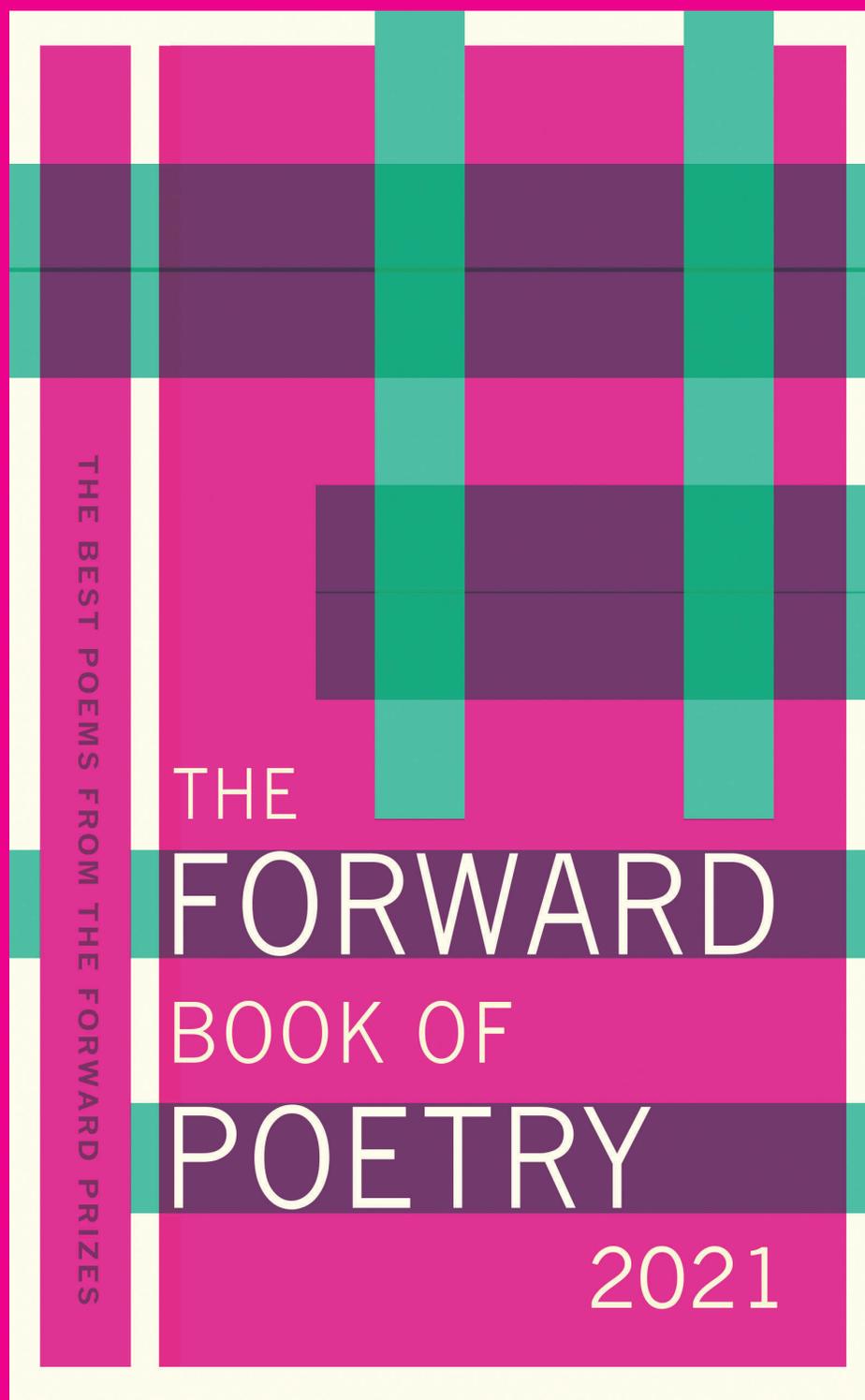


Forward/*emagazine*  
**CREATIVE CRITICS 2020**



THE BEST POEMS FROM THE FORWARD PRIZES

THE  
**FORWARD**  
BOOK OF  
**POETRY**

2021

# Forward/*emagazine* CREATIVE CRITICS 2020

**Closing date: 30th September 2020**

## The Competition

- Read and think about the poems.
- Choose one of the poems and write a creative response to it in the form of a poem (maximum 30 lines), along with a reflective commentary (maximum 300 words).
- Complete your details and submit your entry at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/emagCreativeCritics2020](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/emagCreativeCritics2020)

## Who can enter the competition?

- *emagazine* competitions are open to all 16-19 year olds currently in full-time education. This means that students who finished their A Level courses (or equivalent examinations such as IB, BTEC and Pre-U) in Summer 2020 are eligible to enter.

## Timeframe

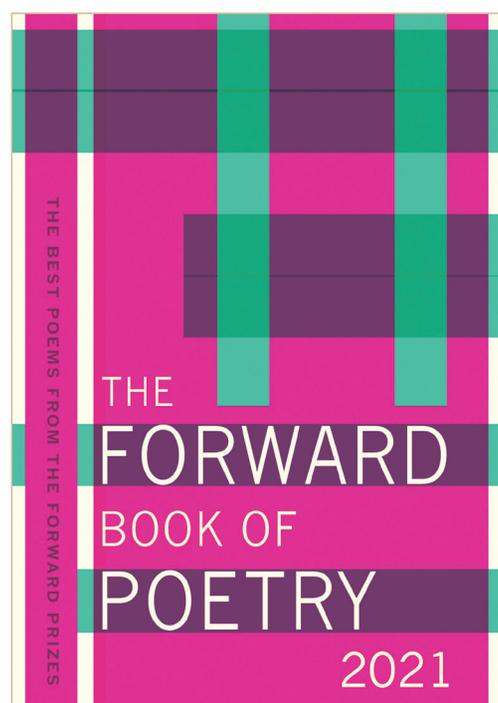
- Close of competition: 5pm Wednesday 30th September **(We will not be able to accept entries received after 5pm, so don't leave it to the last minute!)**
- Winners contacted: 14th October
- Results announced online: 25th October
- The Forward Prizes for Poetry Announcement: 25th October

## Prizes

- Winner: £200
- Two runners-up: £50
- The winning entry will be published in the February 2021 issue of *emagazine*

## Judges

- *emagazine* editors and poet Julia Copus



## **From the 2020 Forward Prize for Best Collection shortlist**

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## Rookie by Caroline Bird

You thought you could ride a bicycle  
but, turns out, those weren't bikes  
they were extremely bony horses. And that wasn't  
a meal you cooked, that was a microwaved  
hockey puck. And that wasn't a book that was  
a taco stuffed with daisies. What if  
you thought you could tie your laces?  
But all this time you were just wrapping  
a whole roll of sellotape round your shoe and  
hoping for the best? And that piece of paper  
you thought was your tax return?  
A crayon drawing of a cat. And your best friend  
is actually a scarecrow you stole from a field  
and carted away in a wheelbarrow.  
Your mobile phone is a strip of bark  
with numbers scratched into it.  
Thousands of people have had to replace  
their doors, at much expense, after you  
battered theirs to bits with a hammer  
believing that was the correct way  
to enter a room. You've been pouring pints  
over your head. Playing card games with a pack  
of stones. Everyone's been so confused  
by you: opening a bottle of wine with a cutlass,  
lying on the floor of buses, talking to  
babies in a terrifyingly loud voice.  
All the while nodding to yourself like  
'Yeah, this is how it's done.'  
Planting daffodils in a bucket of milk.

*From The Air Year, published by Carcanet*

## American Arithmetic by Natalie Diaz

Native Americans make up less than  
1 percent of the population of America.  
0.8 percent of 100 percent.

O, mine efficient country.

I do not remember the days before America—  
I do not remember the days when we were all here.

Police kill Native Americans more  
than any other race. *Race* is a funny word.  
*Race* implies someone will win,  
implies, *I have as good a chance of winning as—*

Who wins the race that isn't a race?

Native Americans make up 1.9 percent of all  
police killings, higher per capita than any race—  
sometimes *race* means *run*.

I'm not good at math—can you blame me?  
I've had an American education.

We are Americans, and we are less than 1 percent  
of Americans. We do a better job of dying  
by police than we do existing.

When we are dying, who should we call?  
The police? Or our senator?  
Please, someone, call my mother.

At the National Museum of the American Indian,  
68 percent of the collection is from the United States.  
I am doing my best to not become a museum  
of myself. I am doing my best to breathe in and out.

I am begging: *Let me be lonely but not invisible.*

But in an American room of one hundred people,  
I am Native American—less than one, less than  
whole—I am less than myself. Only a fraction  
of a body, let's say, *I am only a hand—*

and when I slip it beneath the shirt of my lover  
I disappear completely.

*From Postcolonial Love Poem, published by Faber & Faber*

## The Larder by Vicki Feaver

Yesterday it was the blaze  
of a broom bush; the day before

the peppermint whiff  
of a beeswax lip-balm.

Each day, I fill the shelves  
with things to remember.

Today, it's the powdery bloom  
on the skin of a blueberry,

turning it, cold from the fridge,  
between my thumb and finger;

noticing the petal-shaped crater  
where the flower withered

and the small hole  
where it was pulled

from the stalk; crushing  
its tangy pulp on my tongue.

*From I Want! I Want!, published by Cape Poetry*

# Ghazal: When I Heard the Calling of Birds by David Morley

For Towfiq Bihani

*When I heard the calling of birds, I remembered your sweet voice when you sang the song “remember me this way” - Towfiq Bihani, Guantánamo Bay detainee*

I remembered your sweet voice when you sang, ‘remember me this way’.

When you folded my heart in your wing to remember me this way.

When emerald hummingbirds flashed through the chain-link fence,  
I remembered them that day.

When a palm swift slipped from her nest in the dark of Camp Echo,  
I remembered and counted that day.

When lazuli buntings burst in a blue cloud above my open-sky cage,  
I remembered and blessed their day.

When saffron finches dust-bathed in the detention yard,  
I dreamed of home that day.

When I heard rapid-fire of woodpeckers in the pines below Camp Echo,  
I remembered and trembled that day.

When I saw scarlet tanagers swoop across the gulf of Guantánamo,  
I fled with them that day.

When the oriole bowed his orange cowl from the watchtower,  
I remembered and feared that day.

When stygian owls plied their sorrow-flutes in reeds beyond the kill-zone,  
I remembered and wept that day.

When a mourning dove swayed on her roost of razor-wire above Camp Echo,  
I buried my heart that day.

I wake to macaws squawking *Towfiq*, the echo of guards bawling *Bohani*.  
My heart is folded in your wing. Remember me this way.

*From FURY, published by Carcanet*

## Green Bee-eater by Pascale Petit

More precious than all  
the gems of Jaipur –

the green bee-eater.

If you see one singing  
*tree-tree-tree*

with his space-black bill  
and rufous cap,

his robes  
all shades of emerald

like treetops glimpsed  
from a plane,

his blue cheeks,  
black eye-mask

and the delicate tail streamer  
like a plume of smoke –

you might dream  
of the forests

that once clothed  
our flying planet.

And perhaps his singing  
is a spell

to call our forests back –

*tree*

by *tree*

by *tree*.

*From Tiger Girl, published by Bloodaxe Books*

## Phases of the Moon/Things I Have Done by Ella Frears

New Moon:	I ransacked the house for something that does not exist.
Waxing Crescent:	I ate twelve peaches.
First Quarter:	I Tipp-Exed an old letter from him, leaving only the word <i>basement</i> .
Waxing Gibbous:	I put on my favourite underwear and cried in the mirror.
Full Moon:	I buried a pork-chop in the garden, walked backwards, howled.
Waning Gibbous:	I thought a great deal about drilling a hole in my head.
Third Quarter:	I told the neighbour my heart beats only for her.
Waning Crescent:	I stood outside facing the house, waited for myself to appear.

*From Shine, Darling, published by Offord Road Books*

## Holy Man by Will Harris

Everywhere was coming down with Christmas, the streets and window displays ethereal after rain, but what was it – October? Maybe I'd been thinking about why I hated Tibetan prayer flags and whether that was similar to how I felt about Christmas: things become meaningless severed from the body of ritual, of belief. Then I thought about those who see kindness in my face, or see it as unusually calm, which must have to do with that image of the Buddha smiling. I turned off Regent Street and onto Piccadilly, then down a side road by Costa to Jermyn Street, where a man caught my eye as I was about to cross the road and asked to shake my hand. *You have a kind face*, he said.

Really. He was wearing a diamond-checked golfer's jumper and said he was a holy man. As soon as he let go, he started scribbling in a notepad, then tore out a sheet which he scrunched into a little ball and pressed to his forehead and the back of his neck before blowing on it – once, sharply – and giving it to me. *I see kindness in you, but also bad habits. Am I right? Not drinking or drugs or sex, not like that, but bad habits. 2020 will be a good year for you. Don't cut your hair on a Tuesday or Thursday. Have courage.* He took out his wallet and showed me a photograph of a temple, in front of which stood a family. His, I think. A crowd of businessmen flowed around us. *Name a colour of the rainbow. Any colour,*

*except red or orange.* He was looking to my right, at what I thought could be a rainbow – despite the sun, a light wind blew the rain about like scattered sand – but when I followed his gaze it seemed to be fixed on either a fish restaurant or a suit display, or maybe backwards in time to the memory of a rainbow. Why did he stop me? I'd been dawdling, staring at people on business lunches. Restaurants like high-end clinics, etherized on white wine. I must have been the only one to catch his eye, to hold it. What colour could I see? I tried to picture the full spectrum arrayed in stained glass, shining sadly, and then refracted through a single shade that appeared to me in the form of

a freshly mown lawn, a stack of banknotes, a cartoon frog, a row of pines, an unripe mango, a septic wound. I saw the glen beside the tall elm tree where the sweetbriar smells so sweet, then the lane in Devon where my dad grew up, and the river in Riau where my mum played.

It was blue and yellow mixed, like Howard Hodgkin's version of a Bombay sunset, or pistachio ice cream; a jade statue of the Buddha. I remembered being asked – forced – to give my favourite colour by a teacher (why did it matter?), which was the colour of my favourite Power Ranger, of the Knight beheaded by Gawain, of the girdle given to him by Lady Bertilak, and chose the same again.

*The paper in your hand, if it is your colour, will bring you luck, and if not . . . He trailed off. First hold it to your forehead, then the back of your neck. Then blow.* I unscrunched the ball. *Now put it here,* he said, opening his wallet, *and money please.* I had no cash. *Nothing?* He looked me in the eyes and said (again) that he was a holy man. I felt honour-bound to give him something. Up and down the street, men rode to their important offices. I told him it was my favourite colour, or had been, and as I did I saw us from a distance, as we might seem years from now – scraps of coloured fabric draped across a hall which, taken out of context, signified nothing – and I flinched, waiting for the blade to fall.

*From RENDANG, published by Granta Poetry*

## Open (several short poems) by Rachel Long

Open

This morning he told me  
I sleep with my mouth open  
and my hands in my hair.  
I say, *What, like screaming?*  
He says, *No, like abandon.*

Open

This morning, she told me  
I sleep with my mouth open  
and my hands in my hair.  
I say, *What, Tiff, like screaming?*  
She says, *No, Rach, like abandon.*

Open

This morning she told me  
I sleep with my mouth open  
and my hands in my hair.  
I say, *What, Mum, like screaming?*  
She says, *No, baby, like abandon.*

Open

This afternoon he told me  
I dozed with my mouth open  
and my arm over my eyes.  
I say, *What, like hiding?*  
He says, *No, like before a surprise.*

Open

Tonight he told me  
I fell asleep in the chair  
with my head back,  
my arms tight at my sides.  
I say, *What, like bracing for impact?*  
He says, *No, like working something out with the sky.*

*From My Darling from the Lions, published by Picador Poetry*

## Breakfast in Shanghai by Nina Mingya Powles

*for a morning of coldest smog*

A cup of black pǔ'ěr tea in my bedroom & two bāozi from the lady at the bāozi shop who has red cheeks. I take off my gloves, unpeel the square of thin paper from the bun's round bottom. I burn my fingers in the steam and breathe in.

*for the morning after a downpour*

Layers of silken tofu float in the shape of a lotus slowly opening under swirls of soy sauce. Each mouthful of dòufu huā, literally *tofu flower*, slips down in one swallow. The texture reminds me of last night's rain: how it came down fast and washed the city clean.

*for homesickness*

On the table, matching tiny blue ceramic pots of chilli oil, vinegar and soy sauce. In front of me, the only thing that warms: a plate of shuǐjiǎo filled with ginger, pork and cabbage. I dip once in vinegar, twice in soy sauce and eat while the woman rolls pieces of dough into small white moons that fit inside her palm.

*for a pink morning in late spring*

I pierce skin with my knife and pull, splitting the fruit open. I am addicted to the soft ripping sound of pink pomelo flesh pulling away from its skin. I sit by the window and suck on the rinds, then I cut into a fresh zòngzi with scissors, opening the lotus leaves to get at the sticky rice inside. Bright skins and leaves sucked clean, my hands smelling tea-sweet. Something inside me uncurling. A hunger that won't go away.

*From Magnolia 木蘭, published by Nine Arches Press*

## Tooth by Martha Sprackland

Like a round grey stone lodged  
in the fork of a tree  
the tooth sits intractably  
at the far back of the mouth  
between the ear and the jaw.

The mouth can't close fully,  
like a freezer door;  
can't crank itself open  
more than a few gear-teeth's width,  
enough for water through a straw.

At night it wakes up  
like an eyeball, lolls sourly on the tongue  
rolls against the drum  
tampers with the hinge  
and rubs it raw.

Nothing to do, between the shift-  
change of the painkillers  
but listen to my bedmate  
breathing asleep and the foghorns  
in the hot harbour.

All the world's cameras  
are on this clamorous point:  
this knot, this bole, this clot,  
this breaking news, this fire,  
this prisoner of war,

a sealed world seething  
like a black egg  
incorruptible by amoxicillin  
and saline wash.  
I want it out.

*From Citadel, published by Pavilion Poetry*