My task this summer was made pleasurably difficult by the high standard of entries: many of the poems which didn’t make the shortlist were of publishable standard and had much to recommend them. In the end I was guided to my final choices by their technical skill and intelligence combined with a crucial audaciousness which set them apart. Congratulations to you all – reading your work has sent me away creatively fired up by the possibilities of language.

Esther Morgan

First Prize, Short Poem Category, Linda Saunders

Tresure

She will tresure my letter forever,
Bethany begins, and four pages follow
with spaces for butterflies. Never before
has she received a real letter.

In mine, I taught her PS for thoughts after the end,
and dream now of sharing a love of brackets
(words in the wings) and commas,
punctuation’s breath (the spirit’s symbol).

She is sorry, she says, for not adding colour
to her drawings. But she’s copied butterflies
with such care that colour flashes subliminally
from tortoiseshell shadows, veined wings;

it breaks through ink and white paper, sped
by those flicked tails on her gs and ys;
through vagaries of spelling and the mail.
PS I will write allot more letters in future.

I can believe in treasure, the quark, genes,
a mirror in the heart, as her pencil attends
to the Comma’s groovy wings which, she notes,
don’t look pretty at all on the outside

but when they open its brehttaking.

First Prize, Long Poem Category, Nicolette Golding, for Where Is Jill? The winner is restricted to a single page in ARTEMISPoetry, and, though the poem is conventionally left-justified, as it does not lend itself to being presented in extract, we have – with the poet’s permission – taken the liberty of setting the poem out in an unconventional manner so that it may be presented in full (next page).
Where is Jill?

Nicolette Golding, 1st Prize, Long Poem Category

*Found poem: from* The Children’s Picture Dictionary, Collins 1951

Jack has a gun. He
will not let Jill play with it. He
will not allow her to play with it.

Jack beat Jill. He
ran much faster than Jill. Jack
has a bow. He puts arrows in it. He
shoots with his bow.

Jill has a bow. It is made
of ribbon. She ties the bow in her hair.
Jill makes a bow. She bends
her head down and bows. Jack
can dive into the water. He

is able to dive. Jill cannot dive.
She is not able to dive. Jack
likes to climb trees. He
likes climbing. Jill has
a red comb. Jill can comb her hair. Jack
dug a deep hole. Jack
dives in at the deep end of the swimming pool. Jack
likes to dive into the water. A man who dives
is called a diver. Jack likes to do sums. It is not easy
to do them. Jill does not always find them easy. Everything
in Jack’s room belongs to Jack. Everything is Jack’s. Jack
can draw the figure of a man. Jack can fire his gun. He
shoots when he fires. Jack can lie on his back and float

on the water. Jill wears one glove on her right hand.
She wears one glove on her left hand. Jill is not a bad girl.
She is good. She does what she is told. Jack
has a hoop. He owns the hoop. Jill is on the ground. Jack
is high up in the tree. Jack is higher than Jill. Where
is Jill? She is at home. I am a girl. I have a brother called Jack. Jack
can kick his football. Jack is flying his kite. Jack
is the leader. Jack is going to leap over the fence.

Jill can lift a jug. Jack has a lot of marbles. Jack
is marching with the soldiers. “This is my
snowman,” says Jack. I made him myself. He is mine. Jack
wants to be a sailor. He will join the navy when he grows up.
Jill’s nose is in the middle of her face. Jack’s dog will obey him.
He is obeying Jack’s orders. Jack has a pony. It belongs to him. He
owns the pony. Jill’s cheeks are pink. She has
a pink ribbon in her hair. A poem is a piece of poetry. A man
who writes poems is called a poet. Jill is a pretty girl.

Jack’s pony is quicker. It runs faster than Jill’s. Jack
will go out. Jill will remain at home. Jack
has a pair of roller skates. He can move at great speed. Jack
has gone for a sail on the sea. Jack’s toys
are on the top shelf. Jill’s toys are on the bottom shelf. Jill has
two sleeves in her dress. Jack will soon be at the top of the tree. He
will get there sooner than Jill. Jack can travel through the water. He
can swim. Jack will take his spade to the beach. Jill will
take off her hat. Jill likes to wade. Jack is not wading. Jack is swimming.
Jill can write. She can put words on paper.
Second Prize, Pippa Little

White Afternoon

Join us in the garden, wind-blown by laundry and hawthorn’s steam. Sometimes strange oppositions between joy, say, or the old grief, become the other. Today is that kind of day. We are directed to be still before the camera, and as I hold the warm eleven months of him, he notices a butterfly, ivory-veined, uncrumpling against the sleeves and plackets on the line. His obsidian eyes flash with waterfull fire, turquoise, jade, more ancient than my language, the paleness of me, his stranger grandmother.

I think of marble, and snow, and many things he’s yet to see, fragile or stony, and how long after he’s gone I’ll still be crazy with love for him, how happiness burns even as it falls away. The photograph is taken and months from now will seem anonymous. Rain will approach later in a delicate stippling and I’ll run out, pull down into my arms bundles and clouds and all my sad weather.

Third Prize, M R Peacocke

Coming Across

There’s her trail, a crossing of night ground hauled in chains of effort oval by oval and here’s mine, zigzag of fading patches: tortoise in her dry garden; me. She floats on my greyblue stare, angling her head to balance my image in her birdly eye.

Immobile as specimens in a museum, we’re planted in sunlight in the same accident of time. In, out, the same throb of air, our pecking hearts imperceptible metronomes.

I begin to consider our differences, our sameliness. Our response to gravity, five-toed feet; her manner foursquare, mine more fickle. Under that shell must be skin I imagine as vulnerable as mine. Then, I have hair and she doesn’t – but what if I’d been born with her visceral understanding of planetary shift, emptying blood and breathing into sleep as the world tilted and cooled? –

when my shell-less body interrupts to warn that it’s hot, hot; so I pull open a tomato the sun has split, a piece for me a piece for her, and leave that slow beaking and hingeing of a toothless and wordless mouth at work on the scarlet flesh.