

Forward/*emagazine*
CREATIVE CRITICS 2021

The

Forward

Book of

Poetry

2022

The Best Poems from
the Forward Prizes

Forward/*emagazine* CREATIVE CRITICS 2021

Closing date: 30th September 2021

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 <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ForwardCrCr21>

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 2021 are eligible to enter.

Timeframe

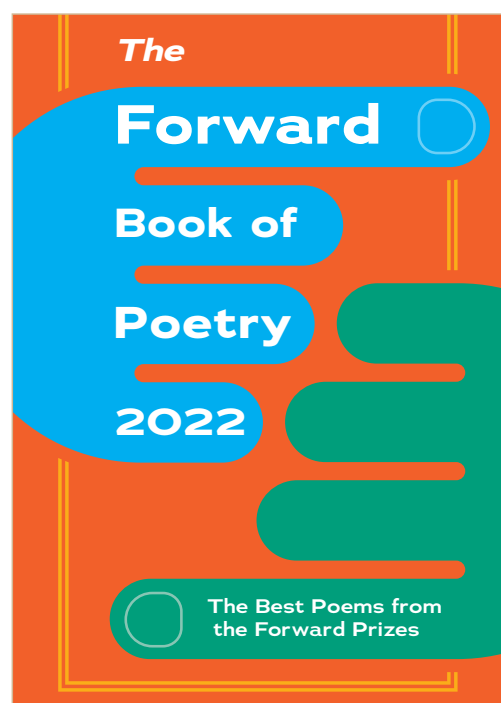
- Close of competition: 5pm Thursday 30th September **(We will not be able to accept entries received after 5pm, so don't leave it to the last minute!)**
- Winners contacted: 20th October
- Results announced online: 24th October
- The Forward Prizes for Poetry Announcement: 24th October

Prizes

- Winner: £200
- Two runners-up: £50
- The winning entry will be published in the February 2022 issue of *emagazine*

Judges

- *emagazine* editors and poet Kim Moore



From the 2021 Forward Prize for Best Collection shortlist

Kayo Chingonyi	‘16 Bars for the Bits’ from <i>A Blood Condition</i>	4
Tishani Doshi	‘Species’ from <i>A God at the Door</i>	5
Selima Hill	‘The Beautiful Man Whose Name I Can’t Pronounce’ from <i>Men Who Feed Pigeons</i>	6
Luke Kennard	‘Then let not winter’s ragged hand deface’ (6) from <i>Notes on the Sonnets</i>	7
Stephen Sexton	‘My Second Favourite Locked Room Mystery’ from <i>Cheryl’s Destinies</i>	8

From the 2021 Forward Prize for Best First Collection shortlist

Caleb Femi	‘Things I Have Stolen’ from <i>Poor</i>	9
Alice Hiller	from <i>bird of winter</i>	10
Cynthia Miller	‘Sonnet with lighthouses’ from <i>Honorifics</i>	11
Holly Pester	<i>Villette</i> from <i>Comic Timing</i>	12
Ralf Webb	‘Love Story: Crown of Love’ from <i>Rotten Days in Late Summer</i>	13

Kayo Chingonyi

16 Bars for the Bits

The old men who meet at the same time each evening
the youngsters get bladdered and stagger; the heaving
the chatter of pigeons emboldened while feeding
and towers that balance at heights beyond reason
a beacon for dreamers and schemers and heathens
you can find angels behaving like demons
in ends where the rents seem to change with the seasons
and murder rates rise when the temperature's peaking
friends changing tack interrupted while speaking
students in packs only back for the weekend
the steadfast who waited and think about leaving
the homeless in parks making bargains with breathing
the lights in the dark guide you home and you're sleeping
or tossing and turning or scratching and wheezing
or thinking all night through the secrets you're keeping
and all this can come in the space of an evening.

From A Blood Condition, published by Chatto & Windus

Species

When it is time, we will herd into the bunker of the earth
to join the lost animals—pig-footed bandicoot, giant sea
snail, woolly mammoth. No sound of chainsaws, only
the soft swish swish of dead forests, pressing our heads
to the lake's floor, a blanket of leaves to make fossils
of our femurs and last suppers. In a million years
they will find and restore us to jungles of kapok.

Their children will rally to stare at ancestors.

Neanderthals in caves with paintings of the gnu
period. Papa homo erectus forever squatting over
the thrill of fire. Their bastard offspring with prairie-size
mandibles, stuttering over the beginnings of speech. And finally,
us—diminutive species of homo, not so wise, with our weak necks
and robo lovers, our cobalt-speckled lungs. Will it be for them
as it was for us, impossible to imagine oceans where there are now
mountains? Will they recognise their own story in the feather-tailed
dinosaur, stepping out of a wave of extinction to tread over blooms
of algae, never once thinking about asteroids or microbial stew?

If we could communicate, would we admit that intergalactic
colonisation was never a sound plan? We should have learned
from the grass, humble in its abundance, offering food and shelter
wherever it spread. Instead, we stamped our feet like gods,
marvelling at the life we made, imagining all of it to be ours.

From A God at the Door, published by Bloodaxe Books

Selima Hill

The Beautiful Man Whose Name I Can't Pronounce

I can but it's so beautiful I don't.
I prefer to think it's unpronounceable,
to go to bed and think of him as fruit
glimpsed at night by someone who is lost,
who walks for many days, weighed down by maps
and dictionaries and old pronunciation guides
until she's so exhausted and confused
she can't pronounce the name of where she's going to,
never mind the name of the fruit
into whose fat cheeks she dreams she's biting.

From Men Who Feed Pigeons, published by Bloodaxe Books

Luke Kennard

‘Then let not winter’s ragged hand deface’ (6)

I had a dream that there were ten of you and we lived in a duplex overlooking the river. It was the only nice part of town. I wanted to make ten of you happy, but it was difficult and mostly I felt like I was letting at least eight of you down. Even though the ten of you were exactly you and exactly the same, you cannot stroke ten people’s hair and tell them they are good, they are so good, and oh the divergent seconds where lived experience changed you. Even the inanities, *I love what you’ve done to your hair. Is that a new top? Could you just shift over a little?* I didn’t think I was up to the job. So this is a *job* for you? I don’t want to make any special claims here: nobody ever walked down to a river without at least considering taking a dive. We only owned nine mugs, for instance, and it only struck me years later, snow-fishing in a void I’d learned to wrap around myself, how easy it would have been for me to do something about that.

From Notes on the Sonnets, published by Penned in the Margins

Stephen Sexton

My Second Favourite Locked Room Mystery

Since I started working at the bowling alley
I think about it all the time: in his barn
from a high rafter or crossbeam a man
has hanged himself with no ladder or platform
to get him there; nothing suspicious save
a patch of damp on the straw-strewn dirt floor.

Cheryl on the other hand is really into tarot.
When the soda fountain's not so busy
she shuffles up my destiny
and every time seems to draw THE LOVERS.
Think about it, flashes the braces in her smile
and the pinsetters chew like beautiful mouths.

Thinking about the future always makes me
so thirsty, so while Cheryl sorts out pin jams
and inventories the shoes, I slurp a Coke
with plenty of chipped ice and before long
my head is full of icemen and their cold chariots,
horse-drawn ice ploughs, the lakes of Massachusetts.

When she's fed up with kismet, Cheryl lets me
build little card castles, and I sometimes think
I could marry her some hot day in the summer:
an ice sculpture of a bowling pin undoing itself
into a puddle of water at the highest of June,
and I think of his horses, what were their names.

From Cheryl's Destinies, published by Penguin Poetry

Caleb Femi

Things I Have Stolen

From the highest shelf
my tiptoes could reach me
I stole a Mars bar & Haribo sweets.
It wasn't a big deal: Mum said
their prices were a robbery anyway.

Later years, Marusha stole my heart,
jerked it out through the ribcage.
In desperation I stole another,
then another. Then a few more:
Fatima, Rihanna, Andrea.
Better to have and not need, I thought,
than need and not have.

Aylesbury estate, I saw Kevin steal Frank's
white Air Force Ones. Do you know how long
it takes a fourteen-year-old yout to save
enough Ps to buy those trainers?
Kevin stole Frank's soul, plucked it
like fruit in a swaying tree.

And I thought, what a game changer:
if Kevin can steal a soul, what else can be stolen?
So I stole the flavour from water
and I stole the solar eclipse.

Then I stole my torn name from the mouth
of the policeman who stops
and searches me
every week. Stole hunger pangs
from underneath our bed, at night.

Six years went by. At Kevin's funeral
I reached into the air
and stole the family's grief.

From Poor, published by Penguin Poetry

Alice Hiller

pistil:

*has been well apart from german measles while
in france. difficult with medicines. aggressive &
difficult with other children. bites and scratches.
difficult to
get her off
to sleep at
night. ie
spoiled++*

ovule:

your
tummy a
hardening
ball of
ache

stigma:

papa's photo shows you aged two waist-
deep in a field of french buttercups with your
red anorak zipped and the sky holding you

text of pistil derived from alice hiller's childhood medical notes

From bird of winter, published by Pavilion Poetry

Note – from Alice Hiller's talk given at the launch of her collection *bird of winter*

As some of you will know, *bird of winter* responds to my own experience of being groomed and then sexually abused as a child, but also of finding my way towards healing. Sadly, it's a crime which is being perpetrated day and night around the world. Millions of teenagers and adults like me make their lives in its aftermath.

One of the difficulties we face in reclaiming ourselves is that the trauma and perceived shamefulness of the experience can make sexual abuse hard to talk about. Many people wait decades to be able to say what was done to them as undefended children or teenagers.

My poems in *bird of winter* seek to create a language, through made artworks, that can help people explore this complex topic safely, and with agency.

<https://alicehiller.info/>

Cynthia Miller

Sonnet with lighthouses

The first lighthouse is you.

The second lighthouse is you, age 12, turned around beneath a wave.

The third lighthouse is a hyperbaric chamber you clamber into when you dive too deep and rise too fast, an oil-dark depth that's child's play for trained divers but you, girl, you clawed yourself up –

The fourth lighthouse tunes into the shipping song over sea static: rain later, good, occasionally poor.

The fifth lighthouse says over and over, I love you I love you I love you you you you there.

Every wall in the sixth lighthouse is load-bearing.

The seventh lighthouse is a scattergram of light that indicates the strength and direction between two variables: ship and safe harbour, moon and tide, shore and vagaries of current, each of us to each other, our future selves to our past selves, every dear friend placed at strategic vantage points in our life.

Just seeing the eighth lighthouse strengthens your circuitry, blood zinging around your bones in delight.

The ninth lighthouse has *worse things happen at sea* cheerfully cross-stitched on a pillow it bought drunk off Etsy.

The tenth lighthouse sometimes just wants to be a lifeboat or a ladder or an oxygen mask, dropped down in case of emergencies and not always looking out for other people when they can't help themselves.

The eleventh lighthouse's favourite piece of furniture is the walnut drop-leaf table that opens so everyone can fit around it.

The twelfth lighthouse makes you feel like stepping out of time.

The thirteenth lighthouse comforts you with Fermat's mathematical proof which shows that light knows where it's going, that it takes the shortest possible route, even through water and gale forces.

The fourteenth lighthouse hollers MARCO.

POLO, everyone you love shouts back.

From Honorifics, published by Nine Arches Press

Holly Pester

Villette

In the novel *Villette*, either I or Lucy Snowe live and work in a girls' school that either she or I found in a small French town. She has nowhere / I have nowhere and no thing in which to hide any of her few / my few possessions. Her mattresses / my mattresses and bedding in the dormitory where she sleeps / I sleep are checked over daily, and she suspects / I suspect that her / my desk in the classroom is also looked through.

She has nowhere / I have nowhere to hide a letter that was sent to her / to me by Dr Graham, who she has a heavy and imaginative crush on / who I have a heavy and imaginative crush on.

She invests / I invest in the letter a devotional adoration that mismatches the friendly goodwill it was written with.

I / Lucy guess that the schoolmistress has snatched, read and then returned the letter to under her / my bed. Lucy panics over her / my lack of private space and makes the eccentric decision to bury the letter in the garden grounds of the school.

She folds the pages tightly / I fold the pages tightly, wrap them in a silk handkerchief dipped in oil, curl them into a glass bottle and hermetically seal the bottle with wax.

She buries the bottle / I bury the bottle under the roots of an ivy bush in an area of the garden that is haunted by either me or the ghost of a nun who was buried alive.

In this gesture / in my gesture, Lucy Snowe rejects the possibility of possessing the letter. She applies / I apply a fantastical value to the letter. The letter passes into an earthed state of absence. I use / Lucy uses burial as a way to disown the letter and to refuse being privately subjected by the letter. She instead / I instead ecstatically ritualise her poverty / my poverty, and her otherness / my otherness to ownership of objects, and evacuate the self into love.

From Comic Timing, published by Granta Poetry

Ralf Webb

Love Story: Crown of Love

There is too much grass to mow.
It's better to lie down in from time to time,
And get lost, clutching, for e.g.,
Your ankle, finally fitting a finger
Into the rim of your ear,
Finding dried blood there
From a miscellaneous fly sting
You might have picked at, and at. Show me
Where, exactly, inside of you
I can hide. I am desperate to hide,
Co-ordinates please, Jesus:
This is the most I have ever wanted.
Or, to peaceably scythe every false growth,
and grow again, from the inside out.

The tree-brains are shedding their pollen.
I am shedding all pretences, refining
My attentions. In a moment
Of lucidity, watching a black ant
Move up your knee, I am convinced
We could bury the artefacts
Of our respective sicknesses, back there
In the vegetable patch, to be nourished
By common minerals, and evolve.
Is this bad taste, selfish, the sense that
There are no more problems left to solve?
Nix to the global crises, the endless
Ecological traumas. Just, don't care.
Let the engines float, then tumble through the air.

What I'm saying is, the chips are down:
I tasted the copper of your body
And instantly handed over all
Of my amulets, for you to evaluate
One by one, and tell me how
To lower my guard. God, I can't deal:
These sort of sickeningly lovely
Scarlet foxgloves in late June
Arrowing themselves at the house,
Stephin Merritt playing on your phone.
The real, actual, terrifying fact
That we've cleared the mesh
Of countless afternoons, and just like that,
Have fallen into it, on your parents' lawn.

From Rotten Days in Late Summer, published by Penguin Poetry

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