

# THE LATIN PROGRAMME POETRY PRIZE 2021



'OMNIA VINCIT  
AMOR?'

FIFTEEN POEMS

THE LONGLIST  
SELECTION



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## The Latin Programme - via facilis

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The Latin Programme is a small educational charity working with primary state schools across London to embed high-quality, inventive Latin lessons into the curriculum. Every year, our Latin teachers deliver our transformative programme to thousands of pupils from KS2-4, providing them with the tools they need to unlock a rich and fascinating ancient language.

But our lessons are about more than just Latin.

The programme is built to support English literacy, encourage creativity in the classroom, and provide opportunities to explore the many ways the ancient Romans continue to influence our modern world.

## The Broadway Bookshop

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The Broadway Bookshop is a small but beautiful independent bookshop in busy Broadway Market, Hackney. They specialise in literary fiction and have a wonderful range of poetry, philosophy & essays, politics, biography, city literature, travel, art, fashion, music and children's books.

## The Prize

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Following the success of our inaugural 2020 Poetry Prize, we were delighted to launch the second edition of the competition in the summer of 2021. Poets were encouraged to compose a poem using the Latin phrase 'omnia vincit amor?' (a riff on Virgil's famous question posed in Eclogue 10) as a starting point. How our poets used the phrase was completely up to them.

Many thanks must go to our wonderful judges, Arji Manuelpillai, Brighde Mullins, and Rebecca Watts who chose the winner from a shortlist of ten.

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# A Love Song For Wystan Auden

Rory Brennan | Shortlist

---

Who'd bring out Auden now?  
Dead drunk in one of his dives,  
On the sidewalk of Skid Row.  
Only love will salvage our lives.

Eyes dark as the shafts of mines,  
Face cracked like broken glass,  
He mutters oracular lines,  
Love too will pass, will pass.

He said mad wars would come,  
He'd seen them in China and Spain,  
So he tells a companionable bum  
Love saves us, but not from pain.

Like Plato so long in the past  
He knew we must care for our State  
Or face the dictator's fist.  
Even love falls victim to hate.

He wrote ballads on soldiers and girls  
And wept in his verse like a child.  
He knew we all cast away pearls.  
Love is kind and cruel and wild.

So he sang of sailors and sea-nymphs,  
Words throbbed in our veins like jazz.  
But we cannot steer clear of the cliffs,  
Love is all that anyone has.

He clung to his rhymes like a secret  
In a wallet close to his heart.  
Empires fall to implacable fate  
And all lovers finally part.

Pylons still loop over meadows,  
A skeletal ballet chorus.  
We live in cacophonous shadows.  
Love's voice is lost to us.

Missiles split the arc of the sky,  
Polyphemus glares from his cave,  
But do not roll over and die,  
Make a raft from the flotsam of love.

Vers libre was as free as the grave.  
Old comrades drove him away.  
Poems cry like the lonely for love.  
Who'd publish old Auden today?

# Amor Non Vincit Omnia

Lucy Coats | Winner

---

Amo.

Amavit.

My present, his past.

Such a tiny, tense change,  
sounding like drunken vodka nights  
we spent on a Finnish lake,  
making love in hot steam,  
then birching ourselves in biting snow  
our cold-flushed mouths  
shrieking like swifts  
under a blue summer sky.

Why do they say love conquers all,  
as if it rides triumphant  
over every brutal incompatibility,  
every knife-cut word,  
every wound to heart and bruised cheekbone?

Is it always a battle,  
where men armour themselves  
against gentleness as if it is the enemy,  
and women wait for blows and words  
they both fear and long to hear?

Here, on the field of his conquest,  
I am left bleeding, raw,  
abandoned like carrion for crows.

Hic sum.

Dereliquit me.

## Venus' Fighters

### Renad Al-karaghooli | Shortlist

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Maybe as burning promises line  
daggers and words hushed in  
the dead of nights  
long past  
I fell. And deeper I  
fall down the rabbit hole and  
maybe there is no out. But  
there is a war waging  
and love it can't yet  
bloom on wilted roses.

But I lay in  
my ashen worn grave  
with fresh cedars, daisys, tea roses  
and a single zephyr flower  
bloodstained with the red of  
my successor. And I  
hear a voice and she says to me  
—"We won! We did it at last!"

And maybe I don't hear  
the end of that, maybe  
there is something I missed, but  
we won the blood we shed

And I can feel her hand in mine once more.

Omnia vincit amor

**Omnia vincit amor?**

**Edward Bell | Shortlist**

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**Like an army invading  
Tanks rolling in the dust**

**Like a mother saying farewell  
To her daughter forever**

**Like a son looking back  
At the shore before the crossing**

**Like a husband receiving  
A call from the police**

**Like a sibling singing  
Alone in a playroom**

**Like a lover refusing  
To talk his language again**

**Like a worn-out cliché inflicting  
An historic human curse**

**Plenty more fish in the sea  
Always darkest before the dawn  
Time heals all wounds  
Love conquers all**

## Love/War

Conchubhar Mac Cana | Shortlist

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Its tanks stood current atop the dead earth to conquer.  
It could crawl out from under stone ruins.  
Shells. Dust settled. Then guns gored through quaint curtains.  
It could kill with kindness.  
Veils slipped, dead widows, jet a pall of bomb strikes.  
It could mandate change  
but souls lifted like drones from the native urn, unable.

It could bury a mother.  
Now every memory is a shell dropped on the homeplace.  
It could begin or end.  
But persistent dreams are a deadlock —  
it could fable, quiet, coo a newborn —  
every night tells a tale of the same heroism.  
It could light a bus on fire.

They touch under the barbed-wire walls, parting.  
It could fight to keep fighting.  
They are certain after crossfires  
it could fight to love (and vice versa).  
Flames catch hearts and armalites alike  
to conquer love and war; though  
it could just as well go without being 'conquered' at all.



## Fugitive

### George Littlejohn | Shortlist

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Athene, stone-eyed daughter sprung full-grown  
from Zeus, departs the battlefield: a stark  
tableau of bled-out souls and splintered bone.

Guarded by owls, a nearby wood grows dark;  
beneath the breathless trees' suspended maze  
a hoplite sits. "No shield: the coward's mark,"  
the virgin goddess sneers. Her freezing haze  
threads through snow-loaded boughs. "No victor's crown  
deserved: no palm, no paeon and no praise."

His face is rigid – a relentless frown  
set hard against the playful imps in flames  
whose light transforms the muscles of his brown  
arms into liquid bronze. Unversed in games  
that Eros plays, she silently descends,  
intrigued. An unfamiliar stirring tames  
the hubris of her martial soul and lends  
the sun and honey, rich with muted gold,  
to crystal veils till now unseen. It blends  
and dances with its mysteries, to hold  
her in its molten clasp, and promises  
to thrill her with a tale as yet untold.

A noise: he starts and shivers as he sees  
the sparking logs within his fire burn low  
and feels the night-chill on a sudden breeze.

"He is a coward after all, of no  
real worth to me." Her frost and clearing mist  
revert to faint distortions in the glow.

He lifts his sword; he holds it in his fist  
and feels the solid hilt within his palm.  
Aflame, Athene watches as his wrist  
strains tense. The weapon has bestowed strange balm  
on him and he, a scrap of trembling flesh  
one hour before, stands beautiful and calm.

In tears: ensnared by Aphrodite's mesh  
of silk and targeted by Eros' blight  
before a Childhood led her from the Crèche,  
she wraps the rasping comfort of the goatskin aegis tight  
around her leaping heart and hides inside the waiting night.

# Hyacinth

Lola Parkes | Shortlist

---

Sparta had hewn me sinewy, tough as the bronze of our spears.  
Eyes of iron. Heart, rock. Footsteps, the beating of war drums.  
If, near my forging, I'd glanced at a flower, I did no more.  
I was a warrior. Warriors had no dealings with flowers.

Hunting. Through trees, dappled sunlight, like fingertips, graced me  
And like a lyre my bow sang, as if blessed with its own life;  
Sunset had its hands on my back, so I turned round to face him  
But he was gone, leaving only the first of my bouquets.

ily-of-the-valley and blue salvia he gave,  
And white roses as well; these names I'd not know til he told me  
How he'd scoured the world's breadth for the verecund blooms  
Some moons later, his head in my lap, hair tumbling past my knees.

Wrestling. This was the second time I sensed he came to see me.  
I prepared in the shade; but, sought by a god, where's there to hide?  
He left camellia; the white roses turned to red;  
Weaving his favours into my hair like bloody streaks, I won.

Then they were everywhere. Satureja — the sentiment was clear.  
My mouth cried only for war, cavalry thighs to ride horseback;  
Bellic instruments, unable to change purposes this late;  
He made sure I knew just what he thought on that. Apollo.

The sun burst in my chamber and his eyes, loud as a heartbeat;  
I was ruined for all other light as I felt it on my skin;  
I was his lyre, resounding to his gentlest of touches;  
He healed freely my mind so constricted, infecting me with love.

Hunting and wrestling, talking and blushing, passing our days in  
Dreamlike poetry; he taught me music, I taught him favourites  
Of mine; places, foods, songs, how I liked him, and flowers;  
He promised me soon he would stretch this time past mortal limits.

Never did I see those stunning asphodel fields,  
Although my shape is grief — a perpetual mourning;  
Hyacinth, the warrior, the flower, was so loved and  
Loved so that death could not touch him; March births him again.



# Daphne

## Matilde Nannizzi | Shortlist

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Two arrows drawn  
by love's divine pride  
its fighter chosen, pierced  
with shining gold and I  
the unwilling enemy  
dented by dulled lead.

Such desperate throes these streams have scarcely known,  
His hunt rivalling his sister's,  
He drives for his fleeing fawn.

A battle cry he makes of sweet proclamations  
though softly would they fall on other ears.  
What battle cry have I?  
What men to rally but brooks and becks that steam at his feet.

Ah me, ah me,  
What pity can I wrench from friendly arms,  
for who should make an enemy of love.

No truce would quench that burning man,  
No fight could I withstand, and in this flight  
Love's champion  
borne on stronger wings draws  
closed this pursuit.

While strength's allyship I swiftly lose,  
I yield a final prayer to rob me of whatever riches  
provoke this raid.  
My desperate plea answered,  
the burden of escape from shoulders sinks  
to feet and roots them in the earth.

But still in his rushed approach he extends an eager hand -  
sun-tipped fingers that flowers would bloom I fear would scorch my skin  
and through the chasing stiffness,  
narrowly can I stretch this wooden frame from him.

Naively did I think my foe would grant me respite in death.  
The curves of bark he artfully manoeuvres,  
and with his trophy picked,  
he sports the spoils in palaces -  
my deformed hands  
wreathing his beautiful head.







## Love's Lament

Catherine Harness | Longlist

---

Brokenness brandishes its burning whip  
and thrashes all still in my grip.  
Torn from my embrace – seared to the bone  
it was your choice to create this wasteland of stone.

Why when my songs soothed the ears  
and my harp stilled all fears  
did you knowingly forget me there  
and leave me perishing, dying – dead?

Your new gods rule the sky:  
where I taught you to live – you now live to die.

Popularity's statues torment.  
Fame's throne tortures  
as Success makes mankind moan.

People imprisoned in their icy cells  
as their frozen hearts unlock hell.  
Like seed sown on frozen ground:  
all life is extinguished – and death is found.

I came as a lamp into the darkness  
and darkness cannot prevail.  
Yet you hid my away – you faithless nation  
and your roots and creation now decay.

My outstretched arm that welcomed all and held you in my grasp  
you let go of and slipped away – darkness your fall masks.

You bar, betray, break and drown others in hate  
and you would rather let them die than share the wealth you create.

You could explore, invent and find solutions to feed  
yet you twist them to evil in your pitiful binding greed.

You ‘protect’, destroy and prevail in the name of war  
yet for you what is justice anymore?

You cannot live on bread alone  
those societal pleasures that bind.  
Under your new dictators you will groan  
and you lost sheep I will find.

You will soar on eagle’s wings up there in the sky  
and when you enter my palace, there you’ll never die.







## A Woodcarver's Love

Patricia Tarrant Brown | Longlist

---

Hot July and the world made an extra rotation, throwing Sam into a loving spin. Oh the softness of her fingers and the whiteness of her palms; not calloused by chisels, nor stained like his.

‘What shall we call her?’ he asked. ‘Leave me be,’ replied his wife. ‘How about Izzie?’ he suggested. ‘Or something else?’ he persisted. ‘You decide,’ she answered.

‘Here let me take her so that you can rest.’

So he placed his daughter in the cot that he’d carved and waxed and polished to a glorious sheen and throughout that heated month he cooked and cleaned and observed the child sleeping as his wife lay weeping, until, with unshaven exhaustion, he said, ‘Wake up my love. Get out of bed.’ But she did not stir. And the world turned more slowly now, with the rusting of his dreams.

Unrelenting August; thunder came, wind raged through the trees. Canopies trembled, blocking out the light. Sam stood on the porch, and asked ‘What shall I do?’ And the answer came from the trees. With his chainsaw, he strode into the heart of the wood, where pale doves watched his every move. A sycamore fell without complaint. He cut three logs and placed the largest on his bench, gouging deep lines to alleviate his pain.

‘See, my love, how your silence brings me such hurt.’

In despairing September he stripped the bark from the smallest log, and with the finest chisel and the lightest touch, he tapped, and flicked and buffed the milky-white surface until it was fresh and clean. ‘Look, my Love. See how Izzie shines.’ But still there was no movement from their bed, and the third log lay unattended on his bench.

Wild October and the world had stopped turning. It was seized up from yearning. It was tarnished and still. Sam was angry. Sam was tired. He returned to the woods, dragging his boots in the musty earth, whilst, up in the branches, doves lingered, observing his dejected gait. This must not be. So they soared and fluttered, drawing untamed lines in the pale grey sky, until Sam too was on the wing. He returned to his bench and with all his heart, he carved his third log, until a figure emerged; sensuous and calm. He led his wife to his creation. ‘Open your eyes, my sweet.’

Raw, womanly forms stood before her, capturing her grace, carved with skill.

‘Sam is this really me?’ she asked, and her question unlocked the jailed air that lay between them.

‘Yes, my love,’ Sam answered. Then, awakened from her wandering dream, unfettered, unchained, and no longer undone, she reached for her daughter and held her to her breast. ‘Hello Izzie,’ she said. And Sam let out a thankful cry.

Then, loosened from nature’s moorings, November leaves began to fall. And the world, oiled by a new-found devotion, juddered back to eternal motion and wise doves returned, uncrowned but content, to their evergreen nests.

# Omnia vincit amor?

William Inge | Longlist

---

The emp'ror from high-backed throne  
Gazed out on his dominion  
And filled with pride turned to his man:  
'Fetch me my scribe, Quintilian!'

His slave so summoned scurried round  
His tablet for to find  
Then stylus poised stood by his lord  
To harken to his mind.

'Now listen well: this is my creed.  
Take care to get it down.  
Then have my mason carve my words  
On walls in every town.'

And so he spoke and all he said  
Was entered on the slate.  
'And now begone, make haste, away!  
And mind that you're not late!'

Chastened thus, the scribe took flight  
And hurried out the door  
And, slipping on the marble slabs,  
Fell crashing to the floor.

His arms went here, his legs went there,  
His tablet in between,  
His emp'ror's words just fell apart  
All smashed to smithereen.

In haste the servants gathered up  
Whatever they could find.  
'The mason sure will be the man  
This mystery to unwind.'

And so the mason did his best -  
They hadn't found it all -  
And, thinking 'AMO' lacked an 'R',  
He wrote 'Love conquers all'.

If he had known his emp'ror's words  
Had focused on the might  
Of mighty ROMA, not AMOR,  
He could have got it right!

But as it was, when morning came,  
His carving there to see,  
They found his body on the hill  
And hanging from a tree.

# Tuatha of Transformation

Esther Robinson | Longlist

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Mountain shrouds encase us giants of the Tuatha Dé Danaan.  
Shining Ones who once walked tall, wielding power in the realm of man.  
Our mystical magic is held by the Fae, who dwell among us still,  
Dancing on hills, in the forest, or by the stream and holy well.

Our sovereignty faded by the erosion of the language of legend through time.  
Songbirds warble it, trees whisper it, wild winds whistle it between hill and dell.  
Only those at one with the land hear our tales murmur like a childhood rhyme,  
Melodious and echoing in Earth's heartbeat; a soporific secret they long to tell.

Our blood now horizons rich with fragments of quartz and amethyst,  
Encapsulating knowledge of lost lands beneath a crust of cold clay.  
Earth's healing treasures to be found and grasped tightly in a fist,  
While celestial bodies of heaven's compass traverse us night and day.

Long ago we were adorned in garments of the finest yarn and silk,  
Now usurped by a tapestry cloak of nature's gems not of that ilk.  
We are bejewelled by amethyst heather, emerald grass and pyrite whin;  
Nature's cloak woven by Mother Earth to create anew our sacred skin.

Diamonds replaced by dazzling dew; berries beguile like rubies on the moor.  
Our perfume now wildflowers meandering on mist or the scent of petrichor.  
Faded fragments of our famous feats etched in Ogham on stone and tree,  
Legendary lines from ancient times when we roamed proud and free.

Humans climb and clamber over us subterranean servants of the land,  
Dwarfed by our rugged, rocky bodies as unwittingly upon us they stand.  
They tramp irreverently like gnats tickling skin, disturbing us sleeping,  
Embedded supine in rocks and minerals, great ancient ones in keeping.



Slumber shaken by drilling, fracking, mining, mankind ever digging deep;  
Prising out Earth's pulse, profiteering from what was never theirs to keep.  
Pillaging the garden of the goddess grieves her with a pitiful price to pay:  
Ancient Mother Danu's pristine paradise will be desecrated one day.

Wounds of separation made people forget all are worthy as one another;  
Connected as one consciousness, to be loved as sister and brother.  
Minds marauded hearts, disseminating disconnect between each being.  
Self-sabotaging selfishness obscures mankind's vision for clear seeing.

"Love me!" Tellus Mater implores from mountains down to lough shore reeds,  
Her sorrowful plea penetrating hearts of rock, planting regenerative seeds.  
Birds, butterflies, bees and the bustling breeze carry far her clarion call,  
To the folk of the goddess awakening as love's artisans, for love conquers all.

Tribes of giants roused to rise up, like the daily promise of the sun,  
To shine a beacon upon widespread damage humankind has done.  
We will reinstate our role as Earth's revered guardians once more.  
As tuatha of transformation we will replenish, replant and restore.

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