

Allison McVety wins the National Poetry Competition with “tour de force” on time, death and Virginia Woolf



Allison McVety, photo by Derek Adams

Allison McVety has become the 35th winner of the Poetry Society’s National Poetry Competition, with her multi-layered poem, ‘To the Lighthouse’.

The year I gave the book another go
[the year my mother died], I learned
everything big happens in parenthesis –
marriage, birth, the War, poetry. Is it the full
manuscript or just the bits in the middle
that count. Is it the woman at the window,
marking the hours, from cover to cover –
or these few lines...

from ‘To the Lighthouse’, by Allison McVety (FULL TEXT OF POEM IS BELOW)

Allison McVety said she found winning the competition “unfeasible and thrilling”. She said, “In the context of the poem, winning the National is like being the most unlikely candidate for head girl and suddenly, in assembly, hearing your name called out”.

The judges - Jackie Kay, John Glenday, and Colette Bryce - read 11,663 new poems from 4,498 poets to arrive at their decisions. All entries were anonymous.

“We admired the way this poem achieves several things at once. It makes you remember that strange sensation of returning to a book to find it altered only to realize the book hasn’t changed: you have... In three stanzas, this poem captures not just the movement of time (that so obsessed Woolf) but also the passing of time in the poet’s life, the journey from the girl in her exams, to the motherless woman at the end. It is a tour de force. It takes huge leaps and yet is shimmering with small details.”

– Jackie Kay

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For further information

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Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch won second prize with her poem 'Ponting', inspired by the centenary of Captain Scott's trip to the Antarctic, and third prize went to Zaffar Kunial for his poem 'Hill Speak', about his father's native language.

Since 1978 the competition has marked a milestone in the careers of some of today's leading poets, such as Philip Gross, Carol Ann Duffy, Jo Shapcott and Tony Harrison. For Allison it is a vote of confidence as she works on her third collection.



NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION WINNERS

Allison McVety won the Poetry Business Book and Pamphlet competition 2006 with *The Night Trotsky Came to Stay* (Smith/Doorstop, 2007), and her second collection, *Miming Happiness*, followed in 2010. For many years an engineer, technical trainer and ITIL service manager at Microsoft, Allison left to manage a digital forensics company. She now works part-time for Smith/Doorstop and is writing her third collection.



Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch's two collections are *Rockclimbing in Silk* (Seren, 2001) and *Not in These Shoes* (Picador, 2008), which was shortlisted for Wales Book of the Year 2009. Her third collection, *Banjo*, celebrates the centenary of Captain Scott's trip to the Antarctic, and will be published by Picador in June 2012.



Zaffar Kunial has been writing poetry for years, and studied in London with Michael Donaghy. He is part of a writing group in Leeds that includes both the poet Ian Duhig and last year's National Poetry Competition winner, Paul Adrian. He writes greeting cards, and wrote a rhyming children's book for M&S. 'Hill Speak' is the first poem he has submitted anywhere for publication.

The National Poetry Competition 2012 will open for entries in April. Download entry forms at www.poetrysociety.org.uk

– ENDS –

For further information and/or to interview Allison McVety, Samantha Wynne-Rhydderch or Zaffar Kunial, contact Katy Evans-Bush on 020 7420 9880 or Alan Ward on 020 7420 9886.

High quality images of the winners receiving their prizes at the award ceremony are available.

Notes to Editors:



Jackie Kay MBE was born in 1961 in Edinburgh to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father, and raised by adoptive parents. Her first poetry collection, *The Adoption Papers*, won the Scottish Arts Council Book Award and Saltire Society Scottish First Book of the Year. She has written numerous collections of poetry as well as fiction, drama and memoir, and appears regularly on the radio. *Maw Broom Monologues* (2009) was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry, and *Red Dust Road* (2010), a memoir about meeting her Nigerian birth father, was shortlisted for the 2011 PEN/Ackerley Prize. She was awarded an MBE in 2006.



John Glenday's poetry collections are *The Apple Ghost* (1989) and *Undark* (1995), both published by Peterloo Poets, and *Grain* (2010), published by Picador. He was awarded a Scottish Arts Council Book Prize for *The Apple Ghost*, and *Undark* and *Grain* both received Poetry Book Society Recommendations. In 2010 he was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Prize for Excellence in New Poetry, and for the Griffin Poetry Prize 2010 for *Grain*. He lives in Drumnadrochit, and works for NHS Highland as an addictions counsellor.



Colette Bryce A previous winner of the National Poetry Competition (2003), Colette Bryce has been North East Literary Fellow at the universities of Newcastle and Durham, and is currently poetry editor at Poetry London magazine. Her three collections, all published by Picador, are *The Heel of Bernadette* (2000), *The Full Indian Rope Trick* (2004), and *Self-Portrait in the Dark* (2008), which was short-listed for the Irish Times Poetry Now Award. Her pamphlet, *The Observations of Aleksandr Svetlov*, was published by Donut Press in 2007. She received the Cholmondeley Award in 2010.

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NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION JUDGES

Notes to Editors *ctd*.

- **Commendations**

The eight commended poets are:

Lindy Barbour for her poem 'White Basin'

Liz Berry for her poem 'Birmingham roller'

Antony Dunn for his poem 'In Vitro'

Rosalind Clare Hudis for her poem 'Photograph'

SJ Litherland for her poem 'Springtime of the Nations'

Ian McEwen for his poem 'Our Lady of the Pylons'

Helen Klein Ross for her poem 'How to furnish an american house'

Jon Stone for his poem 'Blue Poison Dart Frog'

- **The National Poetry Competition**

The National Poetry Competition was founded in 1978. The prize money this year totals £8,800. The top three prize winners' poems will be published in *Poetry Review*, Britain's leading poetry magazine. Previous winning and commended poems can be read on the Poetry Society website at <http://poetrysociety.org.uk>. The Ledbury Poetry Festival features an event with National Poetry Competition winners and judges every July. To enter the National Poetry Competition visit [www://poetrysociety.org.uk](http://poetrysociety.org.uk).

- **The Poetry Society**

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a "more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has nearly 4,000 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, *Poetry Review*. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. To find out more about the Poetry Society visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk

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FIRST PRIZE NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION

Allison McVety

To the Lighthouse

i The Window

It was Virginia's charcoaled stare
that put me off: her disappointment
in me, the reader, before I even started.
So I walked in to the exam without her:
without the easel, the skull or the shawl,
the well-turned stocking, Minta's
missing brooch. In the hall I watched
the future show its pulse and all the girls,
the girls who'd read the book, set off
together, lined up at desks and rowing.

ii Time Passes

You need a daubière and too much time –
three days' absence from the plot. Rump
bathed overnight in brandy, a stout red
brought back from France. The liquor's
boiled once, added back to beef, calf's foot,
lardons, les legumes. For six hours – or more –
it idles. It can't be over cooked. It will not
spoil. At table, a stream of consciousness
breaks out. And it rains. It rains. If not
the stew, what was the woman on about.

iii The Lighthouse

The year I gave the book another go,
[the year my mother died], I learned
everything big happens in parenthesis –
marriage, birth, The War, poetry. Is it the full
manuscript or just the bits in the middle
that count. Is it the woman at the window,
marking the hours, from cover to cover –
or these few lines: that as she eased out from
the bank and into the water the brackets
of it opened and closed about her.



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