

T.S. Eliot

T. S. ELIOT PRIZE



For the best collection of poetry
published in **2020**

**The Shortlist Readings and announcement
of the winner**

In partnership with the Southbank Centre
Sunday 24th January 2021



T. S. ELIOT PRIZE

The T. S. Eliot Prize was set up in 1993 by the Poetry Book Society to celebrate its founding father. The Prize is now funded and administered by The T. S. Eliot Foundation, a charity which was set up following the death of Valerie Eliot in 2012 to promote the poet's work and legacy.

The Poetry Book Society was founded in 1953 by T. S. Eliot and friends to encourage more people to read and enjoy contemporary poetry. The charity has closed down, but as part of Inpress Books, the PBS continues to offer its members its Poet Selectors' Choice of the best contemporary poetry in the UK and Ireland.

The Prize

To mark the 25th anniversary of the Prize in 2017, The T. S. Eliot Foundation increased the prize money to £25,000, making it the most valuable prize in British poetry, with the ten shortlisted poets receiving £1,500. The Prize is awarded annually to the writer of the best new poetry collection published in the UK or Ireland. It is unique as it is always judged by a panel of established poets and it has been described by Sir Andrew Motion as 'the Prize most poets want to win'.

The Prize has also commissioned high quality videos with 5 poems and an interview with the poets, available from the website at tinyurl.com/t6thkju.

Since the announcement of the shortlist on 15 October 2002, the Prize has sent out weekly newsletters releasing the videos, reviews, links to the readers' notes and newly commissioned reviews at tinyurl.com/y47gsbmw.

The 20th anniversary of the T.S. Eliot Prize was celebrated in 2013 with the T. S. Eliot Prize 20th Anniversary Tour, featuring 36 poets in ten venues across the UK. Watch the film of the tour at tiny.cc/eliotprizetour.

**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**

The Judges



Lavinia Greenlaw

Lavinia Greenlaw was born and lives in London. She has published six collections of poetry with Faber & Faber, including *The Casual Perfect* (2011), *Minsk* (2003), which was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot, Forward and Whitbread Poetry Prizes, and *The Built Moment* (2019). Her novels include *Mary George of Allnorthover* and *In the City of Love's Sleep* and her two non-fiction works are: *The Importance of Music to Girls* and *Questions of Travel: William Morris in Iceland*. Her sound work, *Audio Obscura*, won the 2011 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. She is Professor of Creative Writing at Royal Holloway. lavinia.greenlaw.com



Mona Arshi

Mona Arshi was born in West London to Punjabi parents. She worked as a human rights lawyer at Liberty before she started writing poetry. Her debut collection *Small Hands* won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2015. *Dear Big Gods* came out in April 2019 (both books were published by Pavilion Poetry). She won the inaugural Magma Poetry competition in 2011, was joint winner in 2014 of the Manchester Poetry Prize and a prizewinner of the Troubadour Poetry Prize. She has recently been appointed Honorary Professor at the University of Liverpool. monaarshi.com

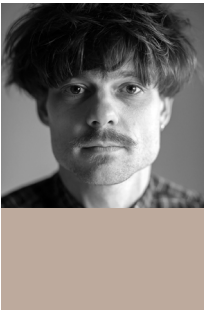


Andrew McMillan

Andrew McMillan lives in Manchester. His debut collection *physical* (Cape 2016) won the Guardian First Book Award, the Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prize, a Somerset Maugham Award and an Eric Gregory Award. It was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Award and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. His second collection, *playtime* (Cape 2018), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, Poetry Book of the Month in both the Observer and the Telegraph, a Poetry Book of the Year in the Sunday Times and won the inaugural Polari Prize. He is senior lecturer at the Manchester Writing School at MMU. andrewmcmillanpoet.co.uk

Wayne Holloway-Smith

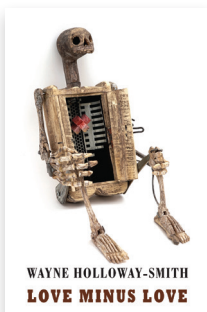
Wayne Holloway-Smith was born in Wiltshire and lives in London. His collections are *Alarum* (2017) (the final poem, *Short*, won the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize 2016), and *Love Minus Love* (2020), both Bloodaxe Books, and a pamphlet *I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WENDING* (Test Centre Publications 2018). He won the National Poetry Competition in 2018 for 'the posh mums are boxing in the square' from *Love Minus Love*, which was also a Poetry Book Society Wild Card Choice.



What is sad is

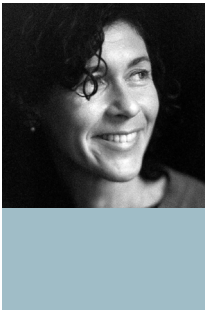
What is sad is I wrote your name all over my jeans
keep the jeans keep the three-meat sandwich we ate
the rap song we made up together in a bedroom
at your house then mine with our parents getting
drunk downstairs and despising each other keep the
elderly woman we both wanted to be on her bike
riding her bike no hands keep the elderly woman
we saw cold and knocked down in the street circled
by an ambulance and an ambulance everything
zooming out and away from her keep the touching
when we touched our boy bodies in out-of-the-way
places in places that were out of the way keep those
David keep your alcoholic mum who left her family
to live on the streets keep the children who hate her
now the husband who did the washing up but also
slapped her in the face sometimes I'm sorry nothing
changed keep the woman throw away the husband
keep my own scar on my upper lip the weight loss
meat-based accelerating into the future.

[canned laughter]



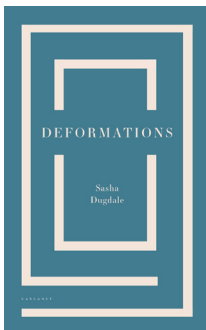
Sasha Dugdale

Sasha Dugdale was born in Sussex and lives in Cambridge. She has published five collections of poems with Carcanet, *Notebook* (2003), *The Estate* (2007), *Red House* (2011), *Joy* (2017) and *Deformations* (2020). She won the 2016 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. She specialises in translating contemporary Russian women poets and post-Soviet new writing for theatre. From 2012 to 2017 Dugdale was the editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. She is poet-in-residence at St John's College, Cambridge.



Think of a Utopian City

Think of a utopian city
Think of its binding walls and its symmetry
The age of attack and repulse is past
but the sympathetic walls remain
purposeful (unlike those sprawling lines of slums
that rise like scales all over the downs).
Think how all have a function in this city
And are dressed in different colours:
ultramarine, lead tin yellow, Verdigris.
We work hard, but when we are not working
we congregate in profile against arcades
and fall in love with the truth.
Some are bakers, some butchers,
some are makers of shoes, or windows, or brushes.
The streets are harmonious, they smell of
woodshavings
rising bread, and cake. Women assist the
slaughter of pigs, the curing of parts.
Every so often a prophet opens a top window
Or an angel lowers itself like a stagehand.
A baby is born at intervals and placed in a trough
for safekeeping.



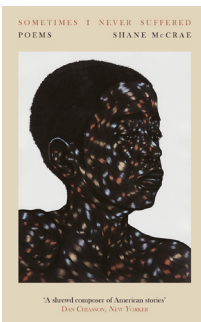
Shane McCrae

Shane McCrae grew up in Texas and California and lives in New York City. He is the author of seven books of poetry, including *Sometimes I Never Suffered* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020); *In the Language of My Captor* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017), which was a finalist for the National Book Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; and *The Animal Too Big to Kill* (Persea Books, 2015). He teaches at Columbia University.



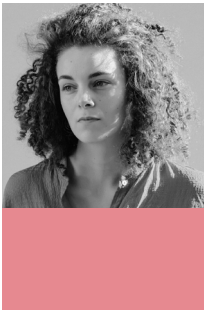
Jim Limber On Possibility

What if I had been born in Heaven do
They do that here I've never seen a baby
But I see full-grown people who
I hear the angels whispering they say they
Were babies when they died I always look
those people in the eye but I don't think
They see me and I've never heard them speak
They just walk around in sailor hats with blank
Looks on their faces those white hats with the
blue
Anchors I sometimes see them walking
With their mouths open the first one I saw
I saw like that and when I tried to talk to
Him it was like I wasn't there
So I peeked in his mouth
and in his mouth was the whole sky and stars.



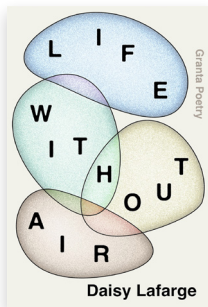
Daisy Lafarge

Daisy Lafarge was born in Hastings and studied at the University of Edinburgh. She has published two pamphlets: *understudies for air* (Sad Press, 2017) and *capriccio* (SPAM Press, 2019), and her visual work has been exhibited in galleries such as Tate St Ives and Talbot Rice Gallery. She has received an Eric Gregory Award and was runner-up in the 2018 Edwin Morgan Poetry Award. Her debut novel, *Paul*, is forthcoming from Granta Books. *Life Without Air* is her first collection of poetry.



the willows on the common are still on fire

the willows on the common are still on fire.
she lives in a combustible North.
memories, the engines
she doesn't want, keep firing blanks
at significance.
in the obsolete commons of crayons
and tarmac
children who resolve too soon to never
play with matches end
up setting themselves alight
with fervour or
goodwill. she keeps a sequin
in her palm; she knows
the sequin
is a girl seed,
a time capsule that must
be artificial, disc-like enough
to withstand its own heat



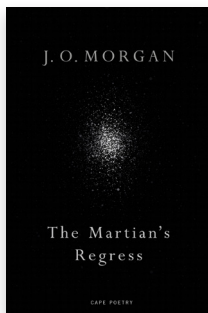
J O Morgan

J O Morgan lives in Scotland. He is the author of seven collections of poetry, each a single book-length poem: *Natural Mechanical* (2009), which won the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and was shortlisted for the Forward First Collection Prize, *Long Cuts* (2012), and *At Maldon* (all CB Editions). In 2015 he published a poem-novella *In Casting Off* (HappenStance Press). *Interference Pattern* (Cape 2016) was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and *Assurances* (Cape 2018) won the Costa Poetry Award.



On a tour of the Martian Caves

If the pale slender figures scratched onto the walls
Were said to reflect the first of intelligent life
It was only due to the sticks of white chalk being
used
Standing out better against the slick black stone
And where these primitive artworks had been
patterned
Out of smeary fingerprints
It was such as children
With small grubby hands often made
And if over countless generations
This record had been preserved through lightlessness
It was only because none but the bored and the
work-shy
Ever ventured to loiter down this way
And if stopping to listen you thought you could hear
Their long-dead voices still murmuring through the
caverns
The trick worked best if you spoke fairly loudly and
clearly
Before shutting up



Natalie Diaz

Natalie Diaz was born and raised in the Fort Mojave Indian Village in Needles, California. She is Mojave and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe. Her first poetry collection, *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, won an American Book Award. She is a 2018 MacArthur Fellow, as well as a Lannan Literary Fellow and a Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Artist Fellow. Diaz teaches at the Arizona State University Creative Writing MFA program. nataliegermainediaz.com



The First Water is the Body (extract)

The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States – also, it is a part of my body.

I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav. This is not
metaphor.

When a Mojave says, Inyech ‘Aha Makavch ithuum,
we are saying our name. We are telling a story of our
existence. The river runs through the middle of my
body.

So far, I have said the word river in every stanza.
I don’t want to waste water. I must preserve the river
in my body.

In future stanzas, I will try to be more conservative.

Natalie Diaz
Postcolonial
Love Poem

Bhanu Kapil

Bhanu Kapil was born in England to Indian parents, and she grew up in a South Asian, working-class community in London. She lives in the UK and US. She is the author of six books of poetry/prose, including *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Kelsey Street Press, 2001), *Incubation: a space for monsters* (Leon Works, 2006), *Ban en Banlieue* (Nightboat, 2015) and *How to Wash a Heart* (Pavilion Poetry 2020), which was a Poetry Book Society Choice.



How to wash a heart:

How to wash a heart:

Remove it.

Animal or ice?

The curator's question reveals

Their power style.

If power implies relationship,

Then here we are

At the part where even if something

Goes wrong,

that's exactly how it's meant to be.

Your job is to understand

What the feedback is.

It's such a pleasure to spend time

Outside the house.

There's nowhere to go with this

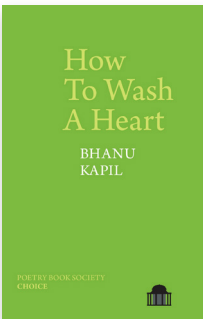
Except begin:

To plunge my forearms

Into the red ice

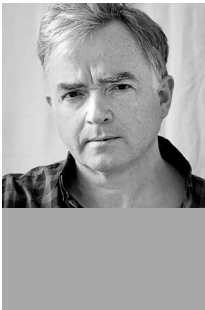
That is already melting

In the box.



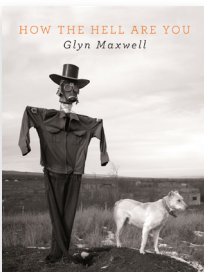
Glyn Maxwell

Glyn Maxwell lives in London. He has won several awards for his many poetry collections, including the Somerset Maugham Prize, the E. M. Forster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. His collections include *Pluto* (2013); *One Thousand Nights and Counting: Selected Poems* (2011); *Hide Now* (2008); *The Nerve* (2002) (all Picador). His work has been shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize (three times), Forward and Whitbread Prizes. glynmaxwell.com



Thinks It's All There Is

As far as I can see that's everyone.
So thanks for that but where else would you be.
Whatever came or went has come and gone
without you why would you not turn to me.
Look I too turned to me I'm just like you.
Stuff came and went but nothing really took.
So this became what else there was to do.
This became where else there was to look.
This became the language that is spoken
here and here became the only spot.
Here I sense I'm only silence broken.
Here I sing because I see what's not
is almost back. It's frightening, I had plans.
You might have warned me. Hold my hand,
both hands –



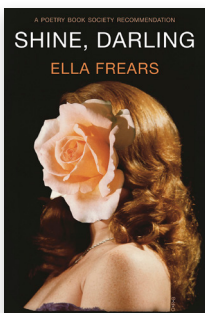
Ella Frears

Ella Frears is a poet and visual artist based in London. Her pamphlet, *Passivity, Electricity, Acclivity* was published by Goldsmiths Press. Her debut collection *Shine, Darling* (Oxford Road Books, 2020) was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. She has had poems in the *LRB*, *Poetry London*, *Ambit* and *The Rialto* among others. Her collaborative installation *The Six Pillars of Modernism*, was exhibited at Tate St Ives.



Hayle Services (grease impregnated)

His head in the front seat
is parboiled. I'm feeling
pretty empty packet, salty
foil. No point in worrying
until we know but oh hello
turmoil. Boots. Up-down
the aisles do you have an oily
complexion? Woman at the till
tries to get my eyes with hers.
Avoid! Toilet-bound, do you
have an oily... M&S escalator
groans, shudders, fan belt
of the universe turning.
Can't go! Foiled again, but then
OK anxious stream. Feel grimy,
a bit doomy. Pissy hands.
Whisper: et tu uterus? Replay –
recoil. The overwhelming
sense that I'm on trial, soiled,
ruined, spoiled. Mamma,
can you come pick me up?
30 seconds. Still wet and blank.
I'm in Hayle, oh not much really,
just waiting for the pink voila.



Will Harris

Will Harris is a writer of Chinese Indonesian and British heritage, born and based in London. His poetry pamphlet, *All this is implied* (HappenStance 2017), was joint winner of the *London Review Bookshop* Pamphlet of the Year. His poems were published in the Bloodaxe anthology *Ten: Poets of the New Generation*. His debut poetry collection *RENDANG* (UK: Granta; US: Wesleyan University Press) is a Poetry Book Society Choice and won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection 2020. willjharris.com



Mother Country

The shades open for landing,
I see the pandan-leafed
interior expanding
towards the edge of a relieved
horizon. Down along
the banks of the Ciliwung
are slums I had forgotten,
the river like a loosely
sutured wound. As we begin
our descent into the black
smog of an emerging
power, I make out the tin
shacks, the stalls selling juices,
the red-tiled colonial
barracks, the new mall.
It is raining profusely.
After years of her urging
me to go, me holding back,
I have no more excuses.



The 2020 Shortlist

Judges Lavinia Greenlaw (Chair), Mona Arshi and Andrew McMillan chose the 2020 T. S. Eliot Prize shortlist from 153 poetry collections submitted by British and Irish publishers. When the list was announced, Lavinia Greenlaw said:

‘My fellow judges, Mona Arshi, Andrew McMillan and I have been reading books written in a different world, the one before Covid-19. The urgency and vitality of the ten books on this shortlist commanded our attention nonetheless. We were unsettled, captivated and compelled. Poetry is the most resilient, potent, capacious and universal art we have.’

The shortlist comprises work from five men and five women; two Americans; as well as poets of Native American, Chinese Indonesian and British, Indian and mixed race ancestry. Nine publishers are represented, more than for many years, with five titles from new or recently-established presses. There are three debut collections.

The Publishers

The T S Eliot Foundation would like to thank the publishers of the 2020 shortlist:

- Bloodaxe Books
- Cape Poetry
- Carcanet Press
- Corsair Poetry
- Faber & Faber
- Granta Poetry
- Offord Road Books
- Pavilion Poetry

This Year's Shortlist

Natalie Diaz

Postcolonial Love Poem (Faber & Faber)

Sasha Dugdale

Deformations (Carcanet Press)

Ella Frears

Shine, Darling (Offord Road Books)

Will Harris

RENDANG (Granta Poetry)

Wayne Holloway Smith

Love Minus Love (Bloodaxe Books)

Bhanu Kapil

How to Wash a Heart (Pavilion Poetry)

Daisy Lafarge

Life Without Air (Granta Poetry)

Glyn Maxwell

How the hell are you (Picador Poetry)

Shane McCrae

Sometimes I Never Suffered (Corsair Poetry)

J O Morgan

The Martian's Regress (Cape Poetry)

Previous winners of the T S Eliot Prize

1993	Ciaran Carson	<i>First Language</i> (Gallery Books)
1994	Paul Muldoon	<i>The Annals of Chile</i> (Faber & Faber)
1995	Mark Doty	<i>My Alexandria</i> (Jonathan Cape)
1996	Les Murray	<i>Subhuman Redneck Poems</i> (Carcanet)
1997	Don Paterson	<i>God's Gift to Women</i> (Faber & Faber)
1998	Ted Hughes	<i>Birthday Letters</i> (Faber & Faber)
1999	Hugo Williams	<i>Billy's Rain</i> (Faber & Faber)
2000	Michael Longley	<i>The Weather in Japan</i> (Jonathan Cape)
2001	Anne Carson	<i>The Beauty of the Husband</i> (Jonathan Cape)
2002	Alice Oswald	<i>Dart</i> (Faber & Faber)
2003	Don Paterson	<i>Landing Light</i> (Faber & Faber)
2004	George Szirtes	<i>Reel</i> (Bloodaxe)
2005	Carol Ann Duffy	<i>Rapture</i> (Picador)
2006	Seamus Heaney	<i>District & Circle</i> (Faber & Faber)
2007	Sean O'Brien	<i>The Drowned Book</i> (Picador)
2008	Jen Hadfield	<i>Nigh-No-Place</i> (Bloodaxe)
2009	Phillip Gross	<i>The Water Table</i> (Bloodaxe)
2010	Derek Walcott	<i>White Egrets</i> (Faber & Faber)
2011	John Burnside	<i>Black Cat Bone</i> (Jonathan Cape)
2012	Sharon Olds	<i>Stags Leap</i> (Jonathan Cape)
2013	Sinéad Morrissey	<i>Parallax</i> (Carcanet)
2014	David Harsent	<i>Fire Songs</i> (Faber & Faber)
2015	Sarah Howe	<i>Loop of Jade</i> (Chatto & Windus)
2016	Jacob Polley	<i>Jackself</i> (Picador)
2017	Ocean Vuong	<i>Exit Wounds</i> (Cape Poetry)
2018	Hannah Sullivan	<i>Three Poems</i> (Faber & Faber)
2019	Roger Robinson	<i>A Portable Paradise</i> (Peepal Tree Press)

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

- T. S. Eliot



Natalie Diaz | Sasha Dugdale | Ella Frears | Will Harris | Wayne Holloway-Smith
Bhanu Kapil | Daisy Lafarge | Glyn Maxwell | Shane McCrae | J O Morgan



Photo of T. S. Eliot by
Herbert Vandyk