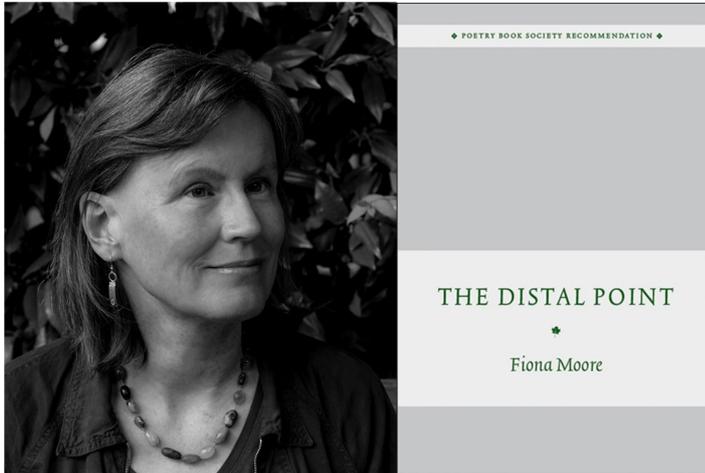


# *The Distal Point* by Fiona Moore (HappenStance)



Fiona Moore lives in Greenwich, London. In 2004 she left her career in the Foreign Office to write and work part-time for a sustainable development NGO. She reviews poetry, was an assistant editor at *The Rialto* and is currently on the editorial board of *Magma*. The first of her two HappenStance pamphlets, *The Only Reason for Time*, was a *Guardian* poetry book of the year and the second, *Night Letter*, was shortlisted for the Michael Marks Award for Poetry Pamphlets. *The Distal Point* (HappenStance 2018) is her first collection. It is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation for Autumn 2018.

## Reviews

'This collection is split into three sections "Overwinter", "Exclave" and "The Rose, the Stars". The first builds a portrait of love and bereavement, mostly by exploring memories, some of which become more poignant and foreshadowed by hindsight. "Tower" starts "You'd never climb those worn stone/ spirals up the tower of a church/ or castle" and ends,

Once in France a church tower was so  
high and you so far away  
in the square under plane trees  
standing among wavy green  
shadows not of water but some  
unknown element that I  
was afraid of losing you  
until I climbed down, found you  
and gave you a kiss

to prove myself wrong.

The gentle rhythm and long vowels remind readers that there's no urgency because this is a memory and the poem's 'you' is already lost to the narrator. This is further underlined by the "s" consonance and internal sound echoes (e.g. "shadows"/"unknown", "prove"/"wrong"). The skill of the poem's craft is worn lightly.' (*The London Grip*)

'Fiona Moore has published two pamphlets with HappenStance, both long sold out. At last here is a debut book-length collection, in which she confronts personal loss and irretrievable change, as well as wider, more public themes—recent European history and the politics of power. To such concerns she brings creativity, humour and intelligence. Her poems emerge from huge pressure like diamonds.' (Happenstance blog)

### **The Shirt**

I didn't find it for months, your shirt  
bundled into a corner of the airing cupboard.  
I shook it out. It had been cut  
with long cuts all the way up the sleeves  
and up the front, so it looked like a plan  
of something about to be put together.  
They must have had to work so fast to  
save you there was no time to unbutton it.  
An office shirt, because that's where  
it happened. The thin stripes slashed through—  
terrifying, unprecedented—a reminder  
of everything I wanted to forget.  
I'd washed it afterwards, not knowing what to do  
with it, or that in three weeks the same thing  
would happen to another shirt, a favourite,  
dull cotton whose thick weave made it look  
as if all the pink shell-grains of sand  
had come together on one beach,  
a shirt for a gentle hug; and from then on  
nothing happened that we would forget.

### **Unknown**

She'd have been eight now, that lovely age  
when the mind, still deep in childhood,  
starts to reach out beyond it.  
The age you were when your father died.  
I picture her with the red hair  
of both grandmothers.

Why a girl, I don't know.

A boy might have reminded me better—  
that photo of you on your parents' lawn.  
Strange to think, after so much, how young  
she'd still be, how this would mark  
the slowness of years.

Would she have carried  
an early memory of you, maybe one  
like mine of our last embrace when you  
could still stand up, with the bed  
behind you for safety?

If you're a ghost that walks  
beside me, she is doubly so. But she  
grows older with time  
whereas you don't—soon  
the gap between you and me will show.

### **Waking Up in a Basement**

Even when I feel the stone weight of the house  
and the earth of the hill it's built into  
I don't really believe in my death—  
not even when I sniff the draught that yesterday  
was tainted by the smell of a small animal  
decaying in the thistles and tangled grass  
under the olive trees whose leaves fall  
past the window like elegant rain.  
This morning the smell isn't there.  
At one time in the past I did, I think,  
believe—I certainly lived day after day  
in repeatedly unfolding horror.  
The sun's come out sideways and is breaking up  
orange across the folds of the duvet.  
There's a blaze at the corner of my eye  
that I need to not look at, partially veiled  
though it is by these showers of leaves and  
tree-trunks that knot and angle their way skywards.  
The bell-tower strikes a half-hour.  
The evidence of all the deaths it has tolled  
is against me. The dead should crowd  
my mind, as do the sweet chestnut and pine trees  
that cloak this circular chain of hills.  
A pair of shots ring out and the deep valley  
moves the noise around: something, perhaps  
a deer or wild boar or (heaven forbid) a

small bird may have died now, or be dying—  
tasting its own blood amid a sense of  
what panic or numb astonishment.

### Discussion Ideas

- An office shirt and a favourite pink shirt: outfits separated by three weeks. What is the poet's choice of shirt demonstrating? Do you think the shirt choice is a factual record of events or a true one? What would be the difference?
- *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Great Gatsby*, *American Psycho* – a short story, a novella and a novel in which shirts play key roles. What are your favourite clothes-in-literature moments, and why?
- 'Unknown' – does this poem seek to comfort the writer? Does it succeed? What comfort might it offer to a reader?
- How might the [imaginary, unwritten] poem 'Waking Up in An Attic' differ from 'Waking Up in a Basement'?
- 'The dead should crowd / my mind' – should they? Do they? What if they don't? How might the poet answer these questions? How would you?

### Other books by Fiona Moore

- *Night Letter*, HappenStance, 2015
- *The Only Reason for Time*, HappenStance, 2013

### If you liked Fiona Moore, try ...

- Jaqueline Saphra
- Dorothea Smartt
- Maura Dooley

### Fiona Moore online

[HappenStance](#)