



Poetry Competition 2023 'Home'

ASIBA is pleased to publish the list of finalists in this year's poetry competition. OIB Cambridge Inspector, Dr Celia O'Donovan, chose the winning poems and book prizes have been awarded to the poets placed from first to fourth place in each category. You can read all the poems, prize-winners and finalists, below. Dr O'Donovan writes :

I have very much enjoyed reading all the poems that reached the final stage of the competition. The theme of 'Home' touched the contributors in many different ways. There was a freshness and originality about the entries showing a mature understanding of the significance of 'home'. Rhyme, assonance, wordplay, colour, appeal to the senses, emotions and imagination – all were covered in this group of poems. The winning poems were those that really managed to express the essential of the theme in a way that engaged the reader immediately, both intellectually and emotionally.

To have made it to the final shortlist is a great honour and all the finalists should be very proud of their achievement. All the poems had merits and the poets demonstrated that they were able to deploy language in a controlled and sensitive way to express their thoughts and feelings. Writing poetry encourages the development of many skills that are transferable to other types of writing and to life itself. It can encourage creative thinking and a sense of self as well as offering an outlet for internal tensions. I hope that all the poets who have entered this year's competition will continue to express themselves through poetry as they move on through their lives.

Dr Celia O'Donovan.

List of prizewinners and finalists

SENIOR Category (Première / Terminale)

- 1st Prize *half past home* by Flaminia VIOLINI, Tle, Lycée Français Jean-Monnet, Brussels
- 2nd Prize *Home 'Home is a place, So many say'* by Salomé Devulder, Tle, CSI, Lyon
- 3rd Prize *'I Sit with Death on the Porch'* by Elios Barbero, Tle, Lycée Camille Sée, Paris
- 4th Prize. *Goodbye, Wormwood* by Lou Ann Clement, Lycée Victor Hugo, Colomiers
- Finalist. *Back Home* by Léa Komeiha, 1e, Lycée International Charles de Gaulle, Dijon
- Finalist. *Irredeemable Home* by Lou Doublet, 1e, Lycée Salvador Allende, Hérouville Saint Clair
- Finalist. *Listen* by Elinor Dudley, Tle, Lycée international Europole, Grenoble
- Finalist *Opulent Loops* by Mila Trechnievski, 1e, Cité Scolaire Internationale, Lyon
- Finalist. *Refuge* by Flavia Bonin, 1e, Lycée EIB Etoile, Paris
- Finalist *Wild* by Rebecca Nguyen Van Hieu, 1e, Lycee Condorcet, Sydney

JUNIOR Category (Troisième / Seconde)

- 1st Prize *Resurrection* by Alice Koskas 2de Lycée Camille Sée, Paris
- 2nd Prize *Not Home* by Juliette Obré-Lafon 2de, Lycée Georges Duby, Aix-en-Provence
- 3rd Prize *Ellipsis* by Eliane Nzabanita Mahirwe 2de, Lycée International Charles de Gaulle, Dijon
- 4th Prize. *My house, your arms* by Pauline Ferré, 2de, Lycée Georges Duby, Aix-en-Provence
- Finalist *The Singularity of One's Home* by Justine Amaré, 2de, Lycée International Charles de Gaulle, Dijon
- Finalist *My white heart* by Kirill Podbeltsev, 2de. Lycée Victor Hugo, Colomiers
- Finalist *Bring Me Back* by Keira Ambre Areeya Zoccola, 2de, Lycée Français de Bangkok
- Finalist *Where? There* by Elisa Muharemi, 2de, Lycée Vaugelas, Chambéry
- Finalist *You are our Home* by Raphael Corser, Lycée Maurice Ravel, Paris

half past home

half past twelve
you're sleeping soundly,
soft snores escaping your lips.

half past seven
barely awake, half-lidded eyes at the breakfast table
you plant a kiss on my forehead.

half past five
you finally return with grocery bags,
smile wide; you've bought my favorite meal.
(you think I don't know but I do, you're terrible at keeping secrets.)

half past ten
you're in my arms, reading a book
I've been criticizing all week.
(I discreetly read it over your shoulder;
you always wait for me to finish before flipping the page.)

half past twelve
I think of when my house wasn't a home, of when you were a mere dream;

it wasn't until I realized
home isn't a place
that I found you.

Home

Home is a place,
So many say

Yet it is a face -
A bright smile that lingers past the sun's trace

Or sometimes, a single touch -
Those fluttering thrums of a caressing sin
Lighting sparks that tango about your skin.

Maybe that familiar melody,
A delicate hymn soothing past sorrows,
Tuned to the rhythm that your heart borrows

Perhaps... the smell of cinnamon cookies
Enticing senses to waken envy.

Dipped in sweet tea -
That warm, honey tea stirred by grandma's hand,
Wrapped in your palms on a winter nightstand.

There's a poignancy within the chatter,
Sitting 'til dusk on the kitchen counter,

While we rewrite the wrong within the world.

Home is not a place
As so many say

Home - is the beating of a heart -
in a peculiar way.

I sit with Death on the Porch

The ambulance has left faint tracks behind.
My sister is sleeping. Though dusk creeps closer by
I keep sitting on the porch, legs stained green by grass pulled under me.
I feel a familiar presence approach but I pretend not to notice
as he sits down beside me with a quiet sigh.
I angle myself towards my companion, careful not to look at him.
I remain expressionless - the only sign of disturbance my closed fists.
I despise his loud stillness
I despise how his reflection shimmers in my family's tears.
Still we sway together to the tune of the trees the wind has picked up.
We stare at the waning light, at the low-flying birds.
Even they do not have the strength to hold up the sky's melancholy.
The air offers the dark aroma of twilight.
We watch from the porch.
Despite it all
I rest my head on his shoulder.
He is my home now,
His familiarity my comfort.
Night settles around us.

Goodbye, Wormwood

Today I exorcised my own demons
Fingers unrolling from fists to become hands again
The words came back to me and with them the memory
Vivid and sharp like glass: home is the raw strength I contain

Then it was dazzlingly easy to return
After years of being lost
The map was still etched into my synapses:
Home is this howling wind greeting me

In the middle of the savage storm
I dance and sing and roar and meet it wildly
I let the overflowing realization crash down upon me
My eyes opening at last upon all I failed to see

Home was never a place to begin with
Home is this feeling of power in my blood
As I stand next to the lightning
As I feel the thunder roll in my veins

The ocean rushes again and again at my feet
It stops feeling like an attack
It starts feeling like a welcome mat
I found myself in my home, home in myself

Back Home

"Stop looking back, the past has passed,
Just keep looking forward where good things are yet to be unmasked," is what you're told
When you keep getting lost in what was,
Forgetting to live in what is,
But can you blame a mind missing a home that was once his?

Take me back home
Where laughter echoes with no ears to hear,
Where people are killed by hunger and fear,
Where they burn the ashes of the hope you once possessed,
Where they stomp on your dreams wondering... why you ever left.

Take me back home
Where warmth is not caused by a fire,
Where fitting in is no longer a desire,
Where my childhood memory stays,
Where a piece of my heart decays.

Take me to where I belong,
Where chaos is a melody and pain is the song,
Take me where my soul is never alone –
Somebody please! Take me home.

Irredeemable Home

I found a home.

Not with four walls and a door,

But a place where I learn how to feel alone.

Because I've never been at peace before

And if I couldn't find it in the fresh cut flowers

That I grew myself, in vases from the yard in nightstands.

Then I shall read gardening books for hours

And hope the sequoias from Yosemite grow where I stand.

Home inspires more than an unreachable peace.

It implies reaching an everlasting state of comfort.

As I gently open my eyes, I realise that the idea of home is fantasies

And it shall only remain in my memories.

Listen.

Do you hear it?

That song along the wind, yearning, alone.

Won't you listen?

She calls to you, pleading. You turn away—

She begs you, *Stay*.

Do you feel it?

Her breath in your lungs, the ache in your bones.

Why won't you listen?

You taste her grief on your tongue but you do not learn

And so you remain, you destroy and you burn.

Do you see it?

The night sky – do you recognize the stars?

No, you say.

They were swallowed by the dark.

And now?

Now there is only us, monsters of clay and dust.

We inhale misery and choke on pollution,

We wait and we watch the decay of creation.

And you?

I wait, and I dream

Of a world not undone by hate or by greed

I think I hope to see it again, someday.

A home, where we listened, and we stayed.

Opulent Loops

Home can be found in the palm of my hand
In the form of a rubber band
Sailing through black holes and dwarf planets
Only to be twirled around lamented cells
or perhaps sustaining its content
Colour or texture does not matter, like the halos of jupiter it will remain
skipping through every epidermis to ever exist
Until the last snap where it will shrivel and shrink into a long line of sap
Left behind, coagulated, curdled, desiccated

Refuge

You shall not my boy remember us
Forget the past, leave us at last.
Do not look back at the mouth of hell
The line is long, bid us farewell.

Do not revenge a wave of death
You can do better with your remaining breath.
Your destiny is now in your hand.
Your home is the foreign land.

To all of you, who read these words
His guilt is only to be Kurd.
He runs away, flees a deluge
To all of you give him refuge.

Wild

Lost in a haze of onyx and green
Rings of silence creep in the leaves.
The air is tight and the moon is gone,
There is nothing to guide me but my beating drum.

Without a sound but the distant humming
Of my skipping heart running hurriedly,
The shadows shift as I set the pace
That rings in my heart and flourishes in my stead.

The once haunting trees become statuesque
And flickers of light skip through nature's breath
I walk and I run and I leap and I sing
The joyous tune that I learned from my kin .

And I look down at the palms of my hands,
Whose creases are carved by the love of my clan.
Lead me to the place where our blood and love blend
And the winds and waters are loved all the same.

Resurrection

Fragments of forgotten objects lie under an overturned oak table
Shattered and broken.

An unwatched vine creeps up the side of the house,
Ever so gradually tightening its hold on the tired bricks.

Slowly the discarded remains of shredded wallpaper disintegrate
And faded paint starts to chip and curl around the edges.
Small drops of water splash onto the floor
And pool on the checkered tiles.

Under the roof, in a small crevice,
Squeezed between two misshapen bricks
A humble pile of dusty trinkets lie.
Cocooned in a bubble of loneliness
Searching in vain to be once again cherished.

Outside the house, unnoticed almond eyes peer through
the crumbling wood
And cautiously activate rusty hinges
Push open a door.

The round face exhales and looks around in wonder
Seeing through the imperfections
Imagining the cobwebs to be fragile lace
The dirt - specs of glistening gold
The vicious vines - dainty wildflowers.

As though sensing the hopeful presence
The wallpaper smoothes out
The broken glass glitters in the cold sun
The home is finally called from its deep slumber.

Not Home

Dear mom and dad, I hope you know I was trying.
But day by day, I grew exhausted.
Tired of crying, pretending, maybe even caring
For people who didn't see that I existed.
This place that I loved so much
Soon became dust.
Oh dad, why can't you see ?
This thing you call « our family »
Is only a dead flower
That you keep watering
In hopes to bring back the laughter
We so long ago stopped hearing.
I often wonder how strangers
Know me more than my own parents
Even though I'm transparent.
Until I met people, amazing,
Wonderful people. I would've never guessed the outcome ;
They are beginning
To feel like home.

...

Can two people make one home?
Or fifteen places one person?
Are you feeling homesick or just guilty
Because you got comfortable?
You jinxed it by calling this place home.
Or maybe it's because you left without saying goodbye.

It's time to press reset;
Pack only what you can carry and forget
As much as possible.

You know what they say:
"Home is where the heart is".
But where is your home? Where have you left it?

Strong winds and dust sweeping through tall mango trees.
A fridge facing the TV in our little room
Someplace where home could be, would be, should be
And will never be.

Broken dreams, blind hearts, shattered promises.
I guess we will forever be homeless.

My house, your arms

This is a place I used to feel well
However I know that nothing lasts.
The day you disappeared was the one I fell.
Back through the darkness of my past.

The comforting light you spread upon me
Every day of my life is gone.
Your smile, your voice, welcoming me
Faded, withered, turned into foam.

The room is now empty of your breath, of your arms,
Of all the things that made it warm.
My home, my haven, my safe place
Lost its meaning alongside your brightness.

Within these walls, I can still smell your scent
Picturing all the moments that we spent;
Looking for light in dark cracks,
Picking hope from under racks.

This hollow room is too big for me,
Way too small to fit the memory
Of all the moments we shared
Together in this charming shed.

The Singularity of One's Home

My home is all around the world
Made of places, people, and memories.
It feels like polished wooden shelves,
And smells like Frangipani trees.

Essential oils are in every room,
Spreading with them lavender haze;
Jazz bursting out from everywhere,
Like orchids blooming in bouquets.

Even though I've moved a lot,
It has always stayed the same.
Every inch of it is comforting
And effortlessly eases my pain.

My home is all around the world,
Growing faster than my heart and soul.
Complex, diverse, and inspiring,
I will always see it as a whole.

My White Heart

I rest my head.
Their birthright - marble spires,
And from them they lament.
Their poor-hung tongues light fires,
And well-meant words foment.

A flash, I'm dead
To them, and yet at home.
The wind bites and the benzene stench
Is as one slung a stone
At my new southern senses. I retch,

My legs of lead
Make me upright again, I breathe
The crystal air
With notes of war's pollution underneath.
My childhood lair.

The snow I tread,
Balcony hangs overhead,
My young self looks down, blank eyes,
Wet nose, blank head,
Glass between us, as a veil of ice.

My waking bed.
Was home, am home, and will be home,
The homes walled off by ice, or time, or tomes
Of histories of friends no longer there,
Southwestward wind masking the scent
Of family, left to another nightmare
Or another dream. I light the incense,
And am dead, and home.

Bring Me Back

“This is home”;
I believe this,
As I dive into suffocating serenity
And She welcomes me into her arms;
Again, the waves lap at my open
Wounds, the coral absorbs the blood;

Presently,
I question this,
As I drown in these familiar hushing harmonies,
And She pillows my lulled fall; As, once
Again, I lose myself to the same
Breathless cadence I always do.

Save me,
From my drowned Venetian kingdom,
This plastic Atlantis;

Save me,
For I'd still rather live
among you,
Than choke on your scrap;

Save me, for
I
am one of
you.

"I'm sorry",
I pull the plug
And look steadily on at murky mirrors I face
As my thoughts, impending fears, spiral
Alongside polluted water, feet
Firmly planted on cold marble.

Vainly, I wish to take it back,
As I watch it spiral down the drain;
Again clawing back to frigid tiles
As I gasp in asphyxiating air; Desperate,
I plead:
“Bring me back”

Where? There.

My base, my favourite place,
There I spent my nights and days.
There is where my inner child stays,
In front of a mirror observing her face,
Wondering what's time and what's space;
Stunned by its pattern and pace.

Her heart is full of rooms,
Constantly waiting for people to visit and stay
All of the doors are locked she assumes?
As she watches everyone go away.

Oh, how the hours, days, years go by;
Under the starry sky
She cannot lie,
She wants to cry!
She lies down to the floor, she can't say bye,
Looking at the stars she keeps her head high;

Loving that place so much,
There is where she digs her grave and dies.

You Are Our Home

As hedgecrickets play their chime of eve
And the last rays of sunlight are caught in the clouds,
In the misty streets, the shuffling crowds
Are desperate, determined, they all want to leave.

They all have the same purpose, they all have the same goal,
To witch they devote their heart and soul.
They desperately want to, at last, be free
To play a bird in its nest or a sloth in its tree,
Under the covers of their soft bed,
Their favourite cushion wrapped around their head.

This is my world, this is my life,
With you I can see my children and wife,
With you I can enjoy the wind and rain
Without undergoing their icy pain,
With you I can think, I can rest, I can sleep
And dream of fences, hopped over by sheep.

And everytime I feel tired and sore
I think of your greeting smile at the door,
Or your soothing warmth healing me to the bone,
Protecting me, am I lost or alone
For this feeling of solitude,
It can never tally long
As the dying day comes to a close
And I hear your homely song.

While the golden stars greet the dazzling moon
And the radio plays its mellow tune,
I lie in my bed, ready to doze off,
And as the pounding thunder is reduced to a cough
I hear, resonating in my weary brain,
The words of Suggs and Dikron Tulane

And I think to myself as I lay on soft foam
Madness sings *our house*, but you are our home.