There were 77 entries to judge in the adult category this year, and though that number is a little down on last year’s I thought the general standard was just as high: I found myself picking out almost a third of the total as an initial long-list. Not surprisingly, then, for each picture there were excellent stories that just lost out to the category winners which were: ‘Far Away and Somewhere Else’, ‘Drawing the Line’, ‘Satyr’ and ‘Restless Migrants’. ‘A Welsh Incident’ won the overall prize for best story across all categories.

I chose my shortlist of five purely on the basis of each story’s power to resonate in my imagination long after my first impression, and to remain lively and interesting after repeated close readings. One of the most fascinating and entertaining aspects of the competition, this year and last, is the sheer range of voices and styles that the different images inspire in writers. The shortlist reflects this, by luck rather than design, and I’m delighted that it includes playful meta-fiction, gritty urban monologue, lyrical prose-poetry and subtle realism.

Though another judge would inevitably have different preferences here and there, I’m confident that all five of the chosen pieces (and one or two besides that lost out to them) are strong enough to capture the imaginations, and reward the intelligences, of most readers. Their imagery is fresh, their voices are distinctive, and their writers are confident and accomplished enough to take surprising, sometimes even exhilarating, narrative risks.

The overall winner faced stiff competition, but after much thought I went for the story that most intrigued me and that I most looked forward to re-reading at each phase of judging. ‘A Welsh Incident’ has many qualities but what particularly struck me was the fluency with which it combines realist and surrealist modes to prepare the ground for a startling and haunting final paragraph. It nods a little playfully to Robert Graves’s famous poem of almost the same name, but creates an atmosphere and mood all its own: a strange, dream-like mix of sadness, loss, wonder and menace. I’m sure I’ll remember it in years to come as clearly as I remember some of Kafka’s parables, or Andersen’s fairy tales.

Wayne Price