

The Harbour Beyond the Movie **by Luke Kennard**



No account of the last decade of UK poetry publishing would be complete without reference to Salt, the press which published dozens of debut poets and opened up the conversation about who gets to write poetry and who gets to hear it. Luke Kennard is a quintessential Salt poet – humorous and erudite; a curator of absurdities, not an autobiographer. Funnier than most, his wit is self-deprecating and utterly snark-free. The youngest poet ever shortlisted for a Forward Prize (he was 26 at the time), he’s also won awards for his comedy writing from the National Student Drama Festival.

I Am No Longer Your Pilot

A pig fell out of the sky.
It landed poorly, but it was not wounded.
‘Tell me,’ said the pig, ‘of cruelty;
Tell me of the sweet, stale smoke on your fingertips;
Tell me of your tinnitus and your unsightly body hairs.’

I heard a note that carried my will away
So instead I told the pig of obloquy and calumny,
And the pig was satisfied – which is no great stroke.
He slept a while, but presently awoke and squawked,
‘Teach me of satire and upper-body strength.’

I was born under the space between two stars,
So instead I beat a military tattoo with maracas
And sang about national identity and gender.
But this time the pig was not satisfied.
‘That is not what I asked for at all,’ he complained.

‘You have reneged on your promise.
You are no gentleman and have learned nothing
About yourself you did not already know.’
Now the pig was becoming transparent,
His form but condensation and mist.

I turned my back on the city.
I moved to a log cabin in Finland.

Where I never read magazines, just looked at the snow
And the silver light on the urns, and the pig-shaped absence.
I never shook off that pig-shaped absence.

The Journalist's Prayer

Oh, that I could harness thought plantations;
Perfect villages of memory,
The tree, ponderous with ravens;
The plastic bread in a plastic oven –
A gentleman proclaiming it delicious,
Winking, offstage, that he might be debunked;
And I, with my thunderous notebook,
Emerging from the vault, yesterday.
I know where to kick a shark, I know
The graceful bull, the loathsome dove;
That their apparent tranquillity
Is rather silent, impotent terror.
May criticising me become forever redundant
That I might wake with a shriek of happiness.
May I never have to bury another leopard.
Let me be thought intelligent, even the kindest;
And when I am without sin,
Let me cast the first stone;
And when I am without pride,
Let them build a statue in my honour.

Nut Factory

The unshelled peanuts pour down the flue
Like a throng of ecstatic bald men, dancing.

I put my hands into the flue and raise them.
I let the peanuts fall over my head.

I place a nut between my teeth.
It tastes of pencil lead.

I place the bad nut in an iron trough.
When the trough is full it is taken to the furnace.

The good nuts are portioned, weighed
And sealed into foil bags – but I am not involved in this.

We can eat as many nuts as we like.
We are all so sick of nuts we cry sometimes.

Friday mornings we leave the factory, dancing,
Like unshelled peanuts pouring down a flue.

Discussion Ideas

- Pigs might fly. Is 'I Am No Longer Your Pilot' what happens when they do?
- What might a journalist write in 'A Poet's Prayer' to match the intent of the poet who wrote 'A Journalist's Prayer'? What might have prompted a poem such as Kennard's?
- Who is the journalist praying to? Will s/he get any answer, do you think?
- What does 'Nut Factory' have to say about working in a nut factory? The *Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English* defines 'nut factory' as 'a hospital for the mentally ill'. Does the poem have anything to say in that respect?
- What other poems using the settings, language and context of work do you know? Given the amount of time we all spend at work, would you expect work poetry to be a large or small category?

Luke Kennard is a poet and writer of fiction. He won an Eric Gregory award in 2005 for his first collection of prose poems, *The Solex Brothers* (Stride Books), and his second collection of poetry, [*The Harbour Beyond the Movie*](#) (Salt, 2007), made him the youngest poet ever to be nominated for the Forward Poetry Prize for Best Collection. His criticism has appeared in *Poetry London* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, and his first fiction publication, *Holophin* (Penned in the Margins, 2012), won the Saboteur Award for Best Novella 2013. He lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham and his latest collection, *A Lost Expression*, was published by Salt in 2012.

Other books by Luke Kennard

- [*The Solex Brothers*](#) (Stride Books, 2005 / Salt, 2009)
- [*The Migrane Hotel*](#) (Salt, 2009)
- [*A Lost Expression*](#) (Salt, 2012)

If you liked Luke Kennard, try

- [W N Herbert](#)
- [Nick Drake](#)
- [Oli Hazard](#)