

HATCH A BLUE SKY

*Poems from the Tower Poetry
Summer School 2018*

EDITED BY STEPHEN ROMER
AND ANDREW WYNN OWEN

TOWER POETRY, OXFORD

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OXFORD
TOWER POETRY
2020

Published by Tower Poetry, Christ Church, Oxford, 2020
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-9996976-0-0

Designed by Libanus Press Ltd. Marlborough
Printed in the UK.

PREFACE

As the group of young poets gathered at the end of August for the annual Tower Poetry Summer School at Christ Church, W.H. Auden's old college, it was not just they who might have been suffering a bit from nerves. The opening evening was held in the beautiful hortus conclusus outside the Common Room, with the small house known as Auden's Cottage just over the wall; and when we were informed, now seated indoors, that the great prosodist would climb through the open windows in his bedroom slippers, and shuffle off to Evensong, it would have taken nerves of steel to feel 'no pressure'! But young poets should bear in mind that their tutors, emerging from deep summer, and suddenly required to talk rationally about their craft, may not have been entirely free of the jitters, either. A tutor might ask, for example: 'What have I been doing, exactly, when immersed in the actual process of writing, and how to describe the magma of inner and outer that (when it works!) crystallizes, into a presentable poem?' And then to have the nerve to ask others to do the same!

Which is why it is always useful to have a few pithy quotations about poetry ready for use. Coleridge was enlisted, his matchless 'more than usual order combined with more than usual emotion'; or Paul Valéry's nicely shocking, mechanistic: 'Poetry is a machine for soliciting the larynx'. Or Marianne Moore's splendidly spiked 'Poetry' which opens 'I too dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle'. What proved most useful was probably Eliot's amalgamation of 'disparate experiences': how falling in love and reading Spinoza, and the sound of the typewriter and the smell of cooking, might all combine to form a 'new whole'.

This last provided the grounds for a first exercise, or 'prompt' – to write a short recollection, combining an event of national or international importance with a personal memory of what they were doing at the time the news broke. The model was Paul Muldoon's famous poem 'Cuba'. But it proved harder than we thought, possibly because these days 'news' on the Web is a nonstop resource, unlike those crisp announcements on the wireless that belong to a now bygone age.

The tutors were soon amazed, and delighted, at the goodwill and the talent, and at how rapidly the sense of a community, of a joint endeavour, emerged. Other 'prompts' included a visit to the Christ Church Picture Gallery, one of Oxford's hidden gems. The venerable art of ekphrasis was thus explored, but students were encouraged not just to attend to what might be going on in the painting, but to what might have been in the painter's head, or in their own heads as they respond to the painting. This produced some of the strongest pieces of writing.

Another prompt, the 'descent into the well beneath the Deanery' proved a usefully *unheimlich* setting; and a wander about the grounds and gardens was recommended, to engage with the patterns and rhythms of nature, and respond to them in language. And in parallel with this – for poetry has many mansions – there was a concluding joyous session of Consequences, played beneath the Cheshire Cat Tree.

Readings every evening gathered the school together and provided welcome relaxation; the tutors read, and on the second evening we were lucky to hear two wonderful poets, Olivia McCannon and Rebecca Watts. The final evening, which was when students were invited to read their poems, some of them written during the school, was a lovely occasion; if nervousness emerged a little, it only gave edge to some terrific performances. The air was full of promise. It turned out also, that the 'Recollection' exercise, mentioned above, had in fact been smouldering in the minds of some, and figured among the best poems read during that memorable finale.

Stephen Romer and Andrew Wynn Owen

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QUDSIA AKHTAR

Qudsia Akhtar is a Manchester-based poet who graduated from the University of Salford with a BA in English and Creative Writing; she recently completed an MA in Creative Writing: Innovation and Experiment. Qudsia is interested in exploring an innovative poetics by using the Fictocritical approach to express her identity politics. Her poetry has appeared in the *Acumen* and at an event hosted by 'Invisible Histories' at the Working-Class Movement Library in Salford commemorating the Spanish Civil War. When Qudsia is not spending hours sharing her ideas in her second language, poetry, she is grasping the inspirations that live underneath the surface of lived experiences.

Portrait of Mother with Child

Fresh from The No-Man's Land
out into the blurred blaze.
The sun paints the room
gold and glares at your
face. The spring light
glazes the moving figures
shuffling back and forth
and leads your eye to the
maze
 outside.

Step into spring,
 come alive and swing
 to the music of the swaying trees
 in the wind.

Your cry, cocooned in your breast,
turns heads to listen
like watchers waiting
for the first cuckoo
to hatch a blue sky.

You're alive, alive, and
 alive.

Midwife prods you,
shelters you in blankets.
Displayed to your mother,
she listens for your breath
as you bathe under sunlight.

You're flourishing, flourishing, and flourishing.

Stamped with date and time,
morning, 07:18, like the
cuckoo clock, your song
will sing
 its hours.

But

listen closely

and
you'll
hear
the
tick
tock
of
the
clock.

your
time
starts

now

Erased

She is a cautionary tale of the feminine curse,
people read her like braille and spit out the words
and fill in the blanks with her name, alongside countless
women who made the same mistake. They quote God

and mourn, for a female's rash choice is her own, and
a mother should feel the emptiness in her womb because
she raised a sin. Her name rests on tongues that only know her
cursed infamy. Her name rests on her parent's shelf like a trophy of shame.

But, I remember the day your bedroom door would not open
and your mum came to find us trapped, crying on the floor.

A Seeker's Ghazal¹

Let me sew smooth webs for you always,
to trap your love, suck your blood, always.

Stoned from floating fantasies, I drink
from your boundless fruitful flood, always.

Let me beat the daff², feel the echo
of the eastern mountains thud, always.

For your hope holds the sun's intensity,
nurtures my small divine bud, always,

I dance naked in fiery deserts
to the holy song you hummed always

of starless nights, drunken daffs, and my
Qudsia's lust for the blest flood, always.

¹ Ghazal – A poetic form that comprises of a reoccurring refrain, rhyme, and syllable length.

² Daff – A middle eastern drum, associated with spiritual music.

Creativity: A Checklist

1. It's ok to take a break from a poem and sleep on it as long as you do not crumple the paper.
2. Do not be afraid to speak your mind in a poem. After all, there is no need to cry over spilt ink.
3. Be grateful.
4. Do not try to drown a terrible poem in the bathroom sink because overtime, you'll end up with a blockage.
5. Instead try to nurture it by leaving it out under the sun to absorb some vitamin D.
6. Do not take your experiences for granted.
7. Do not give up. Have a KitKat instead.
8. Do not categorise yourself because the world does that for you.
9. Stay hydrated.
10. Stick to what you know best.
11. Hear the poem. See the poem. Write the poem.
12. Your dreams are gifts of poetry from God.
13. Stay alert to language and ideas around you.
14. It is ok to sit in isolation and think.
15. Get out more.
16. Read more.
17. It is ok to feel your emotion intensely.
18. It is ok to think and maybe overthink.
19. Drafting does not mean the poem is bad. It just needs to be perfect.
20. It is ok to be self-critical.
21. Trust your gut feeling.
22. Smile.
23. It is ok to slam the desk when your poem is not working or if you find the perfect phrase.
24. Do not break up with a poem. Always stay in touch. It needs time to grow.
25. Take some time to read and write in coffee shops. Poets and coffee, a cliché but true.
26. Enjoy the process even if it drains you at times.
27. Poems are insights. Do not be afraid of your own voice.
28. Stay true to yourself and to your opinions.
29. Stay in awe of words and poems because they help you capture self-expression.
30. Sleep.

GEORGE CHARLES

Georgina Charles is currently studying towards BA in Creative Writing at Roehampton University. She isn't sure about her name or her gender but will answer to the name George. King George (as she would like to be known) has a healthy obsession with Korean music and is trying to learn every language on the planet in order to keep her romantic options open. It hasn't helped her so far.

View from the roof of a bookshop in Kensington

When Gren fell,
I was looking into my comedian's eyes.

I had laughed then,
at his career going up in smoke.

A predator plume circled the sirens,
and there was yet to be news,

"I've quit smoking," he said.

Religion

Persecute me rightly, grandmother.
I have killed the religion of my hair.
Virgin stripped until the dark bark turned pale sick like the white faced foreigners who came to take our colours away.
You've seen this before, you say.
Your son married a white woman.
I am delirious with colour.
Bleach like the beach you sailed away from, pink coconut ice, blue in the sea, sugar cane green and still, altogether, too alien.
You say I hate my own colour.
I hide behind my hair.
Yet I cannot shave my head and show the world my face because a woman's hair is her crown.
Cut it down.
And what man would love you then?
Don't come to church, you say, until you look like you should.
I have killed the religion of my hair.

Ain't I Black Too?

Inspired by Sojourner Truth's 'Ain't I A Woman?' Speech

Those dark-skinned women over there say that *real* niggas flat iron their hair, or wear weave because 4C ain't never gonna grow down to there. And y'all light skinned bitches got curls that unfurl. Yeah, I do. And am I not black too? Look at me! Look at my skin! Nobody ever told me that less melanin made me more human. And I never suffered the way you did, but am I not black too? My father had to fight to be with my mother. I wear headscarves and piercings to feel closer to a brother, and it seems like sisters hate me more because it's true.

Ain't no white person ever called me white.

And I ain't gon fight it, or chemical burn myself just to feel like I belong. My mother used to shave my head because she didn't know what else to do with it. Shit. We all been through it. And ain't I black too?

Soldier Jig

Find me the words
To make you dance again soldier.
Baby grew up strong
And she asks for you.

Some kind of song
To make that heavy heart lighter.
Baby said she'd like
To sing for you.

How can we make daddy dance again
Make him kick up his legs like he used to.
Kiss us on the cheek sly like he used to.
Flash me that handsome smile I'm used to.

Gotta make you dance again soldier,
Baby got two left feet.
She don't got that easy rhythm,
But now you brought home the beat.

CORAL DALITZ

Dizzy

What I remember is my eyes
tracing round and round the spiral stones
in the yard. Then the door opened
and my eyes went round and round
the tight red rings of the stranger's hair.
I remember curling myself into the
folds of my mother's skirt. The last thing
was her laugh, red, yellow, blue.

Portrait of a woman

He gave me a rose to hold.
It's strange. Fingers like mine,
heavy stems and bulbous tips,
don't grow to be framed. A rose
is slim. Her figure meant for paint.
Mine is for chalk: Broad, bold
and difficult to tame.

Snapshot

Length of hose
coiled in looping yellow near the loaded barrow –
both abandoned.
Coiled, I won't say *snake*, you are too
loose of all your tension, you won't pounce.

Unmentioned,
you are not a composition but an interruption
of rough hands.
You show me a man with rough hands,
face turned from the viewer, yellow rubber boots.

Thursday 30th August 2018, Christ Church College, Oxford.

Best is waking alone between new sheets.
Arms and belly, legs and breasts and cheeks
bright warm, make first dent on a crisp fresh cloud
the way the sun does, nosing gently through an
untouched day to kiss another's windowsill. I like it
when the first moment is still: in another bed,
this morning falling golden on another's head.
Waiting for the Perseids

The dark was not the same dark,
not a city yellow, but a friendly dark. A
dark that wants itself close to you, too close;
to fold you into a glossy velvet hug.

Stone houses are cool in the summer, so
I suppose it was, although I thought it wasn't.
I also remember the window being open
but it must have been shut before I

opened it, so how on earth did the night get in?
It was definitely there, choking us. I know
it was cloudy: we were looking for the stars
but we never found them. The Perseids.

When I try to reconstruct that house,
what comes to mind is the bee in the skylight,
quilts on the walls, downstairs a corner
with no Christmas tree. I remember

tall teacups (classy, blue-streaked),
where was the fridge? You are in the
kitchen, lying on the grass, on the sofa,
frozen like waxworks all over the place.

The Selkie Myth

This place suits you: brilliant cliffs
with ridges where the sunlight loves to linger,
vast seas where my amoebic day-dreams drift:
a dazzling mirror when the rainclouds lift.

Overexposed, a picture studio;
the not yet rendered world of a video
game. Bright, empty, endless after rain.
We'd mould our tracks in damp sand with bare toes,

you were a streamlined seal in the sea,
while I, bare-shouldered, watched you from the shallows,
golden and black and glossy in the deep.

Hearts sinking stone-like into one-another.
Eyes and senses rushing to the point
where a sky retreats into its own bright cover.

EMILY DEE

Emily is from Leeds, and currently in her second year studying Biomedical Science at the University of Birmingham. Commended in 2014 and a top 15 Foyle Young Poet winner in 2016, she is now a member of The Writing Squad. Writing about family and home, she is inspired by her surroundings and the Northern poetic voice. She enjoys singing in a chamber choir, advocates for greener living, and is president of University of Birmingham Phab.

The Snail Census

Last time we walked this road,
I was eyelevel to the flowerbeds
planted in the walls.
The air tasted fresh,
after rainclouds shed in the early hours
left the ground a patchwork
with splotches of damp.
One hand in yours,
the other stretched towards the spiral shells,
a podgy finger
pointing out each glistening body.
We gave them destinations, family relations,
named and aged each shining gastropod.
And wondered what they did with their lives.
So passed our slow plod
from the front door to the park.

The Wash Cellar

Green mangle stands idle,
next to the grate swept clean of
its last ash.
No boiling water or elbow grease,
for gone are cotton nappies and
the daily dunk of toddlers.
A washboard filled with dust
collects cobwebs not dirt,
would stain sopping shirts
and turn black knee-socks grey.
For the stairs are so steep,
and the load too light.
Where sat ten
now you stand, scourer in hand,
washing nighties and flowered blouses,
in the kitchen sink
as the kettle shrieks
tea for one.

Home

A chipped red letterbox, and two eyes peep through,
sweet-brown and so very new.
Along another road are railings, recoated twice before.
With many hands we paint away the age.
From a brick-dust Martian surface
clean the Milky Way and wish on stars decades cold,
that pinprick through the inky sky,
a marker home for someone.
Step out to see the circles, spinning geometry of rock to rock.
They're magnetised, dance close, collide.
And home is there.

LOUISE ESSEX

Louise Essex is a poet and musician from Hertfordshire. She studied at the University of York, where she joined The Writing Squad, and later completed her MA at UCL. Her poetry has been published by Banshee and Under the Radar and appeared in Introduction X: The Poetry Business Book of New Poets.

Orange

Holding you in my palm,
I urge you to ripen with licks.

I wax your curves,
pull off every thread of pith, gentle as hair.

Each segment of you is a chapter
fat with blood

bulging under my thumb,
snagging under my nail.

You tear in surprising ways,
as I get to know your weight, your form.

Being my first child,
I could not predict how

you would grow
silent as a husk.

Worse still,
how you'd shrivel
into a terribly small thing

and one day
I'd bite down hard

not realising
you were in my mouth..

Nounou

For months I invited draughts inside
and left the milk sitting out.

I waited until the under-sink bin
grew volcanic.

I let your immaculate child
scoff éclairs until he dripped,

danced with your crisp
Parisian wineglass in hand.

But as last night's bathwater
went slugging down the drain

Madame I turned and tripped
on your abandoned bra -

and suddenly you were real

like the soft sag of your mid-life body
was right at my fingertips.

I wanted to rescue the long hair
from the bathroom sink

to place it back on your head,
to save you.

ANNIE FAN

Annie Fan is President of the Poetry Society at the University of Oxford. She won the Young Person's Prize at Ledbury Poetry Festival, the Felix Dennis Prize at Stratford Literary Festival, and Lancaster University's fiction prize in 2018. Her work appears, or will appear, in Poetry London, *Ambit*, and *The Manchester Review*, among others. She is a shadow trustee at MPT.

The Allotment

In the ninth century the Kashmiri poet
Rudrata buried *that poem*, symbolic
chessboard, in his commentary on
sanskrit poesis, *Kavyalankara*. Which is to say

that a poem of eight lines of eight
letters lies hidden whichever way you
might read; and much later a man
might look from his window and consider

the mushrooms outside, flashlit
by moons - no longer consider himself
a man. The poem, when jiggled to
the legal motions of a knight, miraculously

remains the same. And so ferns will grow
from secret spores, still; the birds stutter
their vowels into a silence -
light hours still the same.

It was given a name. The word
for God? Lungs of potato dust
in wet weather. The word for love?
Leather gloves, a touch, the lightest

kind of grace. Call these the *knight's tour*,
how, here, falling might be the same
as walking through night-damp rows,
flying upside these fields, into space.

The Architect

After Viviano Codazzi's 'Architectural Fantasy,' Christ Church picture gallery; with thanks to Annabelle Fuller

Soufflot does not interest him,
that arching sprawl of mansards,
columns and rigorous quads:
he already knows idiom, can hem
a line full of conceits, precursor
to pastiche, can copy with great art.
Only the sky is real. Hours from the past
spill in every way dark, a murmur
of farewell to the way of things. No,

the gods recast and replicate days
and works, confirm the expendables so
he cannot bear the dead: how a spire always
gives rise to a new crypt--how we go,
then scale to only inscription, the words.

Vesper

This poem was first published in *The Manchester Review* in June 2018.

in all the years just my body,
the cells, the vessels, the gloopy
tubes of blood that separate
the slow work of dying and this
night. again evensong, again
linate blunders of breath-wind
rushing the pews. the hours
fall apart like skin underwater.
i can't remember my hands
except for their resurrection
of the throat, how the soprano
clicks her teeth in low, stately
rumbles on the imperative;
slow-hymn, synecdoche. but,
here are the organ's pipes
like my mouth. again and
again they open, trilling winter to
a finer diction. my thick, foreign
tongue, gnash-lipped, loosening
like the ash of the dying trees, again.
run like stars into the deep blind
houses, over the hill: it begins,
o lord. leave me to catch another.

ANNABELLE FULLER

Annabelle Fuller studies Classics and English at Magdalen College, Oxford. She has had poems published in the Society of Classical Poets Journal, New Poetry Magazine, the Florio Society pamphlet, and the Oxford Review of Books. She won a category of the BBC Proms Poetry Competition in 2018 and was commended in the Lord Alfred Douglas and Martin Starkie Prizes in 2019. She likes to read George Herbert, AA Gill, and Edward St Aubyn.

The Pianist

Press and push the keys,
 And let each finger's weight
 Coax out scant synergies from ivories
Worn smooth as silk-sheened slate.

Flatten. Sharpen. Cram
 The staves with notes that cling
 And quaver once you've played them. Strike and slam
The springs to make them sing.

Give some pedal points;
 Sustain and silence too.
 Treat gently tendon strings and hammer joints.
Play jazz for bruises blue.

The Oil Painter

Flesh was the reason oil paint was invented. - Willem de Kooning (b. 1904)

Would that I could wade in watercolour,
Swim in liquid lilies, fade, and sink
Among the petal pads of paler - palest - pink.
I fear the lure of azure pools,
The depth that vexes and virgules
My empty arms, and makes my heartbeat blink.

Bare body. Canvas. How to make my mark?
Pastel (chalk): the tool of tender choice
For building stippled lips which boast no voice.
Unbutton, mouth, do not unzip,
Now pursing plaintive as you sip.
I'd kiss the scent of morning mists, no noise.

You're safe in un-upholstered pencil sketch.
Unconfined by vacant vapour taint
Of tarry trickles - sorry, oil paint -
For forming you: perfected, plush,
Untouched by hands but not by brush.
Each varnished layer tinctures my restraint.

You're easier to hold, enclosed, like that.
Paint-flecked hands are dealing cold contrast:
Skin pitch or alabaster plaster cast.
Your pupils, burning blackly bright,

Are hit by harshened candlelight.
I'd have to turn my back. I'd move too fast.

I shut you from my eyes. Extensive night.
Wanton oils sweat, and swathe, and seethe;
They twitch their frame, and twist, and thrash, and teethe.
They forge their subject, clot, and keep -
Then crack and flake instead of seep.
How beautiful. They do not let you breathe.

The Sculptor

Nude and unclad porcelain.
Your fingers skip and skim like stones,
Adrenaline

Within them as they graze
And scale my panes of statue-skin.
My gem-laid gaze

Betrays me in refracted blurs.
The Grecian robe you gave me sways
With wavelet stirs.

As shoreline clings to sand,
Cloth marble clutches at my curvatures;
Each softless strand

Purls like an ivory tide,
A liquid rock you hewed by hand
And vivified

With stone you told to drape,
Just as sea-foam veils a wide
White waterscape.

Chiffon ripples. Ocean swells.
You brush the planes of my sculpted shape
Like beachy shells.

THEOPHINA GABRIEL

Theophina Gabriel (@lilaphina) is an award-winning poet and recent graduate from the University of Oxford where she studied Philosophy & Theology. As well as previously winning the Foyles' Young Writers Award, her work has been published in various mediums, most recently being commissioned by the BBC in video and radio format, as well as various journals and publications. She is currently an Editorial Trainee at William Heinemann, and in her spare time continues to run her magazine for underrepresented Black creatives, Onyx Magazine (@onyxmagazineox).

Dani

animato.

I never knew one man could hold so much music,
It pooled from his fingers into silver bowls
Until Home scaled up through the English grey
Guitar pan strumming us
all the way to Tyrell Bay;
Sheetless, my arms mirrored his
Until they marrowed memory,
He'd smile in major 7th
And show me exactly how to stir them;
wrists simmering, rolling into patterns
symphonies untouched by paper,
melodies penned by ear alone.

dolce.

He made me fall in love,
with pianos rainedropped into silver
their notes scattered in pools,
And how to collect them one after another
Until they waterfalled into songs,
Pump me Up,
Mas Que Nada,
Blue Moon melodies
grooved into fingers playing
Key changes that could turn
a midnight into morning.

maestoso.

“again, but softer”
His ears caught every slipped half-tone
steadied them with hammer in hand,
arms lovingly zipped round a cello pan.

cresc.

He gave me my first bassline,
tricky and quick between my palms
Billyjean,
Taught to me to sling the half-cut stick
straight necked
through the unseen and suddenly
I too became a believer in
The faith of a flying hand blindfinding that heavenly
E.

fff.

we moonwalked at Notting Hill,
on floats wildly coloured for carni

and when my arms ached breathless, I trilled still
skipping from drum to drum, rejoicing
with a family of sticks gripped in fervent
worship of Caribbean songs transfixed
You were our god,
of steel,
of ivory,
of string,

dim.

I never knew that one man could hold so much music,
I never knew the volume of his silent malignancy.

Dandruff

Hair streams into coils
Held mid-breath and wrapped
By hands that do not fear decline,
By hands that boast lines jutting with oil,

And when their eyes tries to drown her
Like silk swallowing flesh,
Her coconut fingers splay still-
Teethed and comb-like
To catch their flaking thoughts
Beneath her fingertips.

EVA ISHERWOOD-WALLACE

Eva Isherwood-Wallace is a PhD candidate in English and holds an MA in Poetry from the Seamus Heaney Centre, Belfast. She was a highly commended prizewinner in the 2013 Tower Poetry Competition and was shortlisted in the 2018 UCD Voices of War International Poetry Competition. She was also awarded the 2018 WTM Riches Essay Prize. Her work has been published in *The Tangerine*, *Banshee*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *The Emma Press Anthology of Contemporary Gothic Verse*.

Portrait of a Lady

Christ Church Picture Gallery

Awkward-handed noblewoman watching
what we cannot see. You avoid
the artist, your eyes the same abiding green
as the wall you find yourself against.
So: do they reflect what waits behind
or did he just forget to paint them?
Fear not, we can't remember who he is.
The diamond in your ear will not reveal him.

You hold your breast and check for abnormality,
some change in texture or a hidden lump,
but the layered paint lies flat
over Holofernes, his head is tucked
below your dress. Soften your hand.
The sword no longer feels your clutch

Speilgeach

the bridge remembered itself
in the heat
the reservoir unreserved
beneath a whipping scar of walls
splitting the mountains

each stone staying with the other
only out of respect
for whoever introduced them

we see straight through:
white welts
arranged by bodies
who lost their own arrangements
in the carrying and the stone

Antarctic

In the Antarctic there is sea and snow. The iceberg, being two, is pale and without sex and walks: the self-belief of a Russian queen and every cold androgyny of Orlando. With each move she renounces what she saw on land (seabirds and psychiatry). She holds the octant to her eye, coordinates are plotted (this ship's arc, our floating by) in the notebook in her pocket, and tracks a stranger century of her own forgotten meltings.

SALMA M.

Salma M. is a young polyglot with roots in Ghana and Italy who has recently added Spanish to her repertoire of spoken languages. Different cultures and stories are her passion, and as a result she writes of places and people who exist and who don't. When she isn't writing, she is content with trying to solve old cold cases, murders and mysterious disappearances a la 'Buzzfeed Unsolved'. She enjoys reading Homer's plays, and her poetry muse is Sappho. She currently studies Creative Writing and English Literature, and dreams one day of successfully publishing books of poetry and prose.

Ana

The Conqueror, I see
Holds my heart in her palm
Tied to her ring finger.
When will you let it go?
You pull at it at will.
You're my mistress, I'm your slave.

You're a Siren.
I hear you crying out
The melody of my heart
And I [Enter Fool] chased you.
You were singing a song:
You weren't calling my name.

Enchantress,
Your dress bleeds with the love
Of us, your never lovers,
And your long hair, that swept me
Off my feet,
is a pointed arrow, straight to my heart.

Ruler of Pisces
The tears that well up in your eyes
Are not yours, you thief.

Dictator of my Heart,
You are guilty
Of stealing my heart.

Scorned lover

Repetition don't make it true.
How could he? Refuting the teachings of our
forefathers, for flimsy fanatic's fantasies.
And I, his lover, casted aside
for a man he doesn't know.
Jesus, he scorned their traditions!
Written words from an educated illiterate
medium rare fire on powdery charcoal,
but no steak. Mistake.
Rotten charred sound of barbecued torture

but 'I believe' he repeats
And I, once his lover, once his wrecker, shout
but the flames hit her, angrier, louder.
Who is your God?

Man on a Horse

Shame.
Curios skies overheard, calling
strange silent sisters,
their dresses painted in the cries of
beheaded wives and uncut children.

(sister clotho spins the thread)

Shame!
Like a coward, he runs towards
mighty mistress Mercy,
holding on to the white coated
fear struck and dirty hooved.

(sister lachesis weaves the thread)

Shame...
Shit covered metal, and his hand and
bloody breathless body
drowning in the once white vessel
calling the Virgin's Son, not his used virgin

(sister athropos cuts the the thread)

¡Shame!
Old muddy leather touches the
grainy greeny ground
and his touch
leaves hoove prints.
Then nothing but:
Fear and Fire,
revenge to murdered orphans
and widowed wives
and raped virgins.

The cries of a lone horse mix
with the sisters' laugh.

Atlantis behind the Couch

Upstairs, behind the couch,
where the yellow candle
can't burn
where the dried tongue
of the rat no longer swallows
the cockroach and Athena's
foe eternally weaves,
she died.

Fingers no longer sing (across the page)
and autumn lips choke under
black ink thoughts, drowning
in an omitted thought [it's failure]
Where are you, Atlantis?
Vored by Neptune and Oceanus?
Or where you never Aphrodite on a shell?

DANIELLE OLDHAM

Danielle Jade Oldham holds a First Class degree in Drama and Creative Writing from The University of Salford, where she also founded the University of Salford Writers' Journal, a creative writing workshop group. She is now a teacher of English at Laurus Cheadle Hulme School in Stockport, Manchester. Her favourite poets include Sylvia Plath, Charles Bukowski, Leonard Cohen, William Shakespeare, and Frank O'Hara.

Recollection

It isn't there anymore, but
she remembers
(clearly, like transparent nail enamel –
sticky and tacky)
didn't he lasso her with a strawberry lace?
The tawny-haired girl had giggled
(almost like champagne!) as the voice
on the other end told her,
crackers, buttered scallops and tampons are all
we have to offer.

Saccharine

After 'The Birth of the Virgin' by Corrado Giaquinto.

Mothers giving birth to mothers;
amethysts, like crystal hearts do shimmer
in those curves not quite fit for a god
(do soft fingers ruin a body?)
she'll never dream of receiving a rose,
or of pillows, soft pink, candyfloss.

An aesthetic cheerfulness, all in all, like candyfloss,
for the cherub willed to be a mother.
As long as the cheeks are sturdy roses
and the earlobes white, slicked with a shimmer,
He sees no need to reap the pleasure of the body.
But what of *this* child? Oh, God,

flighty and fleeting, seems God,
with his skies of sticky pink candyfloss
and the rippling folds of the body.
Chubby hands, has the infant mother
as she blows me kisses of shimmer,
her laughing lips the petals of a rose.

Sometimes, in books, young girls press roses
(or so I have heard, pardon me, God)
but after an age does the velvet still shimmer?
The idea is yellowed, saccharine, candyfloss,
the kind of fluff just gobbled by mothers.
Why couldn't she be just anybody?

The promise of future curves has ruined the body,
ruined the chances of perfumed roses,
just mothers giving birth to mothers giving birth to mothers.
Gold dust, trapped at the whim of a god,
his thoughts cloudy and easily ripped, candyfloss –
so why the gold in the yellow hair? The shimmer?

To be pushed from a ruined frame – skin, no shimmer –
will never do for those with a thrusting body.
You may like the romance of candyfloss
and of white and purple roses
(such playful temptations – oh, a silly God!)
but a girl is a mother and a man needs his mother.

At her clutch I'm inclined to sigh. Candyfloss is to
God what the rose between the shimmering folds is to the body
of the Mother.

GREG ROSENVINGE

Greg Rosenvinge is a student based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, having just graduated with a BA (Hons) in Politics at Newcastle University and is now studying for an MA in International Multimedia Journalism. His poetry has been previously published in Haverthorn and Lighthouse, and he was shortlisted for the 2018 Terry Kelly Poetry Prize. He tweets @greg_rosenvinge.

St. Mary's Hasn't Moved

On the tided causeway, giving to low,
Off-white vagary about *Spanish City*—
I am *St Mary's* : switch : idle calamity—
Kicked on saline, dead grandad walks I sew :
Switch : on tided causeway, giving to high,
White by blue *Spanish*, a child for sunned *Whitley*—
I am *St Mary's* : switch : melting whippy idly—
Yem tha neet fresh; wet causeway and not shy.

*A was a bairn — now I speak so moderne;
Gathering the cairn stones — the stark lint of bairn.*

Or apparitions towed in parking. They said the lighthouse was sold.

Essaxon Gold

How to cede absence for regal. GATES + FOR LET line
luster Cut ore in a germination of Posture; fertiliser
leaned in Petals and Trunkless Legs - built visage, loft,
Rained desert, and a cup of Aired sweat - to which the
beetles scatter from the Steps of His Booty. *I've grafted*
to this electroplate gig. I've welded the silver. When at night
Children dig in their sandpits and the Ocean is *So* deep.
They buckle, cede. The beetles Reive in police gear,
and the Gold condenses along tree lined Borders into Off
liquid sweat. *I ain't that smart but I ain't Basildon.* Say
the behemoth isn't Ocean clad in Gold Rust, omniscient
Sculptor. *Maaaate, Nights are slept warriors!* Mere one
of many, he corrects with chinks in all the right places.
My plucky King, Tutankhamen: Elkington missed a spot.

Essaxon Blue

Gold says Treacherous, Veneer — Lock. *Ya opened. Yeah but*
What if I made Heaven a cannister of Copper, Hiding and Driving
From Scrapheap to Carrara, in Spitted varnish? limbed, and —
— Bolt. *Yeah god, ya peering? Counting my steps in Country*
Rain like you've seen Where I've Been. A man kindles his barbecue
With State of the Art butane and barks of Flameless Messiahs.
He tries it Blue but it comes out Colourless before He kisses it
And Epping Forest burns in wildfires — Key. *They're opening.*
How to cede Land for Heaven. *We take what wasn't given.* You

Weren't born. *And so he did it for me.* And there's dye off Southend
Beach on overcast opening hours. *I inherit the East End to Comforts;*
See my Market Stall mum breastfed me in Barnston village hall. And
So it be — Pick. — Turn. *Thank you, Lord.* And also with you in
Dead of Moonlight scanning and all is seen is Black and Blue.

Essaxon White

The Marble of Carrara found itself in *Chelmsford Chalk,*
Blackboard erasing Designer Dress — Frigid Facsimile
While the Chelmer is filled with *litter* and new Bond Street
Vending Chic Sales. *I come with white light, cobalt eyes.*
And the *frigid* buy a drink and are catcalled in thick air.
So when do you become a model? — "The ship comes
Up the canal and the width broke the marble." - "Tan oil
In the fax machine." That's what people say! Prouding like
Mayoral soliloquies, a self-conscious "Jingo" — To have
Nothing but a Brightness, East End *Kitsch* to Uttlesford
Whistler — "from White to Oasis Scouting." You've long since
Failed blue. Your churches are green. Half mill bedrooms
Loud yet there's only *tan oil.* *And to think of gold!* The New
Rue their "*Prosecco Jello*" — the Old Feet Up after a long day.

ELLA STANDAGE

Ella Standage was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets award in 2015, 2016, and 2017, won first place in the Christopher Tower Poetry competition in 2017, and won second place in the Keats-Shelley Young Romantics prize in 2019. They are currently studying Classics at Durham University, and are also working on slowly transforming into a lichen-covered boulder.

ammonite

the world was too big and bright, so i hid in the museum gift shop. i needed something to hold onto as the earth spun, and i found it. the ammonite in my hand was heavy: a stone heartbeat, or a phone-dial. on the other end of the line was the prehistoric yawn before speech, the ocean rumbling reflected stars.

the world was too big and bright, so i developed the tendency to fossilise. i carried around slabs of darkness in coat pockets. i pulled my duvet over myself like a wave folding onto black sand.

now in this undomesticated night
i am a seashell, curled up in the dark,
falling through silent miles of sea.

i could sleep through the apocalypse, growing heavy with dreams of my floating green world,
translucent, like the underside of a lake, as my veins clogged with mother-of-pearl. the earth falls
through this darkness, its bones left undefined by light, preserved under the weight of stars.
but an ammonite is a small thing.
the night in my hand. it's something
i can hold onto as i fall asleep.

in the ruins of New Carthage

The Continnence of Scipio by Anthony van Dyck Christ Church, University of Oxford

i.
kindness is an art. but what does yours matter when my stones lie overthrown? more beautiful is
you in your silks, you in your bolts of colour against the lifelessness you've made of me. new
city. same ending.

ii.
my citizens cast no shadows.
they let water run through their ribcages.
they speak in a language made of spaces.
their voices cannot colour the world.

my buildings have no doors.
makes sense—the people here go
right through walls. light stabs
through my windows and finds black,
the backs of closed eyes.

iii.

you painted a ruin and that's what cruelty is.
construct me in my demolition. precision
in the architecture of my undoing. build me.
abandon me. put me together. pull me apart.

iv.

her white hands, my white marble, all paint
burnt off, or cracked. my synapses mapped:
little feathered grid systems.
city of my city. ruin of my ruin.
find the gaps in me and look through them.

v.

light falls in patches where it can punch through the ash in the air. go on and make a show of it, this
kindness, this art. then walk through cinders, smoke. think how this could have been beautiful, but—
rubble makes a lovely backdrop for you in your red cloak.

sundial

i'm a strange rectangular eye that opens
only at night-time.

in the dark my eyelashes come unstuck and
lift from my cold cheek,

then my plastered eyelid unrolls itself and
blinks, slowly, slowly.

day. the sun cuts me into pieces, etches
blindness with phosphenes.

knife-bright light delineates time. i count the
seconds till twilight—

(i'm nocturnal. married the moon.) i gave her *looks* every blue night;

she looked back. our language is circles that spin, swell and diminish.

when she turns away from the earth, i stare out, gather the empty

sky into a fistful of stars, a pearl, a
Fresnel lens dancing

round—she looks back over her shoulder—and round— turning towards me,

sees my night-face glowing with molten sunbeams stolen from daylight,

kept for her. her wedding band is her orbit,
mine, my gold iris.

JAKE STREET

Jake Street is a student at Lancaster University with a debauched sensibility. He is a very lapsed Catholic, a failed Romantic, a bedroom philosopher, a disappointed idealist and an irreverent cynic. He is likely to be found writing about Christ engaging in amomaxia or something similarly repugnant to the moralist mind. He pretends to be influenced by the punk poetry he frequently reads but really lacks the temperament for it. He won the Simon Powell prize in 2016 and was published in Paper Swans Press' Anthology of Young Poets.

Narcissus

I lie.
Tell me your truth
and I will echo it false.
Now you lie with me.

To Sleep is to Live

To fall asleep is to lose yourself in a forest of memories
each tree a thought,
 branch of concept,
 leaf a moment,
so I quickly clamber the canopy of time
 and slow listen
 to the white noise
of the rich rushing river babbling its secrets
 stridently in its strange wet tongue
 lashing to the aether
 wanting nothing but to be understood;
but all I hear is the absurdity
 of wood and dirt,
 the wondrous, cold
 copulation
of elemental powers
 water,
 earth,
 and air
 on the plastic globe
 with its rippling flesh
and the immense nothing that lies between all substance.
I pray for sweet fire
to sweep across it all,
 wash away my reality in a flood of heat,
still the stormy oceans,
leave naught but salt and ash,
 make barren the river valleys,
 and dry their waters to deserts
burn me into the void of sleep.
 I need release
 from my conscious cage
but I fear the energy which could create such heat;
it would be swift and deadly and all consuming

with passion and pleasure and power and pressure
and it would all be temporary. So temporary.
Yet still I rest for as true as I breathe
la vie est un sommeil, l'amour en est le rêve.

Bones in a Box

I return to my Lord
as small as he made me.
My last supper was forty days ago.

The Woman of the Apocalypse

Babylon sips from a silver goblet
long ago melted in the forges of war,
the civil kind when king and pretender
fought for an equally molten crown. War goddess.
She is bathed in blue, the guise of the Madonna
embodying the whore and such is her beauty
that each sip she takes is Nepenthe to the blind
and each caress of her lips enough
to drive to madness king of Israel and common man alike;
she sits like Saint Catherine, separated by four church men
from martyred Stephen who lies stripped and lashed and raw.
The woman of the apocalypse fears no man
but he who in death his own pleasure denies.
But in the end of days she lives. He dies.

MILENA WILLIAMSON

Milena Williamson is from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. She is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's University Belfast. Her project is entitled 'War, Image, Memory: Contemporary (Northern) Irish and American Poetry'. She was the winner of the Mairtín Crawford Poetry Award in 2018. Her poetry has been published on RTÉ and in *Magma*, *The Tangerine*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Poetry Ireland Review* and more.

Make-Believe

Outside the cinema, my niece lassos the dark
as if she knows the weight of rope.
She wants Wonder Woman's indestructible shield.
Her brother says he will cut one from cardboard
and paint it all the right colors.
In the car, I switch on the radio—
terrorists attack with real knives and explosive belts
made from water bottles wrapped in grey tape.

Dementia

To silence the alarm, you enter the month you married
someone then the birthday of no one you know.

Masterpieces 1300 – 1750

We arrive at the picture gallery
five minutes early.
The doors are locked.
The paintings are still wet.