

29 March 2010

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY 30 MARCH AT 7.30PM

Poetry Society announces: poet and novelist **Helen Dunmore** wins National Poetry Competition



Photo: Caroline Forbes

Leading novelist and poet Helen Dunmore has won the National Poetry Competition. The £5,000 first prize was awarded for her poem 'The Malarkey'.

Helen Dunmore first made her name as a poet. In recent years she has received international acclaim as a novelist with eleven works of fiction to her name. On hearing she had won the National Poetry Competition she indicated that a new poetry collection could be on the horizon:

"I've written very few poems over the past four years ... but now I have the feeling that there is the kernel of a new collection. It is a great boost to receive the prize – a confirmation."

'The Malarkey' is a haunting poem about loss, the cause of which is left open to the reader's imagination. Judges Daljit Nagra, Ruth Padel and Neil Rollinson were captivated, as Padel explains:

"This poem sprang out at me at once, on first read-through, from ten and a half thousand poems, because of the surprising focus it gave, linguistically, imaginatively and emotionally, on something that was not there. It was not showy. I found it completely arresting in its quietness; in the hidden strength of what it was saying so unobtrusively."



NATIONAL
POETRY
COMPETITION

Dunmore is no stranger to literary prizes, having won the inaugural Orange Prize for Fiction for *A Spell of Winter*, and the McKitterick Prize for *Zennor in Darkness*. Her novel *The Siege* was shortlisted for both the Orange and Whitbread Prizes for Fiction.

Her nine poetry collections include *Glad of These Times*, *The Sea Skater*, *The Raw Garden*, *Secrets*, a collection of poems for children, and *Bestiary*, which was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. Her latest novel, *Betrayal*, will be published in April.

Second prize in the National Poetry Competition was won by **Ian Pindar**, who receives £1,000 for his poem 'Mrs Beltinska in the Bath'. His first collection of poetry, *Emporium*, will be published in 2011 and his second, *Constellations*, in 2012, both from Carcanet.

John Stammers took third prize (£500) with 'Mr Punch in Soho'. He will publish his third collection, *Interior Night*, in April this year with Picador.

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For further information

Telephone Lisa Roberts on 020 7420 9895
or Alan Ward on 020 7420 9886
Email: marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society,
22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX
Tel: 020 7420 9880 Fax: 020 7240 4818
www.poetrysociety.org.uk

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Ten commendations of £50 were awarded to Julie Collar, Peter Kahn, Valerie Laws, Neil Lockwood, J.P. Nosbaum, Frank Ortega, Sam Riviere, Cherry Smyth, Jon Stone and Jane Yeh.

This year's competition attracted a record number of entries, with the judges reading through a staggering 10,467 poems to find their winners. The poems all enter the competition anonymously, so the judges are unaware of the authors' identities until after they have made their decision.

The National Poetry Competition, founded and run by the Poetry Society, is one of the world's biggest single-poem competitions. Since it was started in 1978, it has brought into focus many of our current leading poets including the Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, Tony Harrison, Ruth Padel and Jo Shapcott.

The National Poetry Competition 2010 will open for entries on 1 April 2010 with judges George Szirtes, Deryn Rees-Jones and Sinéad Morrissey.

– ENDS –

For further information and/or to interview any of the winners please contact Lisa Roberts on 0207 420 9895 or email marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk. Images from the prize giving event on 30 March 2010 will be available.

Notes to Editors:

• WINNERS

Helen Dunmore was born in Yorkshire and studied at the University of York. She began to write poems as a child, and has published nine collections of poetry, of which the most recent is *Glad of These Times* (2007). Her second collection, *The Sea Skater*, won The Poetry Society's Alice Hunt Bartlett Award; *The Raw Garden* was a Poetry Book Society Choice, and her collection of poems for children, *Secrets*, won the Signal Award for Poetry. *Bestiary* was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. She has been published by Bloodaxe Books since her first book, which was one of Bloodaxe's earliest titles. Since her early twenties she has given poetry readings and led poetry workshops around the UK and abroad. To date she has published eleven novels and three collections of short stories. Of these, *Zennor in Darkness* won the McKitterick Prize, and *A Spell of Winter* won the inaugural Orange Prize for Fiction. *The Siege* was shortlisted for both the Orange Prize for Fiction, and the Whitbread Prize for Fiction. Her writing for children includes short stories, novels for older children, including *The Ingo Quartet*, and poetry. Her published critical work includes introductions to D.H. Lawrence's novellas, to a selection of short stories by F. Scott Fitzgerald, a selection of poems by Emily Brontë, and introductions to novels by Robert Louis Stevenson, Anita Brookner and Barbara Trapido. She has written a new introduction to the Folio edition of *Anna Karenina* and a study of Virginia Woolf's relationships with women. Helen Dunmore's work has been translated into twenty-five languages. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Her website is www.helendunmore.com

Ian Pindar's first collection of poetry, *Emporium*, will be published in 2011 and his second, *Constellations*, in 2012, both from Carcanet. Last year he was awarded the Arthur Welton Award by the Society of Authors to assist towards writing his third collection, provisionally called *Late Night Movie*. He is the author of *Joyce* (2004), a biography of James Joyce, and he co-translated *The Three Ecologies* (2000) by the radical French theorist Félix Guattari. He compiled *The Folio Book of Historic Speeches* (2007) and *The Folio Book of Historical Mysteries* (2008).

John Stammers' first collection, *Panoramic Lounge-bar* (2001), won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection 2001, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award 2001. His second collection, *Stolen Love Behaviour* (2005), was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2005, and the Forward Prize for Best Collection 2005, and was Poetry Book Society Choice. Stammers' third collection, *Interior Night*, is published by Picador in April 2010.

• JUDGES

Ruth Padel is a prize-winning poet, Fellow of both the Royal Society of Literature and Zoological Society of London, and first Resident Writer at Somerset House, London. Her poetry collections include *Rembrandt Would Have Loved You*, *Voodoo Shop* and *The Soho Leopard*, all shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. Her latest collection, *Darwin: A Life in Poems*, was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Award. She has also published two much-loved books on reading contemporary poetry, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* and *The Poem and the Journey*. Her novel, *Where the Serpent Lives*, was published this spring.

Daljit Nagra was born and raised in West London and Sheffield. He comes from a Sikh Punjabi background and his poems reflect this both in their content and their innovative blend of Punjabi and English. His poem, 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!', won the Forward Prize for Best Individual Poem in 2004 and became the title poem for his first collection, which won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the South Bank Show Decibel Award and was nominated for several prizes such as the Costa Poetry Award and the Guardian First Book Award.

Neil Rollinson has published three collections of poetry: *A Spillage of Mercury*, *Spanish Fly* and *Demolition*, all published by Jonathan Cape and P.B.S. recommendations. In 1997 he won the National Poetry Competition. He is currently working with 57 Productions developing a series of virtual online creative writing workshops and the 'Poetry Jukebox'.

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• **THE NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION**

The National Poetry Competition was founded in 1978. The top three prize winners' poems will be published in the *Poetry Review*, Britain's leading poetry magazine. All 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 year. On 4 July 2010 Ian Pindar and Neil Rollinson will be in discussion.

To enter the National Poetry Competition visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk. For postal entries send a stamped addressed envelope to Competition Organiser (PR), 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BX.

• **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 poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has nearly 4,000 members around the world, publishes the leading poetry magazine *Poetry Review*, and has an extensive education programme. It has a long commitment to the commissioning of new work, and runs prestigious competitions including the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the National Poetry Competition. To find out more visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk

NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION FIRST PRIZE

Helen Dunmore
The Malarkey

Why did you tell them to be quiet
and sit up straight until you came back?
The malarkey would have led you to them.

You go from one parked car to another
and peer through the misted windows
before checking the registration.

Your pocket bulges. You've bought them sweets
but the mist is on the inside of the windows.
How many children are breathing?

The malarkey's over in the back of the car.
The day is over outside the windows.
No street light has come on.

You fed them cockles soured in vinegar,
you took them on the machines.
You looked away just once.

You looked away just once
as you leaned on the chip-shop counter,
and forty years were gone.

You have been telling them for ever
Stop that malarkey in the back there!
Now they have gone and done it.
Is that mist, or water with breath in it?

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