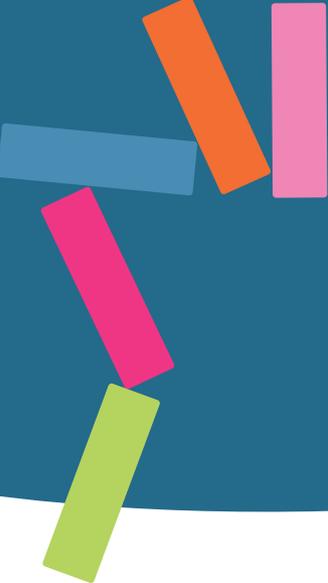


2019 JUDGES' REPORT





POETRY REPORT 2019

Hollie McNish



I'll start by making the obvious point that any decision in poetry competitions will always be subjective. Another judge may have chosen other winners and no doubt people will disagree with some of my choices.

Personally, when judging poetry, I look for form and for feeling and for the imprint that the writing makes upon my internal organs as it repeats on me (in both positive and negative ways) post-reading. My personal preference in poetry is a clean shaped page of words.

That said, if writing is too visceral to fit into such neatly trimmed linguistics, so be it.

In the thirteen poems I chose, I found something of all my poetic joys, with my final three balancing a content which whipped my guts, locked my tongue up or split my lips into grins, but which still cut a structure and vocabulary suited expertly.

The ten highly commended winners were perhaps the hardest to choose, such was the variety amongst the submissions.

First, **'Art History'**. The moment I read this delicate poem, I was meddling in Hokusai's studio. Such little embellishment, but still an entire scene immediately unravelled. I laughed, learnt and nodded, yes, to the genius of ridiculousness. An utterly enticing poem.

'Equity' gutted me. Some stand out sharpness - She's young for there / There are no visitors, plus the continuing play on the open / un-curtained windows. The final line of this poem was perhaps my favourite of all. I was heart broken.

'Seed', shaped lovingly into the title's oval form, was a surprise love. I often find shape poems forced or unfitting, but here the voracious, fierce nature of the content clung in marvellous picturesque contrast.

Hollie McNish

'Big Jim' I did not notice much on first reading. Once on a break, however, I realised I was still thinking of him. By second and third reading, I was praising, rather than ignoring, the more monosyllabic patterning, and the images such as kids 'like scattered thistledown' or chopping wood 'as if...cutting into chunks his wife's old boyfriends' stuck. I went back for several peaks at Jim kissing through the final window. I am a sappy pervert perhaps.

'Ghost Apples' sent shivers as instant pictures appeared; so vivid, this tragic metaphor, placed brilliantly, simply yet stridently, on the page, the sharp twist between winter fields and grief a horrific comfort to cling to.

'Tinder Box' was so full, so verbose in its approach to tragedy. I praised the specifics of this poem; the giant orange poppy fireballs, the burning sagebrush, the chaparral. I felt that everything was noticed and recorded; superb snapshots of sound and sight, panic and loss.

'Gameplay' sent giggles bursting forth. The italics in this poem - so long shifting rocks - floored me. A marvellous comic selection of the most obscure of gaming references mixed with a wink and a jab at the uselessness of human onlookers. The comedy of cruel futility.

The surreal nature of **'Assembling God'** had me picking it apart for weeks; the rubix cube of the collection perhaps. It was a challenging poem for me, but a greatly enticing challenge and sometimes that is what I want in a reading.

'The Way You Knew' I fell for when reading it aloud. I felt the rhythms, repetitions and internal rhymes slipped so subtly between pauses came forth more confidently when leashed from tongue, whilst images such as 'the way you knew as you chewed how big the next bubble would be' and 'even before he began drinking ink' ensured it would not slip into generalisation.

Finally, for those highly commended, **'Epiphany'**. It was the momentary and mindful nature of this poem that I adored: the flitting strands of thought, the continual physical movement throughout, the humour in the mix of everyday and universal. And then ending, I loved the ending. I saw the tulip.

Though my top three were chosen early on, their order was not, but I finally settled.

'Three Candles' is my third place. I dare to say I will never forget this poem. Such stripped down dialogue - a tragic 'chat'. The poem explained nothing, showed everything. The lines 'And I give him a look / And he shuts up' are piercing to me in this respect. I loved the breathlessness of opening mid-scene, the frightful repetitions, the staccato structure of this fight to remember and to honour and to come to terms with.

Hollie McNish

'Hoor', my second place, I read and re-read for days. On each re-read, I discovered new patterns, new tangos of words dancing into the spotlight. I really enjoy writing that blasts chatter into ears. I love hearing tongues waggle.

Here, I was the invisible fly in the field, eavesdropping, giggling, tearing up at the final first kiss. I also cannot stop repeating the line: the tax man, a connivin little hoors bollix in my head, but that's by the by.

My winner was THINGS I WISH I COULD TRADE MY HEADSCARF FOR.

I read and hear many poems about prejudice - they are often the staple of a spoken word poetry scene and whilst the subjects they raise are always, unfortunately, needed, welcomed, vital, it was the originality and imagination within this poem which deemed it my final favourite.

I found this poem both childish and tragic: the scarf speaking parseltongue to waiting bigots; the opening list of abstract, playful, yet terrible comparisons; a tempo, which, added to some of the almost tongue-twisting expressions, kept my breath held throughout. For me, this poem represented one of the neatest examples of the contrast between the enthusiasm and imagination of a young mind and the prejudices it ought never to have had used these for.

I could write so much more here, but I'll finish here with a thank you to the authors instead. What a pleasure it was to be allowed in.

To those of you about to peruse this anthology, I hope you enjoy reading these poems as much as I hated having to choose between them.

SHORT STORY REPORT 2019

Kirsty Logan



Reading the stories for the Bridport Prize 2019 was not only an honour, but also a pleasure. My favourite thing about having the chance to read so many different voices at once was the way the stories seem to speak to one another. One story told of a small girl pretending to be a wolf pup; the next of a group of mysterious partwolf, part-woman creatures taking revenge on violent men. One story explored the complex moral and emotional conflicts of a man emigrating to an unfamiliar country; the next laid out the complex moral and emotional conflicts of a worker at an immigrant detention centre.

It was a pleasure to imagine the stories in dialogue: the wolf-girl grown into a wolf-woman, the flipped coin of the immigration experience.

Clear themes emerged as I read on. Infidelity, divorce and grief centred many of the stories, often from the perspective of a child. Marriages and relationships were generally failed or failing; love was unrequited; babies much hoped for were lost or never begun. From this I take that there are lots of writers out there going through difficult times, perhaps using fiction as a life raft. This is something I can certainly identify with, and it's reassuring to see that stories can have many functions.

'Bedded' by Mikaella Clements is a steady-paced piece of perfection – confidently told, and creating a strange and beautiful world. It's a tender and knowing piece of storytelling.

Nici West's **'Crow'** haunted me in the best possible way; its sinister imagery and body horror comes together in an emotional and satisfying ending. It's a story that stayed with me for a long time after I'd read it.

The raw, heartbreaking brutality of **'Fermented'** by Gemma Reeves isn't something I come across every day, and when I do get to read it, I can't help but be impressed. The command of language, slow build of tension and refusal to shy away from the inevitable ending is a joy to read.

Kirsty Logan

It's not easy to pull off second-person narration, but Hesse Philipps **'The Way of the Pack'** achieves it. I thought there were no new ways under the sun to explore a parent's fears for (and sometimes of) their child, but I was wrong; here the emotional honesty rings true.

Not one, but two impressive feats of second-person narration: Joseph Boone's **'The Sound of Water'** is raw, tragic, sensual and packed full of beautifully-wrought description.

'Exactly the Thing That You Are' by Jane Flett was such a joy to read – the exploration of a muchmaligned form of performance and athletic skill, told with such precision and compassion.

With **'Wolf Women'**, Amy Stewart masterfully takes us from the sinister opening line to an ending that feels both chilling and satisfying – not an easy thing to achieve, but here it's incredibly well done.

Alissa Jones Nelson's **'Al-Watan'** took me on an incredible journey – not just geographically with the protagonist, but emotionally as I weathered the storms of his experience. It's a beautiful and unflinching piece of work.

With **'I Shouldn't Be Calling This Late'**, Jenny Karrison casts a spell with words: the prose is such a pleasure to read, and displays an incredible command over language. It's a subtle story with many layers of hidden depth.

It was no easy task to choose three winners from the impressive pool of submitted stories, but there was no denying the power of these pieces even among the other stories I loved. Anna Metcalf's **'Start Again'** pulled off no mean feat: it created a fictional world that wasn't pleasant to be in, but that I wanted to return to, just to know these characters better and immerse myself more in the prose.

When thinking of Sulaxana Hippisley's **'The Quarter Loaf'** I'm surprised to remember that these aren't real people I can go and speak to; they feel solid, tangible, and the love and loneliness in their lives rings true.

Ross Foster's **'Henry'** is smart, tender and brutal, with an ending that made me gasp out loud. The moment that elevates the story from a good story to something very special is when the protagonist goes into the kitchen and picks up the knife: her rush of blood, her intention.

If there's anything I want to say when signing off here, it's this: keep going. Keep writing. Keep dreaming and thinking and observing. I read an incredible variety of voices and worlds and histories in these stories, and I know there are so many more stories out there still to be written. So please: write them.

FLASH FICTION REPORT 2019

Kirsty Logan



Judging the flash fiction category was a particular joy for me, as I'm a huge fan of flash fiction – both reading it and writing it.

It's an underappreciated form of fiction, and I applaud every writer who approached this tricky type of storytelling.

It's not easy to tell a complete, satisfying story with such a tiny word count; the fact that so many stories were submitted in this category is a testament to the skills of the writers out there.

I won't lie: when the stack of stories arrived through my letterbox, I was intimidated. How to read so many stories and judge them, one against another?

Isn't it comparing apples and oranges? Observation that rings true as struck glass vs. glorious flights of imagination? A wide-ranging world vs. a perfectly-described miniature? Lyrical prose vs. a pacy plot? Which is 'better'? Is there such a thing as 'best'? But when it came down to it, choosing the winners was simple. I chose the stories that wouldn't leave. The ones I narrated to my wife, the ones I thought about while falling asleep, the ones I kept returning to. The ones that burrowed in.

'Ligature' by Daniel Bennett was one such story; I couldn't stop thinking about it after I read it. While the details may initially seem mundane, it's precisely the everyday nature of them that gives the story its power, right to the double-meaning of the heartrending last line.

Louise Fisher's **'Small Bones'** is a master-class in imagery and description. The beetroot, the pigskin, the still-warm mice: while reading I can almost feel them and taste them.

'Genocide Memorial Week, Rwanda 2019' by Isabella Mead pulls off a wonderful feat of ambiguous intent, using a small but significant event to convey a profound and affecting story.

Kirsty Logan

And on to the winners, all of which have achieved something very impressive – creating entire worlds, strong characters and intense backstories out of a lean, mean amount of words. These pieces are that rare thing: stories that may be tiny in word-count, but feel huge in implication. They are a keyhole we can peep through to see an entire world.

'Vigil' by Amanda O'Callaghan was one of the smallest stories in terms of word count, but packs an incredible punch. It's a testament to the fact that in the hands of a talented writer, only a few words are needed to convey a huge story with real emotional impact.

What I loved about Mike Kilgannon's **'Hercules Reopened'** was the ambiguity, expertly balanced to create a multitude of possible interpretations. Every time I read the story I come up with something new, and the rhythms of the prose are a joy each time.

Maria Donovan's **'Aftermath'** leapt out immediately: it's a masterclass in flash fiction, cramming more character development and world-building into 250 words than some writers manage in a whole novel. It's a truly impressive piece of writing.

To all the winners: congratulations, and I can't wait to read more of your work. To every writer who submitted a flash fiction this year: well done on writing this wonderful and unappreciated form. And to every writer out there who thought about submitting, but didn't: keep writing!

THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD 2019

Naomi Wood



I have to admit, the finalists of the Novel Category had to be separated from each other with a comb. On the last day of September, at the top of Hachette publishers overlooking the Thames, Mary-Anne, Aki, Euan and I had the tricky task of judging these novels excerpts on the criteria with which we judge any book: voice, style, characterisation, originality, narrative drive and polish. We also judged the first thirty thousand words on the invisible thirty that were to follow: on its promise. But all we really had to go on was what was on the page; each submission was entirely anonymous.

I would like to share with you what we found most exciting about each novel excerpt.

First, **The Haven**, by Sarah Reynolds, which is Highly Commended in this year's category. Fifteen-year-old Emma Granger mysteriously sends a bunch of flowers to her parents, then promptly disappears. Twenty years later, Emma's best friend is still on the hunt to discover what happened to her best friend under such strange circumstances. Meanwhile, a girl has appeared in the Welsh mountains, with a possible connection to the cold case of Emma Granger. 'A memorably well written and often unexpected story of an unsolved disappearance, and its lasting effects on the lives of a family and a community,' commented Mary-Anne Harrington, publisher at Tinder Press.

The second Highly Commended winner is Sophie Mahoney's **Third Space**, which follows Jenny Gallagher as she journeys to St Ives to find her father. Disruptive and disturbing, the narrative often shuttles between the trauma of the past and the hostility of the present, and it traces Jenny's breakdown in a Cornish cottage with humour, grace and tenderness. 'A haunting, claustrophobic glimpse into the disintegrating mind of a woman under immense pressure,' said judge Aki Schilz, from TLC. 'Written with real compassion, and a deft hand.'

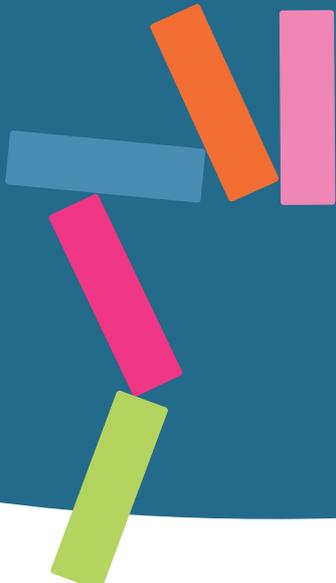
Seagull Pie by Sandra Jensen is the Runner-Up of this year's competition. Breezy, witty, and very funny, the young narrator of this novel is a breath of fresh air as she recounts her family's haphazard life after being uprooted from South Africa to a dilapidated school-house in rural

Naomi Wood

Ireland. The characters in *Seagull Pie* are eccentrically memorable: stone-deaf Bonma, a persevering but casually neglectful mother, and a young female protagonist who will make you smile at every turn of the page. Euan Thorneycroft, agent at AM Heath, commented: 'Charming and often laugh-out-loud funny, this is a deftly observed bildungsroman, the story of a young girl and her family attempting to start a new life in rural Ireland.'

And finally our winner: George Kelly's **City of Blades**. We were all unanimously gripped by this story of South London gangs, drug warfare and high-school romance, so much so that all of us felt very frustrated not knowing what was going to happen in the second half of this carefully scripted and structured novel. This is *The Wire* set in Croydon, and its lead detective is Deanté: a school-boy who is forced to investigate his sister's disappearance at the hands of two warring drug gangs. Fabulously written, expertly plotted, all of the judges agreed the novel was an absolute pleasure to read.

It was this submission which delivered most on all our criteria, and so, after two hours of back and forth, the *City of Blades* nicked it.



2019

POETRY WINNERS

Judge: Hollie McNish

FIRST

Things I wish I could trade my headscarf for

Fathima Zahra, Rayleigh, Essex

SECOND

Hoor

Jim McElroy, Belfast

THIRD

Three candles

Mark Farley, Shrivenham, Swindon



HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

Al-Watan

Alissa Jones Nelson, Berlin, Germany

Bedded

Mikaella Clements, Berlin, Germany

Crow

Nici West, London

Exactly the thing that you are

Jane Flett, Berlin, Germany

Fermented

Gemma Reeves, London

I shouldn't be calling this late

Jenny Karlsson, Arvidsjaur, Sweden

Salva Nos

Jimmy Lowther, Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts.

The Sound of Water J

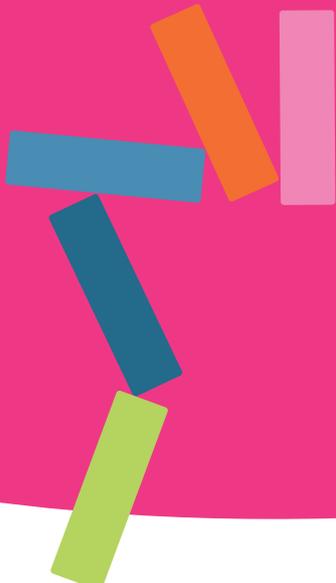
Joseph Boone, Los Angeles, California, USA

The Way of the Pack

Hesse Phillips, Madrid, Spain

Wolf Women

Amy Stewart, York



2019

FLASH FICTION WINNERS

Judge: Kirsty Logan

FIRST

Aftermath

Maria Donovan Bridport, Dorset

SECOND

The Hercules Reopened

Mike Kllgannon, Sheffield

THIRD

Vigil

Amanda O'Callaghan, Wilston, QLD, Australia

HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

Genocide Memorial Week, Rwanda 2019

Isabella Mead, Wendover, Bucks.

Ligature

Daniel Bennett, London

Small bones

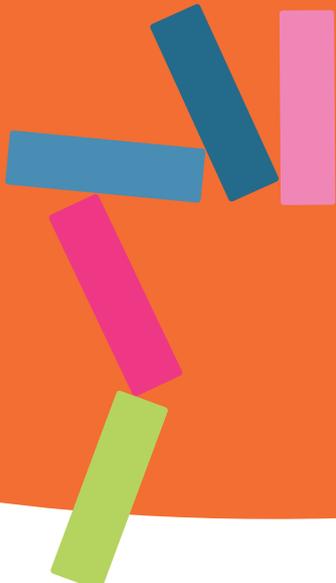
Louise Cato, Pitney, Somerset

THE DORSET PRIZE

Presented to the highest placed writer from Dorset in the competition each year.

Sponsored by The Book Shop, South Street, Bridport, Dorset DT6 3NQ

Aftermath (flash fiction) Maria Donovan, Bridport, Dorset



2019

THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD

Judge: Naomi Wood

FIRST

Seagull Pie

Sandra Jensen, Hove, East Sussex



RUNNER-UP

The Haven

Sarah Reynolds, Carmarthen

Third Space

Sophie O'Mahony, London

SHORTLISTED

Ghost Boy (withdrawn)

Emily Hughes, Maidenhead



LONGLISTED (alphabetical by title)

7HZ

Rebecca Blakkr

Brash and Frazil

Orla Cronin

Dismember the Past

Sean Gregory

Leap of Faith

Mel Gough

Looking for Romance (with Steve Davis)

Ben Summers

The Alchemy of Botany

Kitty Edwards

The Fleeting

Sally Skinner

The Good Steward

Christopher Holt

The Invisible World

Hannah Colby

The Martyr's Hymn

Wenyan Lu

The Only Life You Could Save

John O'Donnell

The Other Son

Aisha Hassan

The Starlight Rooms

Victoria Stewart

The Well-Tempered Wife

Leonora Gale

While there is still time

Daniel Allen

George Kelly withdrew his novel City of Blades after the judging was completed.