



McLellan Poetry Prize 2026 - Scots Competition

First Prize: Shane Strachan, Aberdeen for 'Teem'

Highly Commended: Keith Wood, Edinburgh for 'Sad Heicht'

Congratulations to all of our very worthy winning and highly commended poets.

We would also like to extend our grateful thanks to Gerda Stevenson for her hard work in selecting the winning entries in this year's competitions, and to all the writers who took the time to enter the competitions and to trust us with their words and work.

Our Judge: Gerda Stevenson



Gerda Stevenson is an award-winning Scottish writer (in English and Scots), as well as actor, film and theatre director, and singer/songwriter. She has presented her poetry and prose at literary festivals throughout the UK and across Europe. Her stage play, *FEDERER VERSUS MURRAY* toured to New York, sponsored by the Scottish Government. Her poetry collections include: *IF THIS WERE REAL*, and *QUINES: Poems in Tribute to Women of Scotland* (both also published in Rome by Edizioni Ensemble in Italian translations), *TOMORROW'S FEAST*, and two collections of short stories, *LETTING GO*, and *CAT WUMMAN*. Nominations include: for the Gilder/Coigney International Theatre Award (New York), the Trad Awards as Scots Singer

of the Year for an album of her own songs, *Night Touches Day*, and three times for the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland. The founder of Scotland's leading women's theatre company, Stellar Quines, she has directed and appeared in many theatre productions and films, including *Braveheart*, winning BAFTA for her performance in Margaret Tait's feature film *Blue Black Permanent*. www.gerdastevenson.co.uk



First Prize: Shane Strachan for 'Teem'



Shane Strachan is a writer and performer based in Aberdeen, originally from Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire. He was the 2022-23 Scots Scribe at the National Library of Scotland for which he was awarded Scots Champion at the 2023 Scots Language Awards. His debut poetry collection *DWAMS* (Tapsalteerie) was nominated for Best Poetry Book at the 2024 Saltire Awards (Scotland's National Book Awards).

He has written and performed work with the National Theatre Scotland and was the Loud Poets North Slam Champion in 2024. He displayed his spoken-word film and exhibition 'The Bill Gibb Line' about the

Aberdeenshire fashion designer in Aberdeen Art Gallery

across 2020-21 before further commissions for V&A Dundee; this led to co-editing *Refashioning Bill Gibb for the 21st Century*, published by Bloomsbury in January 2026. He holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Aberdeen where he now lectures. www.shanestrachan.com

Teem

Inspired bi Florence Peake's sculpture

A body aleen disna hae muckle tae say
fir itsel.

It's in the teem

atween twa bodies

thit meaning is made:

the heart shapit space
anaith oor chaft-blades
fan wi kiss -
the almaist touch
o oor nebs

The gaups

atween the peaks

an trochs

in the falds

o oor claise,

an the falds

o oor skin
faniver wi baith
come
thegither.

Athoot this fite space, oor maitter
micht nae muckle maitter:

the fite space wi mould
as wi move
closer tee
an further apairt.

The fite space
o fit's lang been left
unspoken
an fit could still be said -

thon ellipsis atween

far we begin

and far we end.

Highly commended: Keith Wood for 'Sad Height'



Born in 1950 in Walsend-Upon-Tyne but lived most of his life (Since the age of eight) in Scotland (Scottish and Newcastle!). Educated at Forrester High School (Edinburgh); University of Aberdeen (MA hons English literature 1974); University of Edinburgh (MEd 1984?); University of Strathclyde (Msc Educational psychology 1991). Worked as a bus driver; teacher of English in West Lothian secondary schools and as educational psychologist in the Borders and Edinburgh. Studied a Chinese Martial Art (Wudan Tai Chi Chuan) for twenty years: Represented Scotland in martial arts competitions in 1989 (London) and 1991 (Hong Kong) and won Gold, Silver and Bronze medals for Scotland.

Sad Heicht

Ye were aye the first
Tae sclimm the sgurrs
Ayont the lave o us
Streechin aheid
Abune the heichts
Raxin oot tae yer ain starn
Kything a peerie speckit
Afar oan stobs an riggins
Frae Assynt tae Annapurna
Aye the first

Bit we niver jaloused
That ye wid try fer this
The uttermaist pinnacle
This sad heicht

Tae hyne awa
Afore us aw
Bit is it no jist like ye
Tae top oot noo
Ayont the lave o us
Aye the first.