



**Forward  
Prizes  
for Poetry**

**NEWS RELEASE // Monday 12 June 2017**

**For further information contact:**

Annabel Robinson / Ashton Bainbridge

FMcM Associates, 020 7405 7422

[annabelr@fmcm.co.uk](mailto:annabelr@fmcm.co.uk) / [ashtonb@fmcm.co.uk](mailto:ashtonb@fmcm.co.uk)

**BOOKMARK**

## **2017 Forward Prizes for Poetry shortlists: delights and provocations**

**Media Release – Monday 12 June 2017:** The shortlists for Britain's most coveted poetry awards – **the Forward Prizes for Poetry** – are announced today by jury chair **Andrew Marr**.

The prizes, which celebrate the best new poetry published in the British Isles, honour both established poets and emerging writers with three distinct awards: **Best Collection**, **Best First Collection** and **Best Single Poem**. They are sponsored by Bookmark Content, the content and communications company.

Poets from Ireland and the Caribbean are particularly well-represented this year, alongside striking new voices from America and Africa. Subjects treated include exile, lost parents, barnacle geese, sexual confessions, political satire, a daredevil female aviator, nativity plays, sunken slave ships, psychoanalysis, the library of Alexandria and wars in Vietnam and Uganda. Music and memory feature strongly, both as themes, and, discreetly, in rhythms evoking all forms of song: from lullabies to jazz. Taken together – one-liners, interrogations, psalms and all – these shortlists show contemporary poetry as the magpie of art-forms, borrowing delightedly from science, drama, music, polemic and history.

As **Michael Longley**, at 77, the oldest of the poets shortlisted, says: "Poetry takes advantage of all the things that words do." His collection *Angel Hill*, up for the Best Collection Award, explores the landscapes of Ireland and Scotland through love poems, elegies and reflections on the Troubles. It sits alongside **Emily Berry's** *Stranger, Baby*, an articulation of childhood bereavement; **Tara Bergin's** *The Tragic Death of Eleanor Marx* which draws on folksong, fairytale and theatrical monologue; **Nuar Alsadir's** *Fourth Person Singular*, a New York psychoanalyst's take on identity, and **Sinead Morrissey's** *On Balance*, which references fabled feats of engineering – the Titanic, Marconi's radio – to explore states of balance and imbalance.

**Without poetry, you cannot properly understand the world you live in**

**Andrew Marr, chair of the 2017 Forward Prizes jury**, says: "*Reading so many collections of poems over a relatively short period gives one an intense and useful overview of the condition of poetry in English now. Though an enthusiastic reader of poetry all my life, I had had no idea of the variety of the delights and provocations lying all around me. I came away more than ever convinced that if you read journalism alone, or history alone, and you omit contemporary poetry, then you cannot properly understand the world you live in.*"

**Susannah Herbert, director of the Forward Arts Foundation which runs the Forward Prizes for Poetry**, says: "*This is a bold shortlist, full of new names, which take the wider world for their inspiration rather than sticking to territory marked safe for poetry. These are poems that demand and reward close attention from all the senses.*"

## THE 2017 FORWARD PRIZES FOR POETRY SHORTLISTS

### The 2017 Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000)

Nuar Alsadir – Fourth Person Singular (Liverpool University Press)  
Tara Bergin – The Tragic Death of Eleanor Marx (Carcanet)  
Emily Berry – Stranger, Baby (Faber & Faber)  
Michael Longley – Angel Hill (Cape Poetry)  
Sinead Morrissey – On Balance (Carcanet)

### The 2017 Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection (£5,000)

Maria Apichella – Psalmody (Eyewear Publishing)  
Richard Georges – Make Us All Islands (Shearsman Books)  
Eric Langley – Raking Light (Carcanet)  
Nick Makoha – Kingdom of Gravity (Peepal Tree Press)  
Ocean Vuong – Night Sky with Exit Wounds (Cape Poetry)

### The 2017 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (£1,000)

Malika Booker – Nine Nights (Poetry Review)  
Mary Jean Chan - // (Ambit)  
Harmony Holiday – The City Admits no Wrongdoing (Prac Crit)  
Ishion Hutchinson – Nightfall, Jane Ash Corner, St. Thomas (The Well Review)  
Ian Patterson – The Plenty of Nothing (PN Review)

The 2017 judging panel is chaired by journalist and broadcaster **Andrew Marr**, poets **Ian Duhig** and **Mona Arshi**, former Children’s Laureate **Chris Riddell** and writer and academic **Sandeep Parmar**. The jury read 186 new collections and 212 single poems.

The Forward Prizes, sponsored since their launch in 1992 by the content marketing agency, **Bookmark** (formerly Forward Worldwide), have been won by some of the best-loved names in poetry: Thom Gunn, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Carol Ann Duffy and Kathleen Jamie. They are awarded by the Forward Arts Foundation, and supported by Arts Council England.

The awards will be presented at a special event at the Royal Festival Hall on **Thursday 21 September**, featuring readings from all the shortlisted books. The 26th annual *Forward Book of Poetry*, containing the judges’ choice of the year’s poems will be launched on the same day. The event takes place one week before National Poetry Day – Thursday 28 September - and marks the start of a season of nationwide poetry celebrations.

Tickets for the awards ceremony and readings can be found at:  
<https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/119655-forward-prizes-poetry-2017-2017>

For further information, visit [www.forwardartsfoundation.org](http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org) or join the conversation at @forwardprizes #forwardprizes.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

## Notes to editors

1. Biographies of the shortlisted poets and samples of their work can be found on [www.forwardartsfoundation.org/forward-prizes-for-poetry](http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org/forward-prizes-for-poetry)
2. The Forward Prizes are among the most sought after accolades in the UK and Ireland for established and emerging poets. With a total value of £16,000, the prizes are in three categories: the Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000), the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection (£5,000) and the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (£1,000)
3. Bookmark, the world-leading content and communications company, has been the sponsor and key supporter of the Forward Prizes for Poetry since they were first awarded in 1992. Bookmark creates engaging, shareable content in multiple formats and languages: it has offices in the UK, Canada, the US, Peru, Chile and China and its clients include Patek Philippe, Air Canada, American Express, LATAM, Dyson, Lindt, Standard Life and Tesco. Until 2016, Bookmark traded as Forward Worldwide. For more information, see @BookmarkContent and [bookmarkcontent.com](http://bookmarkcontent.com).
4. Forward Arts Foundation, which runs the Forward Prizes for Poetry, celebrates excellence in poetry and widens its audience by encouraging the enjoyment of poems. An Arts Council England National Portfolio organisation, it also co-ordinates National Poetry Day. Find it at [www.forwardartsfoundation.org](http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org) @forwardprizes and @poetrydayuk.
5. Past winners of the Forward Prize for Best Collection are: Vahni Capildeo *Measure of Expatriation* (Carcenet) 2016, Claudia Rankine *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Penguin) 2015, Kei Miller *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcenet) 2014, Michael Symmons Roberts *Drysalter* (Cape Poetry) 2013, Jorie Graham *PLACE* (Carcenet) 2012, John Burnside *Black Cat Bone* (Cape Poetry) 2011, Seamus Heaney *Human Chain* (Faber & Faber) 2010, Don Paterson *Rain* (Faber & Faber) 2009, Mick Imlah *The Lost Leader* (Faber & Faber) 2008, Sean O'Brien *The Drowned Book* (Picador Poetry) 2007, Robin Robertson *Swithering* (Picador Poetry) 2006, David Harsent *Legion* (Faber & Faber) 2005, Kathleen Jamie *The Tree House* (Picador Poetry) 2004, Ciaran Carson *Breaking News* (Gallery Press) 2003, Peter Porter *Max is Missing* (Picador Poetry) 2002, Sean O'Brien *Downriver* (Picador Poetry) 2001, Michael Donaghy *Conjure* (Picador Poetry) 2000, Jo Shapcott *My Life Asleep* (OUP) 1999, Ted Hughes *Birthday Letters* (Faber & Faber) 1998, Jamie McKendrick *The Marble Fly* (OUP) 1997, John Fuller *Stones and Fires* (Chatto) 1996, Sean O'Brien *Ghost Train* (OUP) 1995, Alan Jenkins *Harm* (Chatto) 1994, Carol Ann Duffy *Mean Time* (Anvil Press) 1993 and Thom Gunn *The Man with Night Sweats* (Faber & Faber) 1992. Bookmark, the world-leading content and communications company, has been the sponsor and key supporter of the Forward Prizes for Poetry since they were first awarded in 1992. Bookmark creates engaging, shareable content in multiple formats and languages: it has offices in the UK, Canada, the US, Peru, Chile and China and its clients include Patek Philippe, Air Canada, American Express, LATAM, Dyson, Lindt, Standard Life and Tesco.

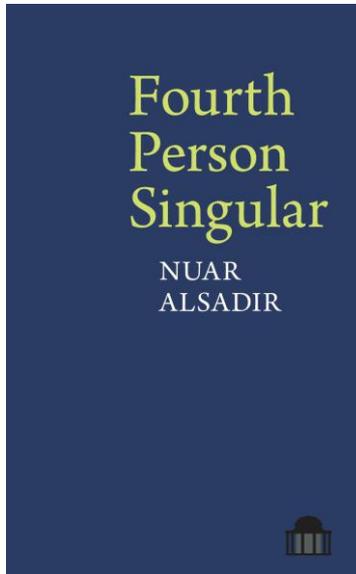
# BOOKM/ARK



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

## 2017 Forward Prize for Best Collection - shortlist biographies

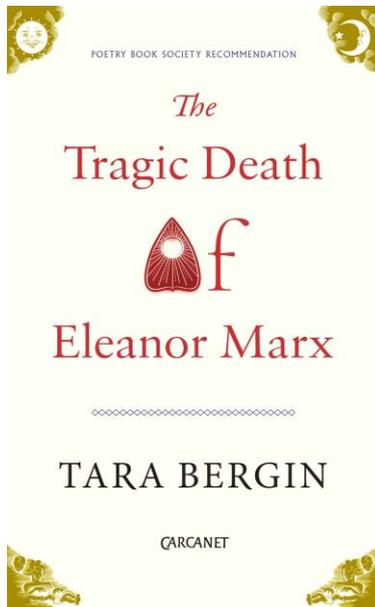
### Nuar Alsadir – *Fourth Person Singular* (Liverpool University Press)



Nuar Alsadir (b. New Haven, Connecticut) works as a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst and academic in New York. 'The mind doesn't see images, hear, smell, perceive in tidy succession,' she says. 'That cacophonous chaos, which visual arts often capture so vividly, is exciting to me.'

Alsadir, born of Iraqi parents, responded strongly to the coverage of the Iraqi war. 'I began to realize the extent to which the chaos of the external world – and my internal world – demanded accurate expression. More than ever, the ready-made forms did not feel relevant to me or able to truthfully hold what the world – or I – had become.' *Fourth Person Singular* is a deeply politically engaged book, which dares readers into new ways of ordering their thoughts and the information around them.

### Tara Bergin – *The Tragic Death of Eleanor Marx* (Carcenet)

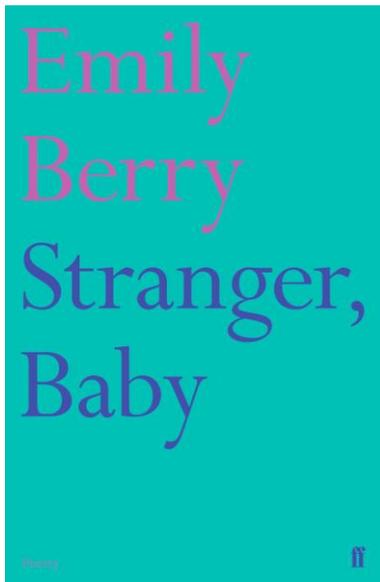


Tara Bergin (b. 1974, Dublin) writes that 'traditional songs ... appeal to me a great deal and they have influenced much of my writing'.

In this, her second collection, Bergin plays with various narratives, most notably those recounting the deaths of Eleanor Marx (daughter of Karl) and of Flaubert's Emma Bovary. These poems are intellectually complex – a deep commentary on the politics of gender and family - while remaining songlike and, as she writes, 'enjoyable to listen to'.

In 2012 Bergin completed a PhD on Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky, and now lives in Yorkshire. She is interested in 'changes that happen to English when it is spoken by non-English voices' and in the relationship between her native Ireland and other countries.

## Emily Berry – *Stranger, Baby* (Faber & Faber)

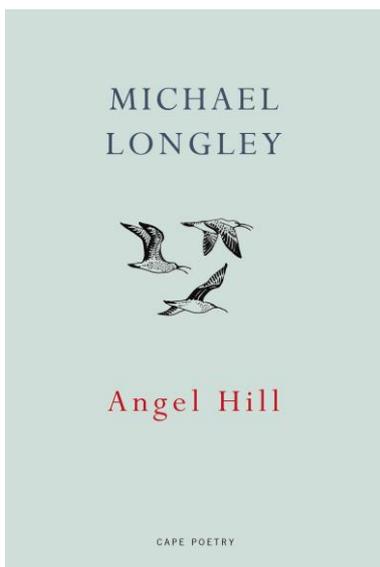


Emily Berry (b. 1981, London), editor of *The Poetry Review*, is shortlisted for her second book, *Stranger, Baby*. It addresses, she says 'the long shadow cast by the loss of a mother in childhood – my own loss'.

Her first book, *Dear Boy*, won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2013. That book focused on eerie, elliptical narratives and askance, lively interactions with the discourse around mental health, gender, domestic (dis)harmony and psychoanalysis.

*Stranger, Baby* drives those strategies into a more personally intimate space. 'There are', she says, 'a lot of other people's words in the book alongside my own. So it's lonely but it's also companionable.'

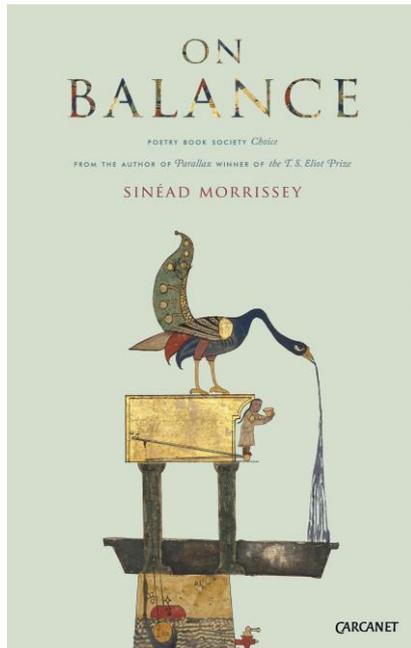
## Michael Longley – *Angel Hill* (Cape Poetry)



Michael Longley (b. 1939, Belfast) wrote his first poem over sixty years ago, at the age of 16, 'in order to impress a girlfriend'. His poetry has continued to impress widely: his honours include the Whitbread Poetry Award, the Hawthornden Prize, the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and, most recently, the PEN Pinter Prize. His friend, the late Seamus Heaney, described him as 'a custodian of griefs and wonders'.

Longley, who cites Edward Thomas and W B Yeats as touchstones, demonstrates in *Angel Hill* a luminous and engaged sparseness of style. He says: 'My work has become simpler as I have grown older ... writing a poem is a journey into the unknown. Poetry is a mystery'. Invested in nature and morality, *Angel Hill* finds beautiful ground for that mystery.

## Sinead Morrissey – On Balance (Carcenet)



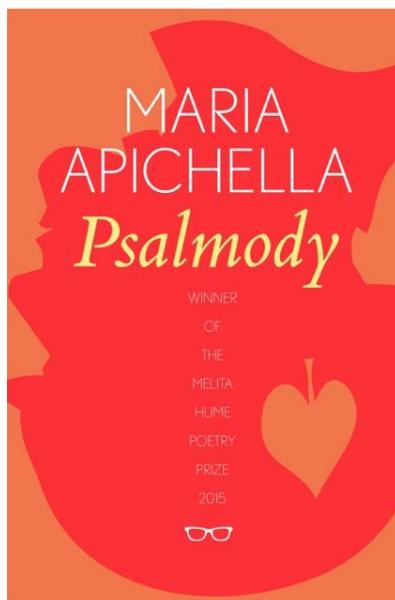
Sinead Morrissey (b. 1972, Portadown, County Armagh) was Belfast's inaugural Poet Laureate until 2016, and is now Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Newcastle. She has published five collections, including the 2013 T. S. Eliot Prize-winning *Parallax*.

Morrissey describes *On Balance* as her 'most cohesive book' to date. 'Just as it says on the tin, the book interrogates ideas of balance – physical balance, structural balance, gender balance, ecological balance, life-death balance – and it does so using the high-wire act of poetic form as a conduit for that exploration.'

Combining a subtlety of touch with a powerful turn of phrase – one character finds in all things 'the über-florid signature of God' – Morrissey here holds narrative and lyric in delicate relation.

## 2017 Forward Prize for Best First Collection – shortlist biographies

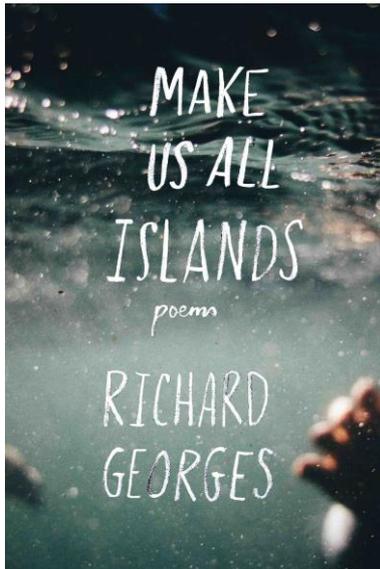
### Maria Apichella – Psalmody (Eyewear Publishing)



Maria Apichella (b. 1985, Oxford) completed her PhD at the University of Aberystwyth, combining study with several jobs: 'Every aspect of life feeds into writing: from teaching to cleaning toilets, to working in a call centre by night to sitting in the Welsh National Library reading Dylan Thomas in rainy afternoons.'

Apichella won the Melita Hume Poetry Prize for the manuscript which became *Psalmody*. 'I used Psalm-like rhythms, metaphors and images, gaining inspiration from the human body, food and place.' *Psalmody* is also vividly worldly and contemporary in its depiction of the relationship between the religious speaker and her atheist partner: 'I love to argue back, / Celtic talker, poet-mouth; you'll never stop exploring, / taking everything apart like a nerd.'

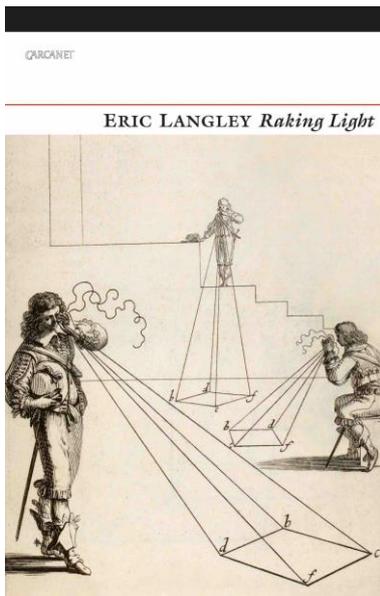
## Richard Georges – Make Us All Islands (Shearsman Books)



Richard Georges (b. 1982, Port of Spain, Trinidad) was raised and now lives in the British Virgin Islands. As an undergraduate, he found himself ‘falling in love with images and rhyme and would find parallels between writers like Walcott and Eliot, and lyrical rappers like Nas and Eminem.’

*Make Us All Islands* is various, familiar and challenging by turns, but keeps returning to what Georges describes as its ‘bones’: ‘Those bones speak to certain submerged narratives of the British Virgin Islands, a place which is rich in histories that aren’t well understood here, and almost unknown abroad. *Make Us All Islands* attempts to write those narratives – shipwrecked human cargoes - into the Caribbean landscape, to fill these island-sized gaps.’

## Eric Langley – Raking Light (Carcenet)



Eric Langley (b. 1977, Birmingham) lectures in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature at UCL. He turned to writing poems in 2011, after the death of his father – the award-winning poet R. F. Langley. ‘When the real poet of the family died, I found that writing poetry was a way of continuing conversations which we’d had.’

He is fascinated by ‘connections between people (eyebeams, communication, arrows, interactions traversing the interim between people, verbal and emotional transmissions).’ *Raking Light* is simultaneously riotous and high-minded, metaphysical and modern, austere and romantic. ‘I take my cue from the art restoration technique of “raking light”, when a beam is shone across the picture plane to reveal over-painting, under-drawing, the artist’s first intentions, buried depths: *pentimenti*, or regrets.’

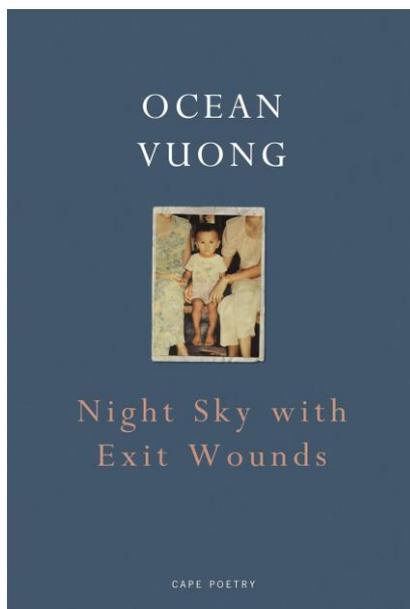
## Nick Makoha – Kingdom of Gravity (Peepal Tree Press)



Nick Makoha (b. 1974, Lumino, Uganda) fled Uganda's civil war and Idi Amin's tyranny as a boy. The childhood hobby of poetry became a sense of vocation when he completed a degree in Biochemistry in the UK. On daring to quit his London nine-to-five banking job, he set fire to his suits: 'I did this to remind me that I did not want an easy way back. I wanted to give my all to the art of writing.'

The poet Kwame Dawes, teaching at Arvon, first made him feel like a poet: 'He asked me, 'What type of poet do you want to be; one that obscures or one that reveals?' Till then I felt like I was treading water but after that conversation I was aware of a burning purpose forming inside of me.' That purpose is manifest in *Kingdom of Gravity*, a searing, mysterious contemplation of exile, fatherhood and violence.

## Ocean Vuong – Night Sky with Exit Wounds (Cape Poetry)



Ocean Vuong (b. 1988, near Saigon, Vietnam) was the first member of his immediate family to be able to read or write but has been around the oral tradition of poetry since birth. A refugee, he moved with his mother to the US at the age of two. He lives in New York, and studied with Ben Lerner at Brooklyn College.

In its powerful contemplations of brutality, family and sexuality, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* is almost religious and almost profane. This is poetry of questions, which refuses to separate the intensely personal from the globally political. It's also an investigation into writing. Vuong says he is 'interested in that shifting of meaning and usage because it feels innately Queer to me – how language, like people, can be perpetually in flux.' Words, he says 'are, in a sense, bodies moving from one space to another.'

## Forward Prize for Best Single Poem – shortlist biographies

**Malika Booker** (b. 1970, London) is the author of *Breadfruit* (flipped eye, 2007), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and *Pepper Seed* (Peepal Tree Press, 2013). She was the inaugural Poet in Residence at the Royal Shakespeare Company and a Fellow of both Cave Canem and The Complete Works. Her work appears alongside that of Sharon Olds and Warsan Shire in *Penguin Modern Poets 3*.

Booker is of Guyanese and Grenadian parentage, and 'Nine Nights' is taken from a series of poems around Caribbean funerals. The poem takes the form of nine fragments, and charts a vivid intersection between biblical and Grenadian funeral rites: 'Lazarus dash way hymns and cuss words from he house with the heavy bass of a thumping speaker box.'

**Mary Jean Chan** (b. 1990, Hong Kong) has been a Fellow of Callaloo and VONA, and is currently a Research Associate at the Royal Holloway Poetics Research Centre at the University of London.

She says her shortlisted poem '//' was 'born out of an intensely personal experience, and also informed by ruminations on the state of mental health amongst LGBTQ youths in a city that I flee from, yet constantly wish to return to.' Its rolling couplets manage to be simultaneously intimate, passionate and politically widely-scoped: 'How many / times have you and I wondered about leaving our bodies / behind, the way many of us have already left?'

**Harmony Holiday** (b. 1982, Waterloo, Iowa) is the author of books including *Negro League Baseball*, *Go Find Your Father/A Famous Blues* and *Hollywood Forever*.

As the daughter of the musician Jimmy Holiday, she was immersed in music from early childhood: 'I just thought it was part of being human, to communicate in some form of sound grammar outside of the mundane daily rhythms and speech patterns. I never really separated poetry from music and music from the body and dance, from ways of moving through space and time.'

Her poem, 'The City Admits No Wrongdoing' is built around Billie Holiday, as a singer, an icon and a subject of 'poised suffering'. Written without line-breaks, it finds its urgent rhythm in the patterns of unexpected connections: 'She loved candies. We need sugar. We run on sugar. Melanin is carbon. Carbon is sugar. Billie is shook, hurry, you love her.'

**Ishion Hutchinson** (b. 1983, Port Antonio, Jamaica) teaches at Cornell University. His collections include *Far District* (Peepal Tree Press, 2010) and *House of Lords and Commons* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), to be published in the UK by Faber & Faber. He first felt himself to be a poet early in childhood: it became a vocation followed in high school. 'The rest is devotion and luck.' That luck includes the right teachers, the right books, though he also credits his imagination's growth to his Jamaican background, particularly 'the landscape – its elemental power as much as the force of its historical current.'

Hutchinson's poem, 'Nightfall, Jane Ash Corner, St. Thomas' seeks to overlay landscape with history and the movements of culture: 'Progress is back, but centuries / are one here.' The poem handles its materials delicately, allowing them to remain both symbolic and sensual. 'The first solid draft,' he writes, 'came last year after I read a poem called 'That Place', by R.S. Thomas, and something blistering and striking in the words 'To return to after the bitter / Migrations,' jolted me towards my poem.'

**Ian Patterson** (b. 1948, Birmingham) has taught English for almost twenty years at Queens' College, Cambridge. His academic books include *Guernica and Total War* (Profile, 2007). He's published numerous works of poetry, including *Time to Get Here: Selected Poems 1969-2002* (Salt, 2003), *Still Life* (Oystercatcher Press, 2015) and *Bound To Be* (Equipage, 2017).

Patterson's poetry comes from 'an awareness that poems were a strange form of knowledge with the capacity to arouse intuitive or unconscious responses, almost like echoes of being'. 'The Plenty of Nothing' is an elegy to his late wife, the writer Jenny Diski. It's a moving, unsettled and capacious poem, enacting the attempt to 'get enough pink forms to reconcile / two worlds of the mind', 'two / true stories in matters'. The poem depicts a struggle, in the face of mortality and of – in Wallace Steven's words – the 'Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.'

**END**