

## McLellan Poetry Competition 2015

This year's poetry competition again attracted a record number of entries.

The prizewinning poets are:

McLellan Poetry Competition 2015 Prizewinners		
Place	Name	Poem
First	John Foggin	Bheinn na Caillich
Second	Susan Utting	Portrait as a Ticked Box
Third	Jonathan Totman	Ghost
Commended	Zetta Bear	Stalker
Commended	Roger Elkin	The brother he never really knew
Commended	Mario Petrucci	Toads
Commended	Paula Jennings	Private View
Commended	Caroline Price	Poison
Commended	Di Slaney	Nottinghamshire Sheet XXIX N.W.

You can read the winning and commended poems below.

## **Bheinn na Caillich**

Because they had the mastery of iron,  
because the land was thin and hard,  
because the sea was the way to everything,  
because nothing could gainsay  
a well-caulked, lapstraked boat  
with a flare at the bow that perfectly  
fit a space the water would make for it,  
because their oceans were swanspaths, whaleroads.  
because they wrote their maps in the wind,  
in the run of the cod, of the herring, of the cloud,  
the way the gulls would go; because of that

they sailed out from granite fjords;  
cargoes with amber and jet and beaver pelts,  
red river gold and wolfskins;  
over the Dogger, the mouth of the Rhine,  
round Cape Wrath, to the Irish Sea, Biscay,  
the gates of the Mediterranean,  
its hot shores, its painted boats  
and whitesailed dhows as bright as ghosts,  
and all for the lapis, amethysts, white gold  
they spun into knotwork dragons swallowing their tails;  
bracelets, cloakpins, breastpins, clasps and rings.

Who counted the hours of tillage,  
the scantlings of barley and oats,  
the frozen sleet on longship shrouds,  
skin torn on intractable nets,  
or how many million herring and cod  
shrank in the wind on racks of spruce?

Who told how it was  
after all the work of hands and years,  
they could fashion chests of black bog-oak,  
bind them with ironstrips,  
lock up the lapis, the gold, the bright enamels  
and bury them high in the eye of the wind  
on a red granite summit over snowfield and scree  
in a grave with a princess anointed and shrouded,  
how they might raise a great cairn,  
chockstone and boulder,  
and no one would touch it.

**John Foggin** lives in Ossett, West Yorkshire.

He writes a weekly poetry blog: *the great fogginzo's cobweb*.

His poems have won first prizes in The Plough Poetry and the Camden/Lumen Competitions. His first two pamphlets, *Running out of space* and *Backtracks*, were published in early 2014, and a chapbook, *Larach*, was published by WardWood in December 2014.

## Self-Portrait as a Ticked Box

I would paint myself green for the luck of the Irish, purple  
my mouth for a Bow bell's chime, one arm banded black  
for the death of a king, dress in red for the wake of my sister.

For the stones on a South coast beach I'd wear rubber shoes,  
for my sea-worthy father a hat made of canvas, cut from a jib.  
I'd be sitting up straight, for uncle Joe's Friday night dinners.

At my back I'd sketch bulbfields for Freda and Eddie,  
their glasshouses still on the Great Ouse's banks, no floods  
but a windmill with still sturdy sails for my grandfathers.

For my foremothers I would put fat Russian dolls, full of dear  
little girls, on collapsible tables, with linen and crochet hooks,  
cooking pots, stained with pearl-barley, and chicken-bone soup.

I'd be dancing a jig, a mazurka, an old-fashioned waltz, would spin  
on blocked toes, paint my feet bloody. I'd be carried away on a longboat,  
a horse-drawn cart, hay wain, or curled in a home-crafted coracle.

I would sign myself small, with a borrowed name, in fine rain  
from the North, touched with good fortune's red from the far,  
Far East, shot with silk, spun out in the West. But here, I must

write myself clear, flat as a Midlands vowel, glottal-stopped, tick  
as I'm asked, I must paint myself funeral, statistical, invisible, *other*.

**Susan Utting** has been involved in poetry and creative writing for many years, chiefly at Reading and Oxford Universities. Her poems have been published in *The Times*, *TLS*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Forward Book of Poetry*, *The Poetry Review* and *Poems on the Underground*. Following *Striptease* (Smith/Doorstop) and *Houses Without Walls* (Two Rivers Press), *Fair's Fair* (also TRP) is her most recent poetry collection. She currently teaches and performs her poetry freelance.

## Ghost

Was that you we heard in our half-sleep,  
a clamour of goose, some great uncoiled contraption  
wheeling low above the Ouse?

Was it you, caught in a tractor's fog light,  
sliding through the barley,  
cracking, like ice under a tyre?

More scarecrow than phantom,  
more curio than legend,  
stuff of pamphlets and glass cases -

you are an eel-themed souvenir,  
a black-and-white film  
playing to no one, on loop.

You are a pheasant on the road.  
A flurry of straw. A lorry skirting potholes  
on the Hundred Foot Bank.

You are the bottle in a pair of scratched hands,  
a warm paper package in the Golden Land  
fish bar, the thirteenth person

in a four bedroom house. Do you call it yours,  
this man-made land? Industrial estate  
of the countryside, great soot-black allotment,

stripped like a patient on an operating table,  
sustained by tubes and wires.  
Sugar beet, Weetabix, oilseed rape.

When they drained the fens dry,  
did you sink into the peat  
or were you left, writhing in sludge?

You are reed bunting, yellowhammer,  
wigeon at sea in summer floods.  
You are water. You are watching,

your face pressed to the glass  
as the Bewick's swans touch down,  
taking in each landing like a loved one's return.

**Jonathan Totman** lives in Ely, Cambridgeshire. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in magazines including *Brittle Star*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Orbis*, *Obsessed with Pipework* and *Snakeskin*. In March of this year, Jonathan won the title of 'Fenland Poet Laureate'. He co-edits new literary magazine, *The Fenland Reed*, and runs regular poetry and open-mic nights in Cambridgeshire. Visit him online at: [www.jonathantotman.co.uk](http://www.jonathantotman.co.uk). *Ghost* was written for the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership to mark the opening of their summer festival, 'OuseFest'.

## **Stalker**

The man who thinks to woo me by explaining  
how to shoot a deer strips by the fire  
peeling clothes off his blue patterned skin  
in his kitchen with the back door wide open  
to the windy night he's come in from  
wet through after standing for hours  
waiting for his doe to show herself  
waiting for the heart shot.

While in his shed ten grey rabbits hang from a pole  
one hind leg slotted neatly through the other,  
his muddy graft hangs from a hook,  
and the doe he has shot and gralloched,  
turns and cools, waiting quietly for him  
to return and undress her.

**Zetta Bear** lives on the edge of a moor in West Yorkshire with a pack of good working dogs who put meat on the table in winter and laze about all summer. She says: 'We are all growing long in the tooth together. My poems are love poems to the men, women, dogs and places I know well, through my life among hunting people. Apart from a poem in Smith's Knoll years ago, and a few readings at The Albert in Huddersfield, most of my work hasn't seen the light of day. I earn my living as a Funeral Celebrant and Psychotherapist.'

## the brother he never really knew

passed himself off from whenever as *bigger where it matters* and because it was the one ace he held in his hand let it go to his head becoming Dad's *Big-I-am That's him*

asthmatic too but didn't stop him dipping fingers into Mum's handbag so that ever after it sat at her side or else she'd cry *Bag Me bag Where's me bag* nor stop him unpicking the lock

of Dad's coming-of-age desk to nick riffled quids elastic-banded just a couple at a time for fags smoked since was six so never caught up with his twin sister but bragged his big-headed time

bad-ladding it around our town and had the crap leather-belted out of him, belted back in Dad strapping his backside *You nowt You nowt* till twigged he could run quicker so legged it upstairs slipped

through window streamed across lean-to roof and spranged over back-garden wall running towards flunking the 11+ to sec-mod with mates Ben-Gunning his pimply adolescence through school play

the nearest he'd come to his *Treasure Island* fagging ten a day behind bike-sheds his tapered nails nicotined and passing-out big-dicked himself to hashish ransacking Chemists for acid tabs

sent down and again after petty-cashing stamps and flashed back again and again longer spell this time around for shipping grass from Spain inside back tyres of hired white van *Micky Spillane*

*Clink's too good for him* Dad railed but once freed reformed in sorts played weekly drumming-gigs with Hutch's Band in clubs and pubs got the beat from beating his meat among other things

Mum always said *Should have been a butcher* till that Christmas Eve back from festive jamming session sat with first can of the night in right hand fag-tab in the left was found next morning *Whata*

*Chrissy pressie* by Sam the down-and-outer he'd roomed to shelter from everything he'd been through found whammed out of life just fifty-seven heart bust apart and I only know cos Sam contacted

that *effing git of a brother* he never really knew

**Roger Elkin's** poetry has won over 200 Prizes and Awards internationally (47 Firsts), including the *Sylvia Plath Award for Poems about Women*. His 11 collections include **Blood Brothers**, (2006); **No Laughing Matter** (2007); **Dog's Eye View** (2009); **Fixing Things** (2011); **Marking Time** (2013); and **Chance Meetings** (2014). Editor of *Envoi* (1991-2006), he was the first recipient of the *Howard Sergeant Memorial Award for Services to Poetry*. A published critic on Ted Hughes, Roger tutored at Wedgwood College, Barlaston, and was shortlisted for the Stokestown International Poetry Prize (2004). He is available for readings, workshops and poetry competition adjudication.

# TOADS

*“The old Mountebanks used to take around with them a boy who ate – or pretended to eat – toads, believed to be poisonous.”*

*Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*

How well his voice makes them waddle forwards  
fresh from their fields like village geese towards  
his strewn crumbs of words. Huge on his bench –

that jar. Greased with the bloated grey gherkins  
of toads. Those sensible eyes that hold you.  
The almost human hands. I deaden my eyes. Make

of myself a listless lickspittle – as though I had been  
delivered but a brief time from some other world  
while his drone rises from fly to wasp and heads

begin to sway left and right for the better view  
as he thrusts back my brow as though this were  
a beheading and I kick out so feebly the assembled

feel they walk the bed of their millpond and I  
on the surface above them am drowning – until  
he lifts that creature innocent from its glass

and widens my jaw with his claw to thrust it jerking  
down my throat. And though it slips unnoticed  
into a pouch in his jacket still I feel it slide rancid

as a cud of black butter down to my gut. Then  
the grimed palm clamps upon my head and I must swig  
his bitter quackery while he bellows *Out toad! Out*

*vile poison!* before he yanks me aloft live as a chicken  
to show me wide-eyed and they clamour for his bottles  
in exchange for beets and cheese. Later a girl in the village

walks with me. Asks how it is to rise from the brink  
of death. I say: ask the toad. She says we could marry  
if I were a prince. But she will never kiss me.

One night under cover of rain he came to my room.  
Pulled down the sheet and made me do it all again.  
Since then with each moon my skin hardens a little.

My body stiffens with bone. Soon I’ll have the strength  
to lift that jar. Then I’ll enter his lair of vapours and farts  
where he snores on his unsold piss – he’ll not hear the grass

outside whisper and gasp with each heavy leap of escape.  
That shattering will seem to him distant as thunder. Like  
a toad deep in mire he will harden in my merciless winter.

Never wake.

Ecologist, PhD physicist and Royal Literary Fund Fellow **Mario Petrucci** is a multi-award-winning poet and residency frontiersman, the only poet to have held residencies at the Imperial War Museum and with BBC Radio 3. He has won prizes in the National Poetry Competition, is recipient of a PBS Recommendation, and holds the Bridport Prize, the Frogmore Prize and a Silver Wyvern Award. *Heavy Water: a poem for Chernobyl* (Enitharmon, 2004) secured the Daily Telegraph/Arvon Prize and "inflicts... the finest sort of shock, not just to the senses, but to the conscience, to the soul" (PoetryLondon). His latest collection is *crib* (Enitharmon, 2014).  
[www.mariopetrucci.com](http://www.mariopetrucci.com)



## **Private View**

The way you aced out of the pack  
was spectacular. The party riffled  
and there you were,

art industry people fanned out  
each side of you, and I,  
who have no time for games,

turned aside and picked one,  
any one, from the half-full  
warm white wines, while you

did nothing but the way you did it  
was something. I reached out  
and the boy with the canapé tray

murmured, *Gannet*.  
I murmured, *Fuck you*.  
So much money in the room –

even people's shoes looked like sculptures.

**Paula Jennings'** poems are published in literary magazines, national newspapers and anthologies. Readings include StAnza International Poetry Festival, Edinburgh Book Festival and Dundee Literary Festival. I have received support for my work from the former Scottish Arts Council and from Hawthornden Fellowships.

### **Collaborative projects:**

*Farlin*, with Helen Robertson (lace wire artworks). Sponsored by Shetland Arts and Fife contemporary Art and Craft, the project generated exhibitions in Lerwick and StAndrews.

*The Written Image*, with Paul Musgrove (printmaker and glassmaker). Facilitated by The Scottish Poetry Library and Edinburgh Printmakers, collaborative art works were exhibited in Edinburgh last year and are due to tour Scotland.

### **Poetry collections:**

*Singing Lucifer*, Onlywomen Press (2002/2007)

*From the Body of the Green Girl*, HappenStance Press (2008)

*Under a Spell Place*, HappenStance Press (2015)

## **Poison**

She goes back to him in the way experienced diners  
return to a certain Japanese restaurant in Soho  
because they know the chef there is one of the few  
to have survived the training, the examinations,  
his fingers clever and confident enough  
to make the incision, knowing just where to place  
the knife tip, to run it along the slit skin  
to the exact point of plunging downward –  
knowing how closely he can graze  
the dusky obscure intestines, the gonads and liver,  
just enough to allow a baby's breath  
of toxin to mist the flesh  
so that as the diners lift their chopsticks  
their eyes are already glistening;  
and they delay each morsel in the soft caves  
of their mouths for a moment before they swallow  
and let the drift take hold, numbing  
their edges, beading their skin with shock  
and the knowledge of having given themselves  
to a master, the lightness that follows, the floating.

**Caroline Price** is a violinist and teacher living and working in Kent. Her short stories have been shortlisted for the Asham, Bridport and London Magazine awards, and she has published three collections of poetry, most recently *Wishbone* (Shoestring Press).

**Nottinghamshire Sheet XXIX N.W.  
OS Edition of 1920**

Ingar's Holt

is nothing now; no  
brushwood, ash or elm,  
no marker boundary  
to the mor, no bolthole  
cover for the son, his  
father famed for  
everything he lacked,  
no bracken beds for  
village girls too slow  
to run, no heathered haze  
to gravel pit, no quick  
cut on to Cockett Barn,  
no pheasant flush or rabbit  
tracelines through the mud.  
Nothing left now, none of it.

Labour-in-Vain

is nowhere now; no farm  
of dust and stones to ire  
the tithemen used to fecund  
work, no bricks or slates or tiles  
that propped the granary wall  
against the turnip house,  
no sickly cows whose milk ran  
thin and drenched the empty  
calf box, no horses lathered  
with the toil of dredging  
hard small gains. Nowhere  
but here now, this hostile soil.

Wycar Leys

is not the same now; no dairy  
for the lord, the kiarr long  
gone down to the holt, no  
byres rousting pigs to troughs  
higgled with turnips, no parlour  
maids smirking secrets through  
the cream, pressing tokens into  
curds wheyed down for love, no  
farmhands clagged with clay  
dragging their Sunday Best home.  
Not the same now, in any way.

Parson's Pond

is nobody's tryst now; no rector  
eking acres to sweat a shilling,  
no fishing rights for enclaved  
few, no ribald gossip at the pump,  
no carpe diem at the open view,  
no ginnel out to Stoney Field,  
no windbreak there to choke the  
gusts that barrel through. Nobody  
trysts now, or knows how to.

**Di Slaney** lives on a Nottinghamshire smallholding with more animals than is sensible. She has a degree in English and European Literature from the University of Warwick, an MA in Creative Writing from Nottingham Trent University and has co-owned Candlestick Press since 2010. She runs a marketing company in Nottingham. Her poems have been anthologised and published in various magazines including *Magma*, *The Rialto*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Brittle Star*, *LeftLion* and *Lighten Up Online*, as well as being shortlisted for the Plough Prize and the Bridport Prize. Two of her poems won joint first prize in the 2014 Brittle Star Poetry Competition. Her debut pamphlet collection *Dad's Slideshow* is available from Stonewood Press.