# *Dear Boy*
# by Emily Berry

After a successful debut pamphlet with tall-lighthouse, Emily Berry published her first full collection, *Dear Boy*, with Faber in 2013. She's a poet of ventriloquism and puppetry, wearing masks and fancy dress to articulate powerful, measured and amused reports from an unstable world. 'My trainer keeps me corseted twenty-three / hours a day' she writes in 'A Short Guide to Corseting' but we are never entirely sure who is pulling the strings.

**I ♥ NY**

No one told me Times Square was a triangle.
Last time we came your uncle showed us round
and I felt proud of Piccadilly Circus.
This time we came by train from Canada –
the half-unfrozen Hudson was cracking up
so gorgeously, and the clouds seemed to send down
light like spaceships marking where to land.
At the border a bearded man was taken away.

In New York their faces light up when you speak.
We bought socks in the gift shop of some big hotel
off Broadway; it was free art Friday and there was
suddenly a blizzard and we'd been soaked to the knee.
I love you both, but it did my head in queuing
for that Japanese restaurant. Katie and I
did Edward Scissorhands with chopstick wrappers.
When the food arrived it looked like it was moving
and I absolutely freaked. You have to say
*wadder*, or they won't get it.

That was the day after I walked past Barnes & Noble
and the *Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas*
fell from the sky. No, really! And they say a penny
dropped from the Empire State could kill a man,
so a book could really do some damage.
You can buy non-sequiturs in bundles now
from international supermarkets. And guilt,
where is that sold? How much for eating cupcakes

on my birthday from the famous bakery
and admiring San Franciscan boys in aviators? Oh –
and when we went for mani-pedis, we sat in a row
and Korean ladies kneeled at our feet.

## Everything She Does is Not Her Fault

The truth is, I didn't imagine I would melt this way,
down to my bones and my milk teeth, this old tin
I kept the things I lost in. I didn't imagine
you'd be round to see me like this, have to listen
to this rattling all night long. Darling, I don't know
if you thought about it, the way the round bone
of my cheek fits the bowl of your eye-socket exactly,
the slow blink of your still-lemonade eyes beneath my face,
each eyelash-graze a tiny sip like a bird drinking.

## The Tea-party Cats

We're suspicious of the tea-party cats;
we don't know why. They all turned out so well
today and aired their charming characters;
they were so smart they frightened us to death.
We longed to have their style and easy knack
of fitting in; we feared our taillessness
would show us up, or our sickly looking
skin. We tried our best all afternoon,
but nothing seemed to do – we spilled our tea
into the saucer, we couldn't think of things
to say, we weren't as dapper as these cats
whose whiskers nicely referenced their bowties.
We stood in corners, if you want to know,
nibbling biscuits though our mouths were dry.
Some of us slipped away before the end.
I stayed until the speeches, when the cats
thanked each other proudly, proposing
endless toasts; and then one of them exposed
a weakness, but quickly covered it up.

## Discussion Ideas

- If 'I ❤ NY' arrived written (in admittedly small letters) on a postcard sent from one of your friends holidaying in New York, would you believe its sentiments? What do you think about the threat-levels in the poem? Where is the 'guilt' coming from? What might have changed between the first visit to Times Square and the second?
- What do you know about Dylan Thomas and New York? Why might his book be falling from the sky, and not the collected poems of a more local writer?
- Is the relationship in 'Everything She Does Is Not Her Fault' set to last? Why are there so many bones in the poem?

- Might these be the Tea Party Cats - https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/11963/lot/177/ Or this one - http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_Nu7mpkW6T3o/S8C9wbnYM0I/AAAAAAAABVo/jlrTdmTBhKY/s1600/earl+gray.jpg Why is our urge to anthropomorphize cats so strong?
- Have you ever seen a cat fall over, then busily wash itself as if to cover up its embarrassment? Is that what is happening at the end of this poem? Is the whole poem an act of covered up weakness?

Emily Berry grew up in London and studied English Literature at Leeds University and Creative Writing at Goldsmiths College. She works as a freelance writer and co-edits the anthology series *Stop Sharpening Your Knives* and is a contributor to *The Breakfast Bible*, a compendium of breakfasts published by Bloomsbury. In 2008 she received an Eric Gregory Award and her first pamphlet *stingray fevers* was published by tall lighthouse. *Dear Boy* (Faber) was awarded the 2013 Forward Prize for Best First Collection.

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