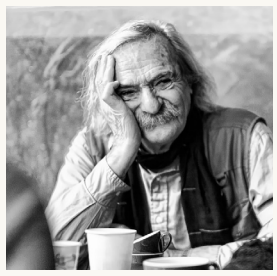
JACK HIRSCHMAN
POETRY PRIZE

In 2024, Poets of the Planet launched the Jack Hirschman International Poetry Prize, honoring the spirit and values of the American poet (1933–2021), whose life was dedicated to poetry, justice, and human dignity.



This document highlights the three poets nominated for the first Jack Hirschman International Poetry Prize, presented in alphabetical order.
Each poet is introduced through a short biography, an argumentary, and a selection of poems that reflect their vision and voice.
The members of the Poets of the Planet network are invited to read, reflect, and cast their vote to select the laureate.

You are invited to read, reflect, and cast your vote for the first recipient of the Jack Hirschman Poetry Prize.

poetsoftheplanet@gmail.com • www. poetsoftheplanet.com/jack-hirschman-prize/

ILHAN SAMI **COMAK**

TISHANI **DOSHI**

WARSAN **SHIRE**

Edition 2025

JACK HIRSCHMAN POETRY PRIZE

Nominated

Ilhan Sami Comak

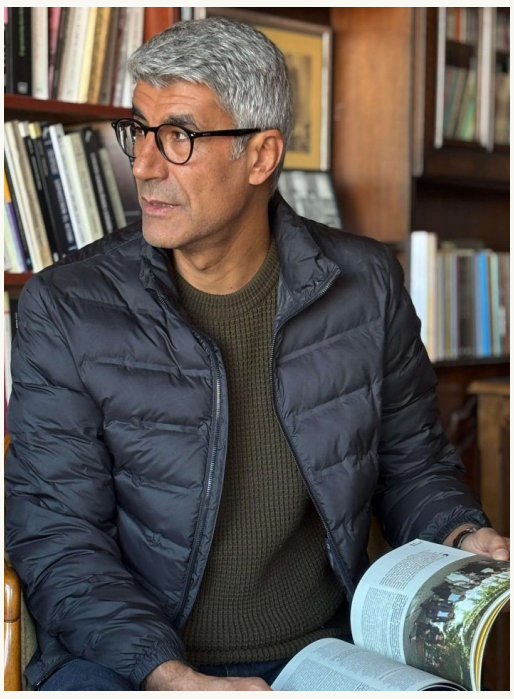
Argument

The life of Ilhan Sami Çomak is an important reason to give him the first Jack Hirschman Prize. Released on the 26 November 2024, he spent 30 years in jail.
And he became an important poet during his imprisonment.
Obviously, his life and work fit with the human values Jack Hirschman was fighting for.
What seems remarkable to me in the poetry of this prisoner is his freedom.
But he is not a political poet in some classical way. (His work for instance is quite different of Nazim Hikmet work). He is more in the line of the Second New Poets in Turkey which appeared in the literary scene in the 50's and who believed that poetry should create connotations, give the reader the freedom to create his, or her, reality in a pool of images.
For instance, he, who was - for so many years - « separated from the sun », as he said, writes a poetry where the love for nature, motherland, the territory of childhood stands on the front scene. His poetry was an attempt to escape from the prison and reach the life that was taken away from him.
His poems, which avoid great rhetorical declaration, are both fresh and deep, dear and complex, and filled with a great sense of life.

Francis Combes, March 2025

Bio

Ilhan Sami Çomak is a Kurdish poet who was imprisoned in Türkiye for thirty years. He was finally released on November 26, 2024, after having been one of the oldest political prisoners in the world.
He was arrested in 1994, along with other members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) during a raid in a cafe. He was then 21 years old, a geography student at Istanbul University. Initially, he was accused of trying to set fire to a forest and a confession was extracted from him after nineteen days of torture. Confessions which he later returned to. A military court then sentenced him to death, then to life in prison. In 2007, the European Court of Human Rights, finding the trial irregular, requested its review. In 2016, a civil court retried him. The arson charge was dropped but the court confirmed the thirty-six year prison sentence for "separatism".
Born in 1973 in Karliova, in the province of Bingöl, he spent his childhood in the countryside, among goats and horses, and his imagination was nourished by this contact with nature and the stories that his mother told him on evening, in their cob house. While in prison, he became a poet and published nine collections. He has received several poetry prizes including the prestigious Sennur Sezer in March 2022. His latest collection, *Hayattahiz Nihayet (We are still alive)* received the Metin Altiok Prize, named after one of his former teachers who was among the intellectuals, notably Alevis, killed during the arson of the Madimak hotel in Sivas in 1993.
Writers from different countries mobilized for his release (notably in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, through their Pen Clubs, but also in France and Turkey).
A collection of his poems, *Separated from the Sun*, translated by Caroline Stockford and a collective of translators, was published in England by Smokestack Books, run by the poet Andy Croft.
For my part, I translated some of his poems into French, from English, to make him known, while waiting for a translation to be made from the original language (he writes in Turkish and Kurdish).



Freedom

Take me away from here, I'se seen so many things
I've seen so deep, so far. Long, long have I have been saddened.
The time has come for mountain springs, for winds blowing
Over the harvest and for the opening of day's great door

Time for the endlessness of my shaking legs,
heading towards the horizon as day opens its great door
Comprehend me from my root, not from my branch
Understand me from my dream, not from the life I've lived
Maybe the mirror is I pieces
Know me by my laugh, not by the mirror's talk.

For so long my street's been peopled with absence
With ivy's soundless climb

Its swallow: shady, sow, and always half-way there.
Take me away from this stagnation
I've seen so much of the abyss, long, long I've stared at it
That void is just repetition.

It's time for you to say you're a bird that is wetted in rain
It's time to breathe the smell of soil, fill with it, grow with it
Know me by my love, not by my loneliness.
Comprehend me from what I long for, not by what I have lost
Understand me by my childhood, not by the present version of me.

I coming in search of you.

(Translated by Caroline Stockford)

We are after you

We are in the time of leaves, in the evening of sprinkling
salt
The whirlpool is expanding on end, troubles multiply
Heat of stones walks from the past to the future
We are in search of smiles infusing light
with the dried fruits and nuts in our pockets
The sky slits open by the crackling sound of branches
Maybe here at our feet
with our steely gaze parsing the marble
with the spirit of a horse going down to the water
we are after the wind

(Translated by Öykü Tekten)

Life does not lie
for Michael Baron

I am between the moon and the tide
between the whisper and the scream.
When I was a child, had still the script of a child,
when I was hostage to my mother's pomegranate smile,
when I looked from the window to the full light of the garden
watching the practical philosophy of hands plucking the fruit tree.
In those times when we still heard the sound of frogs
when women passed through my life, and the lake was blue
when I knew the value of blue. I understand
there is pain, too, on the steps of life.
On the day of existence the wind rose up to meet me resistance,
like dew on the grass met my feet
Ripe fires grew across my body, and doves –
my feelings were met by the rustle of their wings.
In spring's demeanour I hear the sounds of cleaning
I hear footsteps of plains and mountains and the law
of snow melting. Earth grows damp in my memory,
fruit ripens, stones' habitual weight grows light,
makes it to flow and tremble as it wishes.
In my place between trouble and wellbeing
I hear the song of happiness from the world.
As goodwill blossoms: Life does not lie! I say
it does not lie!

Got up and walked

I got up and walked
Lifted my head to the sky
and pulled the width of its vacancy towards me.
Its hands of flowing blue shortened my stride
and I stole the scurrying and the chill of clouds.
I was alone.
I thought of myself as a shower of rain
embroiling itself with winds and their
fishtailing roar.
A rain of the colourful breath of
horizons that opens sunlit flowers
I remembered how snow falls
The relationship of shadow to existence
and a few other things.
Daybreak came following those long nights
I tried to wake up, to remember before and afterwards.
I got up and walked.

(Translated by Caroline Stockford)

Edition 2025

JACK HIRSCHMAN POETRY PRIZE

Tishani Doshi

Nominated

Argument

Tishani Doshi is a voice of poetical activism to the highest degree, namely through world class poetry aiming at illuminating injustice and inequality. The palette of her language and her motifs are many facetted, her conceptual range unparalleled. The grace with which she pinpoints her subject matter and cements it into form is razor-sharp.

Her work is fine example of global poetry – drawing on the literary heritage of both India and the West we discover in her work a dazzling lyricism alongside an exciting array of imagery. Intensity alongside nuance, both personal and universal her work gives voice to justice, injustice and survival. She is also a dancer and the reader will see how that artform inserts itself in the way her words so often dance across the page fully utilizing the visual potentials of a page.

Bio

Tishani Doshi is an award-winning writer and dancer of Welsh-Gujarati descent. Born in Madras, India, in 1975, she received a master's in writing from Johns Hopkins University and worked in London in advertising before returning to India in 2001, where a chance encounter with the choreographer Chandralekha led her to an unexpected career in dance.

She has published eight books of fiction and poetry, including the poetry collection Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods, shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award and the Firecracker Award, and the novel Small Days and Nights, shortlisted for the RSL Ondaatje Prize, the Tata Book of the Year (Fiction), and the New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice.

She has interviewed over a hundred writers about the craft of writing and has published essays in The Hindu, Granta, The National, The New York Times, The Guardian, Literary Hub, and Corriere della Sera. She is a visiting professor of creative writing at New York University Abu Dhabi and lives on a beach in Tamil Nadu, India.

October fugue

The year is laying down its leaves
like an oil spill along the coast of Kamchatka.
A sweep of toxic yellow, dead seals, starfish—
a whole darkening orchard. Persimmon, quince.
This morning I fell over while trying to straighten
the curtains. Perhaps I saw reflections of trees
in the windows and got confused, the way birds
often do. Perhaps I wanted to understand
what it means to slam into buildings of glass
and fall from the sky in large numbers.
This is the roof of the world. Out there,
flares of a burning taiga. Didn't they promise
respite from the air strikes? Who promised
a life, golden? Take this pillow from under
my head. We're running out of provisions.
How far can we flee with headscarves
and slippers? In all this mist it's easy to forget
how a season of dying can still be flamboyant.
We risk breaking our necks but we should
make a go of it. Shouldn't it be now?
©Thisani Doshi

Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods

(for Monika)

Girls are coming out of the woods,
wrapped in cloaks and hoods,
carrying iron bars and candles
and a multitude of scars, collected
on acres of premature grass and city
buses, in temples and bars. Girls

Jack Hirschman International Poetry Prize { Nominees 2025

are coming out of the woods
with panties tied around their lips,
making such a noise, it's impossible
to hear. Is the world speaking too?
Is it really asking, What does it mean
to give someone a proper resting? Girls are
coming out of the woods, lifting
their broken legs high, leaking secrets
from unfastened thighs, all the lies
whispered by strangers and swimming
coaches, and uncles, especially uncles,
who said spreading would be light
and easy, who put bullets in their chests
and fed their pretty faces to fire,
who sucked the mud clean
off their ribs, and decorated
their coffins with briar. Girls are coming
out of the woods, clearing the ground
to scatter their stories. Even those girls
found naked in ditches and wells,
those forgotten in neglected attics,
and buried in river beds like sediments
from a different century. They've crawled
their way out from behind curtains
of childhood, the silver-pink weight
of their bodies pushing against water,
against the sad, feathered tarnish
of remembrance. Girls are coming out
of the woods the way birds arrive
at morning windows – pecking
and humming, until all you can hear
is the smash of their miniscule hearts
against glass, the bright desperation
of sound – bashing, disappearing.
Girls are coming out of the woods.
They're coming. They're coming.
©Thisani Doshi

Macroeconomics

One man sits on another if he can.
One man's heart beats stronger. One man goes
into the mines for another man to sparkle.
One man dies so the family living at the top of the hill
can eat sandwiches on the lawn. One man's piggy bank
gets a bailout. One man tips over a stranger's vegetable cart.
One man stays home and plays tombola till all this blows over.
One man hits the road like a pilgrim to Shambhala, child
on shoulders. One man asks who's going to go out and buy
the milk and eggs? One man's home is across the horizon.
One man decides to walk there even though it will take days
and nights on tarmac with little food and water.
One man is stopped for loitering and made to do squats
for penance. One man reports fish are leaping
out of the sea and sucking greedily from the air.
One man eats his ration card. One man notices how starlings
have taken to the skies like a toothache,
a low continuous hunger, searing across the fields.
One man loads his gun. One man's in charge of the seesaw.
One man wants to redistribute the plums. One man knows
there's no such thing as a free lunch. One man finally sees
the crevasse. One man gives his blanket to the man
sitting in the crevasse. One man says there should be a tax
for doing such a thing and takes it back. The ditch widens.
©Thisani Doshi

This May Reach You Either as a Bird or Flower

(for Varavara Rao)

Sooner or later we must return
to the rooms from which we emerged.
The earth of your childhood is the earth
of mine, even though it may seem we live in
two different countries. You are a dangerous
poet in yours. I am trying to be one. In every
republic there will be some who walk down to
the water with life vests and bread, while others
lead soldiers to trapdoors in the cellar. You stand
at the edge, beating a drum. They say you've been
standing there sixty years, drumming, drumming.
Sir—are you warm? Are the crows bringing you the
latest terrible news? The mobs haul bodies from beyond
the campfires with leaves tacked to their eyes and throats
filled with dust. You should know there's been a breach. The
curtain is not made of iron. The offspring of your arrests have
formed their own political party in prison and are spreading
rebellious thoughts like a virus refreshed after a summer rest.
We must consolidate while there's oxygen left. A day will
come when we are gathered in a courtyard for a historic
photo, and asked to denounce the pawns, the black-and-
white squares, the horses and rooks. Everyone but
the crooks. It will no longer be possible to say
your homeland is not my homeland
because it doesn't speak English.
The languages we love will be
thrown in a ditch. A country
forgets how many countries
it's been. Nothing is gentle
about memory. The sky
speaks in howl, grass
whispers back. We
are already on
our knees.
What else
can we
do but
resist?
©Thisani Doshi

Edition 2025

JACK HIRSCHMAN POETRY PRIZE

Nominated

Warsan Shire

Argument

Warsan Shire is one of the most powerful poetic voices of the Somali diaspora, and of contemporary world literature.
Her work gives voice to exile, displacement, womanhood, and memory — themes deeply rooted in the ideals Jack Hirschman stood for: justice, dignity, and poetry as resistance.
What makes Shire's poetry extraordinary is its emotional intensity paired with sharp clarity. Her words speak for those who are often silenced: migrants, survivors, daughters, and those navigating borders both real and internal. Her poem *Home* has become emblematic of the refugee experience and is quoted across continents.
Shire is not only a poet of testimony — she is a poet of transformation. Her writing transcends trauma to affirm life, intimacy, and belonging. Through lyrical force and brutal tenderness, she exposes wounds while opening paths to healing. Her poetic universe — at once fiercely personal and universally resonant — fully embodies the spirit of this prize.

Bio

Warsan Shire was born in 1988 to Somali parents who took refuge in Kenya. She grew up in London and now lives in Los Angeles. In her poetry, she gives voice to those often unheard — migrants, women, and people living at the margins. "I navigate a lot in memory," she says, "my own, and those of others, trying to make sense of things."
In 2011, she published *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*, a critically acclaimed pamphlet. Her poem *Home*, about the refugee experience, became an anthem around the world. She was the first *Young Poet Laureate for London* and has received several awards, including the *Brunel International African Poetry Prize* and the *Ted Hughes Award*.
Her texts have been featured in Beyoncé's Lemonade, and her most recent collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, was released in 2022. She is the poetry editor of *Spook* magazine.

Warsan Shire, the Netherlands, in 2022. On his sweatshirt is US writer James Baldwin. © ROGER CREMERS/LUMEN/OPALE

Home

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching

or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important
no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in
your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

©Warsan Shire

Backwards

The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room.
He takes off his jacket and sits down for the rest of his life;
that's how we bring Dad back.
I can make the blood run back up my nose, ants rushing into a hole.
We grow into smaller bodies, my breasts disappear,
your cheeks soften, teeth sink back into gums.
I can make us loved, just say the word.
Give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent,
I can write the poem and make it disappear.
Step-Dad spits liquor back into glass,
Mum's body rolls back up the stairs, the bone pops back into place,
maybe she keeps the baby.
Maybe we're okay kid?
I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love,
you won't be able to see beyond it.

You won't be able to see beyond it,
I'll rewrite this whole life and this time there'll be so much love.
Maybe we're okay kid,
maybe she keeps the baby.
Mum's body rolls back up the stairs, the bone pops back into place,
Step-Dad spits liquor back into glass.
I can write the poem and make it disappear,
give them stumps for hands if even once they touched us without consent,
I can make us loved, just say the word.
Your cheeks soften, teeth sink back into gums
we grow into smaller bodies, my breasts disappear.
I can make the blood run back up my nose, ants rushing into a hole,
that's how we bring Dad back.
He takes off his jacket and sits down for the rest of his life.
The poem can start with him walking backwards into a room.

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