



Forward
Prizes
for Poetry

2022 FORWARD PRIZES CEREMONY

28 November |
Contact Theatre, Manchester

#ForwardPrizes

**ABOUT
FORWARD
ARTS
FOUNDATION**

The first Forward Prizes were awarded in 1992, with the Best First Collection that year going to a young poet called Simon Armitage. He was joined on the stage by Thom Gunn (winner, Best Collection) and future Scottish Makar Jackie Kay (winner, Best Single Poem). Since then, the Prizes have lauded some of the most ground-breaking names in poetry including Seamus Heaney, Claudia Rankine, Kei Miller, Malika Booker, Danez Smith and Caleb Femi.

Over the last 30 years, Forward has broken down barriers in the poetry world, and we have become the most influential awards for new poetry published in the UK and Ireland. Because we offer three distinct categories the prizes have successfully championed new voices (particularly in Best Single Poem and Best First Collection categories) and internationally renowned poets alike. We situate ourselves at the vanguard of new poetry, and we have a particular interest in supporting emerging poets to ensure fresh new voices reach wider, more diverse audiences.

Alongside the Prizes, our strong publishing track record (which includes the Poems of the Decade series, one of which is on the A-Level syllabus) and National Poetry Day enable us to reach around 123 million social media feeds per year. The Daily Telegraph has called the Prizes 'the most coveted awards in British poetry', and the Guardian has said our shortlists 'address the world head-on'.

In 2022, 217 books and 192 single poems were pored over by judges. 2023 will see us award the first ever performance prize on a national awards stage (Best Single Poem - Performed), and our 2023 panel of judges will be chaired by Bernardine Evaristo.

TONIGHT'S COCKTAIL

Why not try the cocktail 'Algebra' after the show? It contains curaçao, pineapple juice, coconut water, chai syrup, elderflower syrup and lime juice – which we know sounds a bit out there but it's very refreshing and delicious!

It was mixed by **Christie Cremin**. And is based on the poem by the same name written by **Keisha Thompson**

ALGEBRA

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

I thought I knew what this meant leaning back on my chair cocky in the classroom obsessed with getting the right answer without looking for the truth ∴ this school system has a way of twisting things up like Rubik's cubes. Tells you about algebra without explaining that it is Arabic - a word plucked from a foreign land meaning "the reunion of broken things".

Algebra is the alchemy of the unknown - it means that a can stand for anything.

How I would give anything to go back to my classroom arm raised like Einstein's fringe to ask if a can stand for abolition of transatlantic slavery? Or the aggressive abstraction that makes history teachers speak only of 1807, Wilberforce \wedge the House of Commons? They do not ask us to "show our working out to get full marks" ∴ then we might mention Harriet Tubman or Nanny of the Maroons or the Haitian Revolution. Full marks needs us to reference a moment when Wilberforce argued that slaves are property in order to set them free. Some sugar sweet hypocrisy turned my ancestors into outdated machines so hapless slave masters could reap redundancy fees. The inconvenience of a black human spirit led to the biggest bail-out this country has ever seen.

a could stand for Aviva - just one of many companies we use today kick-started with slave money. a could stand for Abraham Lincoln who was

not pro-black, just pro-economic efficiency. Let's compensate then colonise the slaves - free enough to afford their own poverty. This is the true meaning of algebra - "the reunion of broken things".

b could stand for Blank Panthers bottled up \wedge brought to you by Beyoncé. I don't have an issue with her tribute per se but why should a Superbowl break be a classroom today? Why do I need a pop artist to validate my body, my skin, my story, my past?

b could stand for the Brazilian beauty queen too black to be broadcast. *b* could stand for a Burger King meal served to an assassin with a backdrop of burning black churches. *b* could stand for Bernie Grant, Brixton Riots, bleach creams that attempt to make my race more invisible than it already is. I'm just trying to teach you some algebra - "the reunion of broken things"

I suppose that *c* could stand for colonialism, capitalism, credo colourlessness, consumerism, coercion, cultural castrato. All I know is this curriculum is a caesarean section of mass destruction. It will reach into your womb \wedge snatch you from your roots, unless you are prepared.

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

If you do the etymology on Pythagoras, you could argue that his name translates to "destruction is a marketplace". Pretty fitting since

we know this theorem to be named after a Greek man despite it being used by the Egyptian civilisation to build the pyramids. It was used by the Babylonians before Pythagoras was getting his ass kissed by Euclid. So why is it named after him with no mention of its heritage? Yes he wrote the proof \wedge I thank him for it but once again black intelligence is uncredited - algebra is these bruised knees, a black child come archaeologist, a diaspora of truth, a reunion of broken things.

c could stand for children scribbling confused calculations in confines of their Cartesian coordinate pages. Filling each little square with just one digit, out of context, rehearsing their own limits. But I think c should stand for: critique \wedge creativity \wedge curiosity to find the unknown. Seek out the erasure. Question the missing footnotes in these textbooks \therefore when you do, all these things will actually start to add up.

'Algebra'
Keisha Thompson

2022 JUDGES



Fatima Bhutto is the author of several books of fiction and nonfiction, most recently the novel, *The Runaways*, and the nonfiction reportage about globalisation and popular culture, *New Kings of the World*.



Rishi Dastidar is a fellow of The Complete Works, a consulting editor at The Rialto magazine, a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, and chair of writer development organization Spread The Word. His second collection, *Saffron Jack*, was published in the UK by Nine Arches Press in 2020.



Writer and activist **alice hiller's** debut, *bird of winter*, was shortlisted for the 2021 Forwards Prize for Best First Collection and the 2022 John Pollard Prize. Author of *The T-Shirt Book*, she has reviewed widely, and holds a PhD from UCL.



Nadine Aisha Jassat is the author of *Let Me Tell You This*. Her work has drawn significant acclaim, and she has been published widely and performed internationally. Her debut verse-novel, *The Stories Grandma Forgot (And How I Found Them)* is forthcoming from Hachette Children's Group in 2023.



Stephen Sexton's first book, *If All the World and Love Were Young* was the winner of the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2019 and the Shine / Strong Award for Best First Collection. *Cheryl's Destinies* was published in 2021, and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection.

**FORWARD
PRIZE
FOR BEST
SINGLE
POEM**

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM
SHORTLIST

Louisa Campbell

'Dog on a British Airways Airbus 319-100'

Perverse

Cecilia Knapp

'I'm Shouting I LOVED YOUR DAD at my
Brother's Cat'

Perverse

Nick Laird

'Up Late'

Granta

Carl Phillips

'Scattered Snows, to the North'

PN Review

Clare Pollard

'Pollen'

Bad Lilies

This £1,000 prize, generously sponsored in memory of David King celebrates poems that have not yet been collected in a book or pamphlet.

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM



LOUISA CAMPBELL

Louisa Campbell (b. 1963, Bath) came to poetry late in life, having previously worked as a mental health nurse on acute psychiatric wards. Boatwhistle Books published her first full collection, *Beautiful Nowhere*, in 2021, following on from two pamphlets.

Her shortlisted poem, 'Dog on a British Airways Airbus 319–100', showcases her typically wry and witty approach to form, in a concrete poem reminiscent of Edwin Morgan.

Louisa Campbell

'Dog on a British
Airways Airbus
319-100'

Perverse

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM



CECILIA KNAPP

Cecilia Knapp (b. 1992, Brighton) was the Young People's Laureate for London from 2020–2021. Her shortlisted poem explores her grief after her brother's suicide, finding, in Knapp's words, space for 'one aspect of grief, the surrealness and mundanity of life without the person you adored, the macabre humour we lean into to cope, the precarity of memory, the unanswerable questions you are left with.'

Knapp's debut collection, *Peach Pig*, was published by Corsair in October 2022. Her debut novel, *Little Boxes*, was published in March by The Borough Press. In 2021, she won the Ruth Rendell Award for the writer who had the most significant influence on literacy in the UK in the previous year.

Cecilia Knapp

'I'm Shouting I
LOVED YOUR
DAD at my
Brother's Cat'

Perverse

I'm Shouting I LOVED YOUR DAD at my Brother's Cat

I'm crying at green wallpaper
sick with the memory of your hands.
When you died, though I'd asked you not to,
I got some rest. Fair play. I ate my eggs
and the sun came out. How do you enjoy a fuck
when you're sunburnt with grief?
I had hoped for a loss of appetite,
some silver lining. I live in a flat
that I can't afford. It's got big windows.
They get so dirty. I don't condition my hair.
You'd be disappointed at how often
I let myself go.
I've got your name tattooed on my finger,
but it keeps falling off
when I do the washing up.
I've kept that cat you poured your tenderness into.
I don't remember kissing you
but that doesn't mean it didn't happen.
Some days it's someone else's brother.
You serve me in a coffee shop.
You're on the mend,
pierced ears and a soft hat.

Cecilia Knapp | *Perverse*

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM



NICK LAIRD

Nick Laird (b. 1975, Cookstown) lost his father to Covid-19 in March 2021. 'Up Late', his shortlisted poem, is an elegy, but also a meditation on the form of elegy itself: 'An elegy I think is words to bind a grief // in, a companionship of grief, a spell / to keep it safe and sound, to keep it // from escaping.'

Laird is Professor of Poetry at Queens University Belfast. His most recent collection, *Feel Free*, was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Derek Walcott Prize. He is also a novelist, a screenwriter, and the author of a book for children about a judo-playing guinea pig, co-written with his wife Zadie Smith.

Nick Laird

'Up Late'

Granta

Up Late

If I shut my eyes to the new dark
I find that I start to experience time
in its purest state: a series of durations
rising and dilating beneath my inwards gaze:
an eruptive core where the umbra blooms
in crestless waves of darkness as within
another umbra bubbles up from the interior –
from nothingness, from nowhere –
and at the centre of the crest of this
disintegrating, reassembling nest
the jet of time generates, is consciousness,
the planetary mind, aloft, alone, mine,
jostled and spun like a ping pong ball.

*

My father died today. Sorry to bolt that on.
You understand the shift required. This morning
the consultant said your father now is clawing
at the mask and is exhausted and we've thrown
everything we have at this. It's a terrible disease.

He promises to give him morphine and that a nurse will be beside him at all times to hold his hand and talk him through it.

It being the transition,
the change of state, the fall of light, the trade,

the instant of the hand itself turning from the subject into object. No, we are not allowed in the ward and there cannot be exceptions. Thank you for making this difficult call. But I know what the body wants. Continuance. Continuance. Continuance at any cost.

*

But dying, then, as we speak,
my father in the IC ward
of Antrim Area Hospital.

The icy ward.
The ICU.
I see you too.

On Sunday they permitted us to Zoom
and he was prone in a hospital gown
strapped to a white slab.
The hospital gown split at the back
and the pale cold skin of his back was exposed.

He lifted his head to the camera
and his face was all red, swollen,

bisected vertically by the mask,
and we had to ask Elizabeth the nurse
to say his words back to us –
he sounded underwater –
it's been a busy day but not a good day.

*

I could see even with the mask on
your little satisfaction with the phrase
managed out.

And the achievement left you
so depleted you lowered your head
back to the slab, having done with us,

like some seal on a rock looking up
as we pass on the Blue Pool ferry
out to Garinish.

Dad,
you poor bastard, I see you.
You lay like that for a week alone
with your thoughts in the room.

Tethered. Breathless. undefended.
At sea as on an ice floe
slipping down into the shipping channels.

*

The eye adjusts, even to darkness,
even to the presence of what overwhelms us,
and as I make my way from the bed to the study
the soles of my feet on the carpet warp it
as any fabric made of this space-time will distort
beneath the force of a large object – and my father,
as it happens, is gigantic – and if you thought
an understanding could be reached, you are wrong
for it could not.

The goldfish pilots the light of itself
through a ten-gallon darkness and I keep watch
as the large hand of the clock covers the small
and leaves it behind to the weak approximation
I sit here in and finish writing.

*

I want the poem to destroy time.
What are the ceremonies of forgetting?

There is a spring in Boetia
that lets the river Lethe enter the world.

King Gjuki's ale of forgetfulness.
Excessive phlegm.

But I like the notion of the angel
lightly tapping the baby

in its soft hollow above the top lip, erasing
all the child knows,

all its regret, all its terrible grief,
before it descends again fresh to the world.

*

After your stroke you were born once more
as smaller, greyer, softer, and after Mum died,
left bewildered, adrift, ordering crap online
and following the auctions, the horses, the football,
the golf – but hungering for company, for anyone,
sending money to that Kenyan who was younger
than me and flying out to Germany to see her,
and again, before Jackie arrived on the scene,
the divorced blonde who had ‘her demons’,
by which you meant she was a violent alcoholic,
though with Louise things seemed steady enough,
for a few months, before you got stuck in one
of your loops about her ex-husband funding her
and the weird behavior of her ingrate daughter.

*

You could never let anything go, a trait
I also suffer from, and kind of admire, but

this is not a possibility. The tick of the clock
is meltwater dripping into the fissure.

The minute hand clicks across the hour hand
and hovers for a minute, exactly,

and impinging on the vision is your slack wild face
and the way a nurse's hand might hold

your cold hand or try again to lift your hand
but your hand now will not respond.

*

I have been writing elegies for you all my life, Father,
in one form or another, but now I find the path is just
this game trail through the forest, the forested mind
and I would follow in the manner of an animal –
a deer, a fox, a chimpanzee – returning to the clearing
to nuzzle the corpse, to lick its nape or bite it softly,
to look away, and look again, and wait for a response.
One hand on the clock holds the other for a minute
before going on alone. It is death that is implicit
in the ticking.

*

One must negotiate the next moment. The mind
will not stop and certain things are good to think
with. Goldfish; carpet; clock. I want something fit
to mediate the procreative business of redoubling
the brittle world, and settle on an image, for a second,
since it is a given that the mind will keep returning
to the magic, the legerdemain, the trick: one hand

holding your hand as it turns into an object, as I turn back along the track toward the fold, toward the corner of the field where the father's body lies, and with an animal's dumb clarity do grief work – kiss your hand and kiss your cheek and leave my forehead for a time pressed against yours.

*

When I phoned the hospital this afternoon to say goodbye, though you were no longer lucid,

Elizabeth the nurse held the phone against your ear and I could hear your breathing, or perhaps the rasping

of the oxygen machine, and I said what you'd expect. I love you, Dad, and I want you to keep on fighting,

but if you are too tired now, and in too much pain, then you should stop fighting, and let go, and whatever

happens it's okay. I love you. You were a good father. The kids love you. Thank you for everything.

Then I hung up. And scene. Impossible to grieve and not know the vanity of grief. To watch one

self perform the rituals that take us. Automaton
of grief, I howled, of course, by myself

in my office, then sobbed for a bit on the sofa.
An elegy I think is words to bind a grief

in, a companionship of grief, a spell
to keep it safe and sound, to keep it

from escaping. There are various ways to
memorize. Plato calls on Mnemosyne.

My grandfather Bertie liked to tie
a knot in his blue handkerchief.

My father wrote in biro on his palm.
I cannot leave the poem alone.

*

Do you remember the pure world? I remember it
from being a kid. All was at stake in that place,
one moved through it sideways, through forests
of time, lost in them, and had to be called back
to the moment. Infinities growing in stone,
in moss, in the hayshed, the rain, the wind,
in the darkness under the cattle grid.

Rilke says of the pure unseparated element –
' . . . someone dies and is it.'

*

It's after two.
You are dead by now I hope.
Who thought to write that?

There's no hurry now,
no effort, no need to call.
You might be only sitting

in your red chair
endlessly flicking
through the channels.

*

When I asked the doctor, Andrew Black, he said,
it could take minutes, it could take hours,

and I see you slumped, not sitting up,
propped against some pillows

with your eyes closed. Something in you
finally given up defying gravity,

some obedience to objecthood settled
in you now and set up home. Set in stone.

Outside on the motorway the headlights
of the vehicles are necklaces of diamonds,

double-strung, and alongside them,
heading westwards, necklaces of garnets.

Dad,

I cannot stay in the room with you too
long in my mind. It is too hard. I thought

there would be futurity. I thought things
would happen. Nothing major. Barbecues.

Why barbecues? God knows. You are walking
round Bantry at the Friday market in your shorts

in the rain, your white tube socks pulled tightly up
and a bright t-shirt from some Spanish golf trip

tucked into your shorts. By the way,
we are even, you and I. No need. Look:

How absolutely still the room is. Outside
the widowed sky has grown huge with stars.

The Milky Way meandering like the Ballinderry,
though the night has come with work to do.

It sits with you and broods. It wants you
to come at your own pace. And at this moment

you might get up and speak clearly to everything,
creation, extinction, infinities rising within you.

*

Alastair Laird is dead. Fuckety fuck. Fuckety
fuck fuck fuck fuck. My dad is dead. Bad luck.
The light breaks and the night breaks and the line
breaks and the day is late assembling. Rows
of terraced houses are clicking into place. Clouds
decelerate and make like everything is normal:
the children wanting porridge, voices forcing
pattern out of circumstance, pitching rhythmic
incident on little grids of expectation, satisfaction,
disappointment, and this new awe, and walking to
school, at the corner where the halfway house is,
leaves animated in a briefest circle by the wind.

im CAEL
11.3.21

Nick Laird | *Granta*

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM



© Reston Allen

CARL PHILLIPS

Carl Phillips (b. 1959, Everett, Washington) has published fifteen books of poetry in the USA, but it is only in the last year that he has become easily available to UK readers with the appearance of *Then the War*, his New and Selected Poems from Carcanet. This has coincided with his first appearances in UK journals, which included his shortlisted poem 'Scattered Snows, to the North.'

'It's hard to say exactly how my shortlisted poem began', writes Phillips. 'I suppose the heart of the poem is at the realization of a certain disturbing detachment of self from tenderness, regret . . . And from there, the idea that the feelings we worry about in ourselves – our helplessness – aren't just our own, these are feelings that have always existed, even back in ancient Roman times.'

Carl Phillips

'Scattered Snows,
to the North'

PN Review

Scattered Snows, to the North

Does it matter that the Roman Empire was still early in its slow unwinding into never again? Then, as now, didn't people burst into tears in front of other people, or in private, for no reason that they were willing to give, or they weren't yet able to, or for just no reason? I've never stopped missing you, I used to

practice saying, for when I'd need those lines, as I assumed I would, given what I knew then – nothing, really – about things like love, trust, the betrayal of trust, and a willfulness that's only deepened inside me, all these years, during which I can almost say I've missed no one – though it hurts,

to say it...

Honestly, the Roman Empire, despite my once having studied it, barely makes any sense to me now, past the back-and-forthing of patrolled borders as the gauge and proof of hunger's addictive and erosive powers. But there were people, of course, too, most of them destined to be unremembered, who filled in their drawn lives anyway – because what else is there? – to where the edges gave out. If it was night, they lit fires, presumably. Tears were tears.

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST SINGLE POEM



© Sophie Davidson

CLARE POLLARD

Clare Pollard (b. 1978, Bolton) started writing poetry in sixth form; Bloodaxe editor Neil Astley spotted her poem 'The Heavy-Petting Zoo' in *The Rialto* and asked for a manuscript. Since then, she has published five collections with Bloodaxe, as well as a novel and a non-fiction work on children's picture books, *Fierce Bad Rabbits*.

Pollard's shortlisted poem is a deftly angled take on the pandemic and its weird reversals of emotional intuition: kindness itself becomes lethal, and accumulates indoors in drifts. 'It was best if we just locked ourselves away, / and didn't show we cared, / and hardly lived in weeks, which were our work', she writes, with an idiosyncratic and unsettling knack for putting her finger on the sore point of what she's describing.

Clare Pollard
'Pollen'
Bad Lilies

Pollen

The medium death chose, this time, was love.
Kindness, or what we'd thought was kindness, was now harm
and it was best if we just locked ourselves away,
and didn't show we cared,
and hardly lived in weeks, which were our work.
One week, though, I recall, the pollen came,
piled in our street like snow, or no, like baby hair –
I saw a boy that stroked its fur,
how, on their walk, girls kicked at it,
its carriage on the air from home to home,
over fences, yards, the apple blossom,
in through kitchen windows
to where we stared at screens on makeshift desks;
its waver on warm currents of my breath,
how my eyes streamed with tears.
Tell me that you noticed.
And did you close the window too,
uncertain, now, what you were meant to do
with all that tenderness?

Clare Pollard | *Bad Lilies*

FELIX DENNIS
PRIZE
FOR BEST
FIRST
COLLECTION

FELIX DENNIS PRIZE FOR BEST FIRST COLLECTION

SHORTLIST

Mohammed El-Kurd

Rifqa

Haymarket Books

Holly Hopkins

The English Summer

Penned in the Margins

Padraig Regan

Some Integrity

Carcenet

Warsan Shire

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in

Her Head

Chatto & Windus

Stephanie Sy-Quia

Amnion

Granta Poetry

This £5,000 prize, generously supported by the estate of the late Felix Dennis, is for the Best First Collection published in the UK or Ireland.

FELIX DENNIS
PRIZE
FOR BEST
FIRST
COLLECTION



MOHAMMED EL-KURD

Mohammed El-Kurd (b. 1998, Sheikh Jarrah, Occupied Palestine) 'inherited my father's stubbornness,' as he writes in 'A Song of Home.' His advice for poets starting out today is to 'be stubborn about your sentiment,' and this stubbornness in the face of settler colonialism is the central theme of *Rifqa*, named after the poet's grandmother. 'Poetry was an itch to contextualize, to inform, to hinge severed limbs onto the people to whom they once belonged, to allow those people nuance,' he writes about the early impetus behind his writing.

El-Kurd works as Palestine correspondent for *The Nation*, as well as touring and performing his poetry. 'Although this book isn't an attempt to free Palestine, its central thesis is that Palestine, in its historical entirety, must be liberated by any means necessary,' he writes in the Afterword to *Rifqa*.

Mohammed
El-Kurd

Rifqa

Haymarket Books

Boy Sells Gum at Qalandiyah

The question is not morality, the question is money.

That's what we're upset about.

– Toni Morrison

There are bulldozers in these clouds. Bulldozers in their clouds and they bring rain often. A boy at Qalandiyah and they have stolen the wicks of the stars. He shouldn't be outside. Stones will fling themselves in protest.

This Hebrewed land still speaks Arabic. Their drones will rig this. The boy at Qalandiyah selling gum. He shouldn't be outside. He'll be a thrower, a catcher. A bulldozed bulldozer. Often.

What's a boy doing winning bread under gallows? And where's the merit in that? Whose side is God on? Some days it feels like they've unlocked prayer. They prey often.

A man on the sidewalk explains natural selection. As in the boy's grip shouldn't be softened. The man says the boy's walk looks too much like a song and too little like a man walking.

A woman tells him a pen is a sword. What's a pen to a rifle? Another fed him a sonnet. If Shakespeare was from here he wouldn't be writing.

I write about Palestinian boys as if they're older than labor.

The boy is eight, which is twenty-two for Americans. The boy knows this. His mother calls him a man in his nightmares. You're a man now. A painter stands in this, collecting strokes. A photographer offers a helping hand. They want to build a museum in his torture. The boy wins the bread knowing he shouldn't be.

He tells the photographer to pay him for his bread; the photographer's bread. For wallets fattened by indigence.

His mother calls him the man of the house. She thinks it makes him feel better about the hunched back he's earned before the 6 a.m. of his life. The gray he's earned before the 6 a.m. of his life. Qalandiyah is gray often.

I drive by. I roll down my window. I buy what I can. You shouldn't be outside through the fire. What is fear to the ferocious? I ask him to stop selling gum. He tells me I don't know a thing about this. Don't know a thing about the sun's fingernails clawing the back of his neck.

I'll be quiet then.

I don't know a thing,

Not a man yet.

Not a man

truly,

often.

Mohammed El-Kurd

Rifqa | Haymarket Books

FELIX DENNIS
PRIZE
FOR BEST
FIRST
COLLECTION



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HOLLY HOPKINS

Holly Hopkins (b. 1982, Berkshire) won the Poetry Business Pamphlet Competition for her debut pamphlet, *Soon Every House Will Have One*. Her shortlisted collection, *The English Summer*, is an in-depth exploration of Englishness past and present, brave, broad and resisting the counter-pressures of nostalgia and disillusion.

Hopkins' title poem 'was written while I only had time to write while the baby slept, and the baby only slept while being pushed in his pram. So I wrote it by voice-recording it on my phone in one hand, while pushing a buggy in the other. I remember the relief in having found a way to still make something.' The poem's concerns are a fine embodiment of the entire collection: 'Dun coloured endangered species of specialist interest, / best found on grungy paths, behind gabardines, / near shoes on school radiators, wet socks at work.'

Holly Hopkins

*The English
Summer*

Penned in the
Margins

The Death of a Fridge

Poured on skin, lighter fluid
burns shallow. My hand in flames
was no worse than a plaster ripped off;
we were more burnt by the sun.

I can't even remember his name.
He had a newspaper rolled in a torch
burning up too quick
and nowhere to drop it,
so we slammed it in the fridge.

The box sealed. The rubber trim
sucked tight. We couldn't force it
anymore than we could pull apart
a dinner plate. Not crack a dish
but hold the rims and pull it in two,
everything has its own way to break.

The air was eaten: a dimple

in the cool enamel, a crease,
then, drawn from the inside,
the whole white weight crumpled
with thunks of deep struck metal,
as a girl, trapped by an earthquake,
might smash keys on a pipe
when she still thinks of rescue.

Holly Hopkins

The English Summer | Penned in the Margins

FELIX DENNIS
PRIZE
FOR BEST
FIRST
COLLECTION



PADRAIG REGAN

Padraig Regan (b. 1993, Belfast) studied for a PhD on creative-critical and hybridised writing at Queens University Belfast, and this sense of the hybrid has fed into their work over time; *Some Integrity* combines essay (like the central 'Glitch City,' which discusses openly the animating forces implicit in some of the book's more lyrical poems) with poems responding to art and landscape, food and queer desire.

The collection's title became a guiding maxim for its assembly: 'I would only want to publish a book that had some reason for existing as a book, so the editorial process was mostly one of winnowing extraneous poems from the manuscript,' writes Regan. Regan has previously published two pamphlets, with Emma Press and Lifeboat, and *Some Integrity* is the 2022 winner of the Clarissa Luard Prize.

Padraig Regan
Some Integrity
Carcenet

Salt Island

I wanted to make a gothic of it all:
the trees on the slope where the island dipped
 into the sea, their weird kinks & angles;
the scrap of wool where a sheep had rubbed
 a flank against a tree's arthritic fingers;
the cloud-quilt which was then breaking up
 as though someone had pulled
the one thread which held the whole clump
 of vapours in place. I walked over
the hill with my kilt flapping
 & thought
 wow! all this for me? &
the weather just kept getting better,
 rescinding its earlier threats of rain.
The mood was ruined; I wanted ice-cream.
 In the photographs I scroll through now,
in bed a week later, I see that my red tartan
 clashed with the grass so perfectly
I wonder if I intended to be the punctum,
 the little rip in the surface
where my eye might snag. It is too
 early to tell if I've succeeded,
& too early in the morning — the sun
 not yet visible behind the hills —
to tease out what it means when all this naming,
 of the island, wool, sheep, trees, & clouds,
is just another way of saying I, I, I, I, I

Padraig Regan
Some Integrity | Carcanet

FELIX DENNIS
PRIZE
FOR BEST
FIRST
COLLECTION



© Leyla Jeyte

WARSAN SHIRE

Warsan Shire (b. 1988, Nairobi, Kenya) served as the first Young People's Laureate for London, and was catapulted to global fame when she was chosen to write the poetry for Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and *Black is King*. Her journey into poetry began with a workshop at a youth centre in Northwest London, when Shire was fifteen, where she met her mentor and editor Jacob Sam-La Rose.

'On some level, I've been working on this book since 2011,' writes Shire. 'I wanted to interrogate my memories, explore childhood. I had questions, trauma I wanted to understand.' But Shire's concerns are wider than the narrowly domestic; 'Home,' with its unforgettable opening line 'No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark,' universalises and makes palpable the refugee experience. (Shire wrote the short film *Brave Girl Rising*, highlighting the voices and faces of Somali girls in Africa's largest refugee camp.)

Warsan Shire

*Bless the
Daughter Raised
by a Voice in
Her Head*

Chatto & Windus

BACKWARDS

The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room.

He takes off his jacket and sits down for the rest of his life,
that's how we bring Dad back.

I can make the blood run back up my nose, ants rushing into a hole.

We grow into smaller bodies, my breasts disappear,
your cheeks soften, teeth sink back into gums.

I can make us loved, just say the word.

Give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent,

I can write the poem and make it disappear.

Step- dad spits liquor back into glass,

Mum's body rolls back up the stairs, the bone pops back into place,
maybe she keeps the baby.

Maybe we're okay, kid?

I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love,
you won't be able to see beyond it.

You won't be able to see beyond it,

I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love.

Maybe we're okay, kid,

maybe she keeps the baby.

Mum's body rolls back up the stairs, the bone pops back into place,

Step- dad spits liquor back into glass.

I can write the poem and make it disappear,

give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent,

I can make us loved, just say the word.

Your cheeks soften, teeth sink back into gums,

we grow into smaller bodies, my breasts disappear.

I can make the blood run back up my nose, ants rushing into a hole,
that's how we bring Dad back.

He takes off his jacket and sits down for the rest of his life.

The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room.

Warsan Shire

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head | Chatto & Windus

FELIX DENNIS
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© Alex Sy-Quia

STEPHANIE SY-QUIA

Stephanie Sy-Quia (b. 1995, Berkeley, California) grew up near Paris and studied English at Oxford. She has been writing *Amnion*, her shortlisted collection, for nine years, since she was fifteen – ‘I began writing it in prose, small fragmented chunks which I didn’t know how to arrange. Then, a few years in, I started putting line breaks in and suddenly it felt as if the text sighed in relief, and I remember a very clear thought of “Ah, this is what you wanted to be all along!”’

Amnion is a single long poem, exploring questions of migration, belonging and multiple origins in a form the poet and critic Kit Fan has likened to a ‘detective story’; voices and themes coalesce, submerge and reunite. Sy-Quia’s advice for anyone starting out in poetry today is to read omnivorously: ‘Never let anyone embarrass you about what you find interesting or inspiring, and never embarrass anyone else about it!’

Stephanie
Sy-Quia

Amnion

Granta Poetry

extract from *Amnion*

Of Canterbury I recall
scuff
stone smell
shoe seep
smell at crotch of tights
'blazer'.

To the school: I am delivered. A three-hour drive north, through a valed land replete with cathedrals. There is Amiens, with its traces of paint, still; and Chartres of the windows; Beauvais, unfinished – three times its spire fell through; now it is braced with wooden beams: on crutches. It boasts the highest clerestory in Europe, it smells of mouldering stone. Rheims where are buried the kings; Coulombs which boasts the foreskin of the Saviour. Under the Channel, to burst forth near a hill where runs a horse white in chalk.

(I remember that boat, smallest to answer the call.)
(Named Tamzine, it lies on the floor of the museum for imperial war.)
(The littlest of the little ships of Dunkirk,
clinker-built from Canadian spruce.)

The school is of flint and brick, it too has a cathedral.

At the boarding house, which is new, but built out of the ruins of the old infirmary ten centuries old, another mother is wearing a poncho. She asks where we're from, how we got here. At my mother's reply (the Eurotunnel) she says *Oh well you will have come in under our land then.*

I am unpacked and stowed away.

Later that night, the others start to arrive. There are five blondes in a total of twelve. There is lacrosse gear and lurid pink mouthguards. Their jeans are different from mine (tighter). I have never seen so many sets of big breasts. Their hair is mid-length (it swishes). Their clothes are all somehow the same.

– Are you rich?

(The others wait politely for my reply)

The land seemed so old, but deluded also.

The white horse that leaps on the green hill, singing in chalk,
is a copy.

The stone of the cathedral came from Caen, where as a child in an oversized fleece

I stood in a very large crater near the Museum of Peace.

'My father was at D-Day and was shot in the hip, he lay on the beach in the surf for three days.'

My godfather has my baby sister strapped to his chest.

This cool cold plain of Europe's beige edge is on par with Mont St Michel,

its

great flat-footed expanse where my brother and I dig its ridges for clams before the tide

comes running.

This is deep bone-knowing country.

Albion.

I hold it in my mouth with pleasure like a corpulent pearl.

It contains all the stories England tells itself:

a plosive, bounded space, girded by neat cliffs and land's end.

How they thought of their virgin queen,

the whole universe under her skirts.

The dean beckoned me and with his thumb
Upon my forehead said *admitto te*
And I having for sole reference the Simba smudge, stumbled on the stiff
white surplice lent to me on a two-year lease.

They were so blithe about the signifiers of their station. They had hairless
pits and thighs, and paid, from the age of not yet fucking or fingering, for
bikini waxes. They had an easy greed and met me with incomprehension
when I tried in vain to explain where I came from.

Food was a thing ingested under mild duress.

My femalehood was boarded over my eyes like a set piece.
To determine its deviance became the all-consuming aim.
Cover your shoulders.
Shoulders remind boys of boobs.
My body became as incendiary as a vernacular.
It was the thing that lay in the dark woods at the trailing ends of
sentences,
at the short edge of night and late at skirt.

The blonde others aspired to be described with mean, hard-nosed little
words: thin, pretty, nice.
I wanted big-femur words like wise and kind.

The boys were always
touching
each other.

When the parents came, they were loud.
They came two by two in pairs of Sunday-lunching racists.
The fathers wore trousers the colour of rare meat.

(A hunk of roast beef seeping)
(banking on things in the city)
(with flats, useful for unfaithing.)

Their wives stayed at home, in the counties. Maybe they were lonely, and screamed themselves hoarse in the cut-stone quiet of their houses. These marriages seemed structures of mutual scorn. Watching them made me flush hot with fear that this was coming for me and sent me knock-kneed to hide. Their days of Barbour-ed torpor; the cream-coloured afternoons –

I wanted big-beamed love. I wanted to be one of the women who swear and have grey in their hair. I wanted, though this too was warped, to be the emotional centre without which nothing can hold.

In our lesson the time-lined people have made landfall in America. The people they find there are untime-lined, according to the landfalls they have no history. This is something that even the ancients did not know. This is something entirely new. Everything is uncertain. The world is of unknown proportions. Luther is nailing a piece of paper to a door. He is standing saying I stand before you now and can do no other. Everything is chaos. Nothing is known. The universe is a black womb rioting with stars.

Stephanie Sy-Quia
Amnion | Granta Poetry

**FORWARD
PRIZE
FOR BEST
COLLECTION**

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST COLLECTION
SHORTLIST

Kaveh Akbar

Pilgrim Bell

Chatto & Windus

Anthony Joseph

Sonnets for Albert

Bloomsbury Poetry

Shane McCrae

Cain Named the Animal

Little Brown

Kim Moore

All the Men I Never Married

Seren Books

Helen Mort

The Illustrated Woman

Chatto & Windus

This award is for the Best Collection of Poetry published between 19 September 2021 and 18 September 2022. The £10,000 prize is generously contributed by Bookmark Content.

FORWARD
PRIZE
FOR BEST
COLLECTION



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KAVEH AKBAR

Kaveh Akbar (b. 1989, Tehran, Iran) teaches at Purdue University, Indiana, and is the founding editor of *Divedapper*, a journal devoted to interviews with poets. His debut, *Calling a Wolf a Wolf*, was shortlisted for the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection; *Pilgrim Bell*, his second, takes silence as part of its structure. 'I wanted the language to feel like the negative space poured around silence,' he writes. 'What's the opposite of corrosive obstinate certainty? Shutting my mouth. Letting silence sound.'

Akbar is the editor of the *Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 100 Poets on the Divine*, and faith of one sort or another is a constant preoccupation of his work. 'Loudly. All day I hammer the distance. / Between the earth and me. Into faith,' he writes: the unusually placed full stops, perhaps mimetic of hammer-blows, are one of *Pilgrim Bell's* distinctive formal departures.

Kaveh Akbar
Pilgrim Bell
Chatto & Windus

The Miracle

Gabriel seizing the illiterate man, alone and fasting in a cave, and commanding READ, the man saying I can't, Gabriel squeezing him tighter, commanding READ, the man gasping I don't know how, Gabriel squeezing him so tight he couldn't breathe, squeezing out the air of protest, the air of doubt, crushing it out of his crushable human body, saying READ IN THE NAME OF YOUR LORD WHO CREATED YOU FROM A CLOT, and thus: literacy. Revelation.

It wasn't until Gabriel squeezed away what was empty in him that the Prophet could be filled with miracle. Imagine the emptiness in you, the vast cavities you have spent your life trying to fill—with fathers, mothers, lovers, language, drugs, money, art, praise—and imagine them gone. What's left? Whatever you aren't, which is what makes you—a house useful not because its floorboards or ceilings or walls, but because the empty space between them.

Gabriel isn't coming for you. If he did, would you call him Jibril, or Gabriel like you are here? Who is this even for?

One crisis at a time. Gabriel isn't coming for you. Cheese on a cracker, a bit of salty fish.

Somewhere a man is steering a robotic plane into murder. "Robot" from the Czech *robot*, meaning *forced labor*. Murder labor, forced. He never sees the bodies, which are implied by their absence. Like feathers on a paper bird.

Gabriel isn't coming for you. In the absence of cloud-parting, trumpet-blaring clarity, what? More living. More money, lazy sex. Mother, brother, lover. You travel and bring back silk scarves, a bag of chocolates for you-don't-know-who-yet. Someone will want them. Deliver them to an empty field. You fall asleep facing the freckle on your wrist.

Somewhere a woman presses a button that locks metal doors with people behind them. The locks are useful to her because there is an emptiness on the other side that holds the people's lives in place. She doesn't know the names of the people. Anonymity is an ancillary feature of the locks. "Ancillary," from the Latin *ancilla*, meaning *servant*. An emptiness to hold all their living.

You created from a clot: Gabriel isn't coming for you. You too full to eat. You too locked to door.

Too cruel to wonder.

Gabriel isn't coming. You too loved to love. Too speak to hear. Too wet to drink.

No Gabriel.

You too pride to weep. You too play to still. You too high to cum.

No. Gabriel won't be coming for you. Too fear to move. You too pebble to stone. Too saddle to horse. Too crime to pay. Gabriel, no. Not anymore. You too gone to save. Too bloodless to martyr. Too diamond to charcoal. Too nation to earth. You brute, cruel pebble. Gabriel. God of man. No. Cheese on a cracker. Mercy. Mercy.

Kaveh Akbar

Pilgrim Bell | Chatto & Windus

FORWARD
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© Naomi Woddie

ANTHONY JOSEPH

Anthony Joseph (b. 1966, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago) is a musician and novelist as well as a poet. His work explores the transnational vibrations of the African Diaspora, 'always searching for things the language has not yet said.' *Sonnets for Albert*, his first poetry collection since 2013's *Rubber Orchestras*, is a sonnet sequence in memory of his father, by turns elegiac, deft and formally various, while remaining rooted in what is felt and tangible: 'Look out where rayo trees are planted on tumuli of bones / like ladders for spirits to cross into heaven.'

'There's an essay by Sartre in which he says that people think that language is inside of us that we have language in our brain, we possess languages and bring it out,' says Joseph in an interview with Hannah Silva. 'But Sartre says language is all around us, above us, in the air, and we pluck it out of the air, or space, and formulate it. That idea of language being outside is what I'm trying to get to, in reading the poem you access a bigger pool of language, a collective language and then words suggest themselves to you.'

Anthony Joseph
Sonnets for Albert
Bloomsbury
Poetry

Rings

I only have look at my hands to see my father.
The wide silver ring spans the proximal of my left hand's
ring finger. I remember this ring as a child, asking
my father what the raised letters spelled. But he laughed
and, like everything else made of secrets, he would not tell.
It was revealed after his funeral, when we were at the house
and the jewel bag get bring out from the bedroom
for my brother and I to choose which as heirlooms.
The bag held things which were either removed
from my father's body as he lay dying,
or kept in a saucer beside his Bible.
I chose the silver and soon deciphered that the raised letters
were his initials: AHJ, in Western typeface.
The ring fit firm and right. My brother chose a chain.

Anthony Joseph
Sonnets for Albert | Bloomsbury Poetry

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SHANE MCCRAE

Shane McCrae (b. 1975, Portland, Oregon) started writing poetry aged fifteen, having heard, 'quite by accident,' some lines from Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus': 'Those lines struck me as the gothest thing I had ever heard, and, being aspirationally a goth at the time, I immediately tried to imitate them, writing my first eight poems that day.' From these unpromising beginnings, McCrae has gone on to win a Whiting Writer's Award, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Lannan Literary Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Cain Named the Animals is his seventh collection, and his second to be published in the UK. He lives in New York and teaches at Columbia University. In an early review, Michael Klein observed that McCrae's poems are 'unrelenting and immediate – never delicate and never gentle.' The immediacy and relentlessness remain, but *Cain Named the Animals* is perhaps McCrae's tenderest and gentlest collection yet.

Shane McCrae

*Cain Named the
Animal*

Little Brown

Eurydice on the Art of Poetry

The story you have heard is false it's true
He sang for me and true he lulled the god
Who didn't care to fight him easily
The god is like us all the blood of the dead

Is made wine by their sorrow some don't argue
And others never stop I followed him
Yes but he wasn't told he couldn't look
He didn't look because he felt ashamed

I know now he already had the poem
Finished or nearly so before he left
For the underworld he didn't come for me
He came to check the details he had thought

He'd fail to win me back and in the end
Yes at the mouth of the cave he just ran off
I think he didn't know what else to do
I didn't follow him it was a relief

To be allowed to keep my death I heard
The poem first in the spring sung by a new-
ly murdered boy who didn't know my name
When he was told my name why should he have

I wasn't in the poem the poem was true

Shane McCrae

Cain Named the Animal | Little Brown

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST COLLECTION



© Lorna Elizabeth

KIM MOORE

Kim Moore (b. 1981, Leicester) wrote her PhD thesis on the topic of 'Poetry and Everyday Sexism.' This creative-critical research fed into *All the Men I Never Married*. 'I know that poetry can be transformative, because it's changed my life', writes Moore, 'and I wanted to see if I could write poetry that might change or shift people's ways of thinking about sexism and gender-based microaggressions. What I didn't expect is that the writing of the book changed me – my perceptions, my understanding of sexism and its impact on me.' The poems in *All the Men I Never Married* feel like discoveries for the author, as much as for the reader.

Moore's debut collection, *The Art of Falling*, won the 2014 Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. She is also the author of *What the Trumpet Taught Me*, a lyric essay (like the themed sequence, a form she is drawn to) exploring her years as a music student and teacher. A second lyric essay, *Yes, I Am Judging You*, is forthcoming later this year.

Kim Moore

*All the Men I
Never Married*

Seren Books

7.

Imagine you're me, you're fifteen, the summer of '95, and you're following your sister onto the log flume, where you'll sit between the legs of a stranger. At the bottom of the drop when you've screamed and been splashed by the water, when you're about to stand up, clamber out, the man behind reaches forward, and with the back of his knuckle brushes a drop of water from your thigh.

To be touched like that, for the first time. And you are not innocent, you're fifteen, something in you likes that you were chosen. It feels like power, though you were only the one who was touched, who was acted upon. To realise that someone can touch you without asking, without speaking, without knowing your name. Without anybody seeing.

You pretend that nothing has happened, you turn it to nothing, you learn that nothing is necessary armour you must carry with you, it was nothing, you must have imagined it. To be touched – and your parents waiting at the exit and smiling as you come out of the dark and the moment being hardly worth telling. What am I saying? You're fifteen and he is a man.

Imagine being him on that rare day of summer, the bulge of car keys makes it difficult to sit so he gives them to a bored attendant who chucks them in a box marked PROPERTY. A girl balanced in the boat with hair to her waist and he's close enough to smell the cream lifting in waves from her skin, her legs stretched out, and why should he tell himself no, hold himself back?

He reaches forward, brushes her thigh with a knuckle, then gets up to go, rocking the boat as he leaves. You don't remember his face or his clothes, just the drop of water, perfectly formed on your thigh, before it's lifted up and away by his finger. You remember this lesson your whole life, that sliver/shiver of time, that moment in the sun. What am I saying? Nothing. Nothing happened.

FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST COLLECTION



© Jan Bella

HELEN MORT

Helen Mort (b. 1985, Sheffield) has always taken body image, and the female body, as one of her main themes, but these concerns are particularly central to *The Illustrated Woman*, her third collection. Several life-experiences fed into it: a period of postpartum depression, a parent's degenerative disease, and the traumatic experience of having images from social media appropriated and turned into violent 'deepfake' pornography. 'I wanted the book to examine the ways that we attempt to take 'ownership' of our bodies after these unexpected and defamiliarizing experiences', writes Mort.

One of these strategies is body modification, especially tattooing, and the book's title sequence mediates on the history of female tattoo art: 'a nod to the idea of the body as charted, mapped but unknowable, something we try to illustrate for ourselves.' Mort is a novelist and short story writer as well as a poet, and works as a senior lecturer in creative writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Helen Mort

*The Illustrated
Woman*

Chatto & Windus

Loch Allua

'Every swim is a little death'

– PHILIP HOARE

Your body yellow
when you glance back –
a naked flame, trapped
beneath the brown glass

but – yes – you move,
you almost flicker, kicking
out towards the deepest part,
blood in your wrists ticking.

Where will you go now?
You who have never known
which shore to swim for
or which rock to call your own.

Ahead of you,
the coarse hair of the trees,
the bog beyond,
the path towards the sea.

Behind you, sunlight
and the knuckled limestone,
ground brindled with moss,
the crickets' single tone.

And God, how easy
it would be to let your arms
go slack and let the water
veil your face, lean back

and into it, your mouth
slow-opening like a fish.
But even as you almost
grant yourself the wish,

you know you are at heart
a woman who must swim.
Above your head,
three swallows dive and skim

in navy uniforms,
unbuttoned from the sky.
Watch this. How close they swoop
before they're lifted high.

Helen Mort

The Illustrated Woman | Chatto & Windus

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

We would like to thank the five judges of the 2022 Forward Prizes, Fatima Bhutto, Rishi Dastidar, Alice Hiller, Nadine Aisha Jassat, and Stephen Sexton, who brought passion, diligence, commitment – and good humour – to the judging this year.

We would like to thank our sponsors. Thank you to Arts Council England, Bookmark Content, Garfield Weston, the John Ellerman Foundation, and the Charlotte Aitken Trust.

We thank the estate of the late Felix Dennis for the £5,000 prizemoney for the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection, and we are hugely grateful to the Alsopp family, who support the Best Single Poem category in memory of David King.

The English and Media Centre is our partner in the Forward/ emagazine Student Critics Competition, which encourages young readers to respond critically and creatively to various poems shortlisted for the Forward Prizes. Thanks to Moniza Alvi for judging. The winning entries can be found at www.englishandmedia.co.uk

The team at Contact, our partners in tonight's event, have been supremely supportive in enabling us to showcase the Prizes outside of London for the first time in thirty years.

FEEDBACK

Please answer these 5 short questions to let us know what you thought of tonight's event.

Your views are so important – they help us improve our programme and let our funders know how we are doing.

Thank you!

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HIGHLY COMMENDED

Congratulations to everyone Highly Commended in the Forward Prizes for Poetry.

Qudsia Akhtar
Will Alexander
Claire Askew
Polly Atkin
Sheri Benning
Fiona Benson
Emily Berry
Clíodhna Bhreathnach
Sam Buchan-Watts
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