

National **POETRY** Day 7 October
2021

#NationalPoetryDay
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Great New Poetry Books Recommended for Book Groups Discussion Notes

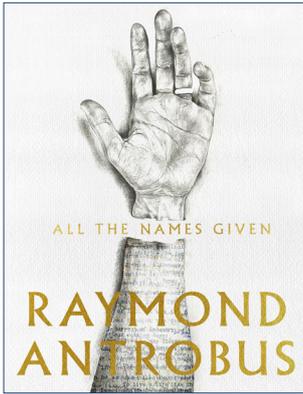
Over the past 18 months people have often turned to poetry. For many the pandemic has meant isolation and boredom, while key workers have been busier than ever. Those who live alone have craved company, while those with kids at home mourned the loss of their personal time and space. Poems have united us when we've been kept apart; they've given us moments of quiet reflection and shouted with urgency. We hope you'll choose to celebrate this powerful artform on **National Poetry Day** by reading one of these recommended books in your group.

If you don't usually read poetry in your group you may want to plan ahead. You might want to begin by each reading a poem aloud to the group, to listen to how it sounds off the page. If a whole book seems too much you can pick a few poems to focus on instead. Below you'll find some questions you can use to spark conversation, but there is no wrong or right way to approach poetry, or to appreciate and discuss it. Poetry has been cherished down the ages and now goes viral online. It can be about a strong sense of home or the trauma of displacement. Poems offer understanding and companionship, but they also pose difficult questions; they offer clarity and directness, but also subtly and complexity. In these recommended collections and anthologies, we find stories, cross time and space, find the unknown illuminated and see the familiar in a new light. So **discover and enjoy!**



All the Names Given

Raymond Antrobus, Picador, Paperback, £10.99

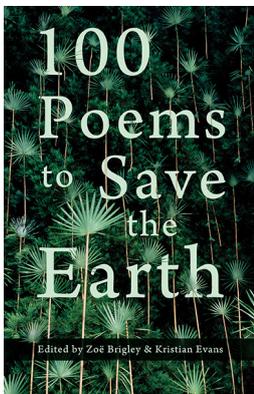


Raymond Antrobus's debut collection, *The Perseverance*, garnered an astonishing number of accolades. The British-Jamaican poet follows that book with *All The Names Given*, which continues his forensic investigation of identity and communication. He meditates on his surname and the places his ancestors lived to explore both family and world history, personal relationships and humanity as a whole.

1. Full of misheard words, imagined sounds and captions, this book tells us much about communication and its limitations. Choose a poem and discuss how it plays with sound and language and what it achieves through this.
2. What do the three poems called 'Text and Image' share, apart from a title?
3. What formal techniques does Antrobus use? What is the purpose of rhyme, rhythm, repetition?
4. Racism and slavery are central concerns of this collection, but it is often approached in slant and surprising ways – for instance 'Plantation Paint'. How does Antrobus use personal and family experience to speak to a wider history?

100 Poems to Save the Earth

Edited by Zoe Brigley & Kristian Evans, Seren Books, Paperback, £12.99



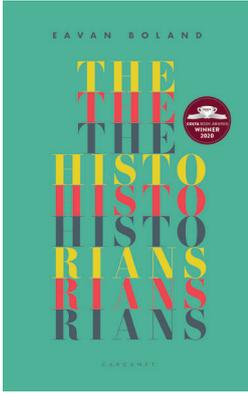
This anthology of contemporary poetry from across the globe was curated to address a climate on the brink of catastrophic change. These are not just poems about birds or trees, humanity is part of nature, and neither can survive without the other. Brigley and Evans have gathered voices which help us to perceive our endangered world as a complex web of connections and mutual relationships. It can be hard to face up to the moment we live in, but poetry brings imagination to bear on the formidable task ahead of us.

1. These poems are angry and hopeful, express fear and wonder. What emotions do these poems evoke and arouse in you?
2. Brigley and Evans have arranged this volume so that the poems speak to each other. Why do you think they did this? Compare two or more poems with the same subject matter or title. What do they have in common and how do they differ?
3. What is the effect of including writers from different places and backgrounds? How do some of these poets explore indigenous cultures and relationships with the environment?
4. "The reader might well ask, how can poems save the earth? Certainly not by marching in step with political campaigns, diverting poetry's meander into propaganda's mill (no matter how worthwhile the cause might seem)." Do you think poetry can save the planet? How is poetry different from propaganda? How poetry might give us different ways of thinking?

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The Historians

Eavan Boland, Carcanet Press, Paperback, £10.99

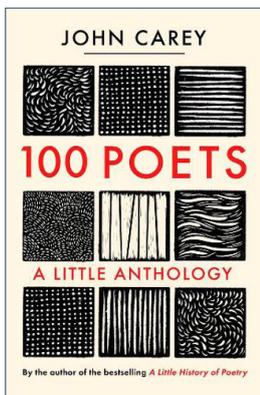


This is the last collection by the greatly-respected and loved poet Eavan Boland whose career spanned nearly sixty years. Born in Dublin in 1944, Boland died in 2020 and – like much of her poetry – her final volume explores the hidden and erased histories of women to give us a different perspective on the past. A long poem addresses Irish suffragettes, while elsewhere Boland unearths more personal narratives. Intimate and radiant, these poems ask us to remember, to look at the past square on – but not without emotion.

1. “Say the word *history*: I see / your mother, mine.” Taken from the title poem, what does this quote tell us about Boland’s approach to history? Does it speak to the rest of the poems?
2. How do nature and natural forces, such as weather, day and night, come into the very human stories Boland tells?
3. How does rhyme work in ‘Our Future Will Become the Past of Other Women’? What formal techniques can you find at work in these poems?
4. “Silence told the story.” How are stories told and not told in this collection? What is said and what cannot be said?

100 Poets: A Little Anthology

Edited by John Carey, Yale University Press, Hardback, £14.99



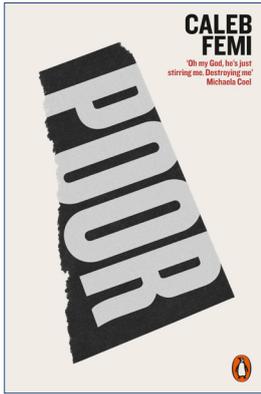
John Carey, Emeritus Professor at the University of Oxford, used a simple principle to edit this anthology; “select the one-hundred greatest poets from across the centuries, and choose their finest poems.” Drawing a chronology from Homer and Sappho to Maya Angelou and Les Murray, the reader will find famous names alongside the lesser known, poets they may have learnt in school, and new discoveries. Carey acts as our guide through the ages, introducing and contextualising each writer. Spanning history and geography, what unites these poems is that they have survived through the ages, and for good reason – they are treasured; dig into this trove of delights.

1. Carey orders this book mostly chronologically. Pick two poets from the anthology, one near the beginning and one towards the end. What differences are there in their work? What similarities? Which forms and themes seem to persist?
2. Did this anthology introduce you to new poets? Did you find your favourite works or rediscover poetry that you may have learnt in the past? Are there poets here you didn’t know before but would like to read more from?
3. “A poem seems a fragile thing. Change a word and it is broken. But poems outlive empires and survive the devastation of conquests.” Why do you think poems survive? Why do you think poetry as an art form continues? What can poems tell us about changing times and places?
4. Carey calls these poems “memorable”. Take it in turns to speak about a poem that you find memorable and why – is it the language, the imagery, the music, the form, the subject?

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Poor

Caleb Femi, Penguin, Paperback, £9.99

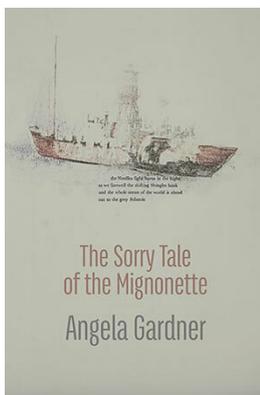


Caleb Femi is a poet and director. He was raised on the North Peckham estate in South London, the scene of this powerful debut collection which combines his photography with his poems. In this vividly evoked concrete landscape, we witness the injustices and ordeals of twenty-first century Peckham as well as the hopes, dreams and joys of young Black men. This book doesn't hide away from harsh realities, but it is also a hymn to the place and people the poet loves.

1. The North Peckham estate is made up of 1,444 homes and you can walk two and a half miles without touching the ground, so it's no wonder concrete is a recurring motif in these poems. How does Femi present this material? In what other ways does this particular place shape and texture his poetry?
2. This book contains Femi's photographs alongside his poems. What is the effect of this juxtaposition? How do the photos chime with add to the poems and vice versa?
3. One poem 'Collective Noun' takes the form of 'A Play by an Onlooker'. What different forms do the poems in this collection take? How does their construction work with the subject matter?
4. There are tributes to rappers among these poems. What role do rap, music generally and other art forms play in *Poor*?

The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette

Angela Gardner, Shearsman, Paperback, £12.95

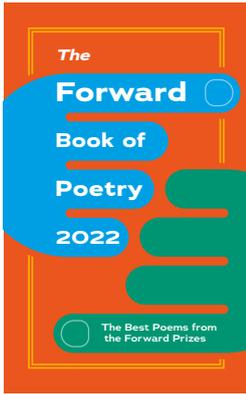


This is a true story. 1884, the yacht *The Mignonette* sets sail from Southampton, heading to its new owner in Sydney, Australia. On board is a crew of four, including a cabin boy, Richard Parker – the cousin of Gardner's great-grandmother. In this innovative work of narrative non-fiction Gardner's poems transport us back in time and tell a horrifying and unforgettable story that spans continents and centuries.

1. This is a work driven by narrative. How does Gardner build drama?
2. How does Gardner give voice to her cast of characters? In what different ways to they speak?
3. This book could have been written as prose non-fiction. Why do you think Gardner chose poems, and a range of different forms and registers to tell this tale?
4. What messages do you take away from this story? Is there a sense of closure? Of justice?

The Forward Book of Poetry 2022

Edited by the judges of the Forward Prizes 2021, Faber & Faber, Paperback, £9.99



The Forward Prizes highlight the vibrancy and diversity of the poetry being published in the UK and this annual anthology features the shortlisted poets alongside work from 50 highly commended poets. This year's judges were fascinated by the way that the work read spoke to life in lockdown, even when it was conceived and written before the pandemic; "a reaffirmation of what the poetic imagination can do in explaining the here-and-now from somewhere else."

1. James Naughtie writes that these poems "[shine] a light on who we are": "How do we survive as individuals? How do we deal with each other?" How do these poems pose this question? And how far do they answer it?
2. "There are gems scattered everywhere. An image, a line, a cadence, even just a word in the perfect place that lodges in the memory." What from this anthology struck you immediately? What has stayed with you?
3. What themes or subjects unite the poets collected here? Perhaps you could argue the case for an alternative title for the anthology.
4. "I am not going to rank the poems in these pages. That's for the reader", says James Naughtie in his introduction. Who are your winners here? What do you most value in a poem?

Our lists of recommended reads for National Poetry Day 2021 feature forty-three inspiring new poetry books from twenty-six publishers. The selection is our biggest yet, reflecting the vibrancy of poetry publishing, particularly from small presses which make more appearances on the list than ever before.

We have lists for adults, book groups, children and young adults, featuring new releases from **Sarah Crossan**, **Raymond Antrobus**, **Kate Fox**, **Caleb Femi** and **Manjeet Mann** to name a few: www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poems/poetry-recommendations

You can support the **Forward Arts Foundation**, the charity behind National Poetry Day by buying via Bookshop.org: uk.bookshop.org/shop/NationalPoetryDayUK

We hope you'll find lots to appeal, whatever your tastes. And keep an eye on the [NPD blog](#) too for interviews, features and the chance to win sets of these exciting books.

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