

THE CHRISTOPHER TOWER
POETRY PRIZES 2018

SECRETS

Judged by
John Fuller
Christopher Reid
Peter McDonald



OXFORD
TOWER POETRY
2018

Tower Poetry is an organization based at Christ Church, University of Oxford, which offers opportunities and resources for young British poets.

We aim to develop the role of poetry in education and enable new poets to develop their talents through a series of exciting initiatives ranging from courses, competitions, and workshops to readings and publications.

Tower Poetry
Christ Church
Oxford
OX1 1DP

01865 276156

info@towerpoetry.org.uk
www.towerpoetry.org.uk
Facebook page 'Tower Poetry'
Twitter @TowerPoetry

You Tube Christophertower1

iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/itunes-u/id381705764>



THE CHRISTOPHER TOWER POETRY PRIZES 2018

First prize

Richard

TARANEH PERYIE
Bristol Grammar School

Second prize

untold secret to my mother

LUCY THYNNE
Lady Margaret School, London

Third prize

A Secret No Longer

ROBBI SHER
Highgate School, London

Commended

How to Invert a Hyperbolic Function

ANNIE FAN
Rugby High School, Warwickshire

Corner table at Tom's Cafe

MIRANDA GREEN
Wells Cathedral School, Somerset

The Mermaid

ZIQI YAN
Westminster School, London

TARANEH PERYIE

Richard

I used to think all men were slaves to me, but
 with the keen flick of your eye, faster than a serpent's tongue,
 you swept through Jerusalem and called me to the foot of your bed.
 You smirk; some strong aphorism has played on your lips.
 Sweet, cool ablution; confessions to men in red; hermits fasting.
 All answer to you. The smooth lines of your neck, the arch of your back.
 I wake sweated over, filthy with want, full of threat and fallacy.

I want to scream, to sing about the whiteness of your throat,
 your cool nakedness. Ungodly red infection of the mind.
 Like the black-faced eremite on his pilgrimage
 from Edessa to the Holy Land, my feet will blister on stone.

You know me by an unspoken name.
 Like the hailing chorus of Gabriel's wings,
 sounds that roll off your tongue, prickle against my skin.
 I'll never see fire or hear the sea again.
 From fertile sin, out shall spring an apple tree,
 share its fruit with me. I will stand by you.
 King of England – dead, a sexless bedfellow.

I gave you my soul. I damned the sweet rivers of wine and
 the protection of the archangel's wing – seized hell as my home.
 And you gave me your sister. A marriage of starched sheets.
 Her sweet eyes aping your own,
 a reflection so dear it made me weep.

And is this how you'll keep me? A dog on a chain?
 A mocking ghost of the memory I kept of you.
 The faint likeness of blue irises? I will not ask.
 Two crowns cannot kiss.

I want to rip out your tongue with my teeth.
 I want to ask why your face is so calm, as if you don't remember
 the embrace we shared, heat that passed between
 our bodies like ghosts. I could tear the hair from my head,
 watch it scatter like leaves, the hours burning
 on their own funeral pyre.
 If only god had reached down from Elysium
 and scorched my tongue to blistered snakeskin.

You will forget, and history will never know,
 like water slipping through cracks in the sky into the ocean
 petrified into pillars of salt useless to a parched beggar's throat.
 We will disappear, but even now I will collect each moment,
 each sound, each soft sighing whisper like precious stones.
 I will etch into rock Once, I loved the king of France
 and keep it as a pebble in my palm,
 quietly turning its smooth sides around in my hands.

Offish waters
 give their colour to you.
 The Seine.
 Now, we can say nothing at all.

LUCY THYNNE

untold secret to my mother

breastbone of water, hold me between
 the thin and the gap. ask me, soft, why

i had wanted to sew absence into my skin.
 tell me that your body too had once learnt

to translate hunger into another kind
 of emptiness; how you had used lack

to chisel your flesh to glass. grip my thinning
 wrists like the white handles of kitchen knives,

brush my hair out over your lap
 in a gleaming fan. like you used to do,

when i ran about your feet and my thoughts
 had not yet contorted. foetal, i now curl

and become a question mark at your toes.
 you say i'm sorry, as if to apologise

for all mothers who have watched
 daughters twin with bathroom mirrors,

watched them cry into self-made carcasses.
 we gaze at the moon outside, an opal wound,

but somehow we know it will heal itself
in the morning. what is left to say

about this night? shy, the sky begins to fold
in on itself; presents the darkness we know

only behind eyelids. i don't know who to tell
so i shout it, huge, down my own throat -

while you are kissing my forehead, cool,
the sheet so thin it leaves a bruise.

ROBBI SHER

A Secret No Longer

Now, a canvas of skin, lathered
in orange foam. They bend her back
in a wide arc: this

to spread out your ribs
and I think of moth wings, eyelids, legs -
things that open as though to reveal us

but cannot.
See how easy it is to push that first
needle into her, swallowed then out

to be replaced by larger tubes:
puncture, reflush, aspirate -
a stomach slit, easy as tongues

through freshwater.
Soon they will haul out the body.
It will be grey-blue, and alive.

ANNIE FAN

*How to Invert a Hyperbolic Function**After Chen Chen / After Cathy Linh Che*

Take the cone away from the cone and
 don't applaud it. I like to say that the body
 is a feat of engineering – how God himself
 plotted the range of arcsinh, these bright
 mountains and light pollutions. Even if
 God has never spoken of anything like
 the night sky, cityscape to cityscape.
 In my sister's long decade of a kitchen,
 we shell boiled peanuts and she says
 learning the area is all there is; that
 Kepler himself used the constant
 for his calculations of Hyperion,
 hamburger moon. She fries mu'er
 with steak and laughs and runs
 about her kitchen, a place that she bought before
 I was born. My sister, who predates
 the Internet. What is it like to know a quasar without
 accretion, to spin before the vast imagined
 planes of her cooking in 3D? I like to say
 every hand that's touched my body is modern maths,
 German: the word for dream, *traum*; the fusions –
 I thought holomorphic and holographic were
 the same word. Do you know? Does she
 care? I can add the number one to the

number one. New York is the meat
 of our distance, fashioned brilliant
 in its false orbits, the large kitchen.
 A dream of every post-racialism and damn
 kind of flesh. So, what am I eating?:
 A partial differential of my mother, stranger
 Gods and their hypersurface domains.
 She does not know about the night I ran
 and threw myself onto a bridge, another
 feat of engineering. The steel was not
 New York, a cityscape, a microlocal analysis,
 a girl left unlocked and slipped right inside;-
 this is the least remarkable thing:
 I am my sister's sister. I don't know how to
 solve the years, a construct connecting us.
 It took more than a decade of planning to find
 the God particle; its science and differentials,
 a pulling force; to bind Earth to light and her to me.

MIRANDA GREEN

Corner Table at Tom's Cafe

He had only just sat down,
 She's late, she was doing her hair
 And couldn't decide what to wear.
 He says he has to leave town.

He doesn't have time to stick around,
 She just feels a chill in the air.
 She got those falling down the stairs.
 He'll stay for half an hour.

She already ate,
 He's doing great,
 She gets a text, from No-one.
 "This has been... fun."
 She's sorry she made him wait.
 He's going to be late.

ZIQI YAN

The Mermaid

Enter a wanton dreamer of wrinkled and tarnished water.
 Who's this strange fish rising, shivering, shrivelling, gliding,
 thirsty eyes thirsting for shore?

She could be any woman at all, and yet
 better mad with the crowd than sane all alone.

Legless nymph of sleepless sorrow.
 Since fear is cracked and shame misshapen,
 the water torture of her secret pours into
 the evacuated channels of her spine,

This scar, racing down the insides of her thighs,
 left / right : both her protection and her mutilation:
 in cutting her tail, she carves out a home.

Of course, the children point and cry,
 not incurious, nor nocent yet:
 why she smells of blight, white froggy
 webbed fingers and a need to have her
 brittle bones near the great opulent water.

They know there is something they do not yet know,
 better mad with the crowd than sane all alone.

