

2021 JUDGES' REPORT





POETRY REPORT 2021

Raymond Antrobus



This year's Bridport poetry prize was the toughest competition I have ever judged! Such a wide and impressive range of ideas, tones, forms (traditional and invented).

I enjoyed how playful and humorous many entries were. It's clear the pandemic (and the general sense of impending doom) hasn't stifled poetic imaginations. Poems had me chuckling, nodding my head, gasping (and in a few cases, actually standing up to applaud).

To read so many poems of this quality did more than inspire me, it assured me that poetry is continuing to be pushed and expanded and ideas of what a poem is (or can be) is still being explored and renewed.

I believe we've entered an age of cross-genre and interdisciplinary exploration; that some of the most compelling poets writing today are borrowing from other art forms, that some poems are part-poem, part archival practise, part-essay, part-translation.

Poetry is more democratic this way. Its reputation as an elite endeavour is (rightfully) fading. If this weren't true, such a rich range of voices and styles would simply not be possible. I want to stress that I'm not just commentating on the winning poems, but an overall feeling that arose after reading ALL the shortlisted poems. But my assignment was to choose the poems that felt most striking, that lingered long after initial readings that had an image, a style, a voice, an energy with staying power.

I'm going to start with ten fantastic highly commended poems. All of them move towards aliveness. They sing and shake on the page in voices that feel unique and earned. I can't wait to hear more from these poets.

The deftly done sequence poem **'76'**, is an Orwellian cautionary tale and an 'experiment in time' as the speaker calls it, an accomplished and fully realised voice.

Jamaica Grapples with 'Til Death Do Us Part', a dramatic lyrical monologue in Patois that is shocking and stinging with its fresh mash up of language and sharp striking phrases like 'triangular rage' and 'pocketable for the sky.'

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'We Real Spinsters' pays literary homage to some of the best poets and writers of recent centuries using Gwendolyn Brooke's 'We Real Cool', this poem feels like a chant, a roll call of names and deliciously compelling lyric sound, "We // Spare Rib // We // Women's Lib // We...".'

'Becoming Catwoman' is a poem that feels like a friend confiding in its readers, at once humorous and strikingly violent, but clever and subtle in its 'killing' final lines.

'A Hill In November' is a brilliant pastoral poem that is (very cleverly) anchored by the remembered image of 'whales here at dusk // on an allotment far from the ocean'. The premise itself is a fresh and subversive approach to the pastoral poem.

'Cradled' is powerful and tender. The language gets more minimal and leaves us, stung with the image - 'Cradled in silence // It was empty- // my womb.'

'Eating God For Breakfast' is a wonky shape for such a precise poem, where language itself is digested and broken up. Here's the fleshy opening - 'we are at the kitchen table eating eggs, and god // i love sundays. imagine keeping sunday so close to me // tattooed on my sternum, or across my knuckles, sun // day, in two easy halves.'

In the poem, **'Fit for Work'**, a clever sonnet-y poem that subtly challenges every-day ableism using a familiar analogy about Stephen Hawking. 'He had a lot to say about the universe // And his mouth stopped working.' Yet it's in the final turn of the poem, the speaker asking its (abled bodied listener) to consider the value of the disabled body (and mind). I think it's a risky (deliberately imperfect) poem and one that would inspire thought and debate in any setting.

'When Two Men, All Pupil No Sclera' is a poem that witnesses the death of (another) unarmed Black man murdered in police violence (Ahmaud Arbery). The poem is lyrical reportage, it doesn't function to beautify the (already sensational) death, but, using visceral imagery like 'windows waiting for glass', it brings us closer to the human layer often missing in (dehumanising) journalism.

Finally, **'In Memoriam'**, a beautifully crafted poem about an unsentimental mother who 'doesn't see the point in monuments' yet, finds a (simultaneously private and public) way to sentimentalise the loss of a loved one (ironically) in print.

In 3rd place, the poem **'Bruised Fruit'** opens with the unforgettable couplet,

'I travel as I live: among the hurt
and hurried, though not as breathless'

That opening is as memorable as many of our canonised poems. A masterful display of enjambments as the poem continues to breathlessly (and effortlessly) unfold. Without the couplet form and each full stop and comma, each image, question and proposition could easily overwhelm the reader (like the woman who can't catch her bracelets when they break away from her wrist.) I can't resist the pun, but it is a muscular poem.

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Look at these active word choices – ‘bends, breaks, leans, stretches, stands and swells’, the poem does everything magical the body does.

In 2nd place the poem, ‘**Guidance Patrol**’, a powerfully rendered Ghazal that stayed with me, even as I cooked my dinner the night after I read it. The heightened drama perfectly suited to the heightened language.

‘When the black van pulled over, my hand was in yours.
They thought I was your lover: my hand was in yours.’

The repeated line is haunting and beautiful. Such light touches are incredibly powerful, carefully handled. The danger is both immediate and historical. (Soldiers, war, crumbled remains, city and body). The word ‘faithful’ is compounded with the divine, but also the belief of love itself. It’s a kind of faithful balancing act, showing us in its preserving refrain, what it takes to love a person and a place (despite, despite).

In first place, ‘**Over the Tannoy**’, a poem that fed my sensibilities as a poet, family archivist, political commentator and emotional historian, a new kind of (immersive) found poem, a new way of speaking to and from a lineage, an ancestor, an intergenerational collaboration.

I don’t just want to read poems like this, I want to read essays about poems like this, I want to see the cinema, the photography, the paintings that poems like this could inspire. I champion this work as a soulful language experiment, a form to be brought forward by more poets, to inspire more writers to delve into family archives. I say this knowing the privilege of having access to your history, of having an archive to explore, of having poet-ancestors, (blood and chosen). ‘Over The Tannoy’ works as a contrapuntal poem, a found poem, a letter poem, multiple forms and two voices happening at once.

Remarkable!



SHORT STORY REPORT 2021

Robert McCrum



2021 is the second year in which this great international story prize has been conducted in the shadow of Covid-19. Once again, so many of impressive tales have been conceived and written in the almost ideal creative conditions of solitude, solemnity and silence within an atmosphere of universal dread.

It's often said that fiction is a mirror, but I beg to disagree. Stories don't just reflect, they open windows. This year's entries will take the reader into many new worlds of life, love and loss. These may be provoked by lockdown, but they're about so much more than the pandemic. Far from reflecting the vicissitudes we've all endured, these stories draw inspiration from a timeless range of individual experience

and the compelling dramas of everyday life. Sure, there are intermittent nods to intubation, the ICU and lateral flow tests. But what's more striking, to me, is the resilient way in which a global crisis has become absorbed into the context of quotidian reality. Perhaps there's less comedy, and more grief in these pages than hitherto, but in almost all other respects, these Bridport stories offer fine examples of a much-loved genre.

And what is that genre? It has become an indispensable lifeline, transistorized fiction for distracted and disrupted times: a contemporary means of self-expression inspired by those great artists of the story – Raymond Carver, Jennifer Egan, Deborah Eisenberg, Richard Ford, Thom Jones, Lorrie Moore, and Alice Munro, among many.

As an annual celebration of short-fiction, Bridport is proud to be a global prize, and the two daunting shortlists from which I've made my selection exemplify the international reach of the English literary tradition, with submissions from Canada, Scotland, Australia, the USA, Northern Ireland and the Home Counties. As a judge, I had no idea what to expect, but it was not really a surprise to find the recurring themes of love betrayed, identity in crisis and families divided.

The ten Highly Commended stories make a show-case for the range and ambition of the prize-entries as a collective. **'The Hall of Human Origins'**, an American story, is notable for its boldness, squarely set in the midst of the pandemic, with a marriage unravelling in an atmosphere of seething hysteria. There's a risk to such topicality, and **'The Sound of Summer'**, set in the Northern Ireland of the Troubles, demonstrates the dividends a story will get from hindsight. **'A Diamond in this Rhinestone**

Robert McCrum

World' is another American story set in a desert part of Texas, a wasted environment in which Jesus Christ and Dolly Parton compete for supremacy in the mind of Liz as she struggles to find love amid the desolation of the American south. 'The **'Leavetaking'** is so short it's almost an exercise in flash fiction, but it demonstrates superbly the power of Less is More in an arresting break-up story.

'A Woman of Paris (1921)' is a highly entertaining historical fantasy, set in Twenties Hollywood, sustaining themes of gender and celebrity with scintillating dialogue.

Still in the USA (always a source of excellent short fiction), **'Gia's Midsummer Eve'** unfolds an unforgettable suburban nightmare with calculated contemporary nods to *The Great Gatsby*, another risk, but one that almost comes off. **'The Entomologist's Pin'** is an accomplished horror story, **'The Hot House'** and **'The Arrival Fallacy'** boldly play with comic material in Australia and Scotland, respectively. **'Mission Accomplished'** is a gay, coming-of-age love-story set against the Iraq war. All of the above promise well for the future.

And so to my winning trio: the third prize, which goes to **'Looking for Light in the Cingulate Cortex'**, a witty and ambitious literary satire about "the neuro-imaging of love". On my reading, this was pipped at the post by the winner of the second prize, **'A breath is a motion is the air rising is water flowing'**, a witty, and quite merciless, portrait of a gay couple in meltdown.

Within the agonised internal debate any judge of new fiction must endure, my overall winner is that joyous thing – the unanimous choice of my various reading selves. **'Manischewitz Night'** captured my attention on first encounter, and no amount of re-reading shook my conviction that this is the real thing. Did I want to hear a new voice? Here, from the first line, is a woman with a scene to paint, a mood to capture, and something she has to get off her chest... Did I want character? Our narrator and her posse (Abby, Cameron, Kiva, Jen, and Thalia) are great personalities, six original and outrageous young women on the raz. The best company, cracking some great lines – too many to quote – on a freezing night in mid-winter Toronto.

So it's **'Manischewitz Night'** that takes the Bridport Short Story prize summa cum laude; I, for one, will eagerly wait to see what its author writes next.

FLASH FICTION REPORT 2021

Robert McCrum



In **Mothers, Fathers and Others**, her latest volume of essays, the distinguished American novelist Siri Hustvedt writes, of reading, that it's an intimate encounter 'every person can have during a pandemic. No social distance is required. In our current world of restricted movement, the book is a geography where complete freedom remains possible.' By the same token, the literary act of writing also remains unrestricted. And when it comes to the upstart genre of 'flash fiction', readers and writers alike still find themselves in an intoxicating world of instant gratification: an extraordinary encounter, a memorable turning-point, or a stunning revelation - that rare snapshot which says everything.

If a successful short-story is a star-turn, then flash fiction, like a rambunctious sibling, is improv. on a stick. Nothing if not a show-off, the flash fiction writer must be flash: nail it from the outset, take the reader by the throat, and stop on a dime - a high-wire act that's not for the fainthearted.

Not every contribution to the shortlist for this demanding category had quite the ice-cool mastery of their material I was looking for - that elusive 'voice' - but the following Highly Commended entries each make a compelling claim on the reader: from the raw heart-break of '**Trauma Light**', and the jaunty '**Swim the Bay with Byron**', to the insouciant heartlessness of '**New You**', and the heart-felt confessional of '**Unsent**'. In '**Present Perfect**', 'people are hanged' becomes the macabre coda to this chilling snapshot of a father-daughter relationship. Still, however, I was looking...

Finally, it was the overall winner (whose title '**What to Watch**' made its own claim), whose seamless single paragraph fulfilled almost all my criteria, and made me smile too. Here was a single page that was on-the-money: responding to the challenge of a tricky genre, playing with the conventions, and (with 'it's this one moment') delivering on time. Nevertheless, it was chased down the final furlong by '**Pineapples**', the story I awarded second prize, a poignant terminal duologue from within the ICU, and third prize '**The Value of Things**,' a memorable and moving meditation on 'last things'.

Congratulations all round.



THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD 2021

Victoria Hislop



The winning novel for the Bridport Prize is *The House of Broken Bricks* by Fiona Williams.

The writer describes with convincing intimacy a mixed-race marriage and lays bare the complexities of the relationship which arise through both circumstances and skin colour. The couple's problems are painfully intensified by the death of one of their twins and a move to deepest rural England.

The themes of loss and deracination are powerfully evoked through the use of metaphor and through the experiences of day to day life, particularly for Jess, the wife and mother of the two boys. Despite the themes with which she deals,

Williams is never sentimental. And she delivers surprise after surprise, not least the opening, which is in the voice of the little boy, Sonny (who has already died). It's a shocking but powerful first page and from that moment it only gets better.

The writing itself is at times utterly magical and lyrical – but never self-indulgent. There is a restraint that I really admired. The descriptions are often very sensory and poetic and there is a sense that the writer really knows the landscapes and the locations in which the characters find themselves.

The book mixes beauty and pain in a truly remarkable way and after the opening 30,000 words, I was left with a strong desire to know what happens in the end. For me this is the best kind of story telling – characters I genuinely care about, and a narrative that demands to be followed. Congratulations, Fiona Williams

The runner up for the prize is “Portrait of a Family” by Tamara Henriques.

From the opening sentence: “The day my sister and I burnt the house down, our mother, Margot was out with her dealer, Cosmo.” I was totally hooked!

In this story we have another set of twins, this time girls. And we see much of the story through their eyes – which is superbly managed. They have sweet, funny, engaging and totally convincing child-voices – that are nicely written without being remotely over-cute. I believed totally in the characters of the children, but of course most importantly in the harassed and mildly irresponsible artist-mother.

Victoria Hislop

she is a wonderfully flawed human being, but all the more likeable for that and I hugely enjoyed reading about her situation. The fraught relationship with her husband lurks like a shadow in the early chapters, very subtly alluded to, but making us want to know and understand more.

There are some glorious metaphors – I particularly loved “The key is still there, heavy and ornate, like a piece of antique cutlery.” But Henriques never over-writes. There is humour (which is hard to do well) and the story is always engaging and never dull. This is a novel where I found myself turning pages quickly to find out what happened next.

HIGHLY COMMENDED ARE:

The Arctic Vault - Helga B. Viegas

I found this a sweeping, ambitious and very timely dystopian novel. There are some brilliantly written descriptions of a new and very terrifying world where everyone is micro-chipped and food is created not grown. It is a frighteningly believable vision of the future and I was gripped from the very beginning.

Me, Rosa and Bridget Bird - Gemma Seltzer

A story of the complexities of female friendships. The writer explores relationships between sisters as well as friends, in particular a love triangle that endures over many years and captures with great acuity the jealousies and insecurities that exist in the female mind.

The Girl in the Glass House - Monica Parle

This is a richly evocative and very original story set on the US-Mexico border. The descriptions of place and period are ambitious, but generally successful. I was transported to another time and place.



2021

POETRY WINNERS

Judge: Raymond Antrobus

FIRST

Over the Tannoy

Emma Walton Hamilton, Sag Harbor, NY, USA

SECOND

Guidance Patrol

Armen Davoudian, Stanford, CA, USA

THIRD

Bruised Fruit

Erin Lambert Hartman, Harrisonburg, VA, USA



HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

76

A hill in November

Becoming Catwoman

Cradled

Eating God for Breakfast

Fit for Work

In Memoriam

Jamaica Grapples with 'Till Death Do Us Part'

We Real Spinsters

When Two Men, All Pupil No Sclera

Nick Makoha, Thornton Heath, Croydon

David Swann, Brighton

Jessica Traynor, Dublin, Ireland

Jennie Ziverk Carr, Spring, TX, USA

Adrienne Wilkinson, Norwich

Jo Davis, London

Susannah Hart, London

Courtney Conrad, Aylesbury, Bucks

Jane Thomas, Oxford

Lois P. Jones, South Pasadena, CA, USA



2021

SHORT STORY WINNERS

Judge: Robert McCrum

FIRST

Manischewitz Night

Charlin McIsaac, Toronto, Canada

SECOND

A breath is a motion is the air rising is water flowing

Adam Welch, London

THIRD

Looking for Light in the *Cingulate Cortex*

Cait Atherton, Bangkok, Thailand



HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

A Diamond in this Rhinestone World

Alana Franasiak, Annapolis, MD, USA

A Woman of Paris (1921)

T. C. Smith, Seattle, WA, USA

Gia's Midsummer's Eve

Dyhanna Raffi-David, Redondo Beach, CA, USA

Mission Accomplished

Gemma Cooper-Novak, Syracuse, NY, USA

The Arrival Fallacy

Hannah Sutherland, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire

The Entomologist's Pin

Stephanie Reeves, Dorking, Surrey

The Hall of Human Origins

Stephanie Early Green, Alexandria, VA, USA

The Hot House

Kathy Tierney, Armidale, NSW, Australia

The Leavetaking

Greta Stoddart, Kilmington, Devon

The Sound of the Summer

Eileen O'Donoghue, Killarney, Ireland



2021 FLASH FICTION WINNERS

Judge: Robert McCrum

FIRST

What to Watch

P.C. Veronne, New York, USA

SECOND

Pineapples

Miranda Overett, Ipswich

THIRD

The Value of Things

Angela Wipperman, London

HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

New You

Shelley Roche-Jaques, Barnsley

Present Perfect

Mary Morissy, Cork, Ireland

Swim the Bay with Byron (only 14 Euros)

Andrew Boulton, Nottingham

Trauma Light

Charlotte Morbey, Campbeltown, Argyll & Bute

Unsent

Matt Buttell-Rogers, London



2021

THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD

Judge: Victoria Hislop

FIRST

The House of Broken Bricks

Fiona Williams, Stathe, Somerset



RUNNER-UP

Portrait of a Family

Tamara Henriques, Cirencester.

HIGHLY COMMENDED (alphabetical by title)

Me, Rosa and Bridget Bird

Gemma Seltzer, London.

The Arctic Vault

Helga B. Viegas, London.

The Girl in the Glass House

Mónica Parle, London.



LOGLISTED (alphabetical by title)

A Beautiful Girl

Kathryn Ensall, Harrogate

Bad Luck Face

Baljit Sidhu, Oldbury

Compass

Sam Christie, Aberystwyth

Gray Matter

Roger Grant, Brighton

Meat

Lindsay Chathli, London

Polar Terminus

Fergal Thomas McHugh, Coolmore, Ireland

Room for Doubt

Tracy Cook, Weybridge

Shale

Kim Squirrell, Bridport, Dorset

Solar

Matthew Putland, Tamworth

The Fair

Andrea Caro, London

The Foundation of Everything

Anna Sonny, Barking

The Long Field

Andrew Bonner, London

The Trinity

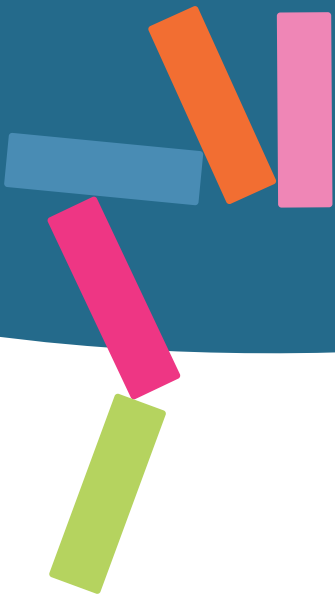
Alexander Whyte, London

Thin Skin

G.G. Gane, Bristol

Walk in my Shadow

Nadia Kabir Barb, London



YOUNG WRITER AWARD

Presented to the highest placed writer aged 16 to 25 in the competition each year.

WINNER

Jamaica Grapples with 'Til Death Do Us Part' (poem)

Courtney Conrad

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

WINNER

Shale (novel)

Kim Squirrell, Bridport, Dorset