



THE GINKGO PRIZE

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**AREAS OF  
OUTSTANDING  
NATURAL BEAUTY**

BEST POEM OF  
UK LANDSCAPE

COMPETITION  
ANTHOLOGY  
2022



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2022

*The National Association for Areas  
of Outstanding Natural Beauty:  
Best Poem of UK Landscape Prize  
Anthology 2022*

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**{ THE NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
Areas of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty**

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## **THE GINKGO PRIZE & AONB BEST POEM OF UK LANDSCAPE**

The Ginkgo Prize is a major international award for ecopoetry, funded by the Edward Goldsmith Foundation and organised by the Poetry School. The award, initially called the Resurgence Prize, was first presented in 2015. It has been run by the Poetry School since 2017 and was relaunched as the Ginkgo Prize in 2018. The Poetry School is a national arts organisation providing inspiring tuition and opportunities for poets and poetry audiences. It was founded in 1997 by poets Mimi Khalvati, Jane Duran and Pascale Petit. Since its earliest days, its courses and activities have encouraged poets and poetry to flourish.

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is an area of landscape designated for its distinctive character and natural beauty in the national interest. Through the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the UK's 46 AONBs partner with the Poetry School to award the 'AONB Best Poem of UK Landscape' as part of the Ginkgo Prize.

## PREFACE

In 1960 Denise Levertov, the internationally respected UK born US poet, contributed a ‘Statement on Poetics’ for Don Allen’s now classic *New American Poetry* anthology. In it she said poetry’s highest task is “to awaken sleepers by other means than shock.”

Our partnership with Poetry School, now in its third year, is our recognition of the power of poetry to awaken us.

Every year we write that ‘this year, the effects of climate change have become ever more noticeable’, and this year is no exception. Europe faces its hottest summer on record. At the end of 2022, at COP27, the UK affirmed its pledge to protecting 30% of its land and sea area for nature by 2030. The UK’s 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), making up over 10% of the land area of the UK, are already playing a key role in the fight against climate change and nature depletion, but we know there is only so much we can achieve without winning more hearts and minds.

The poems in this year’s ‘Best Poem of UK Landscape’ once again highlight the need to act, but more than this, they highlight the need to love. Art can tempt people to explore their landscapes in a way that science cannot. People, once they become explorers, start to write their own stories of landscape, nature and culture. Place becomes a partner in a relationship in which both explorer and place benefit. People cannot be asked to protect what they don’t love, and we hope once again that these poems form an invitation to explore – close to home or further afield – to fall in love with a place and begin their own story.

– **John Watkins, Chief Executive**

**National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**





AREAS OF  
OUTSTANDING  
NATURAL BEAUTY  
BEST POEM OF  
UK LANDSCAPE

WINNING  
POEM



## **The Bowland Sheep**

I hurried on some errand along the dale in a twilight,  
wet moss and stone, wet frigid air,

the ribbon of my road rolled out to a haze,  
my horizon unclear, a fog

poured down from over the fells, a ghost  
of grey, edged with night,

and the black trees, like the thinnest of dreams,  
all wintered and bare.

Then I saw them in my torchlight, resolving through the gloom,  
earthed, and somehow ancient,

the sheep like a circle of standing stones,  
their green eyes gleaming like flares,

they made no sound, but their heads, as they grazed,  
swung low, slow and hypnotic;

I paused, and we were then man and sheep  
together on our small circle of earth.

And when driven back to the City, impatient,  
in lock step herded, time poor and brass-faced,  
I recall the sheep, and their placid insistence,  
how they grubbed at damp grass on their small patch of turf,  
and how when the moon suddenly broke through the murk,  
it turned everything it touched into silver.



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HIGHLY  
COMMENDED  
POEMS



## **Geese, Nevern Estuary**

*Newport, Pembrokeshire*

They have settled here for shelter,  
alighting on the ribbed sand in clusters  
till we can't see the surface, feathers  
ruffling in a Mexican wave, the creak of voices  
spreading from one bank to the other  
like a conversation. Every so often  
something seems to give: a skein of bodies  
lifts and veers inland. Another breath  
and something catches – a solitary gander  
rises to his feet and beats the water,  
pounding the wet to glitter – and is gone.  
Another. And another. One by one  
they drag their heavy bodies upwards  
past the bridge, the line of cars, the watchers,  
in a ragged V of throats and trailing legs  
and flapping wings, heading for higher ground –  
a whole geography of geese, a population  
acting by suggestion on a single wish,  
leaving this stretch of quietly lapping river  
to its tides, the birth and death of islands,  
while we stand and watch inverted trees  
grow back. The sand begins to shine;  
the ripple we had taken for departure  
seems to go calm. *Are* they leaving us?  
Or is this how a flock of geese flies in  
to stay the winter? Low over the road  
they rise and circle, seem to fly off,  
fly in again – until the tide itself has slowed  
and changed direction, while we all  
still stand here squinting through October  
sun, and they pass over.

## The Pitlochry Salmon Ladder

Footsteps drum on grated steel  
    half-lost in a churning boom of surf  
        as the long surging galaxy of the Tummel  
            hurls itself  
    against a wide scowl of concrete  
        and condenses  
    into leaking oily sinew dripped  
through shadowed networks  
    of iron, percolated  
    in a steadily rising grid of black-plated chambers  
        where inky-vortex mandalas spiral  
            in dark undercurrent  
    bullied by deep bedded gears  
        and mechanical teeth,  
            obstacle course  
        of steel jaws and pressurised trenches  
    that April through October  
        juggles glittering swarms of salmon  
spitting them clear like bright butterflies  
    from a cave mouth,  
        into upriver rapids,  
    where they begin their long journey  
from the perpetual night of this factory-womb  
        to the creamy blue velvet  
    of the southern cairngorms,  
        the half-remembered  
    snow-negative  
        that fuels a relentless pump and thrust  
up through salt-reed-bed  
        jungles of spiked bulbs  
    flared with the darted electric of oystercatchers  
        shadowed by plummeting waves of pine,



to be purged  
from all deep-sea impurities  
in narrow throats  
of raw granite, scrubbed  
to pale-scaled essentials, sharpened  
in the onrushing torrent's  
armoury of blades  
into perfect spearheads of flint,  
honed on a lone target,  
tracing the swollen pebble-dash curve of beaches  
where boys from the caravan park  
launch jagged rocks at them for fun, through  
the widening frost-deepened intestine  
of the Garry, where needle-feathered giants  
stand to greet their return  
as they have done for the last ten thousand years,  
conducting the final ecstatic frenzy  
in blinding snow-light, led  
by smell alone, stunted  
and warped  
by the flex of the current, drowned  
and drowned again  
in surging turquoise, distilled  
irreducibly back  
into water and its fine minerals,  
fresh deposit  
in a webbed alchemy  
of alpine white,  
as clean  
as that first fire  
of the egg.



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SHORTLISTED  
POEMS



## **Beneath Kintsugi Skies**

We climb out of King's Wood  
bathed in the calm majesty of oak,  
ash, sweet chestnut, the gold seep  
of anticipation as we rise up into  
*kintsugi* skies atop Cross Plain.

Hands held high, hope floods  
through me as my children float  
and swoop while red kites sweep,  
plane down, tilt over the brow  
of the heathland's lost ways.

Under the high thorn scrub  
we rest with the snagged ghosts  
of winter's wind-washed sheep,  
each tuft a tangled winnow  
of weathered angels, lame.

Here on Crook Peak, above  
the rim of the world, we only know  
the rock's still heart, a silence deep  
within us, and see cracks that glow  
afar like gilded scars aflame.

## **Hillcomber**

### *The Great Glen Way*

miles of rain  
and towpath, the dry-stone bridge  
where I lie down to float

the lone white foxglove  
bride among her bridesmaids  
in their freckles, their deep pink gowns

the cruiser in the middle  
of a field, three tiers rising  
above a sea of vetch and bracken

the telescope on a stone pier  
overlooking Loch Ness:  
first one man, child, woman, then the other

tries their eye against it  
the thinnest gap, like hope or superstition  
between glass lens and forehead

a carpet of bright sorrel  
green light shining up  
through the membrane of the forest floor

the crowd of skinny pines  
exchanging creaks  
and clicks, a conversation

at the speed the world was made  
that one flag iris  
strange unfurling yellow sun

## **Dingy Skipper Butterfly (*Erynnis tages*)**

*After Sean Nevin*

*indicating a dull, drab, or dirty shade ('Dingy', Oxford English Dictionary)*

Do not be fooled by the name. Look hard  
for that wide basking of wings  
on bare ground, tremor brown, the velvet brown of antlers,  
locked in rut, streak of hare's gold brown, inky eartips  
dappling the forewing, heathland brown, bracken,  
the wings of this butterfly a well, singing ancient quarry  
brown, mottled railway brown, the scabbing brown  
of turkey tail over dead beech, lilac brown of wood blewit,  
fruity and sweet, the plush brown of blanket bog, fathomless,  
quaking underfoot, spotted natal brown of the deer calf  
bumping its mother for milk. The buzzard's bloody brown,  
pale belly up, dappled, shot down near the grouse moor.  
The glossy brown neck of the grouse.  
In dull light you might catch it roosting on a flowerhead,  
wings curved back, dead leaf brown, at pause, alight,  
but more likely only a brown blur,  
disturbed, low bolt of flight.







above  
the tin singers' bones  
they knew that 'wheal'  
meant 'work'  
and a wheel could mean  
stillness

hurricane-eye  
*neither ascent nor decline*  
and that Wheal Prosper,  
facing the Atlantic  
or eventually, Argentina

could absolve me  
since  
going home I could  
say,  
could give something back

like ashes in the ocean  
because in six hours  
the tide will pull back  
and I am  
washed  
with patience.

## Flotterstone

Above the ditches, willows puff yellow  
burrs of pollen, halos of sun. The fields  
are grazed by distinct sheep, everything's  
within sight: road, hedgerows. We can hear cars.  
It's not til  
the path twists, into a darkness,  
that we grasp the reason for the path's existence.  
Now the only sound's a gentle swish –  
Scots pine, glittering above us;  
the soft *coc-oons* of wood-pigeon.  
The ground's a carpet of fine needles  
for mending ourselves. We are in the deep fold.

Up the path, further. A shiver of noise  
rushes to meet us. Beside us,  
passing: a turning of small bubbles  
in the deep, amber pool.  
Splash of white  
and constant crash: the waterfall  
comes into view. We climb beside it.

Glories might appear, if we let them:  
if some sun could reach  
from behind us, into the vapour;  
find the light that lives in its opposite:  
the glowing rainbow  
made in the core of our shadow –  
if there's enough mist, if  
our thoughts can break, become uncertain,  
when we stand and look through them,  
we might see the figures of angels.

[Flotterstone is associated with the Nobel Prize-winning physicist CTR Wilson, who researched the meteorological phenomenon of 'glories' and created the world's first cloud chamber to do so.]

## The Rollright Stones

i) *The Whispering Knights: early Neolithic burial chamber*

birdsong blows through us  
we cluster lightness

at our feet protection  
our tips blade stars

here was weeping and grief  
internment in winter

quarries took our siblings  
we were split settled but have always been

captured by stardust  
we are centre and outpost

we receive and bury  
bombs earth-shock

we burrow to underground waters  
speak with them and circling planets

at our heart is the foxhole  
a brush of fur

the dead man's  
red beard

ii) *The King's Men: late Neolithic stone circle*

how we stare out from this ridge  
dig into our chamber beneath  
how we settle stars sink  
bright roads into earth  
ignite the valley's waters

in pre-time we were gathered  
with sweated hands and trunks of trees  
drew ourselves down  
the wind is ours and the night  
we know blood earth-shake

we speak to listeners discount  
the talkers have witnessed the young earth ripple  
suns and suns and suns  
no fire nor cold here  
winds planetary song

to come is a thinning  
the topsoil's shrink bones revealed  
rain for more ask the trees they  
are swift sensitive we abide  
even in erosion

iii) *The King Stone: standing stone to mark a Bronze Age cemetery*

I hum to myself  
a song  
beneath moss

I root moonlight  
under my feet skulls  
shine

scoured by ice  
laid down in warm waters  
a blue sun still

bathes me  
I have tasted blood and blade  
the priest's lament

here's anger weapons  
from the south many miss  
the notes I sing

the future tightens  
to an eddy all else is travel  
when one is still

## **Return to Embleton Bay**

In the final hours you're unreachable –  
plumb the depths of a sleep beyond sleep.

Perhaps you've returned to Embleton Bay,  
to stride easy across the dunes,  
a wild crush of thyme in your wake.  
Beyond spiked clumps of marram grass  
the beach is a half-moon of uninterrupted gold.

Your boots are unlaced for one last thrill –  
a broken wave, that cold-suck rush  
as sand slips from the soles.  
You know you must leave this shore,  
climb into the ruined shadows  
of Dunstanburgh castle, the same faltering  
route we took before the hospice,  
friends taking turns  
to link arms either side, the gorse  
out in force. How it blazed for you!

You'll walk it alone, the final mile  
across fields, a sky so much bigger  
than you could imagine,  
a prickle of salt on your lips,  
that coconut sweetness of gorse –

its thorn-lamps burning  
all the way to the gate. This time  
you'll unlatch it with hands that don't shake  
knowing there will be the curved  
arms of a harbour, yellow-horned poppies  
to nod gently as you pass,  
a bench to watch the tide come in.

## Tintagel, July 2022

Here we go again, tourists  
and ghosts, all up in the grill  
of the myths and idylls, gymnastic  
on this twisting neck of rock,  
picnicking among the old stones.

All is parallax up here,  
    planes of slate and spray,  
        wind and stacks and waves  
            sliding, splicing, shearing  
over the cliffs, storied lives  
wearing the horizon  
as a belt.

*Which way up  
is the map, daddy? What  
even is History anyway?  
Are we all in? Smile!*

    The signs  
play two truths and a lie.

There is a bridge hanging in the gap...  
    There is a statue of power in a tattered cloak...  
        There is a seal, look there... in the calm beyond Merlin's Cave

You've been talking about death again.  
*My Grandpa is dead, you said to a girl  
at the beach, He's underground  
turning into a goblin.*

Tomorrow, sick in bed, you will play  
Sonic: spinning through the ruins,  
you will die in a burst of rings,  
will spring back to blur again  
through looping wrecks,  
dying ever after. Game over  
and over.



## On Visiting Stanton Drew

Frost-sharp morning, our breath  
white,  
we follow the stones uphill,  
    walking the bounds of each circle widdershins;  
my feet aren't used to this and I'm  
    stumbling,  
in my city shoes, on grass  
    cropped short by winter and the rabbits.

On to the upper circle  
    through the kissing gate at the top of the field,  
        plastic shivering on the fence-wires,  
    the sweet-rot scent of cows and silage,  
        and a single bird I cannot name twitching  
            its small body,  
                its small, fragile body,  
            in and out of the hedge.  
            Here, sheep droppings,  
a fallen stone and  
    a hole descending,  
        diving beneath its prone grey body into the dark,  
    and in the fresh dirt at its mouth wide pawprints,  
the suggestion of Badger;  
    I have never known a live one,  
        never seen one breathing.  
I want to know him real,  
    I want to know him warm, and  
    in my mind I shrink myself,  
follow him down  
through the mud,  
    through the strata of the Anthropocene,  
        smell of animal and the wet  
            dark earth,

and as we go he presses  
offerings upon me –  
    ring pulls and  
    a hoard of rusted bottle caps,  
    rotting cigarettes,  
a sharp flint point.

Tell me, Badger,  
What was it like  
to see the first red sunrise,  
when all the stones were new and gleaming,  
    when the valley still held birdsong,  
    when there were still woodlands  
                            and living things to fill them?

What was it like,  
    when the air was fresh and clear?

Driving home, starlings  
    take us by surprise,  
    murmurations  
            like smoke  
    twisting themselves in  
                            and out  
                            of being,  
  over the  
bare fields.

## Anderson's Meadow, April 2020

From two meters away a stranger with a dog tells me this here is his kingfisher spot  
that within half an hour, sat still by the river, a sighting is almost guaranteed

quick and blue

I've never seen a kingfisher

There is so much blue in April:  
forget-me-nots, borage, native bluebells  
& frequently now,  
discarded surgical gloves

But it always takes me by surprise, this colour

I've been daydreaming about texting someone who lives on the other side of the city

wanna hang out? let's try to spot kingfishers

I've been daydreaming about sitting, outside  
sharing crisps from the same bag

when an insect lands on their cheek I'll brush it off with my hand

and when a stranger walks past I'll greet them without  
silently calculating the distance between us

without picturing my hello multiplying in their lungs

maybe I tell them this here is a good kingfisher spot  
& if they seem keen hand over the binoculars

(in my daydream I own binoculars)

*there – see*

quick and blue as a Norfolk sky

## **Crosby Beach, Liverpool**

Morning pours over the estuary  
from the east. Iron Men shift

from black to grey to russet,  
take their places along the beach.

Dunlin tease the shoreline,  
little heads bowed, prayers

for worms, for a turning tide.  
A plank of wood is stranded —

part of a dance floor,  
pattern loose, grain swollen.

Over the dunes — the skylark's  
hymn, begging, its melody violet,

tiny flowers, a fetch of dogs, all  
striving to reach what's sacred.

## The Species Forecast

Area Forecasts / British Isles / *Viking* / Long-snouted / Short-snouted / Seahorse / *Cromarty* / *Forth* / moderate or poor / occasional fog / *Dogger* / Dogfish / Shark / *Fisher* / gale 8 / Rough / Thresher / Tope / Porbeagle / Frilled / Blue / near severe / backing / Leatherback / Loggerhead / Turtle Doves / occasionally scattered / nine-seven-percent dropping / *Whitby* / severe icing later / Kittiwake / Smew / Arctic Skua / *Dover* / *Wight* / occasional snow showers / Undulate Ray / temperatures / moving northward / two-point-five miles yearly / Butterflies / nought-point-six / Tortoiseshell / backing southerly / Hoopoe / rising more slowly / *Plymouth* / Harbour Seal / Harbour Porpoise / Bottle-nosed Dolphin / Sturgeon / Temminck's Stint / already extinct / Wryneck / also wrung / Shags / later / occasionally poor / Redwing / Lapwing / Meadow Pipit / winter-sowing crops / rain / squally snow later / Shearwater / Balearic / Manx / Rattus bite / becoming severe gale 9 / *Ronaldsway* / Hen Harrier / flying more slowly / *Channel Light Vessel Automatic* / *Scilly* / Sole / Atlantic / Halibut / Cod / Puffin / Lundy / Pink Sea Fan / Mermaid's purse / *Great Orme's Head* / dropping / *Fastnet* / westerly storm 10 / *Irish Sea* / Red Squirrel / *Liverpool Crosby* / Snipe / Loaghtan / *Shetland* / *Isle of Man* / Basking / sun to light showers / Cosnard's Net-winged Beetle / beech trees / moderate falling / V-moth / *Rockall* / currants growing / poor becoming fog / Hedgehog / winters / moderate or good / roads / veering slowly / Red-neck Phalarope / Natterjack Toad / *North Foreland* / occasionally good / rasping call / backing / mating / warm and still / Hazel Dormice / hedgerows / moderate becoming poor / Scottish Wildcats / *Cape Wrath* / storm 10 to violent 11 / Water Voles / partially dry / mainly wet / occasional fog / *Ratray Head* / dropping westward / Snow Bunting / severe icing / Common Skate / imminently / Scottish Crossbill / veering north / becoming poor / violent storm 11 / *Hebrides* / *Bailey* / light icing / *Fair Isle* / *Faeroes* / Time / *Greenwich Light Vessel Automatic* / receding slowly / *Southeast Iceland* / warming quickly / *Squatina squatina* / hurricane force 12.

## Meeting John Clare at High Beach

I know it's him kneeling at the edge of the pond,  
still as a heron, a tightly-coiled 'S'

in a brown, patched coat, his thinning hair and cat's  
hot focus on whatever it is he's looking at.

*John*, I say, *is it you?* *Shhh!* he says, a finger  
to his lips, and beckons me to come close.

I kneel beside him, feel the soft mud  
seep into my jeans, a tingle of time between us.

*There*, he whispers, pointing into the long, pointed tongues  
of yellow iris. *Where?* I ask. *There*, he says, *moorhen*.

He inhabits the raw smell of the nineteenth century  
but I lean closer into his well of concentration.

Our shoulders almost touch as I see them  
in the tangled bowl of the reedy nest:

five tiny chicks, each with a bold red splash,  
a bindi on its forehead. We look down into that chorus

of open, upturned beaks, and when he turns to me  
and grins, I just say *Thank you. For everything.*

## Headlands

*'But where there are gulls only, life is not.'* Virginia Woolf

They lure you out, beyond  
the comfortable curves of bay  
to where the restless surf is sucked  
through bared and broken teeth.

A difficult place for sediment  
on these discordant shores:  
shaping clay is washed away,  
exposures taper to their points.

Bare flanks may be cave-gouged  
as waves bully and break,  
but their resistance is ingrained:  
they rise above the blows.

Up there is the lurch of sea-going  
while lubbered to the land,  
almost-islands not quite pledged  
to the tenets of the sea.

Though susceptible to wind-swirl,  
to sea-mist's clutch and tang,  
they're tethered and will never let go:  
the rocky way back is always open.

They probe the salt uncertainties,  
though hold their findings close.  
Only the gulls know, advertised  
in cruel beaks and corrosive eyes



as round the utmost point they plane  
old currents of regret, pick through doubts  
like chip bags, seize upon neglect.  
There they strip away all things.

Ahead—beyond—only gulls may go.  
But headlands are unyielding,  
because deep in their strata they know  
*the rocky way back is always open.*

## **A Starling Murmuration over Teifi Marshes**

Early morning.

First a murmur from the shadows, low and  
dull, surprising, mono, carmine red and earthy,  
rising from the bed, from underground, an echo,  
like an ultrasound of thirty thousand bird-wings  
beating in the reed and meadowsweet – reminding me  
of how we sat alone on Brighton beach that night,  
the old cast-iron pier alight,  
the starlings flown.

Shapeshifters they.

Amorphous in their daybreak congregation  
(veiled and vulgar, swift and shrouded,  
simultaneously cumulus and cirrus in this crowded air),  
the mocking socialites convene, inclined  
to flock for warmth on winter nights – reminding me  
of when, against a windblown afternoon, we spooned  
among the naked shifting dunes  
of Studland Bay.

New day, new song.

Along the hem of Cardigan and Pembrokeshire,  
the sky is full of words, like chiffchaff, blackbird,  
jackdaw, jay; and twitchers' apps are filled with lots  
of names for gulls and guillemots. But still the starlings  
arc and shriek above the wood – reminding me  
of where we stood, of what was said, of who you were  
the day you shifted shape  
and turned away.

## The Singing Ringing Tree

Ekphrastic (Double Exposure) After Mike Tonkin and Anna Liu.

Stuck on a wintry hill whining away

*high up on the savage purple moors*

a glorious view of countryside spoiled

*where the fierce heather hackle scratches*

litterbugs discarding crack canisters

*and the patient tics lie low in wait to bite*

where the bins overspill and mess overflows

*ensnared in the yellow spiky gorse*

follow the north-winding dog-mess strewn path

*where the ghosts of our ancestors lament*

no ghost-train no fun just a tower of hype

*hark the Singing Ringing Tree*

a creaking pile of rusty old pipes

*hear her haunting strains transcending time*

scrap metal, old junk, blot on the landscape

*and they sing to you, and they sing through me*

doesn't even sing or ring, even in high winds

*and they sing to all of those who came before*

must torment the poor old sheep below

*and they sing to all of those who are to come*

£60,000 of taxpayers' cash gone

*her melody discordant elegy for*

a pile of rusty old poles

*the rugged landscape forlorn adorned*

an indulgence in times of austerity

*with dwindling hope that may still wrought to listen*

but they would never listen

*to her song*

no point to its existence

*and it should never be forgotten*

nobody asked for it.

\*Inspired by Tripadvisor Reviews of the Singing Ringing Tree

# POET BIOGRAPHIES

## WINNER:

**David Canning** moved from Essex to the Forest of Bowland in 2021, and this landscape has become a new inspiration for his writing. He has published two poetry collections: *An Essex Parish* (2015) and *The Celestial Spheres* (2020), and in 2021, *Jim-Jam-Julie*, an illustrated children's story in verse. David is the BBC Essex Poet in residence, and he performs regularly on and sets the monthly theme for their BBC Upload show. His poetry has been longlisted in the National Poetry Competition, twice shortlisted for the Bridport Prize, won a first prize from the Sentinel Quarterly Literary Review, and has been commended in the Poetry Society's annual Stanza Competition. He has been published in several anthologies, including Places of Poetry, magazines (most recently in *Wet Grain* and *UKClimbing.com*), and one of his poems featured in a garden design in Channel 5's *The Great Gardening Challenge*.

## HIGHLY COMMENDED:

**Susan Wicks** has published 8 collections of poetry, most recently *Dear Crane* (Bloodaxe, 2021). Her first collection, *Singing Underwater* (Faber, 1992), won the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival Prize. *The Clever Daughter* (Faber, 1996) was shortlisted for both T.S.Eliot and Forward Prizes. She is also the author of three novels, a book of stories and a short memoir, as well as the translator of two award-winning books by the French poet Valérie Rouzeau. She has lived in England, France, Ireland and the US, and taught for the University of Kent, among others.

**Ciaran McDermott** is an Irish-British writer who grew up in rural Staffordshire, and after spending his twenties travelling in Europe, Australia and Japan, and living in Bristol, has settled in the shimmering emerald hills of central Scotland. His work has been published in a wide variety of journals and anthologies, and has appeared in Poetry Birmingham (PBLJ), Acumen, Dream Catcher, Rust and Moth and The Journal, among others. He was highly commended in the Gingko prize for ecopoetry 2022, and won 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 2023 International Dylan Thomas Day Love the Words competition.

He has been longlisted for the Erbacce prize and the Dai Fry award. His writing explores the vivid intersection between ecology, shamanism and myth.

## SHORTLISTED:

**Paul atten Ash** is the pen name of Paul Nash, who lives in Bristol with his family. His poetry has been published by: Acropolis, Apricot, Bent Key, Boudicca, Bristol 24/7, Deep Adaptation Forum, Envoi, Free Verse Revolution, Ginkgo Prize, International Library of Poetry, Luain, MONO., Needle Poetry, Oscillations, Pissoir, Poetry School, Raw Edge, Salò, Seaside Gothic, Sídhe, Tandem, the6ress, Tiny Seed, Understanding, and Visual Verse. 'Vital Signs' was shortlisted for the Alpine Fellowship Poetry Prize 2023; 'Eryri' was shortlisted in the 'Best Poem of UK Landscape' category of the Ginkgo Prize 2021. His work has been widely published in anthologies, including by: Bent Key, Boudicca, Broken Sleep Books, MONO., Poetry School, Sídhe, the6ress, and Tiny Seed. Website: [campsite.bio/northseanavigator](http://campsite.bio/northseanavigator) Twitter: @NorthSeaNav IG: @north\_sea\_navigator

**Sharon Black** is from Glasgow and lives in a remote valley of the French Cévennes. Her poetry is published widely and she has won prizes including the Guernsey International Poetry Competition 2019 and *The London Magazine* Poetry Prizes 2019 and 2018. She has four full collections of poetry and a pamphlet, *Rib* (Wayleave, 2021). Her latest collections are *The Last Woman Born on the Island* (Vagabond Voices, 2022), set in Scotland and exploring the landscapes and heritage of her home country, and *The Red House* (Drunk Muse, 2022), set in her adopted homeland. She is the editor of Pindrop Press. [www.sharonblack.co.uk](http://www.sharonblack.co.uk)

**Rachel Bower** is a poet and fiction writer based in Sheffield. She is the author of two poetry collections (*These Mothers of Gods* and *Moon Milk*) and a non-fiction book on literary letters (Palgrave Macmillan). She is currently working on a collection of poems about endangered insects. Rachel's poems and stories have been widely published in literary magazines, including *The London Magazine*, *The White Review*, *Magma* and *Stand*. Rachel won *The London Magazine* Short Story Prize 2019/20 and the W&A Short Story Competition 2020. Rachel is currently editing an anthology with Simon Armitage (Faber) and her work is represented by Cathryn Summerhayes at Curtis Brown.

**Caspar Bryant** is a poet and mixologist from West Cornwall, now living in Fife. He prefers the Atlantic to the North Sea but has been informed that each has its advantages. Caspar's work can be found in SPAM, *And Other Poems*, *Alchemy Spoon*, *Propel*, and *Broken Sleep Books'* anthology of Cornish poets.

**Sophie Cooke** has previously produced film poems for large public events such as the Year of Natural Scotland. Her prize-winning poetry has also appeared in literary magazines such as *Gutter*. She is working with SEDA (the Scottish Ecological Design Association), producing poems on a range of ecological themes connected to land use, and is also working on her first print collection, on themes of home and journeying. Her poems generally focus on our place in the universe, and the way this is understood through our conception of nature and ourselves, including through folklore. She has previously read her poems at book festivals. [www.sophiecooke.com](http://www.sophiecooke.com)

**Claire Cox**, born in Hong Kong, now lives and works in Oxfordshire. She completed a practice-based PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London on poetry and disaster, and is Associate Editor for **ignition**press. Her poems have appeared in publications including *Magma*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Anthropocene* and *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and anthologised in *Where Else: An International Hong Kong Poetry Anthology* (Verve Poetry Press, 2023); *Disease*, Carnival Press (2022); and *Angled by the Flood* (SciPo, 2021) from which 'Seasick' appears on the Joshua Jaswon Octet jazz album *Polar Waters* (Ubuntu Music, 2023). She was a winner of *Primers: Volume Five* (Nine Arches Press, 2020) and the 2020 Wigtown Pamphlet Prize.

**Victoria Gatehouse** is a Zoologist, poet and children's writer based in the Pennines. Her second pamphlet *The Mechanics of Love* (Smith|Doorstop) was selected as a 'Laureate's Choice' by Carol Ann Duffy in 2019. Her writing has been widely published and broadcast on BBC radio. Her poems can be found in many journals and anthologies including *The North*, *Magma*, *Mslexia*, *Anthropocene*, *Butcher's Dog*, *The Rialto*, *She is Fierce* (Pan Macmillan), *After Sylvia* (Nine Arches) the *Ginkgo Prize Anthology 2023* and the Candlestick Press pamphlets. She is a three-time winner of The Poetry News Members' Competition. Victoria's first collection is forthcoming.

**Sam Goundry Butler** is a teacher and writer living in South-East London. He is currently studying for a Masters in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths. He was long-listed for the 2023 Out Spoken Page Poetry Prize and 2023 Erbacce Poetry Prize and has been published in the Candlestick Press 2023 Almanac and in Nightingale and Sparrow.

**Niamh Hollis-Locke** was born in England, but now lives in New Zealand in a small house full of books. She holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing specialising in ecofiction, and a BA(Hons) in English Literature. Her work has been published widely within New Zealand, and in 2022 she was invited to read at the Wellington Verb Writer's Festival. She is currently working on her first collection, and attempting to navigate her mid-20s.

**Sarah Hudis** is a creative-critical writer from West Wales, currently based in Norfolk. They studied for an MA in Modern and Contemporary Writing at the University of East Anglia. Their poetry and essays have previously been published by Seam Editions, Poetry Wales, and Horizon Magazine, and in anthologies by Kunsthalle Cromer and Crested Tit Collective. They are excited about nature and place writing, exploring the ecological, emotional, mythological and linguistic topographies of everyday spaces.

**Maria Isakova-Bennett**, from Liverpool, creates the hand-stitched poetry journal, *Coast to Coast to Coast* collaborating with poets in the UK and Ireland. Her latest publication is *Painting the Mersey in 17 Canvases* (Hazel Press, 2022), and she created *mira*, a journal and exhibition for StAnza, Scotland with John Glenday in 2020. Maria's prizes include a Peggy Poole Award (selected by Vona Groarke, 2021); a New North Poet Award; and first place this year in Poetry Teignmouth (judge Fiona Benson). Maria is Writer-in-Residence for The Life Rooms, part of Merseycare NHS Trust.

**Simon Maddrell** is a queer Manx poet, editor and facilitator living in Brighton & Hove. He is published in eighteen anthologies and numerous publications including *AMBIT*, *Butcher's Dog*, *The Moth*, *The Rialto*, *Poetry Wales*, *Stand* and *Under the Radar*. In 2020, Simon's debut, *Throatbone*, was published by UnCollected Press and *Queerfell*, and was joint-winner of The Rialto Open Pamphlet Competition. Nine Pens Press published Simon's anthologies with Vasiliki Albedo and Mary

Mulholland — *All About Our Mothers*, 2022; *All About Our Fathers*, 2023.

In 2023, *Isle of Sin* was published by Polari Press and *The Whole Island* by Valley Press.

**Michael Shann** spent much of his childhood climbing trees and making dens in the countryside around his home town of Otley in West Yorkshire. He now lives in Walthamstow, East London, and is a member of the Forest Poets stanza. He has had three pamphlets published by the Paekakariki Press: *Euphrasy* (2012), *Walthamstow* (2015) and *To London* (2017). *To London Two* will be published in 2023. Michael's poems have been longlisted for the National Poetry Competition and highly commended in the Gerard Rochford Poetry Prize and two of the Poetry Society's Stanza competitions. Michael works for the charity Carers UK and is currently working on his first full collection of poems about Epping Forest. [www.michaelshann.com](http://www.michaelshann.com)

**Alice Stainer** is a lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing on a visiting student programme in Oxford. Her poetry particularly explores interactions between people and place and is also profoundly influenced by her activities as a musician and dancer. Her work has appeared in Atrium, Feral Poetry, Iamb, Ice Floe Press, The Storms and Black Bough Poetry, amongst other places. She has won or been shortlisted in several competitions as well as receiving recent nominations for Best of the Net, the Pushcart Prize and the Forward Prize, and has recently submitted her debut pamphlet. She tweets poetically @AliceStainer.

**Pete Taylor**, from the UK, has lived and worked in London, Brighton, New York, Salzburg, Riyadh, Doha and Nairobi – enjoying a long career as a copywriter with international ad agencies. He now works from home in the Cheshire countryside, where he lives with his wife and two youngest daughters. His poems have appeared in *PN Review* and *The Rialto* among others – including short-form poetry collections such as a recent cherita anthology 'the weight of dialogue', edited by ai li. Previously, Pete has been shortlisted (under the pen-name Thomasson) for the Wales Poetry Award, commended in the Acumen International Poetry Competition, and longlisted for The Rialto/RSPB 'Nature and Place' Poetry Prize.

**Liz Beth Turner** is a working-class Lancastrian, raised in the foothills of the West Pennine moors amid the derelict farmhouses, abandoned factories and disused railway



lines of her youth. Her poetry explores themes from poverty and violence to mental health, social injustice and climate change. As a mature student, Liz Beth achieved a BA (Hons) in English Literature and more recently completed a short poetry course at Goldsmiths University, with poetry featured in Guts Publishing's Tattoo Anthology. Today, Liz Beth is a person-centred counsellor on Ynys Môn where she lives with her husband, two rescue cats and a dog.

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The poems in this year's  
'Best Poem of UK Landscape' once again  
highlight the need to act, but more than  
this, they highlight the need to love. Art can  
tempt people to explore their landscapes  
in a way that science cannot. People, once  
they become explorers, start to write  
their own stories of landscape,  
nature and culture.

We hope that these poems form an  
invitation to explore – close to home or  
further afield – to fall in love with a  
place and begin your own story.

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