

# Forward/*emagazine* Student Critics Competition

Write a response to a poem on  
the 2018 Forward Prizes Shortlist

— *the* —  
*Forward*  
—  
*Book of*  
—  
*Poetry*  
—  
2019

THE BEST POEMS *from the* FORWARD PRIZES

**Deadline: 31st July**

Full details, rules and poems here:  
[www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine](http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine)

## Send us your responses to the poems on this year's Forward Prizes shortlist.

Just read ten of the Forward shortlisted poems on the EMC website and choose one that appeals. We welcome two kinds of entries:

- a critical appreciation of the poem (maximum 500 words).
- a creative response in the form of a poem (maximum 30 lines), along with a reflective commentary on it (maximum 300 words).

There are separate categories for ages 14-16 (GCSE), ages 16-19 (A Level, IB, PreU) and for teachers.

Rules and how to enter here:  
[www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine](http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/e-magazine)



The judge is poet **Sinéad Morrissey**

### **Prizes for winning students:**

£100 and an invitation to the Forward Prizes ceremony

### **Prizes for winning teachers:**

Invitation to the Forward Prizes ceremony, a set of ten shortlisted collections, plus the new *Forward Book of Poetry*.

To learn more about the poets shortlisted for the 2018 Forward Prizes, visit [www.forwardartsfoundation.org](http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org)

The Forward Prizes shortlistees will read their work at the awards ceremony at Southbank Centre on 18 September 2018.

For tickets, visit [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk)  
or call 020 7960 4200



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All the poets listed here are included in the *Forward Book of Poetry 2019*, published in September 2018

## Day, with Hawk by Vahni Capildeo

*for K.M. Grant*

Here among witch-hazels I miss  
the peregrine we met just once.  
Like the fire from bare twigs that twists  
a floral kiss on winter's neck,  
He stunned me so I'm hanging on  
to language by its clichés, pushed  
to singer-songwrite fingernails  
down a tumbling slate precipice.  
I would call Him chestnut-stippled,  
light on the arm, I want to say,  
the non-urgent flexing of chest  
muscles making a snow-champion's  
balance; and bad old hierarchy  
doffs its executioner's garb  
to rise with the word, princely. Love,  
this is; no poem. What is the term  
for the gathering of one falcon?  
An embarrassment of poets.  
An adoration. An abyss.

*From Venus as a Bear, published by Carcanet Press*

by Toby Martinez de las Rivas

The next day, fierce gusts still blew. You staggered  
as if wasted – I had no idea, then –  
from a deep-shouldered shove that made no headway  
into pockets of air drained of resistance.  
You came into my arms, I into yours;  
we were driven like leaves across the lawn.

An exhilarance, a fine careless joy,  
consecutive crashes of wheelie bins tumbling.  
My hood trembled with hidden power,  
your voice, even at the full, lost in the roar  
that tossed the crowns of trees about their axes,  
shattered the bullfinch in the orchard,  
rained down. Heaven in such earnest, I thought –  
nothing I love can withstand this onslaught.

*The Great Storm*

*From Black Sun, published by Faber and Faber*

**Our notes to help you:**

Martinez de las Rivas's book *Black Sun* doesn't place titles at the tops of poems. Instead poems are labelled with italic text halfway down and to the side of each poem.

## *from Assurances* by J.O. Morgan

During the early years of the Cold War my father, in his capacity as an R.A.F. officer, was involved in that aspect of bomber-command which dealt with maintaining the *Airborne Nuclear Deterrent*, as it was then. The following takes what I've gleaned of his role over those years and represents it here as a work of variations and possibilities. The scenario itself may be one of routine and repetition, but what I've chosen to draw from it is the undercurrent of waiting, in the ever-present awareness of what is lost when such a waiting is permitted to play out.

J.O.

Born from the need to counteract the threat.  
Now that such a threat.  
For threats have been made.

Now that the enemy has shown that they.  
And in sailing so close.  
In having simply sailed.

That they could even consider.  
That their so-called threats.  
That they might launch, and in so launching.

As such a clear need has arisen.  
And in its rising.  
In its staying up.

A need to negate, to nullify, to rule out.  
By our having in place.  
By our simply having.

Because if the enemy did.  
If the enemy chose.  
If, at some point, at length, the enemy.

Because whatever they might send our way.  
It wouldn't take long for it to.  
From the precise moment of notification.

It wouldn't be.  
It would soon be.  
It wouldn't.

Four minutes is all we could really expect as.  
That's not sufficient for any.  
In four minutes there's not enough.

In such a small window there isn't.  
Hardly even to get out of. Let alone.  
From that initial alarm. From our hearing.

So any counteracting measure must by needs balance out.  
And our own force, already deployed, would.  
Each and every, at the merest drop.

*From Assurances, published by Cape Poetry*

**Our notes to help you:**

*Assurances* is a single book-length poem. Here we have included J.O. Morgan's prose note from the start of the book and the opening section.

## dinosaurs in the hood by Danez Smith

let's make a movie called *Dinosaurs in the Hood*.  
*Jurassic Park* meets *Friday* meets *The Pursuit of Happyness*.  
there should be a scene where a little black boy is playing  
with a toy dinosaur on the bus, then looks out the window  
& sees the *T. rex*, because there has to be a *T. rex*.

don't let Tarantino direct this. in his version, the boy plays  
with a gun, the metaphor: black boys toy with their own lives  
the foreshadow to his end, the spitting image of his father.  
nah, the kid has a plastic brontosaurus or triceratops  
& this is his proof of magic or God or Santa. i want a scene

where a cop car gets pooped on by a pterodactyl, a scene  
where the corner store turns into a battleground. don't let  
the Wayans brothers in this movie. i don't want any racist shit  
about Asian people or overused Latino stereotypes.  
this movie is about a neighborhood of royal folks—

children of slaves & immigrants & addicts & exile—saving their town  
from real ass dinosaurs. i don't want some cheesy, yet progressive  
Hmong sexy hot dude hero with a funny, yet strong, commanding  
Black girl buddy-cop film. this is not a vehicle for Will Smith  
& Sofia Vergara. i want grandmas on the front porch taking out raptors

with guns they hid in walls & under mattresses. i want those little spitty  
screamy dinosaurs. i want Cecily Tyson to make a speech, maybe two.  
i want Viola Davis to save the city in the last scene with a black fist afro pick  
through the last dinosaur's long, cold-blood neck. But this can't be  
a black movie. this can't be a black movie. this movie can't be dismissed

because of its cast or its audience. this movie can't be metaphor  
for black people & extinction. This movie can't be about race.  
this movie can't be about black pain or cause black pain.  
this movie can't be about a long history of having a long history with hurt.  
this movie can't be about race. nobody can say nigga in this movie

who can't say it to my face in public. no chicken jokes in this movie.  
no bullet holes in the heroes. & no one kills the black boy. & no one kills  
the black boy. & no one kills the black boy. besides, the only reason  
i want to make this is for the first scene anyway: little black boy  
on the bus with his toy dinosaur, his eyes wide & endless

his dreams possible, pulsing, & right there.

*From Don't Call Us Dead, published by Chatto Poetry*



## **Annunciation** by Tracy K. Smith

I feel ashamed, finally,  
Of our magnificent paved roads,  
Our bridges slung with steel,  
Our vivid glass, our tantalizing lights,  
Everything enhanced, rehearsed,  
A trick. I've turned old. I ache most  
To be confronted by the real,  
By the cold, the pitiless, the bleak.  
By the red fox crossing a field  
After snow, by the broad shadow  
Scraping past overhead.  
My young son, eyes set  
At an indeterminate distance,  
Ears locked, tuned inward, caught  
In some music only he has ever heard.  
Not our cars, our electronic haze.  
Not the piddling bleats and pings  
That cause some hearts to race.  
Ashamed. Like a pebble, hard  
And small, hoping only to be ground to dust  
By something large and strange and cruel.

*From Wade in the Water, published by Penguin Poetry*

## Do You Speak Persian? by Kaveh Akbar

Some days we can see Venus in midafternoon. Then at night, stars  
separated by billions of miles, light traveling years

to die in the back of an eye.

Is there a vocabulary for this – one to make dailiness amplify  
and not diminish wonder?

I have been so careless with the words I already have.

I don't remember how to say *home*  
in my first language, or *lonely*, or *light*.

I remember only  
*delam barat tang shodeh*, I miss you,  
and *shab bekheir*, good night.

How is school going, Kaveh-joon?  
*Delam barat tang shodeh*.

Are you still drinking?  
*Shab bekheir*.

For so long every step I've taken  
has been from one tongue to another.

To order the world:  
I need, you need, he/she/it needs.

The rest, left to a hungry jackal  
in the back of my brain.

Right now our moon looks like a pale cabbage rose.  
*Delam barat tang shodeh*.

We are forever folding into the night.  
*Shab bekheir*.

*From Calling a Wolf, a Wolf, published by Penguin Poetry*



*Oh tell me tell me tell me  
about hellhounds and rubies  
and pretty boys and bad girls, and runaways and lost boys  
and all the things that made my mother cry  
and all the things he said to make her stay  
and all the things we're not allowed to say –  
there are so many things to know.*

*From Jinx, published by Bloodaxe Books*

**Our notes to help you:**

Yahtzee is a dice game.

## notes on climate change by Phoebe Power

### READING

The more I read on the subject, the more I find I need to know about economics, politics, geography and science. But these are areas I barely studied at school. I am trained to respond to texts: literature, music, the visual arts. Thankfully, I am equipped with the skills to scan and comprehend the main points of articles; this allows me better to understand, but not to do.

### BLACKOUT

Coal/oil/gas needs to stay put, in the ground. Reduce emissions to zero.

What if a magician clapped his white-gloved hands and all the machines stopped their cranking and burring, mechanical arms stilled? Stage goes black. Combustion stops.

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Then chaos; conflict; money wars; people with backyard generators running out to chop wood for fires

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We could accept the proposition of some of the major religions that the self is nothing. We could let go of the self and allow it to dissolve. With this in mind, changes that are coming are nothing more than a great wave. We wait, death grows towards us and widens its embrace. We don't panic but are still, and it carries us away, at some time or another.

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But the religions also teach us to save others, before thinking of our own death. Because the world is full of creatures who did not play a part in this.

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I skip the paragraph on extinction. Yes, so this will happen... 40% of species wiped out (mosquitoes remain, spreading malaria. I hardly ever see them anyway). Birds, a fox sometimes. In the country, sheep. If I want to look at reefs or pangolins I can always stream them.

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If you're a victim of childhood obesity or an eating disorder, then you will have other things to think about.

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Fred is thinking about how to make his day in the office stuck to the computer bearable. He's already stopped for lunch and snacked on a couple of Jaffa Cakes. He's meeting Sara after work; he'll also have to find time to pick up supper from the supermarket; for example, a salmon en croûte. He's going to download the game he wants now online while he should be working. If he's got the motivation tomorrow he should get to the gym before work. That'll make him feel good and closer to perfect; at least, closer to OK.

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Even if your house has been flooded you have other things to consider, such as whether you should move, and also, what kind of new kitchen units you and your husband both like.

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John thinks, when he gets back to England from travelling he'll buy a little second-hand car to run around in. Who are you to say he shouldn't have it?

### THE SUBJECT

In general, times when we are able to find happiness correlate with omission of the subject. Most activities function perfectly well without its consideration. Outside work, we can even buy lunch out or a cake and coffee, go out for drinks, purchase a book or record. We can relax in a spa or book a plane ticket to a lesser-known European city, thereby providing a pleasant interruption to the routine and something new to photograph.

We can even grow fruit, keep chickens and bees, cook together and have sex. We can wander on mountains, draw or paint the colours and shapes we see around us, sing or join a band. We can learn languages, read about other cultures, or take on Proust. We can learn a skill, like knitting, papermaking or cake decoration. We can go camping, do a cycle trail. We can use the internet to share opinions and keep up to date. We can do this without remembering the subject. We can do most of these things without really thinking.

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Actually, it crops up. In this part of Austria it crops up whitely, in the absence of snow. A 17-year-old boy told me of his ambition to be a ski instructor. He spends his holidays teaching on the slopes and is paid €200 a day. He loves skiing. But there are fewer and fewer instructors here. This winter was wetter, Christmas was wrong. At the February carnival, one float was painted with unsaid words like the silent victim of a strangling – *Wann wird es wieder richtiges Winter?*

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In this small town, the elderly walk about over-hot in their antique furs and wool caps pinned with birds' feathers. Maybe a few days a winter, now, can Frau Stellingner put on her best sleek fur to go around town. She takes it off once she's reached the warm bank for her appointment.

On the dry road surface, some triangles of green  
bottle glass flash yellow-white with bending rays.  
Till rocks melt wi' the sun, my dear,  
Till rocks melt.

*From The Shrines of Upper Austria, published by Carcanet Press*

#### Our notes to help you:

In the back of her book, Phoebe Power translates 'Wann wird es wieder richtiges Winter?' as 'When will winter be right again?'

## Good Names for Three Children by Shivane Ramlochan

Do not go into the dark alone.  
Hold my hand; I don't care if it  
embarrasses you, or makes you fret,  
squirm like you were trying to crawl out  
of your own skin.  
You pull away and slice me across  
my Achilles' heels.  
Three years later you will fling yourself from me  
into the grinning gamble of oncoming traffic  
and your years of being carried  
will rush up like starving orphans to kiss your palms.  
Do not go into the dark alone.

Remember your right to use it –  
your voice, your arms, your  
High Street San Fernando desire for the  
girl with an orange blossom tucked behind her ear.  
Do not wake, sleep-ransacked,  
bleary-eyed with a fraud's tears,  
feeling filthy for the way you love,  
the how, the who, the where.  
I cradled your strong limbs in my belly  
and they tapped out against my bones  
the morse code of your whole life.  
Remember your right to use it.

Do not forget the dead  
They sit at your table to stave off  
food poisoning; they have caught  
your infant from the clutches of a fumbling man.  
You are poised in every instant  
over the fertile graves of millions.  
Nothing  
will erase your mother's smile, the gate swinging open  
as you step off the school bus, the tug in your chest a sea swell  
as you swim always towards your first love.  
Do not forget the dead.

*Coryn.*  
*Mara.*  
*Ife.*

*From Everyone Knows I'm a Haunting, published by Peepal Tree Press*

### Our notes to help you:

High Street San Fernando is the busy main shopping street in Trinidad's second biggest city.

## Dancing Bear by Richard Scott

Children bring me coins  
to watch him balançoire, tombé –  
they imagine he has a  
forest inside, they close  
their eyes to see him  
foraging on a high cliff  
above a burnished lake –  
belly to the wet earth  
but inside is just a savage  
who loves only his  
claws, his wild mouth,  
tears at honeyed flesh  
with his barbed tongue  
so I tamed him with  
a rod, a crop, my fist –  
starved him until he would  
dance this way, that way.  
At six o'clock you should  
see me count my money –  
hatfuls of brass and gold.  
I uncouple his snout, rub  
a drop of lotion in, pour  
myself a drink as my  
father unzips his bear skin –  
places his naked head  
on my lap – throat exposed.  
He apologises to me  
for all the places on my body  
his hands have scarred  
but I just close his eyes,  
sing him to sleep,  
nuzzle his ears – a blade  
in my other hand.

*From Soho, published by Faber and Faber*

### Our notes to help you:

Balançoire (French for 'swing') is a ballet step where the dancer swings one leg forward and backwards.  
Tombé is a ballet step in which a dancer falls from one leg to the other, landing with all the weight on the foot that has just moved, flexing the knee.