

DEDDINGTON WRITING COMPETITION 2009

Open Writing Competition

Poem. Theme: "Journey" - Entries: 50

Winner

David Olsen

of Oxford

"Westminster Bridge"

-for Arthur Raymond Bennett

expatriate British painter

A robust man in his seventies
pauses at the centre of the span.
A decade younger, his slight
companion seems more frail.

Heedless drivers speed
with confidence to destinations
known and certain
as that faithful chiming clock.

The wind from the west
waters the eyes of both men.
They squint and turn to look
downriver. The Thames curves

toward a veiled horizon.
Beyond is a sea of ambiguity –
its misted possibilities saturated
with urgency and relevance.

From his bag the larger man
withdraws a canister
and removes the lid.
He hesitates while his friend

steadies him against the parapet.
Ashes swirl on the wind
beneath the discerning Eye.
The crossing is complete. Ray is home.

The competition judge, poet Merryn Williams, commented:

The shortlisted entries were of a very high standard, and I was impressed by their many interpretations of the theme. A river's journey to the sea, or the journey from birth to death, or youth to age, or the journeys of displaced people throughout history. There were nine very good poems, two possible winners, and it was difficult to choose between them. But in the end I was drawn to the beautiful simplicity of 'Westminster Bridge'. We are immediately reminded of Wordsworth's famous sonnet, but since his time the city has changed. There is the London Eye, there is Big Ben measuring the hours, there are innumerable car drivers taking their separate journeys. Two men, frail and aging, are dropping a friend's ashes into the Thames. We are told that he spent his working life in France and has now come 'home', but in fact the ashes are being carried out to sea. As in Dickens, the river is a metaphor for the stream of life; we are all on the same journey.

I was delighted to find so many different takes on the subject of journeys.

Merryn Williams