

LEDBURY Poetry Festival Poetry Competition 2018

Judge: Nia Davies

Nia’s comments on judging the 2018 Competition:

*I feel honoured to have had a special private view of the kind of things people are thinking about through the medium of poetry right now. It was a joy to spend every morning over coffee rummaging through the pile. People are deeply concerned about homelessness and the earth, but they’re also funny and kind and loving. They’re missing lost people or they’re in love or they are thinking through their bodies and how their bodies are changing. For some reason several poets felt drawn to write about shaving legs!! The winners and runners up were the poems that, as well as taking a sideways glance at a subject, also stretched and invigorated language and the form of the poem itself. And they gave me vivid feelings in the belly, the kind of feelings, even, that make me want to write poems myself! Curiously, both the young people and adult category winners explore a particular kind of cultural grief by taking a tour of a dystopian future-present cityscape. But the children’s winner zooms in on an ordinary object, a can of fish! The winning poem in the adult section did everything, it made me laugh in its absurd concern for the post-apocalyptic takeaway situation but it also channels the anxiety we feel in the face of a future that may be homogenised and stripped of distinctive human culture. I checked and checked to know if this was the one and in the end I couldn’t leave it alone. In the children’s category I immediately fell in love with the bloody pilchards and there was no going back from there. In the young person’s category I had trouble deciding between some really insightful, raw and surprising work but settled on something panoramic, atmospheric and embodied, a poem that provoked in me the unsettled feeling of being in a new city. This a aggressively polluted city that demands a very exacting kind of bodily acclimatisation and the poem somehow displaces us in this through the jagged language of a foggy kind of grief.*

Adult Winners

First Prize of £1000 , an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival and a course at Tŷ Newydd, National Writing Centre for Wales:

**R.T.A. Parker**

***All the Bleak Chippies***

 *for Tom Raworth*

Be these sacred places:

all the Scottish chippies,

the Kinness Fry Bar; KFB in Kennington, Samsun.

Dithyrambos,

pickle on cabbage.

Urfa Kebab, Köfteci Remzi—all the many chippies

 stirring within.

All the grim chippies.

The round-shouldered fryers.

The leaves stir as the wind rises—

after the apocalypse only a few chip shops left.

[*—all the awful chip shops;*

 *chips at the Oval, chips near Kings Cross*

*and in Tunbridge Wells and in Bangor*—]

We stepped between the chippies,

in the world passing out of the world,

like tears in the rain, the edifice collapsing.

The wind howls and the demons swarm,

while you’re there forever,

compulsively jiggling the handle on the coffee machine,

that frolic of youth cutting across the whistling wind for a second,

the airbrakes screaming;

all of this will be gone, under new management:

in the dark quiet chippieless night the cyborg shifts in its bed, remembers

Umut 2000, the Fish Dolphin Bar in Sevenoaks, the divine and the dismal as they were

before the plasma-griffins.

In the starflare how many chipshops, unknown, wink out.

The iron cage is all around us

tightening.



Second Prize of £500 and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Pam Thompson**

***Through the Hologram***

Azimuth. Sunwatcher. Its house. She holds out her arm. Stretches.

Horse’s tail. Take it. Forget them. A baton. A torch. A flame.

Smell of tea on deck. Wool Clipper. 1883. Australian wool. Fastest.

New York. Cargo of coal. 1916. Repaired. Table Bay. Cutty Sark. 1922.

Nothing is known. Lallah Rookh. Back from Shanghai. Wrecked.

Kashmiri Princess. Maud. February. Unseasonal spring. Cyclorama.

Old behaviours. Fan museum. Tonight’s sky. Denem. Vega. Altair.

Summer Triangle. As if a real city sky. He switches it on. Now it’s July.

Dirty work. Up late. Sweeping. Maintaining. Last of the £5 glass

of wine. *Emergency. Woke up. In ambulance. So sorry.* Red painted toes.

Sextant. Almanac. Chronometer. H4. Bi-metallic strip.

Switch phone camera to panoramic. Sweep across park. The river.

 “Visions of the Universe”. “Earth like a blue pea”. Apollo 2. “I hid it

with my thumb.” Neil Armstrong. Other side of the moon. Not dark.

Only sometimes. Sugar lump rocks. Watching the vehicle cross Mars.

Forever Lodestone. Magnetic ore. Ships struck feldstone edges. Isles of Scilly.

“Ship wrecked in a storm of a rocky Coast”. Pieter Muller the Younger.

Late 17c. Harrison’s clocks. Simulacra hidden rooms. The future.

Third Prize of £250 and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Robbie Burton**

# Deeds

 heretofore

the spinster of the second part Tryphena Tunstall

thereby assented to the vesting in herself

pear tree

privet hedge

messuage and stable with black half-door

 whereas

the digging of the Big Ditch sliced

Lancashire from Cheshire

and in witness thereof

the well ran dry

 whereafter

the American Sam Thigpen who used to pick cotton

thereby assented to a gravelled driveway

free from incumbrance excepting

dandelions

nettles

docks

 whereso

seised of the property

Edward and Roberta

grew pansies in a slop-stone sink

Tyrolean finished a slate-hung wall

then on all that piece or parcel of land

planned

whereon

the lawful widow and relict

is offering for sale

potential

Young People

First Prize £100 and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Annie Fan**

**essay on grief / a holiday**

somewhere far, lightning drops bigger

past flooded streets & the mirage

of a hand grips all the city / teach me

to breathe underwater. zhengzhou

is the emptiness in air & everyone is alive

without gasping / effort in the flashes /

never lost at sea / nowadays:

gutting clouds, asian dust & every choking

thing, still calling it summer. when

i learned to drink again, the city blocks

were endless - how to swallow

so much of cars breaking into rust /

gulp down spit / cup warm tea &

unborn cousins about to spill over /

how much freedom to take? to be filled

] *night sweats*, insects

] *a cough or breathlessness*

] *persistent itching of the skin all over the body*

afloat. teach me / awake / and so /

to swim. some places aren’t worth

the effort of flying / a month of blues /

tell me i am dreaming this

lucid / sobriety at full throttle, yes:

ships give out light & drown

soundless; yes, i sleep inside

the silence of every wave / the city /

you / were there / you / inside /

me / not a whisper / an ebb / oh

zhengzhou / all together /

zhengzhou --

Second Prize £50 and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Georgie Woodhead**

**Collins**

Harry Collins was an artist who called himself a father.

He was bad jokes and foggy laughs, heavy breaths

that wheezed sometimes when words rolled in and out,

but never touched the air. He was things that he thought

better of saying. He was thick stubble and baggy jeans

like sacks, oversized white shirts, scuffed paper trainers.

He was toothpicks and dimples, rough skin and fidgeting,

a paintbrush dabbed on a brother’s nose. He was a grin

that faded almost immediately, died on the lips, eyes

of china vases and blobs of wobbling ink. Harry Collins

was mixing colours and classical music, he was finding it hard

to get up and out of bed in the morning. He was yawning,

paint pallet in hand like a multi-coloured plastic hedgehog,

and canvases that were never quite right. He was sketches

when there were stones to skim. He was concentrating

when there was an orange hula-hoop struck in a tree,

and he was the opening lines of a story that stopped

when he shook his head like a bad dream.

Third Prize £25 and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Lauren Edwards**

**The Night You Attacked Me**

The night you attacked me I wore only a sewn shut smile,

With screaming button eyes and skin too hot to touch

 yet my fear did not burn you nor did my pleas,

The night you attacked me my house bore two souls

 yet yours dressed in unfamiliar clothing,

Yours dressed like mist,

Foggy and unchallenged.

I dressed in layers yours eyes did not see

See I wore all my mother taught me

Yet you were unfazed by my catalogue of wisdom

See my mother could not protect me from hands that do not have ears

 and ears that do not hear,

Stop.

I asked as if I was a child in a shop asking for toys I do not need; I was ignored.

The night I was attacked your white toothed grin told me I was a flower with dying roots,

A garden rooted in unwatered soil, I shall not breathe.

The night I was attacked your smile told me I was a cracked glass with the potential to hold,

From a distance I look whole.

See I’d forget if I could remember and that’s where I struggle.

See I remember the burning

And I remember the smiling

The part I can’t remember is what I was before the night you attacked me.

And that’s where I struggle,

I cannot forget

What I cannot remember.

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Children

First Prize £25 Book Token and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Aurora B Blue**

TINNED LIFE.

In the moonlight a shadow of pilchards rises out of the deep, netted.

Packed in a cut of salt,

it is boxed and sent to bright shelves.

This cold hard post-box-red,

standing-out-on-the-shelf-tin,

with its after-the-bloody-accident-like sauce within,

is more than just dead, canned fish,

it is tinned life itself.

The smell of the pilchard can

reminds me of my bike,

its raw metallic-uniqueness which all metal has.

Shake the can and you shake the life out of it –

and it’s like rain drops dropping into a puddle - pppppp p!

Second Prize £15 Book Token and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Maxwell Heaven**

**Six ways to look at a word**

A word is a picturesque language from the time of the forgotten, telling stories of its origin.

A word is a vision showing the way to the depths of your deep mind, digging out memories you now remember.

A word is a small wave in a great wide sea of stories, swirling in a rhythm of happiness and sadness, disturbance and rage, trying to flow.

A word is a small family, housing in pens in a neighbourhood of ink, fitting in one way or another.

A word is a medicine to a disease of no imagination, a bone for a lonely dog, a dog for a lonely man.

A word is a fascinating building, bricks of letters, cement of conjunctions, built by an architect of the word.

A word says the poem’s OK.

Third Prize £10 Book Token and an invitation to read at the 2019 Ledbury Poetry Festival

**Mrugakshi (Kankai Walendra),** India

Forgiveness for Forgiveness

 Shall I forgive you coz you have been doing a crime

 Or Shall I forgive you coz you have supported a crime,

 Or Shall I forgive you coz you have witnessed a crime,

 Or Shall I forgive you coz you have reported a crime,

 Or Shall I forgive you coz you want me to forgive you.....

