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## Dancing, mothers and bold colours inspire National Poetry Competition entrants



**What fires a poet's imagination? If the words they most often choose are anything to go by, then dancing, mothers and the colours red and black are particularly inspiring.** A glance through the early entries for the National Poetry Competition shows these words appear with more than coincidental regularity.

**One of this year's judges George Szirtes has his own ideas why all of these words are so prevalent:**

**Colours:** "The colours are relatively easy: red for blood and passion and a great many other exciting things. There is also a red wheelbarrow in William Carlos Williams' poem that might have set a few pulses racing. Black is the colour of death, night and mystery – and there is always the little black dress – and it's kind of cool to be seen in it. Death as an invocation need not be fatal."

**Mothers:** "Mothers are the deep source of everything so are bound to be lurking around poems. They symbolise the celebratory and nourishing on the one hand, and the neurotically repressive on the other. The chances are that they will have played a central part in the extreme spectrum. When in doubt, run to mother."

**Dancing:** "Dancing, the concord of ritualised movement, rhythm, music and codified passion is an analogy for the poetic act. Sir John Davies wrote an entire poem titled 'Orchestra' in praise of dancing in the late sixteenth century. Dancing has not ceased to be popular and unless the poems dance in their own fashion they are not going to be any more than pedestrian."



National Poetry Competition judges 2010 (from left): Sinéad Morrissey, George Szirtes and Deryn Rees-Jones

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Other stimulants to the imagination were drinks, in particular tea although there were those who preferred something stronger, such as a sophisticated Martini.

**Writing a winning poem, though, involves more than just picking the right words, as fellow competition judge Deryn Rees-Jones explains:**

“It’s not simply the words that we put in poems, but the way the words talk to each other, and the way the structure of a poem makes them work. But looked at very simply, the fact that these words keep cropping up suggests probably some fairly central things about the way in which people relate to strong colours, movement and the world.”

Judging this year’s competition along with George Szirtes and Deryn Rees-Jones is Sinéad Morrissey. The closing date for this year’s National Poetry Competition is the 31 October 2010.

– ENDS –

**For more information and/or to interview any of this year’s judges please contact Lisa Roberts on 020 420 9895.**

**Notes to Editors**

• **THE NATIONAL POETRY COMPETITION**

The National Poetry Competition was founded in 1978. The prize money this year totals £8,700. The top three prize winners’ poems will be published in the *Poetry Review*, Britain’s leading poetry magazine. Previous winning and commended poems can be read on the Poetry Society website at [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk). The Ledbury Poetry Festival features an event with National Poetry Competition winners and judges every year. To enter the National Poetry Competition visit [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk). The winners are announced on 24 March 2011 at the Saville Club, Mayfair.

• **THE POETRY SOCIETY**

The **Poetry Society** was founded in 1909 to promote a “more general recognition and appreciation of poetry”. Since then, it has grown into one of Britain’s most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has nearly 4,000 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, *Poetry Review*. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, the Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages. To find out more about the Poetry Society visit [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk)

• **JUDGES**

**Sinéad Morrissey**

Sinéad Morrissey is the author of four collections: *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1995), *Between Here and There* (2002), *The State of the Prisons* (2005), and *Through the Square Window* (2009); these last three were all shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. She was the recipient of a Lannan Literary Fellowship in 2007, and took first place in the National Poetry Competition with the poem, ‘Through the Square Window’, the same year. Other awards include the Patrick Kavanagh Award and the Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize. She is Lecturer in Creative Writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, Queen’s University, Belfast.

**George Szirtes**

George Szirtes won the T.S. Eliot Prize in 2004 for *Reel* and his latest collection, *The Burning of the Books and other poems* (2009), was also shortlisted for the award. Since 1979 he has published nineteen collections, including *Short Wave* (1984), *The Photographer in Winter* (1986), *Bridge Passages* (1991, shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Prize) and *The Budapest File* (2000). He has collaborated often with visual artists and has also written many works for music, stage and radio. He is Reader in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia.

**Deryn Rees-Jones**

Deryn Rees-Jones is an award-winning poet and critic. Her poetry collections are *The Memory Tray* (1994), *Signs Round a Dead Body* (1998), *Quiver* (2004) and *Falls & Finds* (2008). She was named one of the PBS’s 20 Next Generation poets in 2004 and one of *Mslaxia’s* ‘ten notable women poets of the last decade’. She has judged numerous literary awards, including the Costa poetry prize and the T.S. Eliot Prize. She is the editor of the anthology *Modern Women Poets* and is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool. Her forthcoming collection is *Burying the Wren*.

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