

# **Bermondsey and Beyond Poetry Competition 2025**

**The Poets: Anonymous Alex Anton Ellie Bignall  
Ryan Caidic Alison Clayburn Tina Cockett Danuta  
Dagir Peter Davies Jane Deakin Matthew Demwell  
Peter Devonald Emma Doe Ann Fenn Charlotte  
Ginsborg Debra Gosling Mary Gosling Mike Henry  
Susan Hutchings Haydn King Jack Lanham Valerie  
Livina Tony Lucas Keith McAuley Hayley McGirr  
Stewart Morgan Karen Morris Denise Mulligan  
Helen Palmer Carolyn Scott Anna Somerset Elisavet  
Sotiriadou Jahdia Spencer Tina Mary Rose Udeh  
Georgina Wilson**

**The Judges: Alice Bever Sheila Taylor Wes White**

**The Organisers: Erika Huartos-Castaneda Pat  
Kingwell**

# The Winning Poem

## Rules for leaving

The day we buried my father,  
my aunts set the rules for the living—  
after the vigil, leave the house quickly  
so his spirit wouldn't linger.

Walk under a table,  
so his spirit couldn't follow.

Throw some salt to blind  
Death's eyes.

Once the casket was out,  
we were told to never,  
never look back, so his spirit  
would only look forward  
through the veil.

We laid his spirit to rest,  
handed him over to the priest,  
sealed the casket, drowned grief  
with prayers— *Requiem aeternam  
dona eis Domine...*

We stopped at a coffee shop  
to shake off the debris of loss,  
flip off the death that had clung  
to our fingernails, so it wouldn't  
follow us home.

I remember floating in that convoy,  
Trying not to laugh—as if salt  
and glances could ever  
banish a ghost, but even  
as we drove his spirit for the last  
time past the lawn that no one  
will remember that he tended daily,  
past the dogs that howled after him,  
the walls washed clean of his anger,  
I never, never dared to look back,  
because if I did, he might have stayed.

**Ryan Caidic**

# Commended Poems

## BEAR

I imagine you living with a big black bear, who loves your electronic media, for this is what he eats.

He rips Guardian articles from the Ipad screen, crunches through them, snacks on Facebook posts, luxuriates over a long lunch of TV news.

When he's excited he turns on music - he's fond of heavy metal - and dances in the middle of your carpet.

His heaving body blocks the light from your garden window, and your view of family photos on the wall.

You cover your ears, then your eyes.

When he's tired he'll lay his big black head in your lap and, sometimes, you are just too tired to lift it off.

Then I imagine you walking along a rocky seashore, testing the strength of your legs by navigating slopes and dips and pools.

He is lumbering along the strip of sand beside you, nuzzling for cast off sandwiches, being startled by scuttling crabs .

A plastic bag wraps itself around his nose. You look and hope it stays, but he shakes it off.

Then the tide changes, the waves advance.

He moves curiously toward them, runs away, eventually knows he must join you on the higher ground.

Now he too steps carefully from rock to rock and jumps the pools.

You lead, he follows.

Trapped between rocks, you spy a beach ball, the old fashioned type with multicoloured stripes.

You pull it out, admire the colours, turn and toss it to him.

He scoops it up, rears up on two back legs, balances it on his nose.

You are surprised to find you want to dance with him.

**Alison Clayburn**

## **Daffodils in December**

My son never born remains forever eight,  
he loves the world with such passionate intensity,  
laughs easily and often, so thrilled to be alive.

He plays football all the time, celebrates goals  
like he's scored at Wembley, such enthusiasm,  
it's infectious, makes everyone believe their dreams.

He talks all the time, sees the world as magical,  
everything is possible, tells me to wish upon a star,  
I tell him my dreams have already come true, he's here.

He notices skies and stars, fascinated by moon and  
flowers, notices the passing of time, me aging, him  
still the same, fixed forever in a moment in time.

*Why does everyone else die, yet I never change?*  
We play last goal wins, buy daffodils on the way home

**Peter Devonald**

## **Toxic Default**

What is there to say, on Holocaust Memorial Day?  
80 years on, a lifetime gone  
What lessons learnt?  
More bridges, books, bodies burnt,  
Since the calculated slaughter, of 6 million souls;  
Wife, son, mother, daughter,  
Father, spouse, sister, lover, tiny baby brother,  
Another Einstein, Bernstein, Sondheim, Levi... all lost.

Genuine and gesture tears,  
Political and princely promises,  
Still, not enough, for humanity  
To rise, out of our senseless barbarity.  
Rwanda, Croatia, Afghanistan,  
Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan,  
Gaza, Ukraine... all in our name.

Chalamet now sings Dylan's anthems  
To a new generation  
But we're way beyond 'Blowin' in the Wind';  
Hurricanes rage, and wild fires ravage California's wooden heart,  
Yet still, we don't want to see and hear answers.  
We are our own downfall  
Man cruel, not mankind.

When, will we recognise we are one human race?  
All the same species  
Regardless of colour, or shape of face.  
So many still seek to divide,  
Declare and promote their tribe.  
A clique, becomes a cult and then a culture;  
Artificially grown, in the shallow Petri dish of man's own mind:  
Isolating, dividing, uniformed, cloned and uncontained.  
We are the world's cancer  
Multiplying exponentially,  
Dispersing defective ideas of dominance and superiority.

How many more backs,  
Over how many more centuries  
Will be up against a wall?  
Lessons never learnt.  
History on a time loop,  
Wrapped around children's necks.  
Our toxic default, our ultimate downfall.

**Helen Palmer**

## **The Fern**

You bought the asparagus fern  
On your last outing,  
With your sweet friend.  
And a deep purple cineraria.  
It died as all things do,  
But the fern clings on,  
Yellowing now.  
I think she needs  
A bigger pot.

**Jane Deakin**

## **If I'd Known**

If I'd known  
It was the last time,  
I would have stayed a while,  
Instead of rushing away  
To do important things;  
I'd have sat opposite you,  
Sipping tea  
And drinking you in,  
Savouring everything.  
I'd probably have asked  
A hundred pointless questions  
Trying to find  
The right ones,  
And I'd have found  
All the words I never  
Could before.  
I'd have hugged you -  
Extra-long - at the door,  
With screwed-shut eyes  
All desperate-dewed.  
Of course,  
You'd have asked me  
What was wrong;  
I'd have laughed -  
I'd have made a point of it -  
So you would laugh too,  
So that laugh,  
Would glow on  
In my head  
Forever.

**Karen Morris**

## **Equinox**

00:00:0000000000

do not contact me again

04:44 come get me we will  
take back everything that was  
mine

06:50

everything that was mine

11:10

except you.

11:11

when the doors open for me  
i will be ready for you

18:59

wasting time in my heart

21:00

thinking about how to be free

21:25

thinking do you love me

11:59

do you love me

**Keith McAuley**



## **Bernadette is behaving badly**

Banging the table with her  
Gnarled knuckles  
She tells me later that they are  
*hot and hurty*  
I am sorry,  
upset by her pain  
sorry for the other reasonable,  
equally careworn, people in the lounge  
disturbed by the din.  
Sorry not to be the fairy godmother who can fly her  
home resplendent with father, mother, and her proudest possession,  
the practical outdoorsman husband.

Bernadette's son came to visit half an hour ago,  
showing pictures of new great grandchildren,  
designs for planned extensions  
but she is already wailing:  
*Connie!*  
*Cathryn!*  
*Where are ya?*  
*your sisters will be round later*  
we state in saccharine tones:  
*They telephoned earlier*

There is a moment's silence  
whilst she wraps up her bourbon biscuits  
in the tissue she requested to blow her nose  
Mammy!!!  
An unkind soul tells her :  
*Be quiet Bernadette, your mother is long dead*  
And now Bernadette bangs the table **even louder** at this evil lie.

**Anna Somerset**

## **Down River**

reaching a place of cobbled alleys  
smelling of spice and poverty  
gateways on green-slicked stairs  
washed by tides descending  
to where stewed waters seep  
off a sludge of oily ripples  
exposing beaches of scoured concrete  
scarred timber, red brick, slab  
and spar, corroded links of chain  
the half-digested residue  
of mariners and moorings, wharves  
and lost riparians with or without  
their place in faded legacies  
of ships and anchorage  
bargemen and stevedores  
the rusted anchor, rotted keel  
highway of fog and corpses  
today it is black water at the bottom  
of the street, ebbing across  
a shine of olive-grey emulsion  
deep silt in dock-heads, surges  
against high walls to test embankments  
warning how flows accumulate  
all banks are there to break

**Tony Lucas**

# Much Valued Poems

## POETS

What are we poets  
But pedlars of words  
Conjurors of rhyme.  
Blank verse scribblers  
And tellers of inner worlds  
Where my truth might just glimpse yours,  
Fitting together fragments  
Of thoughts, ideas and feelings  
Into the jigsaw of poesy  
Blessed by the Muse Calliopee

Sometimes we poets ride on the breath of Bards,  
In waves of inspiration and creativity  
Touching hearts in ways we cannot tell.  
For words spoken out loud are like spells  
Released into the air with hope,  
Bringing in their wake perhaps  
Some laughter, solace and joy  
From our shared humanity.

Inside our pretty words dissent maybe disguised  
To ruffle feathers, make uncomfortable or challenge  
Us to look again and question,  
How we use the gift of language,  
And through this heresy of self expression  
Lay bare our souls.

We name what lies beneath the surface  
Unspoken and unseen,  
To bring to light their existence  
From our backpack of words,  
For what are we but pedlars  
And conjurers of verse?

**Tina Cockett**

## Happy Little Hormone

What is a happy hormone?  
They're little friends of ours  
Running through our brain  
So top up your supplies

Serotonin is the good mood player  
You get it from the sun  
Basking on the lounger  
Or outside having fun

You can boost it with some exercise  
Or eating a healthy meal  
Practising meditation  
Will give you a happy feel

It helps you with your mood  
Your sleep and appetite  
Keep topping up the serotonin  
To stop you feeling shite

Endorphins are the pain reliever  
Lowers stress, increases mood  
You get a dose with active sex  
Good exercise and food

Laughing and listening to music  
Can send these blighters out  
Dancing and dark chocolate  
Are the cause of our delight

Dopamine is rewarding  
Just trying something new  
Or tick something off your tick list  
And dopamine will spew

It helps you to keep motivated  
Gives pleasure and some pride  
A massage, reading, walking  
Can stop the dopamine slide

So alleviate the suffering  
And get your dopamine fix  
With exercise and nicotine  
Or favourite Netflix

Oxytocin is the love hormone  
It's made up in the brain  
It helps you with your happiness

And keeps away the pain

To get these little bleeders  
You should hug someone you love  
Be affectionate, spend time with friends  
Feel the oxytocin shove

Do something nice for someone  
Or get sexually aroused  
And this little cuddle chemical  
Will be coming to your house

So I hope this little poem  
Is already making you smile  
That lovely happy hormone  
It makes it all worth while

**Carolyn Scott**

## **Eucharistic Adoration.**

In Eucharistic Adoration, we invite your loving presence here.  
Have your way, dwell within our soul, and wipe away our deepest tears.  
Show forth your radiant light, and make our hearts whole once more.  
Call to us, beckon us to come near, and we'll adore.

In this sacred moment, merge with our being, we pray.  
Mate with our spirits, and set our hearts singing in harmony each day.  
Ignite passion's flame, and guide us through life's journey and pace.  
Give us gentle guidance, and show us your loving, sacred face.

Let's feel your gentle touch, like a loving mother's kiss.  
Draw us out from our darkness, and show us the bliss of your eternal wish.  
Like a song that echoes, "I want to show you off" to the world,  
Reveal your glory in us, and let our spirits soar and unfurl.

In Eucharistic Adoration, we await your gentle, loving breeze,  
That stirs our hearts, one more time, and brings us to our knees.  
In reverence and awe, we'll receive your loving, divine caress,  
And be transformed forever, by your sacred, loving tenderness.

**Mary Rose Udeh**

## **The Hidden Jewel!**

You lack gold, but talents shine, give back generously always.  
Diligence and accountability matter, skills or not, strive forward.  
Love, trust, loyalty, and faithfulness are vital, offer freely always.  
Dedication and commitment conquer humble beginnings, rise above challenges.  
Self-respect is paramount, prioritize your worth, no exceptions made.  
A good heart benefits all, kindness has no boundaries here.  
Simple tastes aside, prioritize health, well-being is priceless always.  
Informal self-education through relentless learning breaks free from limitations.  
No excuses, choices empower, breakthrough to new horizons always.  
Your hidden jewel shines brighter with each selfless act done.  
Community benefits from your unique gifts, share without hesitation.  
Unlock your potential, let your light illuminate the world.

**Mary Rose Udeh**

## **Crazy world.**

At the Rehabilitation Center.  
Their voices echo:

If I fall into depression's dark night,  
And succumb to drugs' tempting light,  
Will you abandon me or stand by my side?  
Or will you judge me with a heart full of pride?

Society says we're not worthy of care,  
That those in rehab don't deserve love to share.  
But I say, in our lowest moments, we need you most,  
To hold us firm and feel for us without boast.  
May our loved ones be our guiding light,  
Offering hope and unconditional love in the dark of night.  
May they stand by our side and help us rise,  
From the darkness we can't hide.

**Mary Rose Udeh**



## **The Tree**

As a child

I gazed up into the tree tops high  
The fruit got smaller, the trunk grew wide  
It felt so distant, way up in the sky

As a child

I was fearless,  
and decided to try  
So I climbed up the trunk, way up I did fly

As a teen

My heart grew heavy, my grip less steady  
My mind clouded, the fruit a blur  
As I climbed, I lost focus and then  
I slipped and I fell, down to the dirt

As an adult

I'm back on the ground, gazing upward  
The fruit bouncing, teasing me, how absurd!

So as an adult, in anger I lurched  
And cut the damn tree down, crashed to the earth  
As it fell, the fruit split with a slash  
Inside rotten, nothing but trash  
So I walked away, looked down in dismay  
To find a good fruit, following my way  
It had wanted my attention this whole time  
So I picked it right up, and held it so fine  
And walked away

**Jahdia Spencer**

## **My sister**

I have a sister  
From another mister  
And if yu think im bad  
She's sinister  
When i warn people about her  
They always dismissed her  
And sometimes my pain  
She feels it  
And it assists her  
To do things beyond my power  
Who is she  
Karma  
Thats my sister

**Jahdia Spencer**

## **Get Well Soon**

Get well soon  
You must be feeling very sick  
Cause it can't be you at your best self standing in this room  
Or maybe you fell and hit you head on a brick  
The songs you sing now are at a different tune  
Or maybe you are lost  
I hope you find your way soon

You've shown your true colors so clear  
How dare you try to break me down  
Now I shed tears replaying the harsh words in my ear  
This can't be you  
Now looking, it's a different view  
This is why i really hope  
You Get Well Soon

**Jahdia Spencer**

## **My sweet Octavian**

She,

She's charismatic, charming and has a laugh worth millions.

Her name is Octavian.

Her problems weigh her down but she whisks them away so they could never be found.

Locked it in a box safe and sound while she takes care of those who are numb and are about to drown.

Her makeup effortlessly drawn upon the glow of her skin, it's as if god placed his hands on the one human he put effort in.

Octavian has these teddy bear brown eyes, the eyes that kinda dance when you sing her a childhood lullaby.

Gorgeous brown with a sun kissed aurora around her soul, they twinkle and dwindle under her own god given halo.

Octavian doesn't leave a bad taste on your tongue,

She leaves a mark so powerful even Satan himself wouldn't dare lay kiss on her unmatched crown.

She will devour and conquer, move heaven and hell, break noses even for those who bid her farewell.

She is Unique, strategically placed on earth as if she was the protector of those who are yet to know their worth.

Her name is Octavian and she will continue to listen, glow and mold everyone into the shape of their own halo.

The meaning of her name was forged in ancient rome, born to carry, born to fight, Octavian was born to bring peace and justice to light,

Harmony through her brown eyes, peace through her halo and born to fight for those who are yet to find their own meaning outside the shadows.

Her name is Octavian, she is beautiful, charming and has a laugh worth millions. She is my friend and will forever be my guidesman.

**Hayley McGirr**

## **My Brown eyes,**

In a whirlpool of the what ifs, I found my sanctum in her dark brown eyes and cherry soft lips.

Everytime I look into her eyes it's as though they are magnetically aligned with mine, I feel as though both of our souls have intertwined at the same time.

Her gentle touch captivated the darkest parts of my soul, her aura bleeding onto mine until we merged into two parts of a whole.

She cradled me in her warm arms until my scars became a memory, she made them feel distant and seen for what they were meant to be.

She kissed every scar, loved every crack, touched every insecurity and loved every part of me.

She lay a soft kiss on my lips and all of a sudden breathing no longer feels as if I'm drowning, instead, the air fills my lungs and my mind no longer quakes at the thought of intimacy.

Oh brown eyes, you pulled the plug on my epic attempt at avoiding true love.

You took my hand and led me to the unknown, I found myself leaping into the depths without a second thought following me into the shadows.

She didn't steal my will to live nor my desire to die, instead she stole my heart and waited to merge her love with mine.

She held the key as gently as can be and opened a part of me I had never felt nor seen.

My skin no longer yearns to feel anything other than her touch, my mind is no longer my prison and I no longer fear the artwork of you, my darling love.

**Hayley McGirr**

## **Hold me,**

Hold me through the darkness, hold me until the light shines through.  
You promised me, you'd hold my hand and kiss me through every battle wound.  
I loved you with every square inch of my soul, even believed we were destined and that we were two parts to a whole.  
Destined to live a life full of laughter, kids running around and a life to which we could grow old.  
Oh how I was wrong, so very wrong.  
I trusted you, you trusted me but you only trusted me with half of your heart and I trusted you with every fiber of my being.  
I promised to love you through the good, the bad and the ugly but I never imagined that you were going to be the reason I'd need therapy.  
You abused me, tormented me day and night.  
I'd try to hide from your violence and muster up the courage to fight but it always ended with the same result.  
You'd bust that door down and tell me how much of a horrible person I was and how I made your life a living hell.  
After each domestic dispute you'd sit me down and tell me you loved me with every ounce of blood that coursed through your veins...  
with every empty promise and every half assed apology, I'd take you back.  
Silly me.  
I finally gained the courage to kick you out and now all that's left is a woman with a broken and tainted heart  
I took the pieces you broke after you left, sat at my own table and mended my wounds.  
I even promised myself never to ever let a man treat me like I was his own personal display of decorative art.  
You took my old self with you and let me create an untouchable version, not even you and your charms could get through.  
I am a woman, we fall, we break but we always get back up.  
You lit my burnt out spark and now all I can do is advise you to sage your soul before I become your never ending nightmare of unhinged art.

**Hayley McGirr**

## **The Beach**

A no-man's land of rock and sand  
Where elements collide  
The air and water, wind and waves  
All dancing with the tide

Millennia have come and gone  
Since first dividing sea and land  
And dinosaurs have walked upon  
This timeless, endless strand

Place of departure and of flight  
Before even time began  
Place of arrival and refuge  
For many a weary man

I walk in wonder on this shore  
And ponder the midnight sky  
Is every grain of sand a star  
That came here just to die?

Is every rock and ripple  
Just a murmur in the dark?  
Is every noisy seagull cry  
The lost soul of a lark?

Forever changing, old as time  
Beyond comprehension's reach  
Carved by wind and surging wave  
This awe inspiring beach!

**Mike Henry**

## **Kicked Out in The Bronx**

It's not my fault, how could I know  
That wanting to be just me was not the way to go?  
Just can't believe that's why they kicked me out  
Too many rules and regulations in this house!  
Sixteen years and still they can't accept who I really am  
School wasn't easy, either – too many bullies in the 'hood  
Choosing to pass on recess time to finish my essay  
Was too much for the others, they called me names  
Said I wasn't normal coz who wants to stay in class and write  
When they could be out there shooting ball or having a fight?

Man, it's getting more than I can take!  
No place warm to sleep and I don't wanna stay awake.  
Kicked out with no place I can go  
I thought that I could hack it tho'  
But man, it ain't easy being different in this place  
Ain't easy always being told that I'm a damned disgrace.  
The neighbours think I'm still at home  
They don't know I got kicked out  
And now I'm all alone  
When they find out, I'd like to see their faces  
Kicked out for wanting to be just who I am  
Do they see my bruises; do they even give a damn?

Grow up, drop out, come out - kicked out!  
Natural progression for a kid like me  
But I thought Mom at least would see  
Dad's a different story – grow up, be a man  
He'd say. Don't stand like that, don't walk that way  
Don't act like you don't know what I'm talkin' 'bout  
But they don't know the way I feel inside  
Can't help these thoughts they say I need to hide  
How can a kid pretend it's cool to be this way?  
How can a black kid say he's white or admit to being gay?

**Mike Henry**



## **The Distant Shore**

Our love is like a distant shore  
That stretches ever on  
Into a far tomorrow, beyond the setting sun.  
Each grain of sand, a loving thought,  
Each pearly shell a kiss  
And every pool reflects your eyes,  
The sadness and the bliss.

Our love is like a distant shore  
Washed by the surging sea.  
An ocean of emotion that will never set me free.  
And every plaintive gull-cry  
Is echoed in my heart.  
The sea-wind in the sand dunes  
Sighs that we are far apart.

Our love is like a distant shore  
That stretches ever on,  
Swept by howling tempests  
And scorched by the burning sun.  
Now in my desolation  
I walk this windswept strand  
Searching, ever searching, for  
Your footprints in the sand...

**Mike Henry**

## **Eulogy for Maydew**

Farewell, sentinel.  
No more to overlook the oval,  
With its cricketers and dogs,  
Even sweltering lovers.  
At least you stood up and  
(uncompromising concrete)  
Refused to fit in.  
For that  
You were punished: voided,  
Then a scaffold rash like ivy,  
Murderous while dependent  
On its victim-host.  
We'll observe your decline from a safe distance.

**Stewart Morgan**

## **Narcissist**

Narcissist —

I'd hear this word time and time again.  
Hear people's stories, watch their tears,  
See the pain from all their years of abuse,  
And I never assigned that to him.

I was blind. In denial.  
Ever the victim dragged into a trial  
I could never win.  
Still, I defended him,  
With the hope that one day,  
He could love me enough to not  
Treat me that way.  
But he manipulated me daily,  
He would gaslight with lies,  
And there was nothing but darkness  
When I looked in his eyes.  
I despise him —  
For who I became.  
But I see this word now  
And I think of his name,  
Knowing he was to blame,  
All along.

**Emma Doe**

## **Sonnet No.1**

I haunt you heathcliff and  
I shall not tire,  
Wandering the moors — my elemental grave,  
Woeful — wanting him twas frost from fire,  
Lamenting you — my master, lover, slave.

Snow bites skin, lips blue, still I search for you,  
For the candles light at wuthering heights,  
Death, he torments me, he lends me it's hue,  
Extinguished, it's light, it fades in the night,  
And with it you.

My frozen heart broken yet winds echo  
It's beat somehow. Confined to madness,  
Hell a foretoken — specter — earthbound  
Till you are with me now.

But death is approaching.  
Soon he shall come. Soon, hand in hand, on the moors, we shall run.

**Emma Doe**

## Jack The Ripper

Dim lights flickered in the gas lamps  
Too ornate for where posed,  
On a street of depravation,  
Sparingly they stood in rows.

They bore witness to the poverty,  
The desperation of the poor,  
To the women selling sex  
To just survive for one day more

And on the 31st of August  
In 1888,  
Mary Ann Nicholls was soliciting  
In bucks row, at night, quite late

When she happened upon an unknown male  
Whose intentions were unpure,  
He murdered her so brutally,  
She was the first, then there were more.

A week later, on September 8th,  
Annie Chapman walked the street,  
Soliciting to pay the board,  
For a place where she could sleep

When she happened upon this unknown male,  
In a yard in handbury street  
He murdered her, so brutally  
She was the second, still there were three.

Then 22 days later,  
Catherine eddowes and elizabeth stride  
Two women leading separate lives  
Were bound by what betide

Elizabeth stride had been soliciting  
In the adjacent dutfields yard,  
When she happened upon the unknown male  
Who inflicted just one scar

Catherine eddowes, on the same night,  
Was soliciting Mitre square,  
And, disturbed and having to flee the scene,  
Of his last, alas, he made his way to there  
And she happened upon that unknown male  
So fuelled by anger about his last  
That he murdered her, so brutally,  
And in less than 60 minutes,

Both these women's souls had passed.

But the final woman, suffered more,  
Than the 4 who came afore  
He subjected her to horrors,  
That no one had seen before.

And her name was Mary Jane Kelly

She was An Irish songbird,  
A girl of 25,  
Who happened upon the unknown male  
At dorsett street, November 9th

And he murdered her, so brutally,  
So savagely she died,  
It was only by her 'ear and the eyes'  
she was identified.

And then he stopped. No rhyme nor reason,  
But his infamy lived on,  
They called him Jack the ripper  
An unknown male, bygone.

**Emma Doe**

## **Mourning of Hope**

Washed away with the tide,  
Hope and longing cast aside,  
Refuse scatter on the autumn breeze,  
These feelings turn cold and freeze.

Flowers wither, chill and fade,  
Winters mark has been made,  
This heart falls beneath your blade.

Dreams lie forgotten and rot,  
A sinister and malicious plot,  
Dreams turn harsh and sour,  
Darkness comes with absolute power.

Legions of some evil brood,  
Rattle and shake this fragile mood,  
Rabid teeth and wicked claws,  
Crush all light within their jaws,  
None escape the seething hate,  
I curse this inescapable fate.

A second glance, how I crave,  
An unsolicited and joyful wave,  
Can bring a warmth to this cold hollow,  
Will there ever be a glimmer to follow?

**Jack Lanham**

## **Secrets of The Blue**

With eyes as deep and mysterious as the ocean blue,  
The soft, inviting nature offers no clue,  
Secrets kept locked away tight,  
Like the shadows hidden by night.

What wonders lie beyond that cerulean gaze?  
What revelations do they protect?  
Whispers of an unseen paradise,  
Do flicker in the eternal blaze.

The mind races with ideas of blissfulness,  
Imprisoned with visions of an unreachable utopia,  
Grounded only by the unconscionable wistfulness.

Great blue beacons,  
Impenetrable and confined,  
Resolute with the burden once assigned.

Bring down your defensive walls,  
Open the gates to your halls,  
So minds may mingle and meld,  
Forming a truly unbreakable weld,  
Joining two unique forsaken,  
Into a singular state, unshaken.

Windows to the clearest of skies,  
Oh sapphire gems, release your prize.

**Jack Lanham**



## **Together**

Treading through the pouring rain,  
Moving forward despite all the pain,  
A constant urge to press through the hurt,  
Until we both turn to dust and dirt.

Only the empty road all around,  
An unending void with no sound,  
We all feel the bite of loneliness,  
As if there is nothing, only us.

Grabbing hands pull us from the path,  
Taking us further from the warmth of the hearth,  
Only inner strength can let us return,  
To the road everyone does truly yearn.

Everlasting desire to be something more,  
Turmoil plagues this inner war,  
We climb, we stumble, and we might fall,  
Just trying to reach over the wall,

Truths fly, some good, others bad,  
Emotions scatter, happy and sad,  
All simply shrink and seem meagre,  
Beside you is something that makes you eager.

Here in the void, we desperately grasp,  
For something tangible to tightly clasp,  
An offering hand given for free,  
A friendly light so we may see.

Energy flows free and whole,  
Like an excitable new-born foal,  
You're a kid again in a brand-new world,  
Fingers locked and uncontrollably curled.

Realisation that no matter where,  
In truth, you won't care,  
Be it desert, glacier, or under the dome,  
Together, you're always home...

**Jack Lanham**

## **Krill**

The drifters that had arrived here  
swam through the columns of the sea,

foreign bodies with antennae, searching for sweet  
algae. Around them, fish and beluga whales

sift through the water, besieging entire colonies.  
To survive, they turn invisible, their shells

like ghosts—migrants, unseen across oceans,  
passing through the tide. Nobody knows

that they control the warming of the sea,  
taming the algae that blooms too quickly,

restoring the lost balance. In the shallow  
water, even the red snapping crab couldn't see,

not even the boy swimming beside them,  
and by accident inhales them. Back home,

he flushes it out of his ear, down the sink,  
through the pipes and its kinks, and into

the sewers underground, where others had been flushed,  
all these outcasts cleaning the detritus of the world,

while people celebrate in restaurants, laugh  
in shopping malls, fall in love.

The migrants wait for welcome,  
for the current to dance, for the tide, for their turn.

**Ryan Caidic**

## **The problem with reincarnation**

A movie once wondered, with so many people  
being born ever second, would our souls

keep on splitting, growing smaller  
and smaller, with 1/8 billionth of a soul,

fileted from Adam, a single source.  
I think about our children

and their admonitions when we forget  
to buy glue for their homework, these little guards

patrolling our cooking, telling us how much cheese to put  
on the pizza, and where. Their audacity

to present a debatable cartwheel, or their pride  
when they recite a joke...“What do you call someone

with no body and no nose...” like it was the first time  
we had heard it. I think about their infinite capacity

to forgive, the laughter they share freely,  
the wisdom that shine through their eyes.

All those unexpected talents crammed in a wisp  
of a body. How could they not be fully-formed?

Was I just a piece that splintered from my parents,  
them trying to complete me in their own ways,

their hand on my back, their voices  
in my throat— did I end up as complete as they were?

We carry our children until they  
step out on their own.

We put on their jackets.  
We show them where to run.

**Ryan Caidic**

## **Always scratching the surface**

of a catastrophe  
Is it though?  
You are still you  
and I am busy,  
the headless chicken  
come for the weekly blitz of what can be done.

Travel with you back to 1949,  
chuck out spinach turned to slime,  
play hunt the stick,  
do a better job than the paid carers you rejected.

Others might recoil from your Miss Haversham hoarding.  
I know where the rats hid  
and now that they have gone where the mice live.  
You won't be uprooted,  
you are friends to the birds.

Only I can scratch the surface of your back the way you like it.

**Anna Somerset**

### **Mum – (Inspired by ‘The Emperor of Ice-Cream’)**

Her luscious puddings history but never forgotten.  
Daughter sets the tone in flaming red  
Mum’s in a box, but far from dead  
smoking hot embers of 40 a day Senior Service  
A very bad habit eventually leading to nurses  
no mournfest this, on the walls her art  
overflowing church testimony to her huge heart  
*Cut to the quick and take a jackknife*  
*Dispense with the waffle and live your life*  
the best teacher is a scary creature!

Her luscious puddings history, but never forgotten  
pupils here cos of her incendiary spirit  
she inspired them to jump in and not to fear it  
Europe’s longest black run mastered at 76!  
she was too cool for school and all its tricks  
this art mistress’s heart had a siren call  
she’d eat men for breakfast and women, it was love all  
then drive you to Cambridge to see Samuel Palmer  
what needs such a life force to have an embalmer?  
the best teacher is a scary creature!

**Anna Somerset**

## **Acupuncture**

'This won't hurt a bit if you just hold steady.'

'Oooh, ouch! I fell better already.'

**Haydn King**

**I Wish It Was An ECNALUBMA**

Like any crooked Anglo-Saxon  
I dread the fearsome police car klaxon.  
But I always know it's me they'll stop  
When rear-view mirror says ECILOP

**Haydn King**

## **VIVA SOUTH LONDON**

I wait in the lounge of Terminal One

And ponder the days of sand, sea and sun.  
Brown sauce and tea bags packed in the case,  
The plane arrives and now it's a race.  
On board the jet the cabin crew try  
To convince us we will stay in the sky  
They show how to wear a life-saving suit -  
Why not just give me my own parachute?  
My heart beats again as the wheels touch the floor  
and everyone scrambles to get to the door.

There's a quickening sense of impending doom  
When at the hotel I'm shown to my room.  
I find myself sharing with Germans and bugs.  
The bugs are okay but the Germans take drugs.  
Smoking and joking and snorting away -  
What a great start to my holiday.

The first day's the trip to see the old ruin,  
To tell you the truth I don't know what I'm doing.  
At the back of the coach is the Leeds 'Rent-a-Mouth'  
Who hates everyone who comes from down South.  
He's got a sombrero plonked on his head  
And moans about the food he's been fed.

The next day I spend round the hotel pool,  
The 'headache' from Leeds is acting the fool.  
Splashing around in Union Jack shorts,  
He tries to chat up the girls playing sports.  
He has an idea that he's some sort of Cupid,  
No wonder the Spaniards think British are stupid.

The sky's gone grey, it's no longer sunny,  
I can't get the hang of this Spanish money,  
The greasy food's give me chronic diarrhoea,  
I can't drink the water, I can't buy good beer,  
The local dealer's won't leave me alone,  
Someone please get me on a flight home.

**Haydn King**



### **In a long-term love, our bodily decline**

In a long-term love, our bodily decline  
Influences emotions and attachment;  
Some of its signs are painful and malign  
As scratches on fragile perceptive parchment.  
This distances the best of loving couples;  
They drift away from their early passion;  
What was instinct and genuine, now baffles  
And makes no sense of their past attraction.  
Some other couples continue holding flame,  
Which in itself is a subject of amazement.  
Those happy few sustain their loving game  
That cannot be enforced or purchased.  
If you are lucky to be loved like this,  
Prolong each night and every tender kiss.

**Valerie Livina**

### **Good should have fists**

Good should have fists, and tail, and pointed horns,  
And hoofs, and a beard, fur-covered and feisty;  
We hear its stomp, we see its breathing burns,  
One day it'll come for us to bring to justice!  
Look, here it comes, preparing for a fight,  
With poison running from the tusks to ground,  
The tail is whipping rough and shaggy sides,  
It's howling and its horns are touching cloud.  
My friend, I wish you Good (as well as health),  
My verse reminds you: Good is good at munching;  
And in the night, we'll hear your piercing "Help!"  
That's followed by a chewing sound, and crunching...

**Valerie Livina**

## **My bike**

My bike, although you are drunk, I ride you well:  
Perhaps, with wiggling, but in the right direction;  
I know: like me, you're under cycling spell,  
And we are both excited about adventures!  
From pub to pub, I follow your path,  
Avoided by cars as in a fine enchantment;  
We need refuelling in our cycling love,  
For our shared sunny miles in country.  
Exploring world is best by a drunken bike:  
It holds you tight and knows routes and valleys;  
As a trusty horse, it brings you; yet unlike,  
It needs no food and runs on pure cyders!  
Long live the bike and be improved with time  
Titanium and glorious Shimano!  
And cyder, for the wings to add to fly,  
And a cyclist, for some poetry and drama...

**Valerie Livina**

## **Alone At The Parting**

No light hangs  
in the space  
between the trees  
No breath of breeze  
lingers  
between the leaves  
And no nightingale  
sings  
And the beat of the owl's  
wing is silence.

And like the space  
between the stars  
unmarked and dark  
our road parts.

So here I stay  
stranded at love's divergence  
drowning  
in fog

**Peter Davies**

## **An Integral Part of British Culture**

A mechanised gesture of goodwill;  
The easy flick of a switch to boil water for tea.

Fields of vibrant green reach for the smoke-grey mountains;  
Slowly unfurling, the innocent leaves that will become tea.

The water stains, fragrant in a chaos of umber,  
Then fades under the heavy whiteness of milky tea.

Rain bleeds coldly across the windows,  
Banished to silence by the superior warmth of tea.

The ephemeral catharsis of released anguish  
Soothes my fingers as they curl around my tea.

Centuries of history swirl against the china,  
Blown callously away from the scalding surface of the tea.

An integral part of British culture...  
Everything is fine after just a cup of tea.

**Ellie Bignall**

## **Promise**

And when you took my hand, and all was well,  
Your fingers, curled like leaves, kissed the promise  
Eager on our tongues. You tasted of earth,  
And of beer, warm and amber in the mist.  
We burnt sugar with our mouths, tongues scalded  
To apple-pink and peat-smoke caramel.  
Unnoticed then, that moment crystallised  
Onto my lips.  
The silence was soft, full  
Of your wood-smoke breath: toffee-spice and peat  
Toasting the space between us. Then I knew  
Your taste would linger on my skin, in my  
Voice, and my words; my mouth is full of you.  
Distilled in time, we sought the flowing world;  
While in my hand your promises unfurled.

**Ellie Bignall**

## **A compact made before her creation**

Inside, I am a star.  
I burn. Glow, molten gold  
Coating my throat.  
Across The luminescence of  
The moon, I dance, my touch  
Caramelising the Sky. My brightness scorches.

And like a comet on  
Its desolate course to  
Particles of ice, I  
Sigh as dust spread through time  
Itself; my brilliance  
A flash missed by your eyes.  
I'm hidden now, just as  
You wanted me to be.

But through the curls and grit  
You left my soot across –  
Inside, I am a star.

**Ellie Bignall**

## **To Linda**

It is 5am, a grey square of sky  
Now fills my window's dark frame  
And I think of you

You have gone now at last  
After those long years of being  
No longer quite yourself

When death came to you  
Was it quietly at night?  
A slow gentle change?

Or was it hard for you?  
Did you fight and rage  
Against the dying of your light?

The hour moves slowly on  
The grey sky slowly lightens  
But my heart does not

Then I remember  
That your name meant 'beautiful'  
And I think of you

**Ann Fenn**



## **Midsummer**

Creeping towards 3  
The hands of my clock struggle  
And strain to find dawn

When they reach to 4  
A pale glow thins the darkness  
Of the city sky

And as the light grows  
My clock knows it has beaten  
This midsummer's night

**Ann Fenn**

## **Lost freedoms**

It is 5am  
I wish I was out somewhere  
Watching the sunrise

But I'm not free now  
To take the roads that led to Stonehenge and Glastonbury  
Instead I am trapped – in bed, travelling in my head  
Unable to move

The hour moves on now  
The grey sky slowly lightens  
But my heart does not

**Ann Fenn**

## Clearance

trucks come and go by day  
hard hats and high-viz  
engines, scaffold, dull hammering

but once the work-force all go home  
silence settles bringing a strangeness  
to the voided warehouse

vast spaces filled at night by floodlight  
casting deep shadow between pillars  
ceilings swallowed in gloom

whenever movie action cuts  
to an underground car park you know  
whatever happens next will not be good

so vacancy round concrete columns  
dusty floor, glint of equipment  
at far corners, rouses the misgiving

of what lingers in this emptiness  
even with nowhere left to hide  
except in shadows, heaps of spoil

nothing so fanciful as haunting  
so mundane as guard dogs  
yet a wisp of something missed

not being wholly on your own  
maybe the echoes of past labour  
of expectations lost or futures sold

unless the spectre is of solitude itself  
disquiet, being alone in an at immensity  
of place, no living soul to see or hear.

**Tony Lucas**

## **First and Last**

His granddaughter comes smiling out of school  
clutching in her fist what is revealed to be  
a loose tooth, finally come away. It looks  
so small. White, with the tiniest fleck of blood.  
She carries it carefully, meaning to wrap  
and place it under her pillow for the fairy  
confident of some material reward.

Late night, in the bathroom, he is scrabbling  
in the sink to save the broken crown  
that finally came adrift as he was brushing.  
It looks so small and stained, if not decayed.  
He holds it carefully to wrap and carry to  
the surgery tomorrow. Whether it can be saved  
or not, it is the dentist now gets paid.

**Tony Lucas**

## **Stillness**

As you move inside me  
I learn to stand still  
Like the clouds  
Right before the rain  
Your silky skin against mine  
The sound of your breath  
Your heartbeat so strong  
Ready to explode  
Into the next orgasm  
I let myself soften  
And feel how everything  
Suddenly melts  
The fears, the worries  
The pain and all grief  
Are no longer able  
To step inside my psyche  
'No' is finally a full sentence  
'Yes' is expansive consent  
Once our cosmic dance  
Comes to an end  
I return to my soul  
And tend to her whispers  
Until the next time you and I  
Will merge yet again  
Like the river  
Becoming one  
With the ocean

**Alex Anton**

## **To my Future Lover**

I'm not looking for completeness  
Since I'm whole within myself  
So instead, just be accepting  
Of the parts I'm made up of  
Cheeky goddess, goofy fairy  
Arty spinster with grey hair  
Rebel witch one with the earth  
Often angel, sometimes devil  
Prone to weight gain when alone  
Fearless boss bitch with a mission  
A sun gazer and a muse  
I'm not asking to be saved  
I don't see you as my healer  
I've been hurt, but I'm not broken  
Fire will not touch my essence  
Air will take me where I'm needed  
Earth will hold me with her love  
You can never really catch me  
Don't you dare holding me down  
I'm more slippery than ice cubes  
I'm still water, running deep

**Alex Anton**

## **The Escalator**

Your gaze is firmly fixed upon me  
Like a torch shining in the dark  
Making the world around us  
Go quiet, then simply fade away  
Suddenly you whisper in my ear  
“We have just 20 seconds”  
My eyes are closing in slow motion  
As your lips land softly on mine  
We’ve reached the bottom  
In a split second  
Two worlds colliding  
Becoming one  
Frozen in time forever  
Somewhere in between  
(North and South London)

**Alex Anton**

## **Harmony**

### Sounds of Harmony

You do not have to always sing but know when you do the world listens.

Those in difficulty struggling with life's many burdens take a moment to pause.

They all see however brief a glimpse of something deeper and profound.

For a brief slice of time they rest in the moment.

And experience the Momentous open magic of energy, nurturing and tenderness.

Your voice carried them. Their scattered attention brought home as they hear harmony and know connection and find Peace as they pause. Like a mother holding her precious child the precious Pause a connection to something deeper. The reconnection of head to heart.

Those carrying the weight of the world experience the weightless world free of worry and fear. The past now a Memory, the future just Expectation but the moment is real. Where they can rest in space Freed momentarily. Is this enough we cry?

Is this just an empty void are my words now just passing through empty space or is this space dynamic vibrant and alive. Is this the space of your heart? Does it have a Sensitive Presence Activates Compassion and Empathy could that be what space is? You look around the world and see so much struggle and strife but do we not see our ancestors, those who, struggled before us standing watching watch over us. They know that despite the struggle, your voice remains unwavering. The rhythm, the harmony, the pitch, the melody of your voice is the fabric that provides structure to the weary, support to the lost, it provides a frame of reference a placement to orientate oneself. It projects calm from a place of deep peace. Lifting us all out of the river of tears and placing us all on firmer ground. The ground of presence.

But you cannot always sing. There are times when you listen and hear an amazing song. You struggle to identify the source of the sound you wonder in awe then realise this is the echo of songs you have already sung. As you listen to this echo from the past you don't just hear your voice you hear the voice of our ancestors all humans have sung to your harmony all have added to your unwavering voice.

So you gain strength knowing that even though you cannot always sing you can listen and hear the power of you reflected in all the sounds you hear. Even the silence is singing to you. As you connect with the vibrant space that resonates with you.

Harmony

**Anonymous**



## **River of Life**

"The River of Change  
cannot be Named,  
yet we name it!

We struggle with change as  
everything is fixed and  
Named and Joy and  
Happiness are now fixed!  
One day we will give up  
names and everything will  
Be."

**Anonymous**

### **All I want to do**

Allow me to show you. That is all I want to do.  
Allow me to show you the beauty of this life,  
its depth.

Allow me to show you the medicine  
hidden in your fear, greed and anger.

Allow me to show you,  
so you can see for yourself.

**Tina**

## **A home in truth**

Grant me the ability to hear  
your truth, this truth, the truth.

And allow me to speak it into existence,  
into the world.

So that it may open  
and minds and hearts and butterfly wings.  
So that it may protect  
and innocence and beauty and joy.

As your truth is the only movement that softly defends  
and open hearts,  
and joyful laughter  
and beautiful wings.

A knowing born of safety and connection.  
Being at home in the world.

**Tina**

## **On silence**

No, I do not want to talk today.  
The pain in my heart is too vast.

To pierce the silence with just one word,  
would open a wound,  
so deep  
so intense,  
that no bandage, no gentle touch, no kiss  
could ever stop the gushing river of pain  
that remains contained in my heart.

Pain frozen in silence, held in place by silence,  
Held at peace by silence.

**Tina**

## **Spring Renewal**

Oh, if only she could like a mighty tree,  
every spring let off fresh side shoots,  
dress up in bright greenery of young leaves,  
spread around its ineffable loveliness.

If she could produce a nutritious sap,  
adding her every year strength and snap,  
she would keep straight as a poplar trunk,  
with strands of hair on the blowing wind.

If she could anchor strong roots in the land,  
protecting her from bending to the ground,  
she would not care of her growing old or a look,  
carrying her head high as a crown of redwood.

She would be then a bride of flying birds  
chirping love trills in the branches;  
feathering nests for their young from clouds  
gliding majestically on her haughty corpus.

Spring! A flawless and great magician!  
Make a miracle of biological and mental renewal  
in the one, who lost much of vim and a bit of faith,  
in the sense of life, continuity, human virtues...

**Danuta Dagir**

## **Lights at Night**

When I walk immersed in the darkness of the evening,  
suddenly in the sky, a bit to the side, I see the moon  
- your face - hazy and slightly cut off from one side.

I look at it carefully and see clearly crayoned on it  
- the eyes, nose, and the quickly moving lips,  
which want to say something to me or send me a kiss.

Your fragile light only faintly foliates the surface  
of the murmuring water in the river, and on this wavy  
silver are mirrored yellowish and red streaks of light

- a wobbly reflection of those thousands  
of smaller and larger glass panels, infiltrating from  
the lit interiors plenty of multicoloured shining rays

- from the purest white, through a full range  
of yellow and orange, to the scarlet with a wee bit admixture of the flashy greenery  
and a few flecks of lapis lazuli.

At this enormous glow across the river outline clear  
silhouettes of the colossal buildings - immersed in  
the bright energy of their internals work the brains

of bankers, controlling the making of big money;  
to hell with them! Good, they left me the heavens!  
I have to march home quickly, because of the bitter cold.

The freezing wind is piercing my flesh, although I am  
wearing several layers of clothes, and even the moon winks  
to wish me good night, then hides behind a vast cloud.

**Danuta Dagir**

## **Volcanic Island**

Walls of glazed hotels, climbing up  
the slopes of a deep craggy valley,  
like adroit mountaineers, attempting to reach the summit of the dun mountain  
with the invisible from afar spots of greenery,  
send us golden flashes, enticing  
and calling the newly-arrived to them.

And when the night shadows are thickening,  
from those touristic hubs are springing  
cascades of charming lights, absorbing  
the brilliance of the moon and stars in the sky,  
and only in the distance - silvery scales of  
the ocean - transmit secret light signals,  
and his powerful voice proclaims to all:  
I have been here since always,  
and this small volcanic island,  
is only a miniature pip on my corpus.

Atlantic furiously pounds onto the black  
shore of the sandy-rocky beach,  
as if it wanted to wash it off from its surface,  
or not allow the landing of any boats  
with survivors, chasing their dreams  
throughout its extensive waters.  
But his concerns are futile, because this island  
- a vacation spot for the worldwide  
wealthy corporate employees,  
lies too close to the coast of Africa,  
from which they try to flee to richer countries.

## **Danuta Dagir**

## **Personal Fate**

And some shall walk upon this land  
Their foot falls slow but sure  
Their hands they craft they are their tools  
Their minds a source so pure  
Their is no blinkered views , no limits to their space  
To free your mind to go explore the knowledge of this place

My hand it writes the words .  
My mind it is the source  
All of those was shown to me  
And set upon its course

It is sad that some shall never see  
They struggle on this earth  
They, re bound like slaves  
In dead mens sleep  
Afraid to venture the deepest deep

Here i sit and watch and know  
That round in circles they will go  
Though I walk along this path  
Some times confused, is all made clear  
I respect the power there  
So nothing do I fear.

**Denise Mulligan**



## **PRESERVATION**

I went to see the physio about my knees.

Is there a way, I asked, of preventing them  
relapsing  
into painful inflammation.

She didn't seem to think so.

She looked at them, noted they were an interesting shape.

Then she waxed lyrical about how things have changed. We are all living longer and  
remember, she said, when ailments set in earlier, spines curved and joints distorted. Yes, yes I  
said, remembering mum and aunty's swollen knuckles.

Now we have preservatives, she said, you're all given preservatives.

So that, I thought, is why I'm given all those pills.

If I take more and more, I wonder, will I, and my creaky knees, last forever?

**Alison Clayburn**

## **My female film**

My film will be called *Right on Women* and won't refer to 'of a certain age' and won't feed assumptions about punk looks or dungarees or whatever the modern equivalent is and won't have any eighty plus year olds with silver hair and long legs or round ones wearing flowing dresses or any of these 'Dove advert' women in their undies, but instead will have a fabulous cast of characters who are all totally unique and won't let the label 'stereotype' near them and the opening scene will be someone sitting on a park bench eating sandwiches and I might allow her a dog of indeterminate size and breed and she'll be staring at everyone who passes by and she'll be wearing such ordinary clothes that you can't tell whether she's an office worker or a so-called housewife, or retired or whether she's rich or poor or somewhere in between and you certainly can't tell where she lives and not really how old she is but you will find out more about her by the way she interacts with someone - or some people, who pass by and who she talks to and there won't be any particular reason for them to talk so it's going to be like one of those surrealist plays, the ones people think ought to make more sense, and then of course there'll need to be more of these women, interacting with random people, none of them relatives or somehow significant, just people they meet in the street or a shop or a country lane or a field or anywhere and they may talk about what's around them or politics or art or any other ideas about the world but it'll all be interactions and maybe, just maybe I'll bring the women together at the end.

I suppose it'll need editing so scenes don't go on too long, but I'd leave the editing to someone else because I wouldn't want to cut anything they say or anything anyone says in response and I'd just ensure there's a huge variety of people to be met because that's how the world is.

**Alison Clayburn**

## **Rose**

Somewhere within me, she is chattering  
But I can't hear properly  
Or at least it is distant  
The volume too low  
I wander, searching  
Trying to find her by wearing bright printed fabric and headscarves

The shtetl  
Brick lane  
I read about perimeter fences and lost languages  
Soup and flavours  
But there is no place to rest that makes sense

Calves like my fathers  
Sepia images of street parties  
Identities lost deep in the photographic paper  
Eyes recorded with soft hope  
Gentle at the corners with water

We spoke once in front of the cabinet my great grandfather made  
Of love and marriage  
Her skin trembled  
My eighteen-year-old self knew of what she spoke  
Then she was gone  
And I took the china figurines home with me

## **Charlotte Ginsborg**

## **Katharine's Soul**

Me and my sister can dance  
With beautiful ease  
Shaking a secret of desires

My equivalent  
My dear related soul  
Moving to our mother tongue

We dance to remember  
We dance to forget  
Rhythm buried in our ancestral bones

Eyes closed in release  
Her hip swings with pleased rush  
And I know exactly where her foot will land

Right next to mine

Dads marijuana plants  
Stars & moons on the bathroom blind  
High-top trainers  
JJ Cale  
Inside the bodies of young girls  
We grew by knowing disco  
And our power to scream and shout to each other  
Across the dance floor  
Between the cities  
We hold our secret dear

## **Charlotte Ginsborg**

## **Lemon Tree**

She cooks with lemon juice  
She douses it  
With bitter sweet sting  
Into all the rice  
Green leaves  
And cooling tea

It scores her mouth  
Adds a sheen of the sharp  
Into every bite  
Of her  
In  
Digestion

The lemon rind  
Silences the shouts  
She hears  
When it burns over there  
Out of site  
Behind the sheets of glass  
Barriers, fences, dams

The lemon tree grows  
Nowhere she can see  
Not on her streets  
Where voices are put to sleep  
Slumbered into a silence

She will try and dream in yellow  
And of fruit

**Charlotte Ginsborg**

## **The Elegance Of Snow**

It snowed today, a perfect silence, evocation and beauty, all the gasps and grins, all the excitement, a chance to witness the world again, all bright new, fresh, original, a chance to be born again, for a little time at least, to witness the imaginarium, to see the world anew, like a child, that sense of majesty and enchantment, to believe in wonder again, to stare in awe as the twinkling lights reflect and refract so beautifully off freshly fallen snow, daring to dream about better times and easier futures, longing to embrace all our dreams again, craving for solutions behind the exhausting mundane, in this instant we believe, in this instant we are the snow, we are newborns, innocent and spectacular, all that wild potential wishing and yearning for a better world, we believe in all our endless potential again, we forget the decay, the cracks, the broken memories and regrets, we luxuriate in the exquisite now.

**Peter Devonald**

## **Quietude**

Snow slides in from Scarborough to Sligo,  
Stockport to Southampton, it slips and slides  
into memories; he loved you so deeply,  
you know that don't you? He made hearts soar,  
sore, sour, made lives beautiful, swooning unbearable.

Snow falls deeper, deeper still,  
a softening, a quietening, a solitude,  
all is muffled now, all is silence,  
no movement except the dying light,  
a bed of forgetting, forgetting, dreaming.

I'm still here, waiting somewhere, lost  
in a field of my own desperate choosing,  
lying on my back, arms outstretched,  
made myself my own victim for his sin,  
the endless quietude falling as tears.

After mother left and dad lost himself,  
I saw shadows everywhere, betrayal always,  
the world seemed complicit in his crimes;  
no one heard my cries, no one ever came,  
the world was in darkness, liting and cruel.

As I healed a little I realised the world isn't  
just darkness or shadows or nastiness,  
it was just what I had been shown in childhood.  
My experience had tarnished the world,  
and the world reacted to me as a mirror.

I still haven't healed myself completely,  
but slowly I am able to see the beauty,  
can open my eyes to the shabby truth,  
watch the wonder slip and slide into harmony,  
find a way of hope to witness falling snow.

**Peter Devonald**

## **The light that failed**

My brother John  
Such sweetness  
Such distress  
Labelled paranoid schizophrenic.  
He was touched with the divine  
And sought by demons.  
Trashed against the rocks of life.  
Loved  
Hated.  
Always remembered  
Fondly now.  
Mostly

**Jane Deakin**



## **The bulb**

The bulb is going.  
Glowing faintly now.  
Spookily.  
A dusky amber under a muslin shroud.  
It will die soon  
Spark out.

**Jane Deakin**

## **I wish I could**

Remember who was there in any row  
Front, middle, back, everything merged.  
The electric blue morning never made it  
Inside a cloudless grey canopy, numb box.

I wish I could  
Picture contortions, asides, reflections,  
How each word jolted, jarred and jovialised  
Soothed and scarred all in one long sentence.  
A love affair as I recounted someone coughed.

I wish I could  
See your reactions as I biographised your life  
To a sympathetic audience from all branches  
Of a familiar tree whose trunk stopped growing.  
Dying back solely courtesy of only fruitless child.

I wish I could  
Have asked for an assembly attendance list,  
To tick if those who stuttered your praises  
Would face me with their Dorian Gray faces  
Staring rigidly, with cracks ever widening.

I wish I could  
Ignore the final demands on my slumping hall mat.

**Susan Hutchings**

## **The Release**

I thought we'd agreed that your next move  
would be back to your entrance. As usual  
I erred, brought a smile to smirking blue lips.

Oystercatchers busily padding damp sand.  
Shimmering flat distance, my eyes half open  
looking from a plane window vanishing point.

Gulls land in a creamy flurry along the shore.  
I dip into a picnic hamper where cornish pasty  
celery, blue wedges, dips usually lay wantonly.

A linen napkin around your shoulders, dignity.  
I look seaward, tipping point reached you are free  
to wander anywhere but you lay around my feet.

I take steps backward, you remain where you are.  
Gulls launch, the wind will arise scatter you, I know  
not where. Home I run my finger along the sill. Dust.

**Susan Hutchings**

## **The Silver Witch**

The Silver Witch is Aladdin's Cave  
When you go there you can't behave  
She has all sorts of chains and lockets  
Your money burns a hole in your pocket

Mobiles, dragons and perfumed candles  
Sand-filled creatures feel nice to handle  
There's silver jewellery all around the shop  
You can't walk past, you have to stop

You buy a gift but you cannot tell  
If the Silver Witch has you under her spell.

## **Mary Gosling**

## **What Shall I Do?**

Should I paint a portrait or two?  
Or perhaps a beautiful view  
Animals are favourite and come out quite well  
The sea shore is good with the odd shell  
But pattern and design is another idea  
With plenty of colour for warmth and cheer  
With greeting cards there's plenty of choice  
Some happy, some sad and some to rejoice  
Old streets and buildings, chimneys all grimy  
New streets and buildings of glass all shiny  
What shall I do?

I love growing plants any colour or size  
There have been times I've won the first prize  
I press flowers, so flimsy and fine  
Then arrange them in pictures to keep for a time  
There's cut pieces of paper and photos I keep  
Which make pretty images, some bright and some deep  
What shall I do?

I make bears in such beautiful hues  
There are red, purple, pink, black, white and blues  
Some are large and some are slight  
All glittery and colourful in the light  
I also embroider, cross stitch and all  
Sewing pictures, etc, large and small  
Knitting can be done.  
I get quite keen  
Watching telly, I can knit in between  
What shall I do?

The housework gets done all in good time  
Painting and decorating the flat, that's fine  
I quite like making up rhymes now and then  
Word processing is much quicker than pen  
Now that I've finished  
WHAT SHALL I DO?  
I know, cook the dinner and think it all through...

**Mary Gosling**

## **Freedom**

Scraped knees,  
Dirt-filled socks.  
Leaves in our hair,  
Torn frocks.  
Scabs, plasters, stings,  
Sun-stained arms.  
Scent of beautiful weeds.  
Lolly sticks, dig the dirt,  
Taste the air: factories, chimney soot.  
Smokey bricks. thundery trains:  
We scream beneath the arch which echoes, echoes, echoes.  
Bindweed and caterpillars,  
Dandelion wishes, Daddy Long Legs.  
Sparrows chirp,  
A turquoise blue sky.  
Rainbows in the oil,  
Hot flagstones, burning knees.  
Dig up the moss, smell its colour!  
Happiness.  
We were free!

**Debra Gosling**

## **Tree Of Heaven**

You've stood there for so long,  
On the corner ,  
Reaching up into the blue,  
To Heaven.  
Smelling sweetly, looking beautiful:  
Such pretty leaves.  
You watched me grow up, the child with a buttercup under her chin,  
You watched our corner of the world transform  
From a war-scarred mess to a desirable venue.  
Yet still the roar of choking engines thunder past you,  
Shaking your roots to Kingdom Come.  
You continue to grow, thick and strong, tall and magnificent.  
Please be there for me always.  
And when my buttercup sheds its petals  
And all I have is the stalk,  
I will climb your branches, to the top.  
And you can guide me to Heaven.

**Debra Gosling**

## **Frank's Jug**

I have an old enamel jug - it was Frank's.  
It's at least ninety years old.  
Chipped and rusty in places,  
But it's got soul.  
It survived a high explosive bomb  
In Frank's shop, (rendered to ash).  
It was rescued from the rubble, it had to be, or where would the lemonade go?  
On happy beach holidays Frank's jug was brought along for warm beer.  
Happy New Year! punch was served from it too.  
It was placed in the kitchen cupboard.  
Until it was needed to wash hair.  
Now it's looking its age a bit.  
Yet looks quite cultured as a vase for flowers.  
Frank is gone but his many happy memories  
Are kept in my old enamel jug.

**Debra Gosling**



## **Salty Tears**

Rivers of memories spring from my eyes  
Tears drip from my chin  
Run down the crevice of my breasts  
Leaving their salty trail from my mind

Each tear tells a story  
From the lake of grief  
Or the waterfall of happiness  
To the dam of frustration  
In their attempts to flow

They tinker on my eye brims  
Not brave enough yet to be seen  
Assess their drop  
And wonder will I be forgot?

At other times tears rocket out  
Streaming with peals of laughter  
Caught in a riptide  
Of tinkling and utter delight

None of my tears are ever denied  
Their salty tracks are required  
To live a life full and alive

**Georgina Wilson**

## **What's my rights?**

Look after myself  
Do what is right for me  
Who decides what is wrong and what is right?  
It's not that black and white  
An affront to one  
A victory to another  
The lens we look through  
Affecting all else  
Fighting for my rights  
Not caring about the other  
Tunnel visioned on personal goals  
No room for anyone else  
The agenda to succeed all-consuming  
Selfishness reigns supreme  
The collective another matter  
Just look at the state of our world  
Raped by our unvoiced greed.

**Georgina Wilson**

## **First Kiss**

Her heart skips  
Her chest beats  
Her fingertips grip  
Walking the lonely street

Her chest beats  
The lights eclipse  
Walking the lonely street  
He clasps her hips

The lights eclipse  
Their lips meet  
She clasps his hips  
Kissing makes fear retreat

Their lips meet  
Their fingertips grip  
Kissing makes fear retreat  
Their hearts skip a beat

**Georgina Wilson**

## **K**

you used to call me k  
not for me  
but for kensington & chelsea  
& i can't  
remember why

maybe i was your favourite place in this city  
and all you ever thought you knew  
maybe i was so close to you  
without ever being yours  
and it hurt you to leave  
but you did

you used to be my everything  
whoever you were  
now all i have left of you  
is half a memory  
kensington  
& chelsea  
& isn't it funny

**Keith McAuley**

## **Stay**

i need you to be okay without me  
so i left you at heathrow and said Please keep her safe  
whoever you are  
watch over her up there  
watch her fly!

my love it was all i could do

i need to stay  
i need to stay here tell myself i'm not broken  
i need to stay here keep the voices away  
i need to stay he needs me to stay  
and i need him like i used to need you

and i would come with you  
quick as i left  
if i was strong as i say

so let me stay  
without me i need you to be okay

**Keith McAuley**

## **The Drink**

The swelling freshness of  
A distant shore,  
Though I'm only stepping  
Out my door,  
It feels like I'm wading  
Into the sea,  
Bracing laps of coolness  
Submerging me;  
The inland gull's caw  
No longer jars  
With the breaking rush  
Of waves of cars;  
I feel a rippling peace  
As fresh as silk  
As I head back in with  
My pint of milk.

**Karen Morris**

## **Matisse**

So, what did the Wild Beast do  
When his bed became his cage,  
And his age-tainted palette  
Began to bleed from his view?  
His restless hands would pace  
Back and forth across the sheets,  
The primal drive to find a way  
Mastering his ailing body.  
No more cacophonous canvass,  
Rather paper's frail rustle,  
As colour-stiffened as his resolve.  
Where warm brushes once stroked,  
Insistent scissors would cut  
His borrowed time into long ribbons,  
Crafting fine echoes  
That still roar round the walls.

## **Karen Morris**

## **Venus**

Higher than the moon this afternoon  
The winter wide blue is clear.  
Its midnight sky has not arrived  
But deeper blues are here.

As bright as Jupiter  
Just smaller in size  
The rose tinted marble in the sky  
Washed up, Aphrodite

all the hardened foam  
and being born in the sea  
the first water baby  
roams wild up above

an ornament in our night vault of heaven  
a charm in a bracelet  
don't ever dare to tell her of another woman more beautiful  
the winter cold will be a dream

the heat of summer a pleasure  
she sure will find a curse to have you pay endlessly  
or have you killed a price for you for her jealousy  
but Zeus would not have a woman, his own child,

seduce and play with fire  
punished she shall be for  
following the ways  
of her father.

**Elisavet Sotiriadou**



## **Flee or Fade**

Shadows flee and fade  
Dullness becomes bare darkness  
And the blackbird sings

Exclusive thrills kill  
This season's cinematic  
Summer and winter

Another dream sells  
Puzzled by jigsaw pieces  
Dream that's not your own

Shadows flee  
fade  
And the blackbird still sings

**Elisavet Sotiriadou**

## Two of them

A true hero stands by his words

A mighty river  
Never plays games  
The prospect of a future mapped out by powers  
Over your head

Compared to a swim  
With boundless opportunities  
Once to be right, one to be celebrated

Be careful what you wish for  
As demons hide around the bend  
There is no other shore.

A joker isn't expected to reveal any true emotions  
they give you freedom to laugh  
you abused this privilege at someone else's expense.

He like you was only allowed to be  
Partly himself and part time someone else  
You let go of experiences and cut their thread in two.

Two of them left gaping and stranded  
Waiting parents by these boots.  
Children and friends hoping by these boots.

Empty inside a canvas, an abyss for you to fill  
But none of us others worthy  
As none of us believed you will.

These waters are not for fishing anymore, the air always brings a chill  
As a reminder that your body was given wings  
And enter the heavens like true heroes need.

A reminder for us that we never knew  
How to read your mind  
We made a career out of laughing at you

Did you take on our sins?  
We were all children  
Compromised by geographic restrictions and policies to undermine

They made us not understand ourselves and undervalue our own domain.  
You danced to your freedom; you embraced pain more than anyone  
Leaving us fooled behind.

And for all I know you knew better than us

The vast prairies you never roamed and high mountains you never climbed  
We tell our children of the uncle and older brother they never had  
For here on this beach he took off his cowboy boots for one last night.

**Elisavet Sotiriadou**