice, lighting up shifts of thought and feeling that young readers will recognise but that clichés would conceal. Rooney relishes and shares the craft of poetry; gradually you spot exacting games of form and language beneath a surface that seems simple enough for youngest readers to approach, and the poems will grow in the reader's mind with re-reading, year by year. 'Elizabeth Quinn' is a poem worthy of Charles Causley, a celebration and lament for a girl almost too open to experience to bear the world. This writing can move from teasing to sad to thought provoking seamlessly. It plays but it takes children's experience seriously.

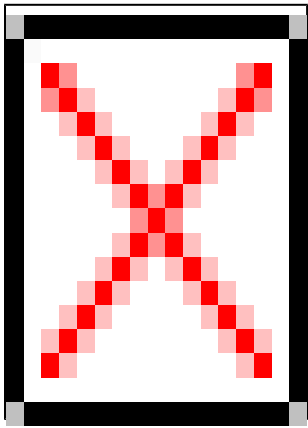
Runners Up

Holding the Hands of Angels: Poems from a Seaside Childhood by Brian Moses



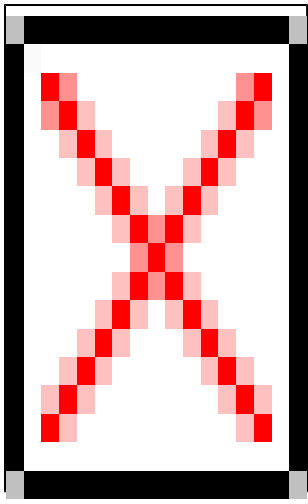
These vivid, economical slices of the poet's childhood do more than recollect the memories of growing up half a century ago, they also re-create the sense of living them. Bravely but rightly, Brian Moses trusts his readers both to be intrigued by the differences in detail of a childhood then and childhood now, and to recognise the common threads of feeling – risk and adventure, fear and friendship, and each step into a new experience, tentatively understood. This collection charts a childhood in memorable anecdotes, crisply told and often lit up with a moment of recognition at the end? right to the brink of adolescence. A book not to be age banded, but lived with – as with all good poetry.

Goldilocks on CCTV by John Agard



Goldilocks on CCTV is another rich collaboration between John Agard and illustrator Satoshi Kitamura where the illustrations humorously mirror and extend the verbal text. As poetry, it is witty, ironic, bold, sometimes lyrical – all the hallmarks for which Agard is rightly celebrated. But Goldilocks offers more than just playful and pleasing humour. Agard invites the reader to think again about aspects of contemporary culture which he blends skilfully with iconic fairy tale characters, breathing new life into this familiar genre. Like Sleeping Beauty whose nightdress was auctioned at Sotheby's with paparazzi at her door when the prince came to –snip the threads of her slumber/and return her to a place called the future?. This inventive collection is bang up-to-date, on the money, using vernacular language teenagers will instantly recognise yet turning it into Auden's famous definition of poetry – 'memorable speech?.

Here Comes the Poetry Man by Fred Sedgwick



This poetry man has assembled a collection of great variety, poems that span the whole gamut of childhood experience. These are gentle poems, there is not much rage here, but plenty of heartfelt emotion ? the death of a beloved cat, moving house, a home without a Mum ? and moments magical too like meeting a fox at dusk, the birth of a baby, snow in the garden. Fred Sedgwick writes with real humour but not for cheap gimcrack lazy laughs, his take is more thoughtful and joyous.

The Books

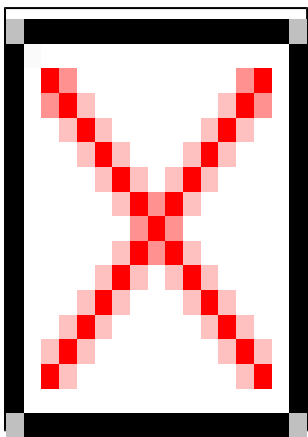
[The Language of Cat](#) [3] by Rachel Rooney, ill. Ellie Jenkins, Janetta Otter-Barry Books at Frances Lincoln, 96pp, 978 1 8478 0167 8, £5.99 pbk.

Holding the Hands of Angels: Poems from a Seaside Childhood by Brian Moses, Salt Publishing, 80pp, 978 1 8447 1297 7, £6.99 pbk

Goldilocks on CCTV by John Agard, ill. Satoshi Kitamura, Janetta Otter-Barry Books at Frances Lincoln, 64pp, 978 1 8478 0183 8, £12.99 hbk

Here Comes the Poetry Man by Fred Sedgwick, Salt Publishing, 80pp, 978 1 8447 1296 0, £6.99 pbk

Green Glass Beads: A Collection of Poems for Girls, ed. Jacqueline Wilson, Macmillan, 288pp, 978 0 2307 5815 5, £9.99 hbk



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