

Patricia McCarthy wins National Poetry Competition for her poem about the Great War



Patricia McCarthy. Photograph: Niall McDiarmid for the Poetry Society

Out of 13,041 poems entered for this year's award, Patricia McCarthy's 'Clothes that escaped the Great War' is the Winner of the National Poetry Competition.

These were the most scary, my mother recalled: clothes piled high on the wobbly cart, their wearers gone.

Extract from 'Clothes that escaped the Great War' by Patricia McCarthy

Judges **Vicki Feaver**, **W.N Herbert** and **Nick Laird** were initially struck by the surprising title of McCarthy's work but were soon captivated by this atmospheric poem.

"We loved the journey it takes – both literally, as the horse and cart piled high with old work-clothes trundles down the lanes, and metaphorically, as these clothes come to represent the ghosts of all the young men lost in the Great War. It follows on from the wonderful poems written by poets like Owen and Sassoon about their war experience, to show the grief of the women left behind." – **Vicki Feaver**

McCarthy's poem is based on a story her own mother had told her – a memory of something she had witnessed as a small girl in Yorkshire, during the First World War. "I am very honoured to win with this particular poem as it is a small part of our oral history, transcribed here into a poem – which will now live on," says McCarthy.

Patricia McCarthy becomes the 36th person to win the Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition. Since it began in 1978 the competition has been an important milestone in the careers of many of today's leading poets, with previous winners including Helen Dunmore, Ruth Padel, Philip Gross, Carol Ann Duffy, Jo Shapcott and Tony Harrison. The competition, which this year attracted record entries from over five thousand writers worldwide, recognises an individual poem, previously unpublished, in an anonymised judging process. The judges only discover the identity of the winners after making their final decision.

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Born in Cornwall and raised mainly in Ireland, Patricia McCarthy lives in East Sussex, where she is editor of the poetry journal *Agenda*. She will shortly publish her third poetry collection, *Around the Mulberry Bush*.

Patricia confessed to rarely entering competitions, but decided to enter 'Clothes that escaped the Great War' thinking it "as good a gamble as a gamble on the horses". It was a gamble that certainly paid off, as she walks away with the £5000 first prize.

The judges awarded second place to Jane Draycott for 'Italy to Lord' (£2,000) and third place to John Freeman for 'My Grandfather's Hat' (£1000). Commendations went to Edward Barker, Keith Chandler, Sally Goldsmith, Pascale Petit, Stuart Pickford, Robert Stein and David Swann.

The next National Poetry Competition will open at the end of April. Entry forms can be downloaded at www.poetrysociety.org.uk. Closing date is 31 October 2013.

– ENDS –

For further information and/or to interview Patricia McCarthy, Jane Draycott or John Freeman contact Robyn Donaldson on 0207 420 9886.

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

Notes to Editors:

NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION WINNERS:



Patricia McCarthy is the editor of *Agenda* poetry journal. She is half Irish and half English. She was born in Cornwall, and brought up mainly in Ireland. After Trinity College, Dublin, she lived in Washington D.C., Paris, Bangladesh, Nepal and Mexico. She has been settled for a long time now in the countryside in East Sussex. She taught at a famous girls' school there for fifteen years. Her work has won prizes and been widely anthologised. A small collection, *Survival*, was published in the US and *A Second Skin* came out from Peterloo Poets in 1985. A substantial collection, *Rodin's Shadow* (Clutag Press/Agenda Editions) came out in October 2012. Another collection, *Around the Mulberry Bush*, is due from Waterloo Press in 2013, as well as a pamphlet, *Trodden Before*. (Photo: Niall McDiarmid for the Poetry Society.)



Jane Draycott's most recent collection *Over* is published by Carcanet OxfordPoets and was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2009. Her 2011 translation of the medieval dream elegy *Pearl*, also from OxfordPoets, was a PBS Recommended Translation and winner of a *Times* Stephen Spender Prize. She lives in Oxfordshire and teaches on postgraduate writing programmes at the universities of Lancaster and Oxford. (Photo: Jemimah Kuhfeld.)



John Freeman was born in Essex, grew up in South London and studied English at Cambridge. He lived in Yorkshire before moving to Wales where he teaches at Cardiff University. Collections include *The Light Is Of Love, I Think: New and Selected Poems* (Stride), *Landscape With Portraits* (Redbeck) and *A Suite for Summer* (Worple). Stride also published a book of essays, *The Less Received: Neglected Modern Poets*. Recent magazine publications include *Iota*, *Poetry Wales*, *Scintilla* and *The Lampeter Review*. The essay 'We Must Talk Now' appeared last year in *Cusp: recollections of poetry in transition*, edited by Geraldine Monk (Shearsman).

The seven commended poets are:

Edward Barker for his poem 'The Mother Dough'

Keith Chandler for his poem 'The Goldsmith's Apprentice'

Sally Goldsmith for her poem 'Thaw'

Pascale Petit for her poem 'Harpy Eagle Father'

Stuart Pickford for his poem 'Swimming with Jellyfish'

Robert Stein for his poem 'Hommage de M. Erik Satie à Soi-Même'

David Swann for his poem 'The Last Days of the Lancashire Boggarts'

Notes to Editors continues over

For further information

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NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION JUDGES:

- **Vicki Feaver** is the author of three poetry collections: *Close Relatives* (1981); *The Handless Maiden* (1994), winner of the Heinemann Award; and *The Book of Blood* (2006), shortlisted for the 2006 Costa Poetry Award and the Forward Prize. *The Handless Maiden* includes the poem 'Judith', winner of the Forward Poetry Prize for Best Single Poem. In 1993 she was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship and in 1999 a Cholmondeley Award.
- **W.N. Herbert** (born Dundee, 1961) is published by Bloodaxe Books and teaches Creative Writing at Newcastle University. He writes in both English and Scots and his seven collections, including *Cabaret MacGonagall* and *Bad Shaman Blues*, have won awards and been shortlisted for major prizes including the T.S. Eliot and the Saltire. Recent and forthcoming books include *Jade Ladder* (with Yang Lian), an anthology of contemporary Chinese poetry, and a new collection, *Omnesia* (2013).
- **Nick Laird** was born in 1975 in County Tyrone and educated at the University of Cambridge. His debut poetry collection, *To a Fault*, won the Jerwood Aldeburgh First Collection Prize; his second, *On Purpose*, the Somerset Maugham Award and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. He currently teaches at Barnard College and Princeton University in the US, and a third collection, *Go Giants* (Faber), was published in January 2013.
- **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 www.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
- **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. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. It publishes the magazine *Poetry Review*, runs the National Poetry Competition, the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the youth performance poetry championship SLAMBassadors UK. www.poetrysociety.org.uk

To read Patricia McCarthy's NPC winning poem, see over

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FIRST PRIZE NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION

Patricia McCarthy

Clothes that escaped the Great War

Not the familiar ghosts: the shaggy dog of Thorne Waste
that appeared only to children; the chains clanking
from the Gyne seat, nor the black barge at Waterside.

These were the most scary, my mother recalled: clothes
piled high on the wobbly cart, their wearers gone.
Overalls caked in dung, shirts torn from the muscle strain

of heavy hemp sacks, socks matted with cow-cake
from yards nearby, and the old horse plodding, on the nod.
Its uneven gait never varied whether coming from farms

where lads were collected like milk churns, or going back
with its harvest of dungarees scented by first fags,
notes in pockets to sweethearts; boots with laces undone,

jerseys knitted – purl, plain – around coke fires.
And the plod, plod, quadruple time; then the catch
in the plod from the clank of loose shoes, from windgalls

on the fetlocks of the horse, each missed beat on the lane
a missed beat in a heart. As a small girl she could see –
at their windows – the mothers pressing memories

too young for mothballs into lavender bags, staring out
propaganda posters, dreading the shouts of telegraph boys
from lines of defence and attack. As the harness creaked

and the faithful old horse clopped forward and back,
the lads were new-dressed in the years never to be had,
piled higher than high over the shafts of the buckling cart.