

# Magma Poetry Competition 2021/22

**Magma** holds two poetry competitions each year: the Judge's Prize for poems of 11 to 50 lines, which was judged this year by **Marvin Thompson**, and the Editors' Prize for poems of up to 10 lines which is judged by a panel of Magma editors.

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## Judge's First Prize: Gwen Sayers Archbishop Tutu's funeral seen from thousands of miles away

white carnations tied with string wilt on Tutu's coffin. cheap pine, like my old bed in Cape Town. the strangeness of unbelonging. London under sombre skies. they say his ashes will be interred below flagstones in St George's. tyres burn and flames cremate in Gugulethu. a mourner fans her masked face. memories unfurl. how Tutu quells a mob, saves a life. Thabo Makgoba swings a censer over the coffin. after the service, aquamation. liberation. a nation's pain soaked in hot water. Mama Leah Tutu sags in a wheelchair under the weight of purple. her daughter says, *thank you Daddy for teaching me to love*. our father teaches me to fear. fear of locusts, tidal waves and quicksand. the white-robed choir sing Nkosi Sikelela. a south-easter unsettles palm trees opposite the cathedral. my father covers half his face with a spade-like hand, plays the piano with his other. faster, faster, phantom of the living room. the bronze bust of Tutu looks on. when did he teach his daughter? after work. after swigging two whiskeys, my dad says, *the haa-de-dah ibis in our garden carries souls of the dead*. I believe him.

## Judge's Second Prize: Pen Kease

### Talking coconuts in the staffroom

She sits back in her chair, relaxed from the crown of her head where her grey roots show right down to the tips of her leatherette shoes. You'd never guess she eloped as a girl with an Italian count. Tells me how she's seen it all before. *These kids*, she says, *all go bad in the end you know. Don't know why but even if he's bright, he'll be got at by the others and they'll tell him he's a coconut - brown on the outside, white inside. Or some such rot.*

*And he'll try to prove himself, to impress, and it won't matter to us if he wears his school tie straight, shirt tucked in, or if his mum goes to church, because the only important thing will be his mates.*

And I want to argue but his tutor refuses to extend a hand because, as she says it will cause him more pain and you can do nothing, being white yourself, and middle-class so I'm condemned for being too soft. *You can't teach if you can't control the little shits.*

And in time, his eyes cloud with cynicism, doubt, and he bunks off school and somewhere years later there's a man who might have been someone and maybe he is, but a different someone and probably still could be if it hadn't been for people like her. If it hadn't been for people like me.

## Judge's Third Prize: Sophie Dumont

# Notes addressed to the person who received my ex's heart

- I know you take a pill every day to prevent your body from rejecting his heart.
- I sometimes dream you're in a hospital bed down the corridor, waiting with a hole in your chest. I'm at the side of T's bed, watching his death arrive for 12 hours. The doctor runs down the corridor with the dripping heart in his blue gloves.
- I remember T's skin wasn't skin anymore but had the texture and weight of wax.
- Every hour T's mum lifted the tube a little and coated his lips with Vaseline.
- A priest came, which felt like a joke.
- A relative I'd never met bought me tea in a polystyrene cup.
- 2 weeks before this I had sat T down and broken us up with the firm hand of *I've met someone else*.
- A nurse made me paint T's palm with green paint and press it on paper like a toddler does. I pushed each finger down to make a print. I was dead myself when I did this.
- Someone took the paper somewhere.
- I imagined a room of colourful dying hands hung like bunting.
- I don't remember the days after the decision was made to switch T off. The week is white.

- In the dream the doctor trips, drops the heart. It skids across the floor and leaves a red streak. A nurse accidentally wheels over the heart with a trolley of clean tools and someone else has to sweep it up with the dedicated heart dustpan and brush, like in bar jobs where the yellow dustpan and brush is for BROKEN GLASS ONLY.
- An ITV producer emailed me for pictures of T.  
*Father meets boy who received his son's heart.* My mum told me not to watch.
- I watched the programme with the lights off, my door locked. I wanted the indulgence of pressing a bruise.
- I stared a hole through your khaki green jumper, through your starched shirt, right to T's/your heart.
- Nobody mentioned how that heart had been mine for three years. This is a sickly-pink thought, I know, because it's just a heart, as boringly everyday as waking up.
- My eyes were sore from watching your bright face. As I stared, I mouthed things I knew your particular heart disagrees with:

*Don't drink more than 2 coffees before breakfast*  
*Don't listen to the 3rd track of Bon Iver's 2nd album*  
*Don't run up Beechen Cliff*  
*Don't drive over to hers as a surprise*  
*Don't ask her what's the matter*  
*Don't let her sit a room away from you*  
*Don't let her open her awful, young mouth*



Commended: Helen Howell

## 闭口藏舌 / Close Your Mouth, Hide Your Tongue

The interviewers ask what I wouldn't speak  
about in class. I don't say: everything – even who I love – speaks.

Sherry, the tour guide, adopts abandoned cats.  
She swipes through photos for me, making them speak.

In the sunrise between apartment blocks  
the elderly stroke the air, willing it to speak.

Food is what's around you: rice in the south, in the north wheat.  
During Natural Disasters, what's around you might speak.

Sherry names the centuries, the buildings, the gates.  
I see the man and the tank, unable to speak.

When my mother was young, bodies from the mainland washed up  
at the beach. Those who couldn't swim couldn't speak.

Tear open a white bun and it breathes.  
Press, and its contents will speak.

In the street, a girl stares at my mixed face.  
美明, they're waiting for you to speak.

Commended: Leah Larwood  
House without walls ~ a prophetic dream

In the dead of morning mother is missing.  
A tornado has spat the house out whole  
and the walls have fallen back into the night.

The one room still whole is the kitchen  
illuminated by a blanket of dandelion light  
that bounces off the tiles onto every clean spot.

The ceiling fan is spinning to a standstill.  
I orbit each gutted living space, searching for her  
- all that is left is infinity in the place of windows.

I sink into the uprising voice from below  
where pipes have burst as if purgatory is leaking,  
and speaking in her mother tongue to the floor -

my grandmother in blinkers mops puddle craters,  
drips land in echo. As I edge into dampness,  
catch my breath past the butchery blackness,

I hunt every desperate wall-less room for her  
but my breaking bones tell me she's already gone.  
Around the last corner I find a suspended stage

with upturned microphones and instruments  
and four slaughtered band members; the music  
has only just stopped, *the show is over*.

In the middle of the basement there's a wall  
with the answer: an illegible name in sticky red  
and she's there, the only audience member,

head back, laid to dry in the midday Maltese sun,  
she's lost 40 years, gained obsidian hair, and eyes,  
including the one she lost to a firework as a child.

I rest my lips on hers and then the dream begins  
or else the ghost of it lays wet fingers on my neck  
while my breath keeps us staring into the underworld.

## Commended: Sophie Segura Zodiac is a Proprietary Eponym

in the Spanish language  
the most widely spoken tongue of  
much of South and Central America and  
is frequently used to refer to vessels  
the so-called 'pateras' skeltering  
towards Spain's *costas*  
carrying undocumented migrants  
with nothing to lose  
the coffin ships of my children's children's history books.

whereas *cayuco* comes via  
the Arawakan language family once common in  
the Caribbean. Anyone in Spain should know *cayuco*  
- *canoa* (Taíno), *piragua* (Carib) are similar terms -  
weighted by history, conquest, human ballast  
in one more humanitarian crisis. These boats  
unfit for high seas, powered by prayer, life savings  
through the deadliest of crossings

Note: The poem can be read as one, horizontally, or as two separate vertical columns



## Commended: James Sutherland-Smith

### A Walk in Winter

A moral mist collects between the trees,  
but it won't even start to snow.  
I still can't travel from myself  
for moderation dogs my heels  
and the wicked give alms to beggars  
while the well-behaved spank their children.

The well-behaved spoil their children.  
A mortal mist thickens between the trees.  
The wicked offer guns to beggars,  
but they won't open fire before it snows.  
Manipulation sniffs at my heels.  
I still can't arm or disarm myself.

I still can't own or disown myself.  
The mischievous neglect their children  
while extravagance snaps at their heels  
and a golden moss glows on the trees.  
Like great wealth it will dazzle when it snows  
and the wicked claim it's too grand for beggars.

The wicked proclaim a curse on all beggars  
though I have yet to denounce myself.  
My breath billows in the woods when it snows.  
The misbegotten mourn the birth of children  
as black frost cracks the bark of trees  
and a panting negative nips their heels.

Why must the devil growl at my heels?  
Who but the wicked should be beggars?  
What melting mystery slips from the trees?  
When is the time to resurrect myself?  
How do the mad forgive their children?  
Which house do we adorn when it starts to snow?

The church is lit but empty when it snows.  
An innocence yaps in play at my heels.  
The mild and good teach manners to their children  
while the wicked blame the weather on the beggars.  
I still can't believe in my soul or myself  
as the mystery beckons underneath the trees.

The cold deep snow is cruel to beggars.  
Only a shadow of myself whines at my heels  
and there are no children underneath the trees.

## Editors' First Prize: Tim Scott Displacements (Armagh, 1972)

The pregnant belly of a military Wessex  
disgorged onto the grass  
of Kiernan's field. Christ, she feared  
for them: council kids in camouflage, flying in  
bad attitudes, poverty and Page 3, hammered  
brawls on Friday nights... the thought  
we were beneath them, looking up. At home,  
she battered hymns out from the keyboard, notes  
that throbbed like rotor blades as I, her  
only child, crawled round the black piano's feet.

## Editors' Second Prize: Maria Ferguson I didn't get to say goodbye, I barely said hello.

The cherry trees in the village only bloom for a few weeks  
but that doesn't make it any less special.  
It doesn't mean it might as well not have happened or stop me  
from pausing to pose for a photo in matching pink tracksuit  
and show my teeth, which I've always hated and lift up my arms.  
It doesn't stop me from smiling every time I pass  
because they remind me it's Spring and that the world  
is still turning and I should probably call my mum.  
I held my belly so tenderly. Went through colour charts, names.  
Loved the idea of it so hard, I poured my wine down the sink.

## Editor's Third Prize: Gavin Ritchie Brilliant White

My friend is blind, but she sees like Tiresias,  
and it scares me. She says everything is so right  
at times, so clear she feels infinite.

She was wearing her Six Million Dollar Man t-shirt  
the last time I saw her, on the top of the old  
multi-storey, where we smashed lips and smoked  
a joint we'd found right down to the roach. *I won't ever*

- she said - *be this young again.*

Her feet dangled over the edge, into  
the brilliant white of everything beneath us.

## Commended: Jen Campbell Fell

When my hair became feral and abandoned  
my head, I remembered the foxes at the end

of our road. How their orange fur tumbled like  
scarves in the wash. How the youngest one waited

at the edge of the wood — a four-legged  
ghost who would perch in the sun. Or a bird

tossing feathers right out of its nest. Now men  
draw a square on the back of my head. I feel

the skeleton skin with the tips of my hands.  
Think a song for this tree who is falling.

Commended: Jacqueline Hutchinson  
Figure of Eight

Dear sister, I am coming to see you  
soon and blown along by the same gale  
my time on this earth is thinning  
just like my hair dear sister  
I am coming to see you soon  
neither Camberwell, nor the old  
mute cliffs of southern Jamaica  
will let me stay.

Commended: Christopher M. James  
Minka\*

A bullet train scratches out the thin street cracks.  
Momentary neons betray the calligraphy of lives  
whose space is counted in tatami mats, whose  
silence casts about for lineage. In the mountains,  
time pretends to go both ways: the cryptomeria  
and hinoki cypress planks stare over the shoulders  
of the master craftsman. He cuts into his own body,  
each time reassembled, drawing the wood planer  
into his viscera, and his saw teeth angled to purr  
by a pulling motion alone, towards, never away.

*\*Traditional Japanese wooden houses*

## Commended: Oluwaseun Olayiwola

### Uses of the Sky

I take you down in the way native to men of my background.  
Your tiny futures history, like an authentic Pollock  
seen from behind, all over me; ecstatic the way *let*  
and *stop* dispose their nuance, visionless, artists  
at the beginning of a new form: Black  
boy. White boy. Nothing, when desire is involved, *has*  
to be wrong like using the sky – How glad I am  
we could never be painters. We are  
an argument of sorrow  
that two hands are never enough.

## Commended: Jim Patterson

### Night Out

She'll slip her full naked light through the squid inked heaven  
A night's crack away from earth's seashoreshunt  
Ready to crash and burn the dumbstruck dark  
Waste the stars  
Tonight the mooners and musers can cast their own fleeting shadows  
She'll gutter the shine off her drunksmudged face  
All reflection turned upside down  
And still hazed bleach herself into morning's light