

## Martin Lucas Haiku Award 2022: Judge's Report

Having never judged a haiku contest before, I felt it an honour and a challenge to judge this year's Martin Lucas Haiku Award. As a way of preparation I read and reread Martin's essay *Haiku as poetic spell*, hoping to capture some of his spirit in the haiku I chose to select. Any of the 30 poems or so constituting my shortlist could have made the cut and I'm confident many of those will find a home in haiku journals or place in another contest. In the end, however, the final selection inevitably comes down to the judge's personal preferences and biases.

### First prize

all the polymers of a swans' nest morning breeze

*John Barlow*

Swans usually build their nests at the water's edge from the materials available nearby. Normally these would be natural such as reeds, sticks and dried grass, but as the purely natural habitats have become rare man-made stuff will also be used. Polymers occur in nature - cellulose, for example, is the main constituent of wood - but we usually first think of synthetic materials such as nylon, polyethylene, polyvinyl, and many more. It is well known that plastic is one of the main sources of pollution, be it in its macro or micro form. I imagine this nest is made mostly of plant materials with a nylon thread or a piece of plastic tucked in between. This swan pair and their offspring may not be facing immediate danger but, though the morning breeze is refreshing, the future is unclear.

### Second prize

as if warm air sprouts wings damselflies

*Marietta McGregor*

Damselflies are creatures of summer. They are also ancient though possibly not quite as old as their larger relatives, the dragonflies. There is something awe-inspiring about these predatory insects hovering around, sometimes appearing as if from thin air. This haiku uses simile to achieve the desired effect, and does it very well. We are told poetic devices are to be shunned in haiku but, as in this case, the right one in the right place makes for a better poem.

### Third prizes

late winter  
the day begins

with robins

*Frank Hooven*

Late winter is a time when mornings are still freezing cold but the daylight is getting perceptibly longer. Crocuses and snowdrops emerge from between the remaining patches of snow and are those first daffodil shoots breaking the soil in the garden's sunniest spot? Moreover, there are robins. We are not told whether the birds were seen, perhaps at the feeder, or just heard. In any case, what better way to start the day?

summer solstice  
                                  tipping  
into firefly time

*Jo Balistreri*

This is a haiku that puts us right into the scene at the time of year when nights are shortest and it's a pleasure to hang outside after the sunset when the heat eases off and the fireflies' mating show begins. The atmosphere is relaxing although the days will inevitably get shorter as on its way around the sun the Earth tips toward the other end of the pendulum, the winter solstice. I like the way the indented L2 consisting of a single word, "tipping", adds to the overall effect.

### **Commended**

wobbly legs  
the fawn saddled  
with a galaxy

*Scott Mason*

A new life has emerged and already it is marked by no less than a galaxy! The spots on the fawn's fur serve as camouflage as it lies motionless in the undergrowth hiding from predators. What a delightful thought it is that the whole galaxy is helping protect it. There are other possible interpretations, of course, but in this case, I prefer to focus on the positive.

theatre improv  
teens explore  
the afterlife

*Maryam Mermey*

Is the show a comedy or a drama? Is it about the afterlife at all? In any case, the adolescents have decided to delve into this topic which can be as heavy or philosophical as one makes it to be. But we all die in the end, or is it really the end?

rock wallabies on cave walls all that we lose along the way

*Mark Miller*

Rock wallabies, a genus of several nocturnal species of wallabies, live in steep and rocky terrain where they can find refuge during daytime. Their depictions appear in aboriginal cave art. However, their populations, like so many others, have become vulnerable due to habitat loss, climate change, predation and competition with introduced species. All this and more is contained within this monoku.

gathering dusk  
an oil pump jack's  
Jurassic shadow

*Mike White*

In the fading light the pump jack can look like a T-Rex relative. The crude oil contained in the field may well have been there during the age of dinosaurs. But humans have been using these valuable resources extensively and causing all kind of damage to the planet which will soon no longer be able to sustain our ever-growing population. An ominous dusk is gathering as we're all heading towards the sixth great extinction.

*Polona Oblak*