

# BRIDPORT PRIZE

INTERNATIONAL  
CREATIVE WRITING  
COMPETITION

*Raising funds for Bridport Arts Centre*

# 2022 JUDGES' REPORT



# POETRY REPORT 2022

## Inua Ellams



Judging this year's Bridport Prize was a challenge. My other projects had overrun and spilled into the days I had reserved for the process, such that I struggled to find enough time to read and contemplate – at first. But as soon as I began, the importance of poetry – its particular offerings and the reasons for its hallowed place among the literary arts – recaptured my attention, grew within me, and out, to envelop the precious hours I spent among the verses of so many talented and passionate writers. Their voices would call to me as I slept, and I'd wake with their words in my ears.

There were poems about angels and champagne, prayers to the octopus, about care work, wind turbines and cameras, about field mice and domestic boredom, sonatas and blackbirds, about the many names for rain among many poems about grief and death. The wide range of topics covered, and the various forms, tonalities and textures demonstrated the growing democratisation of poetry, and the vibrant writing identities and communities creating important work.

I'd like to start my report by touching on the fantastic highly commended poems, beginning – in no particular order with: **Working Debenhams' Late Shift**, a gorgeous poem that begins as a critique of hyper-capitalist retail tradition, then grows to a tender portrait of a young woman's relationship with her father.

**Game**, expertly and deftly recounts the grey areas of a relationship played out through social media, where in the final line, the writer asks us the readers our interpretation of the events "*Did he did he use me.*"

In tightly written couplets, **Townies** uses the group of city slickers visiting the countryside pop culture trope to comment on responsibility and power, on gods and mortality "*But it's hard / for gods – they never get on.*"

**All my bodies** which includes line "*to bathe in oil and submit to massage without revulsion*" is a powerful poem about self-reclamation, a woman coming to terms with, and owning the changes and transitions of her body throughout her life.

**New School** is a haunting, haunting, depth charge of a poem, a clever, subtle lamentation of a childhood death and the gaping hole left – a poem that grows with each reading.

**Telegraph poles** reads like a nature poem, but it is a deep and curious, sonorous fragile capturing of telecommunications... "*Tune in to electric blood that thrilled and sang / along the wire*"

**David and Goliath** follows in the tradition of poems about sculptures. Picking out precise details of the marble Biblical hero, "*if you could flatten the frown / and part the lips*", it asks a simple question... what might David say about his current predicament?

## Inua Ellams

As a fan of basketball, **Watching The Little Sisters** leapt out to me for its precise commentary on the gender dynamics within the sport, but more importantly, for the watchful eye of its speaker as the young *“practice defense, as women must”*.

**Remembrance** is a poem about a seemingly insignificant “shard” of a thing. By its use of repetition – though we never know what it is – the shard grows with importance and with language, much like how poetry works *“Just a fragment... A tiny piece of plate or something”*.

And finally, **Waiting Outside** another haunting poem that emotionally and powerfully conjures memories of the tireless work of medical professionals in its depiction of a lost surgical glove *“a pale / hand scabbling in the dust / for something lost”*.

In 3rd place, I chose – **My Father’s Fingernails**. Of the many emotive poems submitted about death, this poem uses what is often frowned at and discarded from the body as its starting point. The speaker finds *“a tiny / cache in his backyard on a stump under the pine”* – foreshadowing the poem’s ending, but along the journey, describing the father’s habits. We learn he was a smoker, a private man, who kept his mysteries to himself, all of which explains the speaker’s tender actions *“I swept those trimmings / into my palm and brought my breath close, / as if blowing on embers”*. It is a tender work, that lifts in its closing line, pointing towards the circle of life.

**Scene in Media Res** took 2nd place. It is said, poetry and photography often serve the same function, and this poem serves that argument. The first lines declare its intention *“The frozen present glitters like a frost / full of storefront manikins”* and though it unfolds almost like a typical list poem, the writer’s choices – what is drawn to our attention, and the formidable uses of line breaks, keeps us transfixed as we read of: spaghetti, birds, explosions, a couple, droplets of rain, all driving towards an unexpected, emotionally charged figure, alive and alone in the city.

Choosing an overall winner was exceptionally difficult. I was torn between two poems, **My Father and I Drive Back to St. Louis For His Mother’s Funeral** and **After You Self-Medicating with Roethke’s The Waking Read by Text-to-Speech App**. The similarities are stark. Both poems have long titles, both deal with memory and cross-generational familial relationships, both use repetition as structural devices, both poems are prose poems, both require you to read by tumbling through and piecing together the narrative, and both poems being with a mother-figure.

**My Father and I...** comments on abuses of power by police officers, deftly conjuring the uncomfortable yet familiar scene with *“I am asked to exit my vehicle / as if I had a choice / So there is a point in the journey when the frame holds”*.

**After You Self-Medicating...** comments on feminine interdependence and maternal love, with the line *“you lift the baby who watches you with milk drunk eyes half closed and as you lay her in your daughter’s arms”*.

Both poems have halting, startling imagery. In **My Father and I...** *“the hill stills / more or less / its green / & the dandelions become a haven / for the bees to stuff their pockets with gold”* and in **After You Self-Medicating...** *“lullaby you once knew but now is a fragment of bees buzzing over the figs that have fallen as you lay in the shade”*. Both poems also reach suspenseful and emotionally charged cliff-hanger endings.

For these reasons, I could not choose one over the other, so chose both poems as joint winners of this year’s Bridport Poetry prize. It is my belief they are in conversation with each other, and should be read together, that by their pairing, we glimpse the human spirit and expand our understandings of contemporary life.

# SHORT STORY REPORT 2022

## Tim Pears



V. S. Pritchett, English master of the short story, wrote that a story “can be rather stark and bare unless you put in the right details. Details make stories human, and the more human a story can be, the better.”

I was repeatedly reminded of Pritchett’s dictum while reading the one hundred shortlisted entries for this year’s Bridport Short Story Prize, which glittered with memorable detail.

The best art achieves two almost incompatible goals: an artist gives us their unique vision, yet in doing so enlarges and illuminates the wider world we all share. Such is the case with the following ten Highly Commended stories.

### **Caravan**

Five men drive their camels across featureless, harsh steppe. Camels loaded with opium. Hard, desperate, determined men, each one etched in words as if in stone. On they drive, through the sand and wind, towards their misbegotten destinies. What a story.

### **Focaccia**

Subtitled A brief tale of infatuation in the modern age,

to which there’s little to add except to say that the tale hopscotches from paragraph to paragraph with tremendous wit and élan.

### **Hatches Before They Chicken**

Lena demands her daughter Katy and boyfriend Harry’s compulsory attendance at her seventy-eighth birthday party, in the Polish Community Centre. The party is an opportunity for Lena to ridicule and castigate her guests. This eccentric immigrant is at the centre of rich comedy that surely extends outside the story.

### **Seventeen Weeks**

Bianca is pregnant, but is there something wrong with the baby? The author takes us into her mind, digressing, obsessing, threatening to unravel yet fiercely intelligent, and fascinating to travel with into a medical, emotional circle of hell.

### **Pollinate**

Amber and her young colleagues work in a vast orchard. What are they doing, as they move around? Are they dancing? Gradually we understand that they are pollinating the fruit trees, humans mimicking the actions of the bees that have gone. An outlandish scenario the author renders entirely credible.

### **I need you to be Harold**

A classical short story. The fey narrator, a modern day superfluous man, goes out of town for a weekend away and is drawn into a hare-brained, identity-swapping drama, which is also a lovely consideration of our sense of ourselves as substantial beings.

### **Alice**

Ian, the narrator, gets a call at two in the morning from his volatile exgirlfriend. She needs rescuing. He responds. Does she really need rescuing? Does he really need to respond? The author takes us on their subsequent journey through the night with verve and brio.

## Tim Pears

### 1967

New York. A man meets a woman in Grand Central Station. The identities of these people, where they're from, what they're doing, and the wider relationships in their lives, is fed to us so subtly, line by line. This writer is an angler, drawing us in.

### Monumenta

A female chief executive of a construction company flees Germany for her mother and brother at home in Belgrade, after a terrible accident for which she might be responsible, or at least blamed. Is she in flight from disaster, from the future, from success, from modern Europe? In flight to refuge, the past, the primitive? Real, earthy characters yet politicalcultural resonance, what more can one ask for?

### The Last Year the Ice Lake Sang

A man lies in a hospital bed, in a strange clinic somewhere in Germany. His night-shift nurse, Heike, tells him about the ice lake, and conceives a plan to take him there. Gradually it dawns on the reader who this man is. A magical story.

Any of these Highly Commended stories could have made the top three. Judgement of work of such quality is not merely subjective but almost random. Still, the choice had to be made.

In third place is **The Truth about the Lies People Told about Cattle**, an audacious, innovatively structured yet highly readable, worldly story about geopolitics, international trade and cultural difference, featuring a cow falling from the sky and sinking a boat. Quite brilliant.

In second place, **46A to Dun Laoghaire** follows Annie through a manic evening with her troubled, unstable, intoxicating girlfriend Lorna who, from one moment to another, gets Annie in trouble while simultaneously liberating her. An exhilarating ride for both Annie and the reader, the theme is thrillingly embodied on every page.

In first place is **This is Going to be Huge**. Sasha's best friend in childhood, Blair, inexplicably betrays her. In time Sasha gets over it. She builds a life, a career, a family. Blair is long gone, yet remains, a faint unresolved ghost in Sasha's mind. Then they meet again... A beautifully modulated story about character, with clues to the personality of those drawn towards cultish insanity, and a most moving exploration of the needs friendship can probably never fulfil.

# FLASH FICTION REPORT 2022

## Kathy Fish



Quietly or not-so-quietly incendiary. Expansive. Evocative. Containing more story, more complexity than seems possible in the limited space it inhabits, flash fiction demands us to sit up and take notice. By its sheer brevity, it announces its urgency on the page, demands that we pay close attention to every single word.

And we do. The best flash fiction works this kind of magic. It may take as little as two minutes to read, but we come away feeling as though we've read a novel. The best examples of the form are immersive and precise and deeply compelling. Much more than simply a shorter short story, often employing the tools of poetry, flash fiction is its own distinct literary form.

The late U.S. politician Ann Richards famously said Ginger Rogers had to do everything her dance partner Fred Astaire did, only backwards and wearing high heels. That is the challenge of the flash writer, to accomplish what short story writers and novelists do, but with a fraction of words at their disposal.

For the Bridport Flash Fiction Prize, writers were limited to a mere two hundred and fifty words, at the lower end of the flash fiction range. These writers were not only dancing backwards in high heels, they were teetering on a tight rope. Flash this short requires precision and daring and if needs be, a willingness to work outside traditional structures and rules.

My thanks to the team of initial readers who made the tough decisions necessary to winnow down the submissions to those I was honored to read and judge. Any judge of art is of course, subjective. Ultimately what made the stories you're about to read stand out for me was mastery of craft and originality. This is what guided me as I made what turned out to be quite daunting decisions from a high standard of submissions.

All of the Highly Commended stories moved or delighted me in some way. **Falling Woman** tells a universal story in a fresh and layered, poetic manner. **Valentine's Day** is told via a series of images that build to create a powerful overall picture. **The Time You Went into Space** is a voice-driven piece that captures a devastating moment around a dinner table in a single sentence. **Autopsy of a Mother** is surprising and original, both tender and sad. And **The Life of Fibonacci, Shaped to Resemble a Galaxy or Pine Cone** is a dazzling display of form.

I found the three prize winning stories simply brilliant, captivating, haunting. Even after multiple readings, these stories stayed with me. Indeed they will always stay with me. Third Prize winner **In the Museums of Heaven and Hell**, is an aimed and powerful piece, unique and incisive, with a final sentence that lands hard.

**Yesterday, They Crossed the Elbe** won Second Prize and is a striking, cinematically told story that will forever haunt me. The point of view alone is one of the most original I have ever read.

The flash I chose for First Prize, **Some creatures trapped in ice** clobbered me on first reading and every read thereafter. The very best flash fiction has an epic feel to it. Something urgent and compelling and utterly new. This flash was all that and more. All three of the top prize winners are stories that will stay with me a very long time, but especially this one.

Warmest congratulations to the winners. I am in awe of the skill and daring and passion you brought to your work. And to the readers, I am confident you will enjoy these tiny masterpieces as much as I did.

# THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD 2022

## Monique Roffey



**I Want** by Zad El Bacha was unanimously chosen as the winner of the Novel Prize, 2022. We found it highly original, deeply moving and formally thrilling.

**I Want** is experimental fiction as well as a deeply feminist novel; relevant and contemporary. In it, the protagonist, a young Muslim woman, Amar (which means moon), asks questions about consent during sex and her complex sexuality, more generally. Having had a disquieting sexual encounter with a man she desires, Amar realises this encounter had crossed a line. Confronting her rapist over coffee is how this novel starts. It's also the beginning of a long journey into not only her abusive encounter, but the systemic abuse in her family and the sexual abuse of Muslim women over centuries.

**I Want** examines sexuality and sex amongst Muslim women over generations using poetry and prose and the novel manages to skilfully deliver its promise and scope. It mixes the concerns of a 21st century young Muslim woman with the poems of Hafsa bint al Hajj

Arrakuniya, a female poet of Andalusia writing in 1100AD, also the love songs of Innana and the stories of her mother brought up in war. The interconnectedness of contemporary narrator and these other women gives this book heft and cadence, as well as perspective.

The narrator says, "*It's lots of things*", refusing binary and reductive ideas. Formally, much of it is set in one room, a bedroom, and we find out that the narrator is a shadow in this room. This device is ingenious, giving this omniscient narrator an implicit intimacy with Amar and her desires and love of language and poetry. Throughout, we found the prose fluid, sophisticated and engaging.

There's a slow down here, morally, around sex and questions of consent which is rare to read. This is the sex of young people, the sex people have when they first start having sexual lives. It is full of tenderness and awkwardness and getting it wrong and longing for having it right. The judges found the book breathtaking and very readable. *I Want* is book for today, and a book about life, a book which should go viral.

The runner up is *The Haven* by Tom Brown, a thriller set on the edge of Tailbone Lake, a mid-west American town. The judges felt this is a freshly imagined thriller with great characters and a complex, contemporary plot for readers to sink their teeth into. Place looms large and the opening pages suck us in; Tailbone Lake has a legend and reason for being so sparsely populated. The lake was once a place of an unexplained plague amongst its marine life.

We liked much about this thriller; tone, great dialogue and a subtle yet complex web of a community where not one crime happens but two. While so many thrillers travers well-trodden ground, we felt Tailbone Lake offered something new. Same sex protagonists, one of whom must grapple with newfound fatherhood, a female detective who fulfils promise no one has for her.

## Monique Roffey

A place with spook. So much here in the mix. We felt the prose was engaging and fluid, too. In all, a jolly good read and a cut above thriller.

The Highly Commended novels are **Blackwater**, by Eileen O Donoghue a moving, astute tale of two families in 1980s Ireland enmeshed by shared grief in the aftermath of a terrible accident. Loss, and the pretences and defences that rise up to protect against it, ripples through the generations of Bowmans and Dillons, cracking some relationships apart, and binding some even closer together...

Full of poignancy and tenderness, **Mother, Maiden, Crone** by Jessica Barnfield presents the story of two women separated by time but joined by blood. It offers a powerful meditation on women's bodies, on

motherhood, and on trauma that spans generations but can be broken by the sheer willpower of female solidarity.

**Snow Moon Flower** by Gareth Hewitt stood out for us for its author's distinctive voice and confident use of imagery. It felt wonderfully fresh and immediate, when writing in this genre can feel very involved, and it surprised all of us, as judges, and really earned it its place on this winners' list. It's such a visual novel, sharp and precise but also wide ranging and ambitious, and we all hope it will take its author as well as its characters on a striking adventure.





2022

# POETRY WINNERS

Judge: Inua Ellams

## JOINT FIRST

After You Self-Medicate with Roethke's  
The Waking Read by Text-to-Speech App

Roberta Beary

My Father and I Drive Back to St.Louis  
for His Mother's Funeral

Chaun Ballard

## SECOND

Scene in Media Res

Damen O'Brien

## THIRD

My Father's Fingernails

Lance Larsen



## HIGHLY COMMENDED

Game

Nicole Adabunu

Working Debenhams' Late Shift

Freya Bantiff

All My Bodies

Janet Dean

Watching the little sisters

Jenny Doughty

Telegraph Poles

Beatrice Garland

New School

Nairn Kennedy

Waiting Outside

Paul Matthews

David and Goliath

Kate Rutter

Townies

David Swann

Remembrance

Cath Wills



# 2022 SHORT STORY WINNERS

Judge: Tim Pears

## FIRST

This is Going to be Huge

Trent England

## SECOND

46A to Dun Laoghaire

P Kearney Byrne

## THIRD

The Truth About The Lies People Told About Cattle

Johnny Eugster



## HIGHLY COMMENDED

I Need You To Be Harold

Peter Adamson

Pollinate

Abi Curtis

The Last Year the Ice Lake Sang

Lindsay Gillespie

Monumenta

Lara Haworth

Hatches Before They Chicken

Malcolm Heyhoe

Seventeen Weeks

Kerry Lyons

Alice

Damien Murphy

1967

Yseult Ogilvie

Caravan

Thomas O'Malley

Focaccia

Felicity Pepper



2022

# FLASH FICTION WINNERS

Judge: Kathy Fish

## FIRST

Some Creatures Trapped in Ice

Hilary Taylor

## SECOND

Yesterday, They Crossed the Elbe

Jelle Cauwenberghs

## THIRD

In the Museums of Heaven and Hell

Goldie Goldbloom

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## HIGHLY COMMENDED

That Time You Went to Space

Barbara Diggs

Valentine's Day

Helen Irving

Autopsy of a mother

Katie Piper

Falling Woman

Hannah Retallick

The Life of Fibonacci, Shaped to Resemble  
a Galaxy or Pine Cone

David Swann



**2022**

**THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS  
FIRST NOVEL AWARD**

**Judge: Monique Roffey**

**FIRST**

I Want

Zad El Bacha



**RUNNER-UP**

The Haven

Tom Brown



**HIGHLY COMMENDED**

Mother, Maiden, Crone

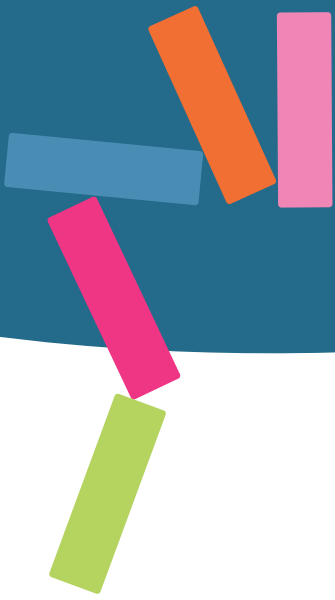
Jessica Barnfield

Snow Moon Flower

Gareth Hewitt

Blackwater

Eileen O'Donoghue



## YOUNG WRITER AWARD



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

### JOINT WINNERS

Game

Nicole Adabunu

Working Debenhams' Late Shift

Freya Bantiff

## 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

Amydgala

Paul Saville