

Brand New Ancients **by Kate Tempest**



The 2014 Next Generation list is notable for the number of genre-busting artists it contains. While others have one foot in the visual arts and one in poetry, Kate Tempest bridges the divide between poetry and music. Alternating publishing books and releasing records, she's feted equally by Chuck D and Carol Ann Duffy for her work which fuses formal poetic metre with hip-hop's energy and context, and which she delivers live, thrillingly, with the cadences and social concerns of a barnstorming preacher. In 2015, *The Bricks That Built The Houses*, her debut novel, will be published.

from ***Brand New Ancients***

The stories are here,
the stories are you,
and your fear
and your hope
is as old
as the language of smoke,
the language of blood,
the language of
languishing love.

The Gods are all here.
Because the gods are in us.

The gods are in the betting shops
the gods are in the caff
the gods are smoking fags out the back
the gods are in the office blocks
the gods are at their desks
the gods are sick of always giving more and getting less
the gods are at the rave –
two pills deep into dancing –
the gods are in the alleyway laughing
the gods are at the doctor's
they need a little something for the stress
the gods are in the toilets having unprotected sex
the gods are in the supermarket

the gods are walking home,
the gods can't stop checking Facebook on their phones
the gods are in a traffic jam
the gods are on the train
the gods are watching adverts
the gods are not to blame –
they are working for the council
now they're on the dole
now they're getting drunk pissing their wages down a hole
the gods are in their gardens
with their decking and their plants
the gods are in the classrooms
the poor things don't stand a chance
they are trying to tell the truth
but the truth is hard to say
the gods are born, they live a while
and then they pass away.

They lose themselves in crowds, their guts are full of rot.
They hope there's something more to life but can't imagine
what.

These gods have got no oracles to translate their requests,
these gods have got a headache and a payment plan and
stress about
when next they'll see their kids,
they are not fighting over favourites –
they're just getting on with it.
We are the Brand New Ancients.

*from **Brand New Ancients***

Her name's Gloria,
she works behind the bar
pulling pints for the locals
down the Albert and Victoria.
She's happy in her way, she don't expect too much from life.
She believes that everybody deserves to be treated right.

She used to be a troubled type with a look in her eyes
that invited looks from the guys
that she'd meet every night in the bars
that she went to with her best mate Jemma;
they swore they were gonna be best mates forever –
they loved each other, did everything together,
they used to run riot, a couple proper little terrors.
But then Jemma stopped calling her quite so much
'cos Jemma got into going protests and stuff.
Jemma wanted the world to change,
she was 16 and smarter than most girls her age,
so while she was reading books and hanging out on picket
lines,
Gloria was sniffing lines
hooking up with different guys.

Jemma wanted to go uni; she started studying hard
and the two of them just drifted apart.
Glory ran away from home when she was 17,
he was supposed to be the man of her dreams:
he had a smile like a jewel in a sewer,
knuckles like an open tool box,
eyes like Kahlúa –
he made her feel like he was the only one who ever knew her
and when he told a lie nothing ever seemed truer.
Then one day she was in a state in a heap on the floor,
wiping the blood off her jaw,
thinking I deserve more.
At the time she might have been convinced it was love
but these days, she barely even thinks of him much.
She's the kind of girl whose scars run deep
but if she smiles at you for a second it'll last you all week.

She don't compare herself to others,
she believes everybody has their own strengths;
if she was a statue she'd be less marble, more cement.
She's straightforward, no-nonsense, she just wants people
to be honest,
she don't have no time for pretenders and she's never broke
a promise.

*from **Brand New Ancients***

Polish the silverware, dust off the telly screen,
it's holy hour on Saturday evening,
the new Dionysus is in his dressing room preening,
the make-up girls hold their breath as they dream him
into a perfect bronze and then leave him
to his pre-show routine of stretching and breathing.
He winks in the mirror as he flosses his teeth,
pulls his trousers up to his nipples and strides out to the stage.
The permatanned God of our age.
We kneel down before him, we beg him for pardon,
mothers feast on the raw flesh of their children struck by
the madness
that floods the whole country, this provocation to savagery.
Let's all get famous. I need to be more than just this.
Give me my glory. A double page spread.
Let people weep when they hear that I'm dead.
Let people sleep in the street for a glimpse of my head
as I walk the red carpet into the den of the blessed.
Why celebrate this? Why not denigrate this?
I don't know the names of my neighbours,
but I know the names of the rich and the famous.
And the names of their ex-girlfriends
and their ex-girlfriends' new boyfriends.

Now, watch him shaking his head, he is furious:
how dare this contestant have thought for a second
that this godhead, this champion of unnatural selection,

should be subjected to another version
of a bridge over fucking troubled water.
I stare at the screen and I hear the troubadours sing
the Deeds of Simon. He took the eyes from our heads
and blamed us for our blindness.

Why is this interesting? Why are we watching?

Discussion Ideas

- Here's Kate Tempest performing the first extract in the official trailer to her show *Brand New Ancients* <http://katetempest.co.uk/video> , and there's a lot more of her work to be found on Youtube. *Brand New Ancients* (the book): poetry collection, verse novella or script?
- Bearing in mind the description of the piece as 'a tale of two families and their intertwining lives, set against the background of the city and braided with classical myth', what is 'the language of smoke, / the language of blood' – in an ancient sense, and in a modern sense? Do you read / hear this language being spoken in Tempest's poetry?
- In the second extract, what's happening with the line 'if she was a statue, she'd be less marble, more cement'? Is that a compliment or an insult?
- At the end of extract 3, the line 'Why is this interesting? Why are we watching?'. Why indeed? Who is 'we'? Are you watching? Is there a mythical tale to be experienced in *The X Factor*, or is that just wishful thinking?
- The introduction to this book says 'This poem was written to be read aloud'. Is that how you've experienced it?

Kate Tempest is a playwright, novelist, poet and recording artist. *Brand New Ancients* (Picador, 2013), her epic poem set to a live score, won the Ted Hughes Award in 2013, the Herald Angel at Edinburgh Fringe, and was performed in the UK and New York. Tempest is the author of three critically-acclaimed plays, and her debut novel, *The Bricks That Built the Houses*, sold at auction to Bloomsbury and is published in Spring 2015. Her next poetry collection, *Hold Your Own*, is published by Picador in October 2014.

<http://katetempest.co.uk/>

Other books by Kate Tempest

- *Hold Your Own* (Picador, 2014)

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