



Chiltern Arts Poetry Collection 2025

Journeys...

2025 Poetry Collection

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Winner: Adult Category

A Seat for the Traveller
Kavita Hansla

I take a seat
so the table feels less empty.
I set out the cards I have kept over the years,
and this year too.
Carefully, as if the ink were still drying.

I light the candles, there is one more than last year.
Enough to warm the room,
enough to soften the edges of an evening
spent in the company of shadow.

I press shuffle, and the room shifts -
the first note pulls at something distant.
The playlist hums old summer memories as a teen,
each sound an echo of something once mine -
stitched through years of candlelit laughter,
too-sweet cake, too-loud singing.
The sound brings with it whiffs of mama's cooking,
vanishing with the last note.

A new song begins, and suddenly I'm seven,
spinning in the arms of a past
I didn't want to outgrow.
I tug on the threads of my jumper
as the sitar tugs at my heart.
This jumper - woven by hands that once held me,
carried across an ocean, still heavy with warmth.

A third song plays, and I am nineteen,
stepping off a plane, feeling the weight of goodbye.
I stare at my tea, watching the leaves swirl -
as if they know it's a celebration.
As if they know I miss the same fields too?

I offer myself the first bite of cake,
and every bite after too.
As the notes play.
As the leaves dance.
As the jumper holds.

I do not move, and yet -
the years gather around me,
pull up their own seats,
and stay a while.

A Corinthian Conversation about Life's Journey
Tom Chinnery

"Faith, Hope, Love and the greatest of these is Love"
The mountains call and I am unmoved.
The sea murmurs but I turn away.

The skies lighten with golden sunsets but I am oblivious.
Memories are fading and stories stale with their retelling.

Autumn is over and I remain.
Can we rekindle the fiery freshness of youth?
To look to the mountains with wonder and awe?
To embrace the sea and call her sister?
To enfold the sunset and feel aglow?
To have faith in the future and hope for better?
But love, love endures the coldest of winters.
Of all in the telling love remains till the end.
All we can ask that love was a friend.

A Suitable Exercise
Nicola May

No longer tethered to the sandy
bank they ride upright, like
four starched dolls, bright
against a monochrome sky

In a boat? Have you lost your —

Two of them work at paddles.
Their dark skirts anchor them
to the curve of bow and stern.
Parting the water, slow and
firm, they leave behind
the ripple of a wake

— I'll be damned if I'll let you go out

And these two with idle hands
sit in the centre, sleeves half-cuffed
to wrists. One is stiff from bodice up,
the other bends a little to the lens,
her pinned cushion of hair
loosening...

This nonsense —

Don't move.

— must stop

The photographer sets the shot,
Lines up the black box, slips
beneath the hood

I strictly forbid it.

Come now, ladies, smile,
he says.

And one does.

At Little Missenden Festival: a journey in time
Elizabeth Wager

Mute masonry in a quiet village church
what changes have these pillars witnessed?
What fleeting fads and fashions outlasted?
Walls and images plastered, painted, masked:
then revealed again.

Which sounds echoed in this space?
For you have surely heard the shifting tides
of Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and now English:
Catholic, Puritan, Protestant rites,
plainsong and polyphony;
a raucous serpent, perhaps, before the respectable organ?
Riots, revolts, reformations,
The steady tick of time.
A new squire more important than a new but distant king
in this remote chalk valley.

Today, the music resonates, then dies away
Adding to history's echoes ...
What's a semiquaver to a Saxon stone?

At Sydenham Hill Wood the Children Discover the Architect's Folly
Marjory Woodfield

There's cricket on the common. In allotment gardens, red flowers of runner beans peer above a coppiced fence. We break from the road, follow a path greened by ancient oaks. Reflections disappear. The summer day paints darkness into light.

Light paints algae, spreads it like lace across a pond. Red-tailed damselflies hover, shimmer. Small ripples break the water's surface, appear then disappear. The children find pond skaters, dragon nymphs, green water snails. Reflections flicker, break apart. We return to the path.

Hidden by trees, beyond the path, a ruined folly. Dappled light plays over tumbling stone, paints pictures. Streams, grand homes, landscaped gardens. Crystal Palace, a carriage ride away. Brightness of laughter, crinoline and parasol. Reflections in plate glass. The children turn and run. Scattered stones, a half-arch greened by moss. Time disappears.

Voices cut through silence, disappear. The path is well behind. One child follows another up the arch. Her green mermaid dress, the boys' yellow shorts. Bare feet, sunlit legs, painted patterns over grass. I'm as high as the sky, her voice hits hard bark, reflects, fades.

Clouded reflections in an ornamental stream, remnants of a rockery, small plants long disappeared. We leave the folly. Walk among hornbeam, wood anemones, dog violets. The boys find a broken branch, climb, swing. She lifts a shaded log beside the path. Wood louse, scurrying beetles, giant slug. Chases a butterfly with painted wings. Looses it among green leaves.

Nuthatch in a tree where once a greenhouse stood. Shattered reflections. Vast homes, lawns, a painted palace, all disappeared. We take another path. The day breaks into sun.

Shortlisted: Adult Category

Small Town Boy
John Dredge

The rising cost of living
Is taking all I've got
And so I've had to sell my flat
And move to Bekonscot.

But all is clean in Bekonscot
Immaculate and shiny
And nowhere's ever crowded
As the population's tiny.

Oh happy town of Bekonscot
You'll always get my vote
A town where small is special
And where little is of note.

Shortlisted: Adult Category

Not In Kansas
Alison Lowe

Wide flat land and dust dirt roads
Colour bleached by the white sun.
An occasional wooden cart,
Rider and animal incurious, slumped.

A mounded yard,
Stretches oddly dark in the noon,
Seeming to ripple in the haze.
As I stare, the grey surface schisms.

Fat bodies solid, tails twitching,
The wide river of rats
Splits to tumbling streams
And surges around my planted feet.

In the drumming echo of their scampering
And the heat an almost pressure on my neck,
I feel my distance from home.

Shortlisted: Adult Category

The call to the North
Isobel Richards

Broken fragments cross the miles:
“Ambulance... Catastrophic”.
Blurred view of flight website;
“Business or Leisure?”

Sharp moon over de-iced wing,
Starlit engines roar.
Spinning blades race ebbing life,
Taxi glides silver through frozen hills.

Kind uniforms, distant beeps,
Time measured by rationed breaths;
Journeying together in curtained stillness:
Solemn vigil gladly kept.

Creeping dawn brings
Slowing pulse beats.
Final departure.

Shortlisted: Adult Category

Sediments and Sentiments
Catherine Rowland

The smooth skin of a pebble etches
its history into the hollow of my palm: cold and soothing
to touch. I toss it between impatient fingers mulling over
its journey to this place; the fragments it lost as the waves
broke and moulded its shape. The weight of nostalgia it
carries from seas far-travelled, weightless yet heavy in my hand;
I think of how it spun through uncertain currents searching
for somewhere to land. Forming and re-forming from
sediments weathered by collision and clime;
a geographical memoir that finds me, as I found it:
skimming through the passage of time.

Shortlisted: Adult Category

Aotearoa
David Taylor

Aotearoa: New Zealand -
'Land of the long white cloud'.
The concatenation of rich Māori vowels
clashes with flat Anglo-Saxon
monosyllables -
as once proud chieftains
suspiciously encountered
urbane British Bible-bashing
imperialists.

1840: the Treaty of Waitangi:
birth of a nation
or destruction of a culture?
2025: our daylong voyage
brings us to witness
a tortuous, eggshell-treading journey
to reclaim, respect, reinvigorate that heritage.
Tentative, still, and incomplete:
but a journey of reconciliation and
bilingual rapprochement
which may yet let its people
reflect the unmatched beauty that is
Aotearoa.

Winner: Under 18s Category

The Pilgrim's Path
Eleni Barrett

The road began, a whispered call,
A thread of dust, unseen by all.
The horizon gleamed, a ghostly fire,
Half a promise, half desire.

The forest stood, a shadowed keep,
Its roots sank deep where memories sleep.
Each twisted branch, a silent guide,
Each step, a truth I could not hide.

The mountains rose with ruthless grace,
Their jagged spires a timeless face.
I climbed not to conquer, but to yield,
To scars that time had yet to heal.

The desert spread, a sea of flame,
Its sands unmarked by step or name.
Yet through the void, a voice rang clear,
A stillness born of burning fear.

At last, the ocean, vast and pure,
A hymn of depths, both sharp and sure.
Its waves erased what came before,
Yet opened wide an unseen door.

The journey shaped what I became,
Its trials carved both wound and name.
Now I am road, and stone, and sea
The pilgrim's path, the pilgrim's key.

The Journey of a River
Elodie Comonte

The Journey of a River,
Starts as a small spring
A trickle of water speeding around trees and bushes
Playing and splashing happily.
Slowly it widens out needing more space,
Growing faster, speeding by in the summer sunshine.
Then continuing its journey,
It stretches into a small lake
Wondering where it's meant to go,
Then spots an exit,
Flowing out again
Makes a mistake and is sent-
Tumbling,
Tumbling,
Splashing and turning round and round.
Down a waterfall of adventure,
Then, it knows it's made it.
Out in the open sea.
Floating.
Then it makes its journey all over again,
This time though, it takes its time,
Knowing it will get there some day.

Where I'm From: Journey Of My Life
Elena Hankins

I come from creaky wooden floors
And the scent of books, books worn,
Where reading them feels like time stops.
From autumn leaves falling, and thunderstorms watched from

The nook in the attic.
From summer nights as kids where
I scanned the night sky for the Big Dipper and Orion.
My home is where my mom calls us down to dinner,
"Spätzle" sitting on the antique dining table
And the lingering flavor of "Kalter Hund" on my tongue,
Chocolatey with the secret ingredient of love,
And where my siblings and I sit and bicker.
From stories shared over "Kaffee und Kuchen",
From waiting for Nikolaus to fill my boots every December

And early morning Christmas Mass
That I learned to appreciate and understand over time.
From the planes taking me to faraway places,
From sunburns and hikes,

And late night swims and early mornings on the slopes.
But home is with me wherever I go,
Where the rain falls into my skin and veins,
With the Austrian Alps planted into my core,

Steadying me,
The roots holding memories in place
In the bustling soil of my mind.

At a Train Station

Maya Mujeeb

At a train station a girl is running for her life
She learned it from her mother
Her mother who took a train to the docks
Carpet bag with her belongings:
An outfit and a dream of the mother country
A country that would never really want her
And do her best to keep her down
At a train station the mother ran for her life
From the skinheads and their fists and spitting words
And made it home to her daughter
Tried to teach her she was wanted,
Something she never quite managed.

At a train station a girl runs for her life
From the station her mother left from
But leaving her mother behind
She wouldn't be able to visit the grave again.
At the station the girl is running from her life
Towards brighter shores and better days
Until she can bring herself to return home
To the flat without her mother
When she does, now an adult, now a wife
She promises she'll succeed
She'll make her children feel wanted.

At a train station a girl runs from her life
She learned it from her mother
Her mother who taught her her family's tragedies
And the world in which they suffered
To bring her a life she won't have to run for
Still at the station she runs from it
Lack of violence doesn't mean healthy
She beats herself up as others don't
And if she tells herself she can't feel the pain,
She won't suffer -
Something her mother didn't mean to teach
She runs to uni and starting again
And so, in a way:
At a train station a girl runs for her life
She learned it from her mother.

Shortlisted: Under 18s Category

My Magical Adventure
Georgina Fellowes

I packed my bag with all I need,
A magic map, some books to read.
Set off one bright and sunny day,
To find a land, far, far away.
I crossed the hills and swam the streams,
Chased after butterflies and moonlit dreams.
I met a dragon, big and bold,
Who told me tales of treasures old.
I sailed across the sparkling sea,
A pirate ship for company.
We searched for jewels and gold, and pearls,
And found a cove, in the sea's swirls.
I climbed a mountain, reached the peak,
Could touch the stars, so unique.
Found a unicorn in a secret glade,
Its shimmering horn, a lovely shade.
Through enchanted forests, I did roam,
Till finally, I found my way back home.
With stories galore and treasures fine,
The greatest adventure,
It was all mine.

The Big Adventure

Anna Gosa

I packed my bag with things I need—
A snack, a map, a book to read.
The world is waiting, wide and grand,
With secrets I don't understand.

I step outside, the air feels new,
The sky is painted every blue.
The wind is singing through the trees,
A song that dances with the breeze.

I climb a hill, my legs feel strong,
Each step a beat, a marching song.
What's over there? What's past that stone?
It feels so good to be alone.

But not alone, not really quite—
The birds are chirping, the sun's so bright.
The clouds are shapes that drift and play,
They guide me gently on my way.

And even when the path grows steep,
I hear the whispers: "Go, don't sleep!"
A journey's more than where you go,
It's what you find and what you know.

At last I stop; the day is done.
The journey ends where it begun.
But I am different, not the same—
Adventures always change the game!

Shortlisted: Under 18s Category

The Path Unknown
Aaditri Manjunath

I set my foot upon the road,
A path ahead, yet fate untold.
The sky is vast, the winds run free,
Where will this journey take me?

Through whispering woods and valleys deep,
Where secrets of the ages sleep.
Over mountains, tall and steep,
Where echoes of lost voices weep.

The sun may shine, the rain may pour,
At times I'll soar, at times endure.
Each step I take, each turn I find,
A map not drawn, but shaped by time.

The past behind, the stars above,
I walk with fear, I walk with love.
Not just in miles, but in my mind,
A world to see, a truth to find.

And when one path comes to an end,
Another waits around the bend.

Shortlisted: Under 18s Category

Waves of Destiny
Isha Vibhin

Life is a treacherous journey like a long winding river
Begins as a gentle spring giving birth to boundless dreams
Life nor rivers journey is easy
For one's current guides and carves its path
Through stones and rocks it strides
For life, its dreams meets with struggles
And yet it confronts and surges forward relentlessly
Even when raging storms toss and lash it down
Nothing shatters the river's desire to meet the sea
And so does life
Even when failures strike and breaks it down
It dusts itself and rises from the ashes
Alas! The river meets the sea, with endless depth
And life finds its purpose as destiny embraces
It with both hands

Shortlisted: Under 18s Category

Acrostic Adventure

Siri Vijapur

As the journey unfolds, I start to roam
Distant places, so far from home
Voyages and ventures, they call out to me
Every adventure seems destined to be
Navigating through storms, wild and free
To places where I long to be
Underneath the sky, I wander far
Reaching for the light of every star
Every step, a story to unfold and grow
Striving for more, where the wild winds blow