

The prizewinning poets are:

McLellan Poetry Competition 2019		
Place	Name	Poem
First	Pam Brough	Marmalade
Second	Christopher James	The Milliner of Hudaydah
Third	Jane Kinton	A Potter contemplates
Commended	James Caruth	A Harvest of Stones
Commended	Emma Harding	The Pink and the White
Commended	Carole Bromley	Letter from Allan Bank
Commended	Joanna Will	Landing in Mozambique
Commended	Anna Woodford	16/17
Commended	Kitty Donnelly	Greenwich Foot Tunnel

Judge's Comments on the 2019 McLellan Poetry Prize winners

It's conventional for judges to remark that the task of adjudication has been difficult, but given the best poems entered for this year's McLellan competition it was a considerable challenge to try to place them in order. All the poems were absorbing; all of them were different. But decisions had to be made. And so ...

First Prize

The winner of First Prize is 'Marmalade', by Pam Brough, which in a sense does what it says on the tin. The poet's use of tercets, often with short lines, gives the poem mobility, while the variation of line-length and the frequent enjambment enable the play of wit (trolleys 'fill / with apprehension and no oranges') and make the most of a variety of rhythmic opportunities, for example the decisive iambic pentameter of stanza 4 line 3. The same intelligence moves the poem quickly from a low-key opening towards the various actings-out of the process of making marmalade. Sound and sense are satisfyingly unified: 'In winter, bitter oranges'; or 'so sour, their own skin puckers in shock / against the bitter flesh.' By this stage the poem has become dramatic rather than descriptive. Gradually it unifies the kitchen – small, private, at first not apparently part of the larger movement of time and events - with the global context. And while this happens the poem takes on a larger suggestiveness, where the yearly ritual with the oranges is shown to be a complex mixture of habit, creation, propitiation and fatalism. In the end, the grandmothers know, 'they'll be beyond all that'. Pam Brough has produced a rich, subtle, cunning poem whose meaning shifts and expands at every reading. I wondered at the occasional eccentric (i.e. missing) punctuation, but the poem's assurance was persuasive.

MARMALADE

It's January. They should be here.
Their season is so short -
what if this year they don't arrive?

Mothers now too old,
too careful of cold winds
fret over empty jars. What's not said

is how they need small certainties.
In winter, bitter oranges,
the ritual of making marmalade.

Daughters are sent with lists
to prowl the aisles
like acolytes in search of absolutes.

Trolleys, wire baskets
shift and congregate, fill
with apprehension and no oranges.

What if this lack signifies a sick world,
a system breaking down -
it's almost thrilling. But

the world's as yet un-wobbled by catastrophe.
In February two boxes, perching
edge of shelf, as if by accident -

Seville oranges. Wordlessly extreme -
so sour, their own skin puckers in shock
against the bitter flesh.

No-one - they say, the mothers,
going at them with knives -
would ever die from over-eating these.

These oranges are not content within themselves.
These oranges want to jump and jive
in a pan of sugar

to bubble and boil up
till the air steams sticky and fragrant
and the kitchen fills with it

till the last drops cling
to the tilt of a wooden spoon
and hang there, heavy with readiness.

How rare, this winter gold
the alchemy of sweetness
and sour flesh.

How well it sits upon the shelf
this winter hoard
secure beneath the sealed lid.

But they'll not gloat, these mothers.
They stroke the jars as if to settle them
then close the cupboard door.

Their land of just enough
boils down to a few safe platitudes
stored in a cupboard, dark.

When they were young
anticipation was a taste upon the tongue.
They have known lack

and would not miss
the easy year-round endless flow
of everything

for everything reminds them now
of something else
till there is only darkness to rely on.

And if there comes
a springtime of no swallows
a winter of no oranges -

they'll be beyond all that.
And who's to argue if they sit
and beat upon the cupboard door

and cry for certainties?
and say – we cannot move for misery
and falling out; the kitchen floor

piled up with bombings and dead children.
And who's to answer when they ask -
are we to blame?

Their only legacy is in these jars -
the bitter flesh, the wrinkled skin
preserved beneath the sealed lid.

They stroke the jars as if to settle them
and calculate, if they have made it well,
this marmalade might well outlast them all.

Pam Brough lives on a hill farm in the North Staffordshire Moorlands. For many years she taught part-time in the village primary school in Flash.

Writing for radio includes Moorland Matters on BBC Radio Stoke, and Diary of a Moorland Winter on BBC radio 4 with Prunella Scales. Her Rock Opera FRANK was screened on BBC One.

She wrote The Burma Play, which toured Britain with Arts Council/The Co-operative financial backing, along with other plays supported by the Scottish Arts Council.

In Cumbria she was commissioned to document the effects of Foot and Mouth through poetry and scribed conversations with farmers. This work became part of research by Nottingham University for The Social Impact of Foot and Mouth, published by Manchester University Press.

Arts Council England grant-aided the writing of Jinglebones, a long narrative poem linking the felling of a local forest with themes of war, particularly in Iraq.

She has worked as a creative writing tutor for the universities of Glasgow and Lancaster and for Borderland Voices, Leek.

Second Prize

In second place is ‘The Milliner of Hudaydah’, by Christopher James. This too is a poem about work, but its methods are quite different. The language is almost bare of metaphor, and the line-endings are mostly matched to grammatical phrasing, while the tone is close to neutral. The hat-maker in the besieged Yemeni city understands that in the scale of things black tea, aerial bombardment and attempted robbery are of a piece: the task is to endure, to work, to affirm through practicality. A weaker poem would have drawn a moral: instead it becomes hard to infer what such a moral might be. What we witness is a startling common sense allied to a degree of self-possession which may go unnoticed in the slaughter and unrecorded in the media. A strong, subtle piece of work

The Milliner of Hudaydah

I am the milliner of Hudaydah.
I doff my hat to no one – not Houthi nor Hadi.
You will find me on Zayad Street, the shop
with the purple door, below the high tower
and balcony that juts like the brim of a madhalla.
Each morning, I make black tea then listen
to the Apaches bomb the suburbs
then the jets that stitch the sky with fire.
I do not deal only in dollars and rial,
but trade my hats for dates and pistachios,
coffee and raisins: the currency of hunger.

I keep a Kalashnikov in an umbrella
and a measuring tape around my neck.
On the day they burned the grain silos
I took three families into my cellar where
we played hands of cards and sang songs of Sana’a.
I once chased away a man who broke in,
chopping a length of his hair with my scissors.
On quiet days, I plait date palms while
streaming Aljazeera on my Samsung.
I never leave my shop without my jambiya,
hidden beneath my Harris tweed.

I dream now of the lost land of Shem,
the country of Noah's son; the days of peace,
when boys played cricket against the wall
and I went camel jumping with my brothers.
I turn out ten madhallas before noon,
then fill them with all the rice I can buy.
I take these to the Bedouin women,
the black witches that drive goats
across the white stones. I accept no pay
except to watch their children eat,
knowing, one day, they will buy my hats.

Christopher James was educated at Newcastle and UEA where he studied for an MA in Creative Writing. A first prize winner of the Bridport, Ledbury, Oxford Brooks and National Poetry Competitions, he has also received an Eric Gregory Award from the Society of Authors. He has published several collections, including *Farewell to the Earth* (Arc, 2011), and *The Penguin Diaries* (Templar, 2017). He has also written three Sherlock Holmes novels and now lives in Suffolk with his family, folding bicycle and ukulele.

Third Prize

Third prize goes to Jane Kinton for ‘A Potter Contemplates the Funeral Cortège of Queen Eleanor, December 1290. Another poem about work! When I began to read it I was worried that it would turn out to be pastiche medievalism. Far from it. I was intrigued by the form, where a kind of iambic tetrameter is varied and extended as required, while intermittent rhyme is applied to decisive effect. The vocabulary is interestingly plain, and the tone of the whole piece is sombrely conversational. The theme is an ancient one, familiar in all times and places – that power and status confer no immunity to death. As James Shirley puts it in the 17th century ‘Death the Leveller’, ‘There is no armour against fate.’ The wheel of fortune – central to the medieval imagination – goes on turning, pitilessly. Himself bereaved, the potter has his own reading of the cycle of life and death: ‘and from the grounde there comes my clay / that pottes I make every day / and earthe my pottes and earthe sand earth shall we be / and earthe this queen with her bright beaute’. The departures from the metrical base are well judged, the result an unanswerable eloquence, whereby the proverbial is given a renewed force, which is one of the ancient tasks of poetry.

A Potter Contemplates The Funeral Cortege of Queen Eleanor, December 1290

I can nat slepe ne nat one bit
though nyght ys yfallen on thys toun
and quiet ys al that was thys day
so full of besynesse
hyt ys ten months I may nat slepe
but al the whyle awake al nyght

and I thys morn had scarcely seen
the sonne come up when on my doore
there knocked full loude
my neighbour John and he did cry
oh how my frende hast thou not heard
the messagers horne that blew so hye

what now sayd I ye woote well
that al is nought to me
I ne heede nothyng but worke and sorowe
and reken nat a reed for messagers

come out quod he hyt will do thee goode
to looken on knightes and processions
and the kyng and hys quene and eke to see
another that ys in grete miserie
hyt myght ease thy woe pardee

so I did leave my whele and pottes and
beholde griefs pageant pass me by
and I sawe the kyng so talle
and stronge and comely
pitee was hys eye was droopy
else there never was kyng more handsome
on his hors as black as nyght
and hys quene robed al in satyn
a golde corowne upon hir hede
in huge procession she lay there dede

and I sawe the kyng himselfe
full sorwful like hys hert would breke
to see hys wyfe hys lady swete
as stille as stoon and eke as colde

and thoughte me of mine owne deare wyfe
that was my love my very lyfe
pale whyte and washèd red with bloode
as with our childe she lay there dede
and al my blyss ys turned to woe

and Lady Fortune with hir wheele
trewly ne potter ys she no
that gentle holds the claye and turns
hys whele al carefully
and smoothes it rounde and rounde

fals fickle Fortune spins hir whele
full faste and to the floore she flinges
kynges and potters al alike
breke and broken on the grounde

and from the grounde there comes my claye
that pottes I make every daye
and earthe my pottes and earthe shall we be
and earthe thys quene with hir bryght beaute
in hir satyn and hir goldeyn corowne
a bier hir bedde so colde and harde
in the church thys nyght doth lye
now slepes she for eternitie

and yet thys kyng I sawe today
methinks he will nat slepe no wey
for wepyng even yf they hym yive
a feder bedde al smothe and softe
hyt ys ne better than a potteres bedde
when sorowe and grief are in hys mynde
and hyt did ease my woe pardee
that a kyng ne moore may slepe than me

Jane Kinton was brought up near Waltham Cross in Hertfordshire, site of one of the three surviving Eleanor Crosses, which was the inspiration for this poem. She studied English at Durham University, works in industry and plays the violin in any time she can spare from working and writing. Jane only started writing seriously in 2017. She has nearly finished her first novel and has just completed a Diploma in Creative Writing at Cambridge University Institute of Continuing Education. Jane has not had anything published before, except for a short autobiographical piece in *The Guardian*.

Commended

Kitty Donnelly's 'Greenwich Foot Tunnel' imagines a death, a man 'being stripped / from the fanfare of the day', with the tunnel as the passage out of the world. Donnelly skilfully creates a physical reality – 'river-cold, water-weight', dripping / cast-iron, sudden chill' which enables her to consider death in similarly specific terms: 'a word is happening / that won't find the tip / of your tongue.' She also builds in an apt pre-echo of the poem's closing couplet rhyme

Greenwich Foot Tunnel

For his coffin
he chose the irises
his mother brought him
in a dream.
I'm thinking of him
now as I descend
at Cutty Sark
to river-cold,
water-weight.
I'm thinking
*this is how it
might've been* –
dying, being torn
from the day
to walk beneath
dripping cast-
iron, leaving
food-stalls, faces,
reams and reams
of photographs.
Attempting to shout:
Stop! I need those
(*need those*, echoing),
knowing a word
is happening
that won't find
the tip of your tongue –
light spreading
like untrodden snow –
relief. Then letting go.

Kitty Donnelly lives in West Yorkshire. She has had poems published widely, including in Acumen, The Fenland Reed, Mslexia and Quadrant. She is currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has worked in the field of mental health for many years.

Commended

Joanna Will's 'Landing in Mozambique, January 1994' seems at first to stand at the border of poetry and reportage. It succeeds as a poem because of Will's eye not only for compelling detail, but also her command of passages of a pulsing music (as in stanzas 5-7) which help us to understand how to read the poem aloud. Will also leaves room for shifts in tone from the declamatory to the intimate and back, and for an exultant sense that no adventure should be without risk.

Landing in Mozambique, January 1994

So I flew into Maputo
with a suitcase full of Marmite and no plans.

Descending in the darkness,
the plane was kazapped by a bolt of lightning
but I was in no mood for omens.

My Regency terrace in Leamington Spa had been
as straight
and as white
as teeth too long in braces,

so I'd sold my old Saab to the milkman
and bought a one-way ticket straight down south.

And I was electrified by
streets smelling of roast chicken and black exhaust,
the heat a dark creature following me with its hot breath
and the night filled with the voices of a thousand thin dogs.

The sun rose, tinting the ocean a quiet lemon pink,
and I was the hummingbird darting from flower to flower,
I was the white duck carried upside-down by its feet to the party,
I was the grey-crowned crane spreading its wings and

soaring over burned-out buses full of bullet holes
and vast churches exploding with joy.

This was a city stunned by peace,
a famished city
where as a last fond farewell,
the Portuguese had driven their tractors into the sea
and the only things blossoming in the fields
were landmines.

This was a war-sick country,
where all the city's rats had been roasted
and where Olive my little tortoiseshell cat
eventually reappeared
as a Davy Crockett hat.

Where I put on my clean cotton frock
and strode in car-tyre flip-flops
along burst pavements in the shade of acacias,

still expecting cars to stop for me at zebra crossings
but not expecting my shiny watch
to be snatched from my wrist
after thirty seconds in the central market.

And the shadowy suburb of Mafalala was blessed each night
by the Tetrapak wine of oblivion,
where we danced to the rapturous rhythms of Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens,
and the one-legged boy with Kalashikov crutches
was by far the best dancer.

Where I was enchanted for a spell
by a dreadlocked artist who made sculptures from rifles and raffia,
rolled joints of salvation from the pages of the Bible
and carefully collected
all ten of my nail-clippings for his own dark arts.

And at weekends I sat outside the cafe
with my basket of unpronounceable fruit
beneath a billion bluebell jacaranda blossoms
fizzing against the hundred-Watt sky,
writing flimsy airmails home,

writing
that I was sitting at the Califo B
(the California Bar
before some letters dropped off!)
that I'd just ordered *cafe com leite*
and a *pastel de nata*,
that the streetboys kept calling to me
sista! sista!
hawking tortoises and single cigarettes
and angling for my white sugar,

but omitting to mention
the cat's surprising metamorphosis into a hat,
the band of pale skin at my wrist,
the joints rolled from the Gospel of John
and the fact that I had
no plans
no plans at all
to come home.

Joanna Will spent many years in Tanzania and Mozambique teaching English Literature, training teachers, translating for the UN and writing three films which were shot in Mozambique and South Africa. She set up the Black Dog Writing Group in 2008 soon after arriving in Devon, and feels very fortunate to have a job that surrounds her with lovely creative people. Writing the guidebook Lesser-Known Lyme Regis in 2014 was a great educational experience but it was a great strain having to stick to the facts at the expense of some excellent stories. She's currently trying to get a film script about a one-legged car thief produced in Mozambique.

Commended

Carole Bromley's 'Letter from Allan Bank' is a brief and startling glimpse of married life from the viewpoint of Mary Hutchinson, who married William Wordsworth only to find, like Princess Diana, that a third party was always in the offing – Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy. 'When he came to ask / for my hand, her cold pork was still in his pocket!' Mary, unlike William and Dorothy, doesn't see things in elevated literary terms, but gives her mother an excruciatingly funny account of the toothless Dorothy and her ceaseless cake-making. Bromley leaves open the question of whether Jane considers Mary's behaviour to be something more than an unwarranted intrusion.

Letter from Allan Bank

Oh Mama, I had the strangest dream. The house was on fire
and William propped up in bed. I shouted but no words came.
Woke up and there she was in the doorway, finger on lips, smiling.

It's so cold! No wonder William never liked this house.
Dorothy's still here, giving him those weird looks.
She took to her bed on our wedding day,

wore my ring all the night before. It was still warm
when he slipped it on my finger. When he came to ask
for my hand, her cold pork was still in his pocket!

She walks into Ambleside every day without fail,
tapestry bag under her arm, to fetch the post. And she bakes.
Cakes and more cakes. Not a tooth in her head.

Carole Bromley is from York. She has three collections with Smith/Doorstop, including a recent children's book, *Blast Off!* and a fourth, *The Peregrine Falcons of York Minster*, due out from Valley Press next year. Winner of a number of prizes, including the 2019 Hamish Canham Award, Carole is delighted the judge chose her poem which was written at Wordsworth's desk in Allan House, overlooking Grasmere.

Commended

James Caruth's 'A Harvest of Stones' has an impact out of all proportion to its apparent means. The speaker reports an older woman recalling farming life in Ireland – landscape, moonlight, animals, the fact that her family only rented the land from which they derived a yearly 'harvest of stones', with 'God somewhere in the darkness'. It's a way of life that seems at the mercy of an immutable injustice, but the tone is stoic. I was slightly reminded of the work of John Montague. Caruth's skill lies in letting things seem to speak for themselves, in the subtle deployment of rhyme and caesura to lend resonance to plain-spokenness.

A HARVEST OF STONES

for Elizabeth Scott

That September the rains came early,
light fading by mid-afternoon
so she'd sit by the fire knitting, telling me
of the small farm near Mullaghbawn
where on days like these she'd lean
on the jamb of the door watching the sky
altering over Slieve Gullion.
How her people had cleared those fields;
each year a harvest of stones.
How not an inch was theirs, not a blade of grass.
She'd cup her hands to catch the moon
while things moved in the dusk,
a beast settling in the low pasture,
the rill of water in a ditch, a breeze
shivering a hedgerow, and God
somewhere in the darkness.

James Caruth was born in Belfast but has lived in Sheffield for the last 33 years. His first collection *A Stone's Throw* was published by Staple in 2007.

Dark Peak a long sequence appeared from Longbarrow in 2008 followed by *Marking The Lambs with Smith Doorstop* in 2010.

His poems have appeared in a number of anthologies including The Sheffield Anthology (2012); Cast – The Poetry Business Book of New Contemporary Poets (2014) and One For The Road (2017).

His pamphlet The Death of Narrative was an overall winner of the 2013/2014 Poetry Business Competition judged by Carol Ann Duffy.

His last pamphlet Narrow Water was published by Poetry Salzburg in 2017.

Commended

Anna Woodford's '16/17' brings a terrific exuberant fizzing energy to the moment when adolescence begins to offer a glimpse of adult freedom in the offing – the city, going out, sex, the urgent need to get on with life before the window closes again. Woodford crowds the poem with detail, often to comic effect, while maintaining the poem's headlong momentum: 'Leave! says the door /.../...or be an adult crushed like a martyr but under the weight / of old trophies and Garfields.' Just so.

16/17

I have to go out half ready, badly made up, so
one day I will be ready completely. It will take years.
I have tights for a hairband and my mother's tights on
and a little skirt and big boots to argue
with the little skirt (my childhood is a scrap
of toilet paper stuck to my heel). I have concealer,
Juicy Fruit, Silk Cut, a towel as well as a tampon
and am swinging my hair as though through the *Timotei* field
on my way to the bus-stop. One honk, one put-down
from a wound-down car window and the metaphorical tray
I am carrying will clatter. Now I can marry, drive a moped,
have sex, leave school – I am going back to school
after two years at home in front of an artificial fire.
I have the password (16!) to the office of Newcastle
Careers Guidance. Newcastle is Annacastle upon Tyne.
It is time chimes the golden girl in the nip on Blackett Street's
art deco clock. Newcastle is the paved path
to London, to Liverpool, to Life, Literature and Thought.
For now, Newcastle is Newcastle College and The Broken Doll.
My mother keeps the door to the city on the sneck at night
and goes to snuggle in with my father. Leave! says the door,
Come back with a love-bite, L-plates, a portfolio of your own
work or be an adult left behind in a childhood
bedroom, crushed like a martyr but under the weight
of old trophies and Garfields. I need to rise out of my pit
like the Iron Man and get my clank on. I need to stop
hanging around. Already the circus of my adolescence

is being disbanded, its tigers and one trick ponies set free.
Next year, there will be flatmates, *Femidoms*, eighths
for breakfast, Nirvana will be everywhere and
Rich will be rattling my window with pebbles.

Anna Woodford's latest poetry collection is *Changing Room* (Salt, 2018). She is Royal
Literary Fund Fellow at Newcastle University.

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Commended

Emma Harding's 'The Pink and the White' deals with a suicide bombing in Moscow. It powerfully balances plain notation – 'fashion mags on lipsticks, film stars' while using underplayed rhyming and sonnet form to turn the facts – the 'quiet schoolteacher from Dagestan', the 'remote detonator', into a lament. Where the Hail Mary is usually a prayer for intercession, Harding's poem ends by addressing 'all the Marys' sacrificed for all the violent causes. It's richly ambiguous in its handling of a subject with many pitfalls.

The Pink and the White

A whitewashed house, a hornbeam,
all that daughters hide from fathers.
In Mariam's magenta bedroom
fashion mags on lipsticks, film stars

pedicures, holy war, Gazavat.
This quiet schoolteacher from Dagestan
at Lubyanka metro, gravid with a belt
whose fire will be delivered by a man's

remote detonator. Her father knew her
from her severed head, her pink veil.

We too are seeking answers

She knows. Allah knows. That's all.

Mariam, Mariya, Mairead, Mariel
all the Marys, hail.

Emma Harding lives in Kent. Her poems have been published in various magazines and anthologies including Poetry Review, Stand, Magma, Acumen and The North.