

Poetry Pamphlet Prize 2021

Firstly, thank you for sending your poetry into the pamphlet competition. It's a brave thing to make yourself vulnerable to others by sending your work into the world. We live in a time when writing is not only individual solace but a powerful way to connect and to leave a mark on the story of a world with so many needs so please keep writing, keep pushing your craft and knocking on doors with your work.

This year's pamphlet competition attracted an extraordinary range of talented voices with over 450 entrants. There were a lot of pamphlets about lockdown this year, probably not surprisingly, but what struck us, reading many of these, was the question of whether it's too early to reflect deeply on the seismic shift in life that is still playing out. The answer to this seemed to be yes, but there were also notable exceptions, generally in powerful poems that alluded to the pandemic without making it the foreground. In each year of the competition there are clusters of themes and this year there were a lot of pamphlets about serious illness and loss, as well as several pamphlets centred in eco-poetry. These brought us some fine and heart-breaking writing, especially where the poets maintained a sense of control and unsentimental observation and were able to find new images for concerns that we all share.

What struck us overall is that there is no subject too lowly or too vaunted for poetry. The elements that make beautifully narrated poems that are accessible yet also ring with deep resonance, and celebrate language that is as exquisite to the ear as it is artful on the page were present in poems across every subject. What mattered was the way the poets brought these elements together. Poets who could stretch language while making it accessible and who layered shadows and depths into their work hooked us and made us want to return and read again. These poets didn't reach for cliché, but for fresh, unstrained images, didn't tell too much yet communicated a great deal in pared back phrases so that every word counted.

What delighted us were those pamphlets that were willing to take some risk – whether with form or image, persona or language or the questions the poems raised without giving glib or easy answers. Those on the shortlist also showed an elegant balance between the surface and depths of each poem and further delighted us was a sense of coherence across a body of work. Sometimes this came from theme, sometimes it came from the distinctiveness of the poet's voice, a confidence of tone and register that reached across intertwined themes.

The long-listed and short-listed poets were those that showed this confidence and attention to craft, that surprised and held us in the reading.

Congratulations to all those who made the initial longlist

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| Vasiliki Albedo | Roselle Angwin | Steve Boorman |
| Christina Buckton | Lesley Burt | Hanne Busck-Neilsen |
| Alison Campbell | A C Clarke | Claire Cox |
| Sarah-Jane Crowson | Ellen Davies | Rachel Davies |
| Emma Filtness | Shephali Frost | Rachel Goodman |
| Huw Gwynn-Jones | Mary Gurr | Mandy Haggith |
| Kate Hendry | Daniel Hinds | Natalie Ann Holborow |
| Dominic James | David Keyworth | Sue Lewis |
| Simon Maddrell | Christine Marshall | Christine Macfarlane |
| Jane McLaughlin | Christopher North | David Olsen |
| Emma Page | Nina Parmenter | Liliana Pastereska |
| Charles Penty | Andrea Porter | Sue Proffitt |

Eleanor Punter
Anne Stewart
Bonnie Thurston
Martin Zarrop

Belinda Rimmer
Aly Stoneman
Vivienne Tregenza

Abigail Rowland
Peter Julian Taylor
Li Wallace

And huge congratulations to the shortlisted poets:

Vasiliki Albedo
Hanne Busck-Neilsen
Rachel Davies
Emma Page
Bonnie Thurston

Steve Boorman
Alison Campbell
Emma Filtness
Liliana Pastereska
Martin Zarrop

Lesley Burt
A C Clarke
Sue Lewis
Abigail Rowland

From these, after several readings, we had five finalists.

Steve Boorman
Bonnie Thurston

Hanne Busck-Neilsen
Martin Zarrop

Sue Lewis

Narrowing the finalists down to two winners was a long task with lots of back and forth and questions along the way. The standard of these five poets was so high but in the end we confidently chose two outstanding pamphlets:

Sue Lewis: *Journey*

Bonnie Thurston: *Forgotten Futures: a memoir*

What we love about Sue Lewis's *Journey* is the ability to combine a conversational tone with exquisite phrases and images that surprised without any need for showiness. The quiet elegance of the poems, the sound patterns and pressure on language combine with a sensibility of the fragility of life that nonetheless refuses to be crushed. There's a yearning ache in these pieces that remains unsentimental and leaves space for what isn't or can't be said; an intelligence that pays attention to the deepest connections and celebrates 'the everyday enchantment'.

Bonnie Thurston's *Forgotten Futures: a memoir* is a tender heart's cry and a passionate celebration in one. There is deep poignancy and longing here, but not a mawkish or maudlin word. We travel in two landscapes – the world inhabited with wonder for each small detail, and the internal world of half a couple, observing both the relationship's moments of grace, joy and intimacy and those of wounding, longing and loss. In supple, accessible language, honed to beauty, these poems resonate with a sense of the sacredness of small things and the transforming power of memory.

Sue and Bonnie's pamphlets will be published early in 2022.

Thank you again to everyone who entered. The competitions are a huge contribution towards our being able to keep publishing distinctive voices and we hope to read more of your work in the future.

Jan Fortune & Adam Craig
April 2021.