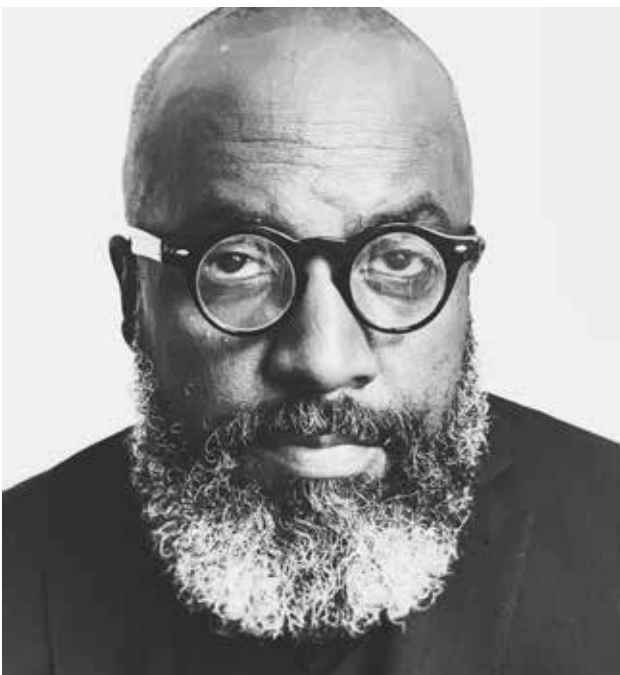


2023 JUDGES' REPORT



POETRY REPORT 2023

Roger Robinson



The importance of literary prizes, and in particular The Bridport Prize, is to connect readers with new and exciting writers. Appearing on the winners' list will guarantee new audiences for the writer, something particularly important during this time. I believe poetry and books have taken on added importance and are now regaining ground as an alternate technology as people tire of screens. I think it is safe to say that we all hope that trend continues and brings more audiences towards poetry.

What a privilege it has been to judge The Bridport Prize and to get to the heart of the poems received.

As the judge for The Bridport Prize, my task was to choose the best poems submitted to the prize. But what was the best poem? The one that I enjoyed the most, or the poem with the best craft? The poem that spoke to the future but gave a nod to the past? Was

it the most politically strident or a poem that spoke to the turbulent times in which we all now live? The wildcard showing unrelenting promise? Or maybe all of the above?

The more I read, the more it became important that poems chosen for each stage challenge literary forms and norms. A sense of craft definitely played a part in my choices, but also how much the poem mattered. Did it take on new, big, or important themes that could resonate with readers years after its release? Of course, this is all subjective, but these contexts really helped me to move forward and helped guide my contribution to choosing the eventual winners. Letting new and fresh visions of reality lead the way, I chose the winners based on what I believed to be the best poems pushing at the edges of their forms in interesting ways, without sacrificing narrative or execution. I hope new readers will enjoy these poems as much as I have.

I would personally like to congratulate all the winners and highly commended poets and extend my thanks to The Bridport Prize and everyone involved for their support of writers and readers. The Bridport Prize is such an essential beacon for new writers and world literatures, so I would like to give a large round of applause for their relentless contributions to literature.

I've had the privilege of living with the poems for an extended time and am grateful for all of the work. Unfortunately, I could only choose a few poems, and it was an incredibly hard task, but I got there eventually. I want to talk about the ten highly commended poems that I have chosen for this year.

'The Sadness is on Me' is as close to the Spanish idea of Duende that Gaelic can get. A poem that quantifies its loss by contextually inferring what is lost.

Roger Robinson

'Grandma's Book Of Receipts', a poem of food and the senses that surround it, holds the weight of memory for emigrants.

'Fear' explores how pervasive the emotion of fearfulness can be when it takes hold. In its list making of fears, it illustrates how anxieties can grow exponentially.

In **'What We Think about Tintoretto'**, a father and son talk about the sensuality of painting to avoid talking about life.

'Ursa Major' plots the points of stars as a type of fate determining portions of tragedy in a life, but also its expanse is soothing in tragedy's aftermath.

In **'Blasphemy Americana'**, the syncopation of jazz is used to comment on the maelstrom of American politics.

'Noodles, August, the Courtyard of New York-Presbyterian Hospital' is a poem essentially contemplating nature, food, music, life, death, and the culture in which they live.

'Casting Our Nets Into Unremitting Drifts' is a panoramic nature poem juxtaposing the growth of a child with the seasonal nature of her surroundings.

'Road Trip Sestina' uses the Sestina form to illustrate the small repetitions of care within the macro of this trip, maybe a cancer sufferer's final road trip.

'Finally Offered His Dream Audition for the NY Philharmonic, my father turned it down' is a poem essentially about the fear of success and how crippling it could be to a whole life but also to the lives of their children.

Many of the highly commended poems experiment with form or language or both, and the measure between being on the commended list or a winner was at times less than a hair's width.

Now, let me introduce you to the winning poems.

3rd placed poem, **'Why I Kissed The Dead Man'** is an exercise in radical empathy and how proximity can build love incrementally. It also accentuates the idea that you don't have to be blood-related to love as if you're blood-related. It also highlights that in death, who knows what seems like a natural reaction or thing to do.

2nd placed poem, **'Prayer w/o Punctuation,'** uses the form of a prayer but resonates more like a meditation. The questions in the poem act as a form of thinking, an exercise in not knowing while being achingly aware of both dreamlike and dystopic contextual surroundings. The effect is cinematic in its move from thought to surroundings. A visionary take on nature.

1st place winner, **'Patient And Daughter Appear Closely Bonded,'** pulls us in with a startling narrative hook and proceeds to peel off layer after layer of explanation through associative plot and lands perfectly on symbolism. Striking, surprising, and technically excellent, the poem resonates way beyond its ending.

Again, I want to congratulate all the winners and highly commended poets, and I look forward to seeing what these writers do in the future.

SHORT STORY REPORT 2023

Colin Barrett



Reading the shortlist for this year's Bridport Prize, I began thinking again about the peculiar intensity inherent to the short story. The intensity I am talking about is not one of subject matter, the "what" the story is about. It is an intensity of form.

If longform narratives, most germanely the novel, are capable of achieving their own kinds of intensity, they generally do so by accumulation, by the compounding of event upon event and/or by successive expansive plunges into a character's memory or psychological interior. But novels have time on their side, and given that most novels are, in the most basic sense, a story that happens in time, in their approach to character and plotting they are fundamentally incremental, additive (if not always strictly linear or sequential); in a novel we can watch characters change, bit by bit. They can start out as one type of person, and by the end, be someone different. Plot in novels usually happen in bits too, events unfolding over and within any temporal scale the novelist wishes: hours, weeks, years, decades. We can see the lead up to things, the long aftermath, the shape of a life and/or incident as it evolves, peaks, and subsides in time.

The short story is different. Time is not on the short story writer's side. Consequently, time is a much more condensed, pressurised element, both in the story and how it acts on the story. This is a pressure on form and influences everything from the depiction of character, to how that character exists in the world of the short story, to how that world exists in time.

By definition, change in a short story cannot be depicted novelistically, as a graduated series of events or instances unfolding across a given expanse of time. A short story can of course depict a moment of change, but it cannot depict the leadup to that change (or not very much of it, at any rate) - only the final precipitating spark. So change (of circumstances, of self) when it arrives in a short story, often arrives as a kind of shattering or undoing, an abrupt realignment, the breakage or disruption of some established pattern.

This shattering or disruption may take subtle forms; it might not at all be some dramatic outburst or climactic confrontation, it might in fact be barely discernible on the surface of the story (and to the characters themselves, sometimes discernible not at all). It may manifest merely as a moment of arrest or a gesture of negation, an act of withdrawal or episode of incapacitation. But it does happen, and no matter how it happens, what it usually means is that a veil is parted and a character (or again, perhaps only the reader) sees through the illusion of the self, the very world, the story has created.

The short story is a violent form in this sense. Destabilising. The world in the short story is not voluminous or continuous or durable. It is intimate and contingent and metamorphic. Character, too, is provisional and frangible. This is why the short story's prevailing mode tends to the revelatory, the epiphanic. As the narrator puts it at the end of Frank O'Connor's story 'The Guests Of the Nation': "And anything that ever happened me after I never felt the same about again."

This is something like what I mean when I think about the peculiar intensity of the short story.

The best stories on this year's shortlist achieved these intensities, by pleasurably and thought provokingly exploiting the peculiar pressures of the form of the short story.

Colin Barrett

‘Starlings’ - Tripti is the proud, difficult, ruthlessly guarded mother of Richa, one of several young victims of a predatory gang and still naively in love with the man who groomed her. When a reporter shows up looking to tell Richa’s side of the story, Tripti is faced with a difficult choice. The material in this story is highly charged and emotive, but the author handles it with skill and control by grounding the narrative in the perspective of the wonderfully memorable Tripti, whose hard edges and unapologetic, incandescent rage are depicted with moving compassion and lucidity.

‘Visitors’ - Teenager ‘Ken’ McKensie is left keeping the lights on in the Canadian auto business her profligate, drug addled older brother inherited after the death of their father. This story has energy, ambition and bite, always moving out and beyond the expected.

‘Digestible’ - Ingrid works with Mr Guratsky in his prop design and puppetry workshop. When her latest assignment has her building an enormous foam intestine for a play its participants insist is “not a horror”, she falls into the sights of a charismatic actor, Mark. Strange, offbeat and unexpectedly poignant.

‘The Invented Languages of Adela Arkani’ - A grandfather works as a labourer alongside his disaffected son Xavi and his adored granddaughter, Adela, for a company that requires all its adult employees to take an experimental drug that incapacitates their ability to speak in daylight, thus theoretically making them more productive, efficient workers. Reminiscent of the eerie, tech-dystopian allegories of George Saunders, this story wears its conceit lightly, unfolding with poetic grace.

‘One Good Thing’ - Mrs Silifa, an accomplished and capable academic, a contented widower in her sixties, discovers she might be pregnant by her much younger boyfriend Ben. Then Ben’s cousin comes to visit. A funny, sharp, poised and poignant story.

‘In Canada, We Train Our Dogs To Smell Fire’ - In deepest rural Canada, a teenage girl and her dog join a band of rough-hewn local men and boys as they desperately attempt to fight a vast forest fire - “the sprawl” - by setting a series of precise controlled burns. A thrilling, muscular story, full of physical dynamism and laced with deft character moments.

‘Steel Glass’ - Jayanthi, helped by the impoverished local laundry lady Bayanti, illegally cremate the body of Jayanthi’s violent, alcoholic husband in a public park during the height of the pandemic. A story of unflinching intensity and lingering power.

‘Mother Versus Deep Blue’ - The narrator recalls the time he and his mother, an artist famous for her abstract representations of the matches of famous chess players - travel to watch Gary Kasparov’s famous

defeat by the supercomputer Deep Blue. Understated, tight, and playful.

‘Margot’ - An actress has an idle affair with the series script writer of the show in which she plays her most famous role, the titular Margot, as they negotiate a European press junket. Spare, uneasily hazy and haunting.

‘The Child Is A Mother Too’ - A Chinese American illustrator living in New York negotiates an unexpected pregnancy while mourning the recent death of her mother in China. This story takes an ostensibly familiar premise to strange, bracing, and at times visionary places.

In third place **‘Cincinnati’**. Ryan is a washed out former junior tennis player, now languishing in the suburbs with his elderly father and taking care of his nine year old niece, Thump, after his brother, Thump’s father, disappeared on a bender. Thump persuades Ryan to enter a tennis tournament in Cincinnati as a wild card.

‘Cincinnati’ is a warm and funny story, shaded with fine characterisation and punctuated by several outwardly low key reversals and twists that nonetheless surprise and move the reader.

In second place is **‘The Boy’**. Teenager Eddie, off school and drunk after a lazy day in the park, and stuck in the middle of an increasingly fractious texting back and forth with his girlfriend, encounters a stray dog and accompanies it to the house of a man named Konwani, whom he assumes is the dog’s owner. Konwani admits he is not, but invites Eddie in for a drink.

Written in the close third, ‘The Boy’ is a sophisticated portrait of Eddie, who is simultaneously handsome, and charming, easy-going to the point of complacency, innocent and eager for experience, and seemingly unaware of his innate capability for incidental cruelty. The events that shock his world and jar his sense of self are relatively small but expertly depicted in this sharp, assured story.

In first place, **‘An Intervention.’** Nafhat wakes up one day to discover that her hapless, depressive, alcoholic father has disappeared, a fact met with calm, unnerving dismissiveness by Nafhat’s beautiful, green eyed mother and older brothers. Despite her protestations, the rest of her family insist he will no doubt return, sooner or later. A story of beautiful control, attentiveness and discipline, at once dreamlike and grittily realistic, **‘An Intervention’** is a story of absences and circling malice, a memorable and lingering ghost story.

FLASH FICTION REPORT 2023

Christopher Allen



Thank you to the editors and organisers of The Bridport Prize for asking me to judge the flash fiction portion of the 2023 competition. Congratulations on your 50th anniversary. Reading for The Prize has been a great pleasure and honour.

What makes a compelling micro? This is so difficult. Each of the stories I read does something moving with the space, so narrowing the field took weeks. The top eight narratives are all memorable and innovative in their various ways.

All the highly commended micros are singular examples of what's possible within the word-count constraint of the micro. **'God Save the King'** shows how affecting a subtle list story can be. **'The Sandcastle'** defamiliarises the all-too-familiar deterioration that comes with age and dementia. The analogy in **'Anna Wonders Whether Birds Will Build a Nest with Cat Hair'** is memorable and relevant, as is the central image in **'Patterns'**. And finally, among the highly commended, I loved the apocalyptic frenzy of **'On the Nextdoor App'**.

Setting plays an important role in all three of the top narratives. From winter in Indiana to a town hit by a killer tornado to the geography of a simple sofa, I'm excited by the possibilities of place in all three of

these moments of being. Oddly—or perhaps just a sign of the times—a jolt of devastation also plays a leading role in these stories. Devastating situations alone, though, can't guarantee great writing. Sadly, if we live long enough, we'll all experience our share of devastation. Kudos to writers who manage to convey these stories in a layered, innovative and affecting way.

In **'Carve'** the narrator asserts ownership of her life—with a butcher knife. The setting is winter in Indiana but more the phantom feeling of a perpetrator's grip. The subject of domestic abuse is perennial in flash, and it's important that editors don't become desensitised—which is a challenge since we see so many stories of abuse. The same is true for loss.

Tonally, **'The Sofa'** has the weighty atmosphere of a French drama, each detail pregnant with loss. It's a devastating situation: a mother and daughter hamstrung by the death of the husband/father, a person full of optimism for a future in a new country. The sofa, the last purchase before the father's death, works so well as a symbol of their lost hope and security. In the end, we are left with the question 'What now?' inviting us to imagine the paralysing horror of starting over again.

By chance, the first-place entry, **'The Whirling Aftermath'**, also ends with a question: 'Would you blame me?' The interrogative is an effective device to encourage and more importantly expand the readers' investment in the possible future outcomes of the story. The narrative is a classic breathless paragraph, echoing the mayhem of the story's weather and the energy of the narrator's sexual desire. This form has become a classic workshop task, so flash editors read quite a lot of these pieces with equal amounts of hope and scepticism. The syntax of a good one-sentence story feels organic and necessary, as it does in **'The Whirling Aftermath'**. Literal environmental devastation is the setting, but the writer chooses to have their tornado strew sweets all over the town. What a bountifully messy image and what a welcome subversion of the very idea of devastation.

Congratulations to everyone.

THE PEGGY CHAPMAN-ANDREWS FIRST NOVEL AWARD 2023

Sarah Hall



The first prize winner, *Paradise Beach*. It is wonderful for a piece of fiction to transport and relocate the reader to another setting, and one of the immediate joys of this novel is its nuanced, colourful, intimate depiction of Santa María, the coastal margins, and Mexico City. As a reader I always want to know and experience the exact world I'm entering, how it looks and operates, how it feels; I want to be convinced, cerebrally and sensually, of the geography, the people, cuisine, customs, politics, weather, and the layers of history. The atoms and dynamism of a place, through which it is evoked and activated in the imagination. If a writer constructs a convincing virtual reality, an artful frame for narratives, the characters and dramas within make more sense.

Paradise Beach is brilliant in this regard, with superb details of physical setting — the seaside houses, of both the rich and poor, drowned graveyards, big weather, streets and vibrant sunsets, mountains and rivers. It's brilliant too in its astute understanding of the residents

and visitors who populate both the marginal spaces and the tremendous, brutal, fizzing metropolis of the city.

The portraiture and development of the characters is deft and compelling, with the dancing apart and weaving together of protagonists, as the tragic plot of a dead child and a missing mother begins to gain momentum and intrigue. They move, not as predetermined pieces in service to a story-board, but as flawed, empathic, reactive human beings through their unfolding fates. We can feel the presence of powerful, malevolent forces — an underbelly of criminality and dark economy in the region — presiding over the story, and the multicultural heart of the country itself. But it is these ordinary individuals who really illuminate the canvas, who illustrate the complicated, stratified nature of the place, with all its hardship, opportunity, chaos, verve, beauty and tenacity. Its spirit.

And spirit is really caught within the writing style, which is by turns worldly, confronting, poetic, and flavourful. It's rare to find an author who is like a conduit, who - this reader certainly feels - could take us to many other places too, just as vividly and as skilfully. Rarer still to find an author capable of level observation, and so capable of reproducing humanity's dissonance, its joys and heartaches, its ironies and truths.

The runner-up is *I Just Live Here*. Spanning several generations of a family, and several eras in Glasgow, this novel cleverly lays down the mystery of missing paintings after the death of a celebrated, reclusive artist. The story is told from the perspective of several women - either directly involved with the man himself, or in the aftermath of his death - to create a lovely, refractive, composite piece of fiction that reveals hidden aspects of both the characters and the world in which they live.

Sarah Hall

The writer carefully develops the relationships in the book, between mother and daughter, artist and lover, auctioneer and art industry, and explores our notions of value and worth - both material and emotional - asking what we cherish most and why, and when we might act improperly to preserve integrity or keep those we love close by. It's a lovely, calibrated novel, that moves through time and the city using interesting angles and optics. The depictions of both old and modern Glasgow are faceted and atmospheric, from the poorer classes to the gentrification of tenements. At the heart of the book is the idea of versions of reality, versions of identity, and from the varying narrative perspectives the reader comes to understand that, like art, much of life, and much of our behaviour, is open to interpretation.

The Highly Commended novels are *Love, I Must Go* which illuminates a single night in a woman's life as she decides to leave her husband. Through clever flashback and in deft prose, the author expands and collapses an entire life. This quietly compelling novella has a strong emotional undertow, and I was enthralled by it.

Run As If The Devil Were After You is a thrilling, evocative tale of a woman grappling with the 7 year old mystery of her sister's disappearance. Driven by unresolved grief and the garbled clues from a psychiatric patient at the hospital where she works, Gwen Merrick pursues her sister's memory deep into the past, until the present catches up with her.

The Ties That Bind Us is an unflinching, sensory drama about the Harding family, an estranged mother and daughter pulled into close quarters when one is diagnosed with a degenerative illness. Through the language of love, resentment and food, the novel explores themes of motherhood, inheritance and bodily autonomy - and the quiet traumas that echo across the generations of a family.



2023

POETRY WINNERS

Judge: Roger Robinson

FIRST

Patient and Daughter Appear Closely Bonded Amanda Quaid

SECOND

Prayer w/o punctuation Alyson Kissner

THIRD

Why I Kissed the Dead Man Lance Larsen

HIGHLY COMMENDED



Blasphemy, Americana	Joelle Schumacher
Casting Our Nets In The Unremitting Drifts	Kizziah Burton
Fear	Mara Bergman
Finally offered his dream audition...	Joyce Schmid
Grandma's Book of Receipts	Mary Mulholland
Noodles, August, the Courtyard of New York-Presbyterian Hospital	Margaret Ray
Road Trip Sestina	Erin O'Lunaigh
The Sadness is On Me / Ta Bron Orm	Jean O'Brien
Ursa Major	Jenny Pagdin
What we think about Tintoretto	William Wyld

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of several colorful sticks or pencils in shades of blue, orange, pink, and teal, arranged in a cluster.

2023

SHORT STORY WINNERS

Judge: Colin Barrett

FIRST

An Intervention

Tom Miles

SECOND

The Boy

Alex Luke

THIRD

Cincinnati

Andrew De Silva

A decorative pink wavy line.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Digestible

Georgia Campbell

In Canada, we trained our dogs to smell fire

Fred Lunzer

Margot

Asia Haut

Mother versus Deep Blue

Shane Tivenan

One Good Thing

Mustapha Enesi

Starlings

Mohini Singh

Steel Glass

Radhika Maria Tabrez

The Child is a Mother Too

Mary Wang

The Invented Languages of Adela Arkani

Danny Thiemann Venegas

Visitors

Eamon O'Riordan



2023

FLASH FICTION WINNERS

Judge: Christopher Allen

FIRST

The Whirling Aftermath

Emily Roth

SECOND

The Sofa

Ruth Moore

THIRD

Carve

Allison Field Bell



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Anna Wonders Whether Birds Will
Build a Nest with Cat Hair

Kathleen Latham

God save the King

Adam Z. Robinson

On the Nextdoor App

Christopher Notarnicola

Patterns

Stephen Wunderli

The Sandcastle

Rachel Lastra



2023

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

Judge: Sarah Hall

FIRST

Paradise Beach

Lucy Foster



RUNNER-UP

I Just Live Here

Pauline Diamond Salim



HIGHLY COMMENDED

Love, I Must Go

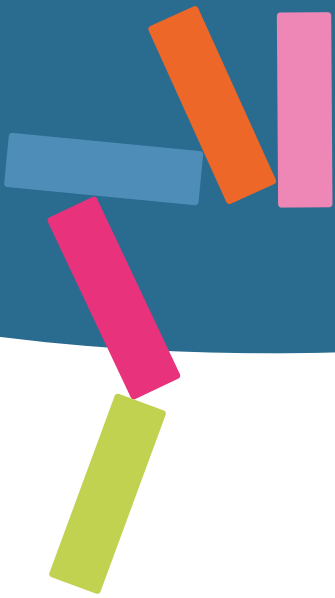
Rebekah Miron

Run As If The Devil Were After You

Jenny Jack

The Ties That Bind Us

Faiza Hasan



YOUNG WRITER AWARD

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

JOINT WINNERS

Digestible

One Good Thing

Georgia Campbell

Mustapha Enesi

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

Love, I must Go

Rebekah Miron