

McLellan Poetry Competition 2023

One of the cornerstones of the McLellan Arts Festival is the annual Poetry Competition. This year, in addition to the main standard English competition.

We are delighted to announce that the results of the McLellan Poetry Competition 2023 are in from our judge, Joelle Taylor, and are as follows:

FIRST PLACE

Catherine Spooner from Lancaster “The Bears are coming down from the Mountains”.

SECOND PLACE

Matt Hohner from Baltimore USA for “Kitten Steals Grenade from Ukrainian Soldier”.

THIRD PLACE

Julie Sheridan from Barcelona for “The Men at My Fence”.

Five highly commended poems:

- Jim Mackintosh from Perth for “Tour Package”
- Louise Green from Dalbeattie for “The Solway Tide, 2023”
- Caroline Bracken from Dublin for “Selective Mutism”
- Simon Maddrell from Hove, East Sussex for “Knockaloe Camp”
- Elle Becker from Arizona USA for “Unfinished”

Congratulations to all of the winning and commended poets, and thank you to all who entered the McLellan Poetry Competition. All poems are included in full below, along with a bio of each poet.

FIRST PLACE - Catherine Spooner, "The Bears are coming down from the Mountains"



Catherine Spooner writes both poetry and fiction, and recently returned to both after a gap of many years. In 2021-2, she took a career break to complete an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. In 2022, she was the recipient of the Northern Writers' Arvon Award, and in 2023, she was longlisted for the Women's Prize Discoveries Award and received an Honorary Mention in the Fish Poetry Prize. In her other life, she is an academic who writes about Gothic literature, culture and fashion. She is often inspired by the landscapes of East Yorkshire, where she grew up; London, where she spent her twenties; and

northern Lancashire, where she currently lives.

Our judge's comment: "My number one is Bears, a thrilling, surreal, and emphatic piece - almost spoken word in its unwavering eye contact. It has a haunting rhythm that has followed me for days. And anyway, it's about time that William Blake came down from the mountain..."

The Bears are Coming Down from the Mountains

The bears are coming down from the mountains. The bears are sitting in cafes in Hampstead and Highgate, eating cupcakes. The bears are ravenous. The bears are putting on fat. The bears are rampaging down the streets of Hoxton, ransacking hipster cereal cafes. The bears are queueing at 3am outside the Brick Lane bagel bakery. The bears are in the sushi bars of Bloomsbury, hunting down sashimi grade salmon. The bears are riding the escalators at Angel, going up and down the wrong way and bothering the commuters. The bears are eating vegan kimchi burgers in King's Cross, playing in the fountains outside Central St Martins. The bears are lapping up builders' tea in the greasy spoons of Whitechapel. The bears are gorging on organic honey at Borough Market. The bears are fighting outside fried chicken shops in Camberwell. The bears have gone to ground in Shepherd's Bush. The bears are dancing in the gay clubs of Vauxhall where they are proving rather popular. The bears are coming down from the mountains.

The Goths are coming down from the mountains. The Goths are riding their horses through Piccadilly Circus. The Goths are brandishing their spears and storming New Cross Gate. The Goths are beckoning with their tattoos in Tooting Bec. The Goths are checking out each other's boots. The Goths are fidgeting with their fingerless gloves at Farringdon. The Goths are feeding the ravens outside the Tower of London. The Goths are flocking in Trafalgar Square. The Goths are preening in toilets in Tottenham Court Road. The Goths are spreading their plumage at Pimlico, wishing they'd brought a spare eyeliner. The Goths are twittering on the telephone wires. The Goths are wading in the Thames at Heron Quays and snapping up sticklebacks in their beaks. The Goths are taking a dustbath at Mudchute. The Goths are abseiling off the Millennium Dome. The Goths are coming down from the mountains.

William Blake is coming down from the mountains. William Blake is cavorting with angels in the parks of Peckham. William Blake is inking infernal fire in the cellars of Soho. William Blake is picnicking with the bears in Richmond Park. William Blake is drinking tea with the Goths in South Kensington. William Blake is teaching at Goldsmiths College, where he can't get a promotion and his students don't appreciate him. William Blake is working from home. William Blake is out of the office. William Blake will reply to your message in his own good time. William Blake is surfing the web. William Blake is booking an Airbnb in Switzerland. William Blake is at Luton Airport boarding an EasyJet flight to Zurich. William Blake is setting up a writers' retreat with optional yoga. William Blake is not coming down from the mountains. If you like what William Blake does, please consider buying him a coffee on his Patreon.

SECOND PLACE - Matt Hohner, "Kitten Steals Grenade from Ukrainian Soldier"



Matt Hohner, a Baltimore resident and native, recently won the Jacar Press Full-Length Book Competition for a poetry manuscript that will be published in 2024. He has been a finalist for the Moth International Poetry Prize and won the Maryland Writers' Association Poetry Prize. He won the 2016 Oberon Poetry Prize, the 2018 Sport Literate Anything but Baseball Poetry Prize, and the 2019 Doolin Writers' Weekend Poetry Prize in Ireland. Hohner has held two residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, made possible by a grant from the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. He has been nominated for a Best of the Net Award and a

Pushcart. An editor for Loch Raven Review, Hohner's book *Thresholds and Other Poems*, his first full-length book, was published by Apprentice House Press in Fall 2018.

Our judge's comment: "Kitten is a simple poem, like a 2 second Instagrammed reel, but more powerful as a consequence - small like a bullet."

Kitten Steals Grenade from Ukrainian Soldier

*Someone has tried to kill me
and has failed
- Lucille Clifton*

In the six-second video clip, hand diving towards danger, the young man's voice negotiates between chuckles while reaching to retrieve a live grenade from the upturned helmet in which it rests, but to the kitten between the grenade and the hand, this is playtime: tiny paws teeth bared, hypodermic claws, twists and nips. I think of blue jays robbing cardinal chicks from their nests, of lemon-peppermint sticks in Baltimore summers, the bitterness softened through sweet mint. I think of how long it takes to die, to laugh, and the reason we fight to know the difference.

THIRD PLACE - Julie Sheridan, "The Men at My Fence"



Raised on the west coast of Scotland, Julie was fascinated by Spanish as a child and spent her pocket money on pocket dictionaries. After graduating in Hispanic Studies from the University of Glasgow, she worked in Edinburgh for a decade before moving permanently to Barcelona in 2011. Her work has been published in journals including Lines Review, Poetry Scotland, Poetry Ireland Review, Causeway/Cabhsair and PENning, and anthologised in Unbridled, with a poem recently 'highly commended' in the Welsh Poetry Competition. She's currently working towards her first collection.

Our judge's comment: "The Men at my Fence is a strange beast but its metronomic quality and impending threat was haunting enough to work its way into the top."

The Men at My Fence

There are men at my fence
in a very real sense
there are wastrel men in the woods.

Sundays are gun days
boars on the run days
shots shake the oaks to their roots.

They're not supposed to
come close to the house,
they're not supposed to intrude.

You learn when you're young
to observe the fence. You learn
incursions are common.

I'd say it started at seven.
A phalanx of mini
would-be men

lined up in a smirk at the driveway's edge
cockily practicing flashing
at me and my best friend.

There are men at my fence
in a very real sense
there are robbers breaching my roof.

Hindered by my lintel
they take another route.

Through the keyhole I see there are two;

the shoulders of one
hoist the other's boots
through a hatch up into the roof.

Any minute, now,
they'll vault straight down
and land in what they know is my bedroom.

Raiders invaders
infiltrators
interloping intruders.

There are men at my fence
in a very real sense
there's a stalker staking me out.

A cab drops me home
but as the door closes
a man behind me sneaks through.

The hands of this man
on my lips in the lift
of a building he's no right to be in.

Poachers and broachers
preaching encroachers
traders and treaders trespassing.

I want to trip them
to gut them and rip them
to ram an axe into their ribs.

So I found the safest space that I could.
In a den, in a glen,
where I built a fence

the first thing I knew I should do.
A house hewn into a hill of firs
and roes rootling close in the woods.

This side of the fence
I heel in herbs
I plant up pandemonium.

The women tell me they're scared of the woods,
the women all say You're so brave.
They tense when they sense the spoor of the boars,

they talk of estranged terrain.
Looters and loggers and laggards on quads
hunters, punters and runters.

They pummel their fists
through the gaps in my gate
they rally and rail at the railings.

All flesh is grass
and they rage as I hold
my ground in the palm of my hand.

In the lift, in the loft,
on the curb, at the gate
it's getting harder to keep them at bay.

It's not having, but having to hold the space.
It's how many times do I have to say
Get your fucking foot out of my gate.

The men at my fence
mistake its stakes - they've come
to watch the witch burn.

Witch, stand your ground
hold the line, stare them down.
High hedge-witch, stake your claim.

Highly commended - Jim Mackintosh for “Tour Package”



Jim Mackintosh is a poet, editor and producer based in Perthshire.

He has published six collections of poetry, the latest of which was *Flipstones* (Tippermuir Books, 2018). He has edited or co-edited four poetry anthologies including the critically acclaimed *Beyond The Swelkie* (Tippermuir Books, 2021), a celebration in poems and essays to mark the centenary of George Mackay Brown which he co-edited with Paul S Philippou.

He has undertaken several residencies including for St Johnstone FC between 2016 and 2019, the first professional football club in the UK to appoint a poet in residence. He was the Makar of the Federation of Writers Scotland in 2021, the Poet in Chief of the Hampden Collection (2019-22) and created the role of the Poetry Editor of *Nutmeg Magazine* in 2017 which continues to be the only sports journal in the world with a regular poetry section.

Jim is Makar of the Catearan EcoMuseum in east Perthshire and the Angus Glens. He is the Secretary of the Friends of William Soutar and a committee member of The Friends of Hugh Miller.

Jim is a regular at both Literary and Music Festivals and most recently toured a multi-media collaboration based on *Beyond The Swelkie* and has appeared at various events since its publication including *Celtic Connections* and the Edinburgh International Book Festival with musicians Duncan Chisholm and Hamish Napier. In February, 2023 Jim along with Duncan and Hamish were invited to perform an extract of the show as part of the *Celtic Connections 30th Anniversary Gala Concert* in a sold out Glasgow Royal Concert Hall.

In April, 2022 Jim produced the sold out Concert for Ukraine which took place in Perth Concert Hall and brought together a huge cast of poets and musicians to raise funds for Ukrainian charities. Jim has subsequently appeared at similar events to read his own poetry in collaboration with musicians at sold out concerts in Eden Court, Inverness and the Usher Hall, Edinburgh.

His latest book *The Banes o the Turas* was published in November 2022 by Tippermuir Books. It is a poetical translation of and engagement with *Turas Viaggio*, by Pino Mereu, the Italian poet, producer, composer and friend of the late Hamish Henderson. *The Banes o the Turas*, in keeping with the traditions championed by both men, is a poetical owersett in Scots. It has been shortlisted for Poetry Book of the Year in the 2023 Scots Language Awards.

Tour Package

anonymous man in woods on a road to Calais said today's special offer once in a lifetime deal promised ATOL protected all your savings best seats new boat best in fleet free upgrades for early arrivals sea view seats free life jackets chances to see the King on every Border Agency ID Badge unique dusk sail-away party dancing on waves bobbing vomit sparkling lights cargo ships and ferries across busy dangerous waters opportunities to drown unlimited water albeit salted dedicated tour guide scams there until engine breaks down abandoned small intimate groups interesting strangers drifting stories to share seasoned travellers broken spirits guaranteed extra blankets not supplied displaced families welcome all ages catered for sorry no pets all-you-can-eat buffet bring your own despair futures buried free estimates welcome committee on arrival on the beaches unlimited access pass to secure accommodation free parking of all ambitions tailored packages of humiliation designed by experts honed on Empire's history of human rights abuse tailored packages of brutal oppression local citizen fear manipulated stoked by media escorted shore excursions broadcast live on television celebrities for seconds victims forever the world will know your journey never care for your name unlimited length of tour but stay alive guaranteed entry free prize draw top prize non-return flights to Rwanda for all the family free travel insurance limited baggage allowance dignity must be stored don't read the small print there isn't any this offer only found here enforced by a heartless government whose migrant ancestors cry bitter

/ ASHAMED

Highly commended - Louise Green for “The Solway Tide, 2023”



My career has covered many bases - journalism, broadcasting, editing and teaching and more recently, in therapeutic practice. My work has always been connected with the written word and includes my own poetry, short stories and non-fiction. After living in the West of England for many years, lockdown was followed by a particularly turbulent year. This prompted me to achieve a long-held ambition to move with my partner and family to Scotland; a homecoming of sorts. Living in a caravan on the Solway coast brought us the solace and healing we needed. After twelve months I began to write again and now have a

permanent home in the beautiful county of Dumfries and Galloway.

The Solway Tide, 2023

After half a lifetime inland, I'm learning again to listen to the sea
checking the thrum of its tidal pulse, hearing the wind change
as it heaves its shoulder, drawn back to the land it left behind

like a murderer returning again and again to the scene. Last
night it left bodies, sprawled on the shore as if strangled
by the seaweed that drapes their corpses all along

this coast from Annan to the Mull. Beaks upturned, wings
like broken coat-hangers, eyes dulled, feathers mired.
We'd come in search of sea glass. Fulmars lined the wreck

beyond the quick-sands, gannets stalked the scalloped foreshore.
where a notice warns that 'dead men's fingers' have been driven
inland by storms. But I know that's not what killed the herring gulls.

I wake each night to the turning tide. Full moon tomorrow but already
its rays harrow my dreams. One sleepless hour later the surf takes
up the low notes as it slaps the slipway, floods the inlet, hisses a retreat.

A handful of sea glass, rubbed pale by the sea's friction, glows on
my windowsill. A scatter of ragged triangles like outstretched wings.

Highly commended - Caroline Bracken for "Selective Mutism"



Caroline Bracken's poems have been published in New England Review, The North, Poetry Wales, Poetry News, Gutter, Howl, Best New British & Irish Poets 2019-2021, Poetry Jukebox, the Honest Ulsterman, Belfield Literary Review and elsewhere. She was shortlisted in the Manchester Poetry Prize 2020 and recently completed her debut collection 'Exteroception' with the assistance of awards from the Arts Council of Ireland and DLR Arts Office.

Selective Mutism

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. (Proverbs 18:21)

i. Spit it Out

Speech
was not a choice
words piled up inside
like matchsticks
pointed and ready
to burst into flames
should they scrape the sides
of my trachea
some did catch fire
their smoke
drifted out
in a whisper
sulphured
sometimes they stayed
stuck
searching for the exit
saliva dampened
their light
turned them to ashes.

ii. Why Most of my Twitter Followers Have me on Mute

I have nothing interesting to say about them.
I have nothing ~~interesting~~ to say about them.
I have nothing interesting to say ~~about them~~.
I have nothing interesting ~~to say about them~~.
I have nothing ~~interesting~~ to say ~~about them~~.
I have nothing ~~interesting~~ ~~to say about them~~.

iii. Is she Talking Yet?

My mother gave me Lucozade and flat 7Up	it didn't work
The doctor injected me with magic medicine	it didn't work
The local prayer group put me on their weekly wish list	it didn't work
I moved to a different school	it didn't work
My mother gave me Milk of Magnesia	it didn't work
Other mothers invited me to parties	it didn't work
A voice coach tried to make me sing	it didn't work

iv. Please Wait the Meeting Will Begin Shortly

On Zoom I keep my microphone on mute and my camera switched off
other attendees have curly blow-dried hair and bookshelf backdrops
with the latest taste in literature and bouquets of rare flowers
flown in from countries they've never set foot in state
their opinions everybody thinks they are a Seville orange
in a bowl of Pink Lady apples

If I turned my camera on they would see uncurated bookshelves which I visit
daily and am often surprised by what I find there: *Creativity and its Contexts*
The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde *The Long Shadow of Temperament*
sometimes I find books which have not been published yet
and others I don't remember buying or reading
I treasure them all as a child cherishes her hairless dolls

If I un-muted my microphone they would hear distant techno from my son's room
the street below my window throwing the sound of car engines
cyclists shouting slogans seagulls cries breaking in now and then
every fifteen minutes a train driving to or from the city
at night they might hear ropes chiming off yacht masts
from me they would hear nothing

v. Just Because the Sea Can't Speak Doesn't Mean it's Not Saying Something

Asking the sea why it does not speak
will not make it break its silence.

Why not allow it to flog its white horses
grow one million species in its underbelly

Why not play above or under its surface
sail treasure-dive windsurf finswim

Why not let it carry us to lands hotter or colder
than our own transport newcomers to our shores

Why not taste from its plate
carrageen moss mussels oysters

Why not sit on a beach and stare at it
for hours until words rise like a tide in you?

vi. Quantum Superposition

My voice is trapped inside a box/ it is Schrodinger's
cat both dead and alive at the same time/ maybe it's
the cat that got my tongue/ Jessi-cat was named Cat
of the Year for helping her owner/ who never spoke
before he got Jessi-cat/ he whispered *I love you* into
Jessi-cat's ear as he stroked her fur/ they appeared
on breakfast TV but the owner did not speak for the
cameras or even look at them/ Jessi- cat did not purr/
the presenter seemed disappointed in the lack of speech
and lack of proof that Jessi-cat had actually performed
a miracle/ I had a cat long ago but it ran away/ perhaps
I should get another one to teach me how to open the
box / I could stroke its fur/ feel it purr/ whisper in its ear
Me Ow

Highly commended - Simon Maddrell for “Knockaloe Camp”



Simon Maddrell (he/him/they) is a queer Manx poet, editor and educator living in Brighton & Hove.

Simon is published in numerous anthologies and publications including AMBIT, Butcher’s Dog, The Moth, The Rialto, Poetry Wales, Stand, Under the Radar.

Simon’s four pamphlets:

2020 — Throatbone, UnCollected Press; Queerfella, which jointly-won The Rialto Open Pamphlet Competition.

2023 — Isle of Sin, Polari Press; The Whole Island, Valley Press

Knockaloe Camp

Knockaloe WWI Internment Camp, 1914-1919.

Those assigned male on entry were confined to sub-camps of a thousand each — twenty-three units in total, just like

this couplet form creates the whole. Varieties of shows — theatre plays, concerts & comedy — camp entertainment

with many tens of thousands of gender holes in its casts. Presenting as female was now a possibility for countless

internees — who grabbed high-heels & lipstick illusions, grasped those pearl & wig allusions — whatever it took,

for whatever motivations — polyvalent not ambi-valent — just as those going on a stag do so for more than one reason

like believing the custom — *what happens in Knockaloe...* Otto, for example, plays drag for a laugh — *me in a dress!*

I’m no fräulein and certainly not beautiful! But gorgeous Emil revels in facing-up — with slapstick & smiles —

even though being noticed positively had not been their abiding experience — *Life is a masquerade, my dear!*

Gustav loved to boost morale — taking one for the team by dressing up and pinning gold stars onto his own chest.

Bruno fancied boys as a kid — of course he did love the leading roles — but he also prefers being out

front as a theatre attendant or backing up as a waitress — giving him free reign to flirt like a trooper —

skirting offence & defence from within a pinafore dress. Reinhardt — from deep within their no-womans-land —

believed in recreating heimat — that untranslatable feeling of hearth & home — *by using female impersonators*

to keep the camp feelings wearing a wholesome costume. Toni always knew she was a woman, and now also lives

as a female outside of the twenty theatres — in a way that presenting as a woman is the gateway to being herself.

One lieutenant felt — that for her — *presenting as female on stage was acting in accordance with their own nature,*

their real self — but doubted how many others noticed. Herwig reserved such thinking for his private diary —

I've realised recently how much better the world would be if some men were women, and some women were men.

An ambivalence that internment enabled certain freedoms whilst liberation for many — even for the lettered & noted

— took a year from war's end — after they lost or won their appeals against deportation to a place unknown

to them. Just as going back to where you came from doesn't always garner medals or garlands around the neck,

like one Margarete Klopfeisch who was interned during World War II at Birch Holme and probably also detained

in a ward — she was only really released from oppression
— in Germany where she died — in nineteen eighty-two.

With thanks to Heyam, Kit (2020) Gender nonconformity and military internment: curating the Knockaloe slides. *Critical Military Studies*, 6 (3-4). pp. 323-340.

Highly commended - Elle Becker for “Unfinished”



Elle Becker, an Arizona native, finds solace in the desert's embrace, calling it home despite her adventures elsewhere. Writing is her compass, guiding her through the twists and turns of life. When not immersed in the world of words, she treasures moments with loved ones, relishing the Arizona winter outdoors. She hides under a rock in the summer. A lover of art, literature, and crushing Scrabble victories, Elle dreams of embracing her inner dog enthusiast as a future crazy dog lady. She has previously won the prestigious Tempe Writing Competition in Poetry and has publications in *Five on the Fifth*, *Twenty-Two Twenty-Eight*, *The Mighty*, and

The Rare Bird Writes.

Unfinished

You were on page 72.

I tried to read it for you but

I couldn't get past that dog-eared page.

Plus your clothes were still in the dryer.

I couldn't wash them again for a long time after that no matter how much I wore them.

There's a hair on the soap in the shower
how could your hair be there when you're gone?

Then there's your toothbrush.

It was brand new, and everyone knows you keep a toothbrush for three months so how could a toothbrush outlive you

I can't understand

why you didn't fix the towel rack
the one that we knocked down when
we made love up against the wall and
after we finished

you started your new book but
you only got to page 72.
