

## Ledbury Poetry Competition 2019 Winners

judged by Daljit Nagra

### Adult category

First Prize £1000, a residential course at Ty Newydd and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival

Elisabeth Murawski

### Duplex

March is always gloomy  
as Leopardi,  
the unthinkable

seeping in like silt.  
A dream of rape  
by the mailman,

my scream so loud  
I wonder  
if my neighbor

hears me  
through the wall.  
Panic at the thought

of knowing more.  
The dead azalea  
on the side of the house

is all spikes  
and gray sticks.  
It looks like pictures

of Nagasaki  
after the blast,  
the hair

of *The Dying Gaul*  
with his small  
but fatal chest wound.

Comments: A complex poem whose very title indicates mapping on of things, and the doubling of things. The poem presents trauma as a displaced experience that might be presently lived or it might be imagined as having been lived. The shock of this is set against the delicate stanzas that navigate us swiftly and helplessly through the drama. Compressed images of the azalea, Leopardi and the mailman create a succinct lyric mood which heightens the shock of the apparent event. The final images of the Dying Gaul, which was first considered to be a Roman soldier, and the reference to

Nagasaki, which came after Hiroshima, further extend the duplex theme and deny the narrative and memory from settling into a first impression.

**Second Prize £500 and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Sarah Wimbush**

### **Bloodlines**

In the Bloodlines  
there's a hooped earring.  
In the Bloodlines there's an open vardo  
door, ramsons on the other side. Songs and seasons  
wave at you from the Bloodlines, atchin tans watch you  
fly. In the Bloodlines there's an acorn of swagger that  
inflates into a barrel wearing a vest. In the Bloodlines  
there is nothing to offer up to the Old World except  
a pair of shammy bootees -  
your past, their past.  
Bloodlines stare,  
bemused by the  
chant of Tables,  
a company car;  
lunch. Bloodlines  
hoick slingshots at  
woodcock and snipe.  
Damp earth is a must  
as you lie with the Bloodlines,  
some scratch the name of the wind into elm with a crotchet hook,  
others chor lollipops from children. Bloodlines can't hear you but  
they follow you in a handful of photographs and crumpled vowels:  
the shortening clay pipe; *gorgio fowki*. In the Bloodlines you make  
yourself make steamed pudding, then eat salad. In the Bloodlines  
there's a long blue thread. In the lea and the lanes there must be  
someone who can tell you about the Bloodlines; about  
the rhythm of your tongue, your flying fox glare,  
the need to set curtains ajar at night.  
What are you searching for  
in the darkness? Why are you?  
And yet, it's the Bloodlines  
that murmur on the barval,  
Bloodlines that understand  
the spell of a campfire,  
your attraction to gold,  
how if I shuck my paleface  
from gullet to hairline,  
the world would turn  
scarlet and all that pours  
out will be road.

Comments: A linguistically charged and visually dynamic poem that foregrounds a fascination with identity. The speaker imagines what remains of them as a gypsy now, and what they have lost of this historic identity. The poem is part serious mediation on belonging to a minority group and part playful with several mischievous moments. The formal structure is stunning, the shape is worked at carefully so line breaks hit the mark, so that both meaning and urgency are not impeded by the mazy journey the eye must make as it reads the poem. I love the strategic use of gypsy words integrated into the poem, and they remind us of the excitement of being plural.

**Third Prize £250 and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Denise Bundred**

**Anatomy Theatre**

*And She had a Heart! – E. Simonet*

*oil on canvas 1890*

Simonet asked to observe my autopsy. I refused.  
I know he painted her. Perhaps  
more than just her face.

Internally, there's a different intimacy.

Dark nipples suggest what I now fear to find.

No bruising on her neck or arms.

Down her back  
livid stains show how she lay after death.

I am anxious to explore her heart.  
It repeats its cadence in my ears.

I trace a line from throat to diaphragm,

divide breast bone, splay ribs,

reflect pleura and retract lungs.

Their sponginess is lost in a congestion of blood.

I dissect veins and arteries to free the heart  
from its attachments.

I lift it from the cavity.

A draught from the high window shivers gaslight  
onto silver pericardium. Its fibres are impenetrable

to all but the sharpest blade.

I hold a troubling heaviness in my hand, recall murmurings  
from my stethoscope in her shadowed room.

The weight tells of a fault I failed to hear.

I suspend the scale on a hook

and place the heart in the bowl below.

The needle swings and loses equilibrium.

Comments: A poem inspired by a painting about an autopsy. Where the painting shows the surgeon holding aloft the woman's heart, in the poem the perverse male gaze is deepened to show the historic joy of scrutinising a female from the insides. It's a chilling, politically challenging poem that reveals the surgeon's pride and flaws imagined through the most exquisite sequence of rhythms, line breaks, spatial and sound effects. I was hugely impressed by the synthesis of scientific information, and all those Latin medical terms with simple diction, into the predominantly triple rhythms. Lightness of the music vies with the methodical manners of the surgeon. This subtle poem hints at backstory while always focusing on the necessary anatomising of the woman.

### **Young People First Prize £100 and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Cia Mangat**

#### **Planet Earth II: Cities**

(note: see Planet Earth II, episode 'Cities' – in which turtles hatch and are naturally drawn to the moon; the draw of city lights, however, throws them off, so crabs bury themselves directly beneath beach lights and wait for their prey to come to them)

#### **i. David Attenborough to the turtles**

Listen / I'm still here and I can feel sand / crawling up my shoulders in the shower / Listen / I swear  
I'm plagued / by the thought / of turtle hatchlings / swarming into my ears / covered with sand / Listen  
I love you and I'm sorry / for calling you a plague / I'm sorry for shouting / at you in dreams over the  
tyres' screech / see / Sometimes I look out of the window / and the moon spits at me / for letting the  
city / copy light / Sometimes I see trees full of leaves / that tremble like your flippers / However hard  
I scrub the folds of my back / I can't get rid of the sensation / of hard wooden shell / I'm sorry the  
black plastic camera crew / did nothing to subdue it / These days I have taken / to sleeping on my  
front / like this / like you

#### **ii. The turtles to the crabs**

– n–ght –f c–ld / w– s–rf–c–d / fr–m n–sts w– c–m– / h–p–ng f–r w–t–r / f–r m–nl–ght / th–nk y– /  
cr–bs / try t– p–ct–r– 80% –f y–r sp–c–s / l–st / d–s–r–nt–t–d / wr–ng d–r–ct–n / th–nk y– / –t  
l–st / –t w–sn't b–rds / pr–d–t–rs? / p–ct–r– b–ng dr–pp–d fr–m th– sky / w–ldn't y– r–th–r / b–

cr-ck-d / by cl-ws / th-n sm-sh-d / -n - r-ck ? / - n-ght -f c-ld / th-nk y- / h-r- / th- wh-l- c-sm-  
s / s-ms s-lv-r / th-s-nds -f m-ns / j-st f-r -s / th-nk y-, cr-bs / w- m-ss y- / g-dn-ght

### iii. The crabs to David Attenborough

david / I / we / love your soundtrack / see / and we / I / wave our / my / pincers / heads / to the soft  
music when I / we / can / undulating / in received pronunciation / when it comes to us / me / wait /  
can you hear us / these? / some nights we / I / contemplate reconstructing / huge black / beasts with  
cornered elbows / you / brought into the midst of / my / our / habitat / welcoming us / predators? /  
david / sometimes I / we / contemplate its rolling / glass eyes / how your arms look more like /our /  
my / beaches / thick and varicose / than they did / before / if you can hear me / us / please /  
acknowledge the cheek marks I / we / gave you / if you can hear us / me / stop panicking / about the  
blare / of the street's metal beasts / with moon eyes / stop panicking / we / I / will stay with you / for  
the whole night / promise /

Comments: An incredibly inventive, witty, audacious, intelligent and ultimately, moving poem. The  
three monologues are carefully developed to convey the theme of a dying planet alongside an aging  
David Attenborough. The latter becomes a symbol, for me at least, of nature's last ambassador  
among humans. Each section is vivid, I especially loved the middle section with its missing vowels,  
yet they do not stop us from making full sense, while the final section refers to Attenborough's arms  
as 'thick and varicose.' I love how the form itself is no longer in conventional poetic shape, so even  
this adds to the drama of loss. Yet there is hope in the final section (I/will stay with you for the  
whole night'), and this shows us how skilful the handling of tone has been. This poet is a star in the  
making!

### Young People Second Prize £50 and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival

Lydia Wei

#### Section 49 Quiz: The People's Republic of China

How was the People's Republic of China born?

- out of the barrel of a gun and the whites of the Guómíndǎng's eyes
- from his flesh which became the farmers' fields, from his left eye which became the  
revolutionary sun, from his right eye which became the sickle moon
- a leftover dream of the starved peasants, scraped grains from the bottom of the cracked rice  
bowl
- a prayer declared from the blood-stained gates of the capital

Who was the founder of the People's Republic of China?

- martyr of the peasants, of the landless, of the illiterate, of the forgotten
- landowner's son with a rural Hunanese accent, cut off his queue pigtails with scissors  
delicate as cranes
- Red Emperor born from the flames of stag-horned dragons, cupped this ancient nation and  
downed its elixir of life
- liar, murderer, tyrant, god

What were the consequences of the Great Leap Forward?

- the lion bared as a stray dog, licking his wounds in a corner of the shed

- b. the earth betrayed: metallic soil assaulted, gnarled roots of revered trees sawed by the starved
- c. question marks of shrunken bodies buried in the fields, parched crops curled beneath unanswered supplications
- d. government reports, falsified figures

What were the principal components of the Cultural Revolution?

- a. ransacked temples, smashed caisson shards raining down like shrapnel from the heavens
- b. scarves that slashed the blackness as a dimple-cheeked teenager kissed her vermilion fists, laughing
- c. his painted face, plastered on bustling street corners and found in dusty mirrors
- d. red: beastly, venomous, obsessive red

What is the legacy of the People's Republic of China?

- a. a frayed poster hung in gūpó's crumbling house, where she scatters seeds for her naked chickens to bite off the sun
- b. pitiful anecdotes as Oxford academia shake their heads disapprovingly (but they'll never understand the poppy's blood-lusted perfume)
- c. some souvenirs of history, gap-toothed Jǐngāngshān hawkers with pencil holders and t-shirts and calendars and watches
- d. what was once fierce-browed has sunk its fangs in its ideals, now crackles bitter red, merciless

Comments: I love how so many contemporary poets are seemingly turning their backs on poetry by creating a poem that defies the usual expectation of the poem. This seeming quiz chooses to call itself a poem, and why not! I enjoyed the questions because they each offer a series of true and fictional responses. We have history by the back door, through poetry, but we also have poetry, through its engagement with history. The poet has mocked the great leader of China and his legacy, and reminds us of the way tyrants invent the past and future. There are too many super single lines to mention here and the poem should be read as whole for its full effect.

### **Young People Third Prize £25 and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Rose Brennan**

#### **THE SOUND OF WAITING**

In the void between  
the tension builds  
a discordant note held for a little  
    too long.  
The crescendo of electric silence –  
a static force of nothingness.  
The collective intake of breath  
    and then,  
out of open mouths  
pours a squall of notes

that one might call  
music.

Comments: The Sound of Waiting YP114

Short poems rarely win prizes so I want to champion this slight but beautifully constructed poem about music, in turn, about poetry and the music of life. I love the rich internal echoes that run through these precise and interestingly lined lines. I enjoyed the paradox of the 'void', the silence as being essential to the music, and the 'collective intake of breath' an audience makes. Lovely poem!

### **Children's Winners**

**First Prize £25 book token and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Aurora B Blue**

#### THE CAT THAT NOBODY WANTED.

(or THE DOOR TO DOOR SALES MAN)

There was a cat that nobody wanted that was brought down our road  
by a man shouting, "Anyone want a little, cute, black kitten?"  
No one did.

Next morning I found,

dead and frozen on the pavement,

the cat that nobody wanted.

Its black fur looked grey, eyes set in frozen stare, tail outstretched stiff, and no collar.

THEN...

"Anyone want a cat? I have: Long or short-bodied, large or slim, brown and black,  
fat or flat, tabby or tortoiseshell that will go well with your carpet.

Or how about a surprise cat-in-the-bag? So, does anyone want a cat?"

The door-to-door-man went door to door, 'Does anyone want a cat'-ing.

"Yes." Said an old woman, "I'll have a black cat".

"Yes." Said an old man, "I'll have a cat but not a cat-in-the-bag, I'll have a tortoiseshell that will show up against my carpet."

"HEY" said the salesman, "YOU LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG."

On the frozen pavement lay the stiff, dead, grey kitten.

Comments: A wild and hugely inventive poem that the great Stevie Smith would have been proud to write. So many exciting poems go in one direction then veer off and release their freedom of the mind. This poet tells us about a neglected cat, a 'door-to-door-man', and enters Dr Zeus territory with a cat out of the bag. Puns, misdirections and relaxed free looping lines create for a hugely enjoyable poem!

**Second Prize £15 book token and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Maxwell Heavens**

**Imagine a world without any laws**

Imagine a world without any laws  
Imagine that world with all those flaws  
People wouldn't need any money  
Now, wouldn't that be funny  
Murders and harassments would be everywhere  
People on the road wouldn't care  
Everywhere, guns would be shot  
We would all be as feral as an ocelot  
Everywhere people would lie dead  
With all the blood, the floor would be red  
Every window would be shattered  
All curtains and clothes would be tattered  
All the shops would be robbed  
Everything would be daubed  
All the planes would crash and fall  
And break and kill us all  
Let's stop thinking of all the flaws  
And just be thankful that we have laws

Comments: A wise and sensible poem that is serious and cautionary, and reminds us of our troubled times. I love how the rhyming couplets and carefully sequenced pairs of thought build momentum to show us how horrible the world could become if we didn't respect laws: 'Everywhere, guns would be shot/ We would all be as feral as an ocelot'. A poem of warning but ultimately gratitude that we have just enough sanity to protect our rights, 'be thankful that we have laws.'

### **Third Prize £10 book token and reading at Ledbury Poetry Festival**

**Han Fang**

#### **Big Eats Small**

A bee came flying through the Autumn sky.  
Then came a quick blue bird which ate the bee.  
Then came an eagle preying on the bird.  
Then came a hungry toothless[sic] dinosaur  
Which swallowed up the eagle in one gulp.  
And then the mouth of endless lifeless Time  
Devoured all that lived upon the Earth

Comments: A short and fantastic poem that takes us back to children's stories of being swallowed up by bigger things. The compression into a few lines is hugely impressive and shows us the danger of bigger or more powerful forces, both literally and metaphorically. Climate change seems to hang at the back of the final couplet, 'And then the mouth of endless lifeless Time/ Devoured all that lived upon the Earth.' Good poets pick words carefully, and how shocking is the use of the adjective 'lifeless' when describing what will become of us all. The reference to dinosaurs, and the drawing under the poem show us our poet can have a good time, that they can play, which is essential to all good poetry.

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