

Jane Draycott's report on the 2023 Competition.

It has been a pleasure to read such a wide variety of strong, and strongly felt, poems submitted to this year's Edward Thomas Fellowship poetry competition. The competition always attracts a large number of lyrically powerful entries – often personally-charged poems, poems evoking a resonant sense of scene or exploring the relation between the individual and the landscape in all its minute and larger-scale presentations and the 2023 entry has been no exception. In an additional fascinating coincidence, some of the most memorable and striking poems this year also have offered a particular interest in ideas around thresholds, and water: I'm not sure what wider growing focus of imaginative or other interest this might represent, but many of the winning and highly commended poems this year share a wonderfully compelling sense of mysterious other worlds, held or reflected as possibilities within the sharply observed detail of the real world.

There were also several very striking entries with images of animals at their heart, not least this year's first-prize-winning poem '**Marsh Angels**'. The poem's marvellous title opens the door on a scene of horses stooping to drink in reflecting water in the Camargue, and transforms that into a moment of profound stillness and sufficiency, dramatised in rippling language and fragmented lineation, taking risks with repetition-as-reflection and in its bold central exemplification of the herd as a single, capitalised 'Horse'.

It's a poem of exciting and searching exploration of animal behaviour, delivering a similar kind of observational thrill as appears in the opening lines in '**Seal**' (joint second prize), again a marvellously transformative poem, compelling at every moment of its rich and dream-like imagining, as deep in mystery as it is in pathos at its rather visionary close. Joint second prize is also awarded to '**We Will Be Out until the Light Has Gone**' with its vivid, complex arrival at a shocking psychological threshold in its powerful account of a child taken out shotgun hunting by an older man, perhaps a father. It's a poem which I came back to again and again in admiration of the poet's capacity to deliver its powerful emotional charge with such concision and delicate economy, step by step to its thought-provoking conclusion.

It's been a very strong entry overall this year, and the choices have been especially hard to make - my appreciative thanks are owed to all the poets who submitted, even though sadly not every poet's work could make it to the final selection.