

This is Yarrow **by Tara Bergin**



Tara Bergin earns her place on the Next Generation list by virtue of her debut [*This is Yarrow*](#). She writes with a Grimm-like matter-of-factness about sex and violence, folklore and the fantastical, but never veers to the wrong side of fey. In 2012, Bergin completed her Newcastle University PhD research on Ted Hughes' translations of János Pilinszky with a particular interest in how translation affected Hughes' own work, focussed on his collection *Crow*. At Newcastle, she also became involved in the study of the Bloodaxe Books archive which is kept there, and has contributed to a film about its riches.

At the Garage

Ask me:
have I fallen in love with the mechanic?
Perhaps – perhaps, for a moment.
He doesn't know what it is.
It's his hands –
so thickly black with engine oil,
so hard-working, and in such high demand.

Ask me:
is there violence in the dirt?
Perhaps – perhaps, for a moment.
Like a criminal's thumb which gets
held firmly by the prison officer
and is then rolled hard onto gummed paper
so that we know, we know, that he is done for –

and even the backs of the mechanic's hands,
as well as the palms, are all inked black,
and everything they touch will be evidence of him –
the keys, the white receipt, my own hand
or cheek
were he to touch it.

Ask me, ask me how that makes me feel!
My cheeks turn pink with the thought of it,

while his blushes, if he had blushed,
would be hidden behind grease –
a soft deep dirt that is soft and thick
like the ink in tins that etchers use.
It makes the whites of his eyes whiter,
and the blues bluer –

Yes, perhaps I am almost in love with the mechanic.
But it is terribly awkward, face to face.
It is terribly awkward to be in such close proximity
to the mechanic, and the dirty girl on the calendar
who is always there, just visible from the small window
where I go afterwards, to pay.

This is Yarrow

In this country house I had a dream of the city
as if the thick yarrow heads had told me,
as if the choked dove had told me,
or the yellow elder seeds had made me ask –
and in the dream I went up to the dirty bus station
and I saw the black side of the power station
and as if the brown moth's tapping at the window
made me say it I said, do you still love me?
And when I woke and went to the window,
your tender voice told me: this is yarrow,
this is elder, this is the collared dove.

At the Lakes with Roberta

Our guide
(with whom Roberta has already been ingratiating herself
in a horribly forward manner)
has taken us to Windermere,
and tomorrow will take us to Grasmere.
Of course I am eager to see,
first-hand, as it were,
the sources of inspiration,
but I fear Roberta's behaviour
shall spoil the entire experience.

Speaking bluntly: she is far too light-hearted;
rather superficial if one may say such a thing,
and she *flatters* him, that's the point,
she flatters him with her incompetence.
I'm afraid I find it unseemly.

The fact is,
if she continues to distract our guide from his duty as guide,
there will be a breach between Roberta and me.
The fault will lie with her:
it's perfectly clear she came only to enjoy The View –
while I can hardly bear it, you see;

I can hardly bear the weight of this poetic air,
the air that WW breathed: such steep atmosphere.
There's nothing for it: one must simply never travel
with one's female companions.

And now, look:
our guide is daring to quote from 'To the Small Celandine'
(never a favourite of mine)
and Roberta's foolish gasps of pleasure hang on the mist.
It's unfortunate, really, that he has been quite so taken in,
so swallowed up by what one might call
a rather ordinary attractiveness.
And clearly I shall remain ignorant for the rest of the tour
about the more – intimate – details
of a poet's life.

Discussion Ideas

- Mary Douglas in her 1960s book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* famously traced the idea that what is regarded as dirt in a given society is any matter considered out of place. What is the dirt doing in 'At the Garage'? What is dirty, who thinks it is, and why?
- Are you a mechanic? What do / might you feel about this poem if you are / were a mechanic?
- 'At the Lakes With Roberta' is about, among other things, poets and their audiences. Who might Wordsworth himself have sympathies with – Roberta or the voice of the poem? Is the poem a commentary on Tara Bergin's own audience?
- Have you been to Wordsworth's house at Grasmere? Or to the historic house of any writer or public figure you admire? Was the air notably more 'poetic' or charged? What are we looking for in these houses?
- What's the difference between the 'chokered dove' and the 'collared dove' in 'This is Yarrow'?

Tara Bergin was born and grew up in Dublin. She moved to England in 2002 and currently lives in North Yorkshire. In 2012 she completed her PhD research at Newcastle University on Ted Hughes's translations of János Pilinszky. Her poems have been published in *Poetry London*, *Poetry Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation* and *Poetry Nation Review*, as well as in Carcanet's anthology *New Poetries V*. She was awarded the Seamus Heaney Prize for Poetry in 2014. *This is Yarrow* (Carcanet) is her first collection.

If you liked Tara Bergin, try

- [Lavinia Greenlaw](#)
- [Amanda Dalton](#)
- [Penelope Shuttle](#)

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/AAAAAAAAABVo/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.

<http://www.emilyberry.co.uk/>

If you liked Emily Berry, try

- [Robert Crawford](#)
- [Sophie Hannah](#)
- [Sam Riviere](#)

Bee Journal

by Sean Borodale



To follow Sean Borodale's progress through his publication record is to trace the coming into being of a poet. A visual artist by training, Borodale's first book was *Notes for an Atlas*, a 370 page topographical work written on walks round London and described by Robert Macfarlane as 'an extraordinary poem' but it wasn't until the debut-billed [Bee Journal](#) that Borodale was classified specifically as a poet. Next year, Cape is to publish his *Human Work (a poet's cookbook)*, a collection of poems written 'live' among the pots and pans of a working domestic kitchen.

28th February

Do I dare to trust... these pets? They are not that.
Now as the rain skims down through rattled air
the last dead things, like skeletons of stones,
catch on my feet: *bee-friend*, the late dead things,
the skeleton of Christmas, fireworks of midnights vaporised,
the awkward purposeless haste of visitors...
These bees are visitors, how long they last, our guess.
The skeleton of song, the robin's cry note entering the bees.
Time very arthritic; the clock's joints ache.
Black bees, like models made of tar and grit, get stuck.
The queen inside them all; they, wall and bedding, cluster
walls' eyes, measuring and smelling, fitting...

7th August: Property

A frame of honeycomb is in the kitchen:
Just a candle, vigil, out of respect.
It's like a body I visit
Laid on the table's midnight.

The smell is first; under its pinewood resin
The smell of light is in a miracle:
I – criminal – touch

Its tear-easy skin of skeletal reef.
(Best use of space from minimal effort.)

No waste for them, just work,
And days of nectar flow are nearing end.

Flowers are here, springs of them,
Wells and weightless drops of briefest sex;
A wax shroud turned down at its corners;
A dead skin most beautifully scented,
Drawn out of dark.

When touched,
Observe the way
That light swells in the crack
And golden-eyes.

But it is cold,
I paid for it with hooks across my flesh.

10th February: Queen

I keep the queen, she is long in my hand,
her legs slightly pliant;
folded, dropped down, wings flat
that flew her mating flight
to the sun and back, full of spermatozoa, dronesong.
She was made mechanically ecstatic.
I magnify what she is, magnify her skews and centres.
How downy she is, fur like a fox's greyness, like a thistle's mane.
Wings perfect, abdomen subtle in shades of brittle;
her rear legs are big in the lens;
feet like hung anchors are hooks for staying on cell-rimms.
Veins in her wings are a rootwork of rivers,
all echo and interlace. This is her face, compound eye.
I look at the slope of her head, the mouth's proboscis;
her thin tongue piercing is pink as cut flesh, flash glass.
Some hairs feather and split below the head.
Those eyes are like castanets, cast nets;
woman all feral and ironwork, I slip
under the framework, into the subtle.
The wing is jointed at the black leather shoulder.
I wear it, I am soft to stroke, the lower blade fans.
Third generation queen of our stock,
you fall as I turn. I hold your hunchback;
a carcase of lightness, no grief, part animal, part flower.

Discussion Ideas

- '28th February' – 'these pets? They are not that.' Where are the lines drawn between working and companion animals, livestock and pets? Honey can be bought from a shop; bees don't know their owners ... why keep bees? Does this poem hint at the reasons you might have for being a small scale beekeeper in the early twenty first century? Have you ever been tempted to raise bees yourselves?
- '7th August: Property' – 'I paid for it with hooks across my flesh' – do we pay enough for honey, financially or symbolically? Are there missing words implied by the title of this poem, if so, might they be '... is Theft'?

- '10th February: Queen' – what's happening in the line 'I wear it, I am soft to stroke, the lower blade fans.'?
- Alice Oswald says of this book "These are pre-poems, note-poems dictated by phenomena. Their context is bees, but their subject (intriguingly) is Time ...' What do you think?
- If you've read the whole of *Bee Journal*, how was the experience? How did it relate to the reading of other journals or diaries you may have read? Did you read it more like a work of natural history or science? Have you ever kept a journal yourself? What is its intended readership?

Sean Borodale works as a poet and artist, making scriptive and documentary poems written on location; this derives from his process of writing and walking for works such as *Notes for an Atlas* (Isinglass, 2003) and *Walking to Paradise* (1999). He was selected for the Granta New Poets series in 2012 and his first collection of poetry, *Bee Journal* (Jonathan Cape, 2012), was a PBS Recommendation and was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize. His second collection, *Human Work*, is published in February 2015 by Jonathan Cape. He lives in Somerset and is currently Creative Writing Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge.

<http://www.seanborodale.com/>

Other books by Sean Borodale

- [*Notes from an Atlas*](#) (Faber, 2007)

If you liked Sean Borodale, try

- [Mick Imlah](#)
- [Deryn Rees Jones](#)
- [Paul Batchelor](#)

The Broken Word **by Adam Foulds**



Already on Granta's 2013 list of 20 Best Young British Novelists, Adam Fould's ear is tuned to both prose and poetry. [*The Broken Word*](#), the poetry book which earned him his place on the Next Generation list, is a hybrid: a verse novella which served as many younger readers' first introduction to a dark episode of Britain's imperial history, the 1960s Kenyan Mau Mau uprising and its attendant horrors that preceded independence. The publication which followed – *The Quickening Maze* – combined history, prose and poetry in different ratios, to produce a novel exploring the institutionalisation of troubled 19th century nature poet John Clare.

from 5: Night Fires

Why had Tom thought they'd stop
after the first kill, as though they'd done enough?
Of course they didn't.
Over the long night they killed two more,
a modest tally by others' standards.
The second one Tom didn't shoot.
He held his gun up while the others shot
and watched him fall.
The third came after long hours,
with splintery light through the trees.
By now, trekking back,
they could smell the burning villages everywhere.
Tom's legs itched horribly.
His shirt sucked at his skin,
rubbed a slow burn into his collar.
There were bodies everywhere
in different attitudes:
stunned, reaching, sleeping, tumbled.
Then from behind something a man sprang up
and Tom shot him.
Just like in a Western: the attacking Indian:
Tom saw the man look straight at him,
clownish with terror
as he pulled the trigger,
saw the bullet make a splash

in the man's bare chest.
Only the fall backwards was different,
looser and ugly, spastic, almost embarrassing.
A Home Guard walked up sideways,
slowly, and shot again the wriggling man.

*

Back at the vehicles, the men murmured,
passing round a hip-flask.
The sky was oppressively bright,
acres of weightless gold above them.
Prior saw Tom's face
and walked over to him,
placed his hand on Tom's shoulder.
You'll be all right, old man.
Chipper after some sleep.
First time is always the worst.
Tom turned, unable... to thank,
and held on to his wrist.

8: Who Were These People?

Home. The door swings inward.
A servant, his face relaxing
with recognition, then his mother
drifting into the vestibule.

Tom. You didn't say you were coming.

But here I am.

Yes, you are, aren't you.
She rubbed his left upper arm,
chewing her smile.

*

The familiar food, the furniture –
the way the armchair by his window
spread behind his shoulder blades
and supported his thighs.
Tom could have cried.

*

Eventually:

I'm just a little concerned, Tom.
His mother, pouring tea
into three cups. His father
tightening in his chair.
About you just giving up like this.

Actually, that isn't quite what happened.

His father broke a biscuit,
shook crumbs from the two halves.
It's not really a habit you should acquire.

Tom, don't sigh like that.

I didn't sigh. His voice was loud.
They riled him so easily.
He sipped tea, felt it rush
around his teeth, and recommenced
with a lawyerly, factual, frangible calm.
I didn't just give up.

*Have you thought about this being just
a little holiday here and then going back?*

Back? He looked up,
then down, falling back in his seat,
mouth slowly closing.
They watched him closely,
thought he hated the idea
but his actual thought was:
It *is* still there. They're all still there,
save for the newly dead.
No. No. I want to start next term.

I mean to say, aren't you needed?

What he could tell them about there,
if he wanted, to shut them up.
If they believed him.
But it wasn't even possible,
so wildly unmentionable,
like bringing up wet dreams
or school things.
Impossible.
I told you, it was agreed.

His father tried to sting him
into it. *Well, you're a man now.*
You can make your own decisions.

But it was a weak lunge
and after it, they were all still there,
waiting, and it was Tom, in fact, deciding.
It made him think
Who are these people?
The frightened man with his telescope
and strapping, sunburnt wife?

Yes, I am. Yes, I am.
And I reckon I've done my bit.

He took a biscuit
almost not trembling.
But his mother was effective.
*Tom, I don't want you living
with the shame of crying off
of something difficult for the rest of your life.*

Tom put down his biscuit, finished his tea,
and threw the cup against the wall.
It smashed wonderfully, as though charged,
into a thousand tiny white knives and powder.
Tom looked over the whole service,
deaf with pleasure, considering them for bombs.

from 10: Falling Asleep

Lying beside one another on the grass,
inspecting faces, trying not to laugh.
Tom noticed the delicate fizz of light
along her jaw like a nettle stem.
In the inner corners of her eyes,
tiny submerged pink – what? – like
cushions or pleats, and beside them
in the whites' gathering convexity,
beneath bending tree reflections,
the finest threads of blood.
What? What have you found?
Everything jumping.
Sshh, I can't concentrate.
In her throat, a half-inch
of artery that pulsed.
Hmm. Little larva.
Touching it with a fingertip.
A half-pumped inner tube,
but alive. For a moment
he saw her whole head scarlet
and glistening, her teeth
folding back under a good thick stick.
God, he said out loud.
What?
Nothing. Lie still.
To put it out of his head,
he leaned over and kissed her
hard, pushing down to find
the moment of consent
and introduced his tongue.
He felt her eyes open
and close again as she responded
with a strong, blunt prod
of her own tongue back at his.
Wonderful. The time was right.
He took hold of her left breast
through her clothes, and squeezed,

still kissing, taking his time.
Then he slid his hand down
to the bottom of her skirt
and stroked the bony hump of her knee.
Then moving on again,
onto the smoothness of thigh
and up, short of breath,
getting as far as her underwear,
the disquieting, burnt grass
dry crackle of hair
through the cloth, flesh
beneath it, before she'd had
enough and grabbed his wrist.
He kept his hand there,
using his strength. She
disengaged her mouth.
Tom. Please be nice.
I am being nice.
Pushing against her lovely weakness,
pressing the warm cloth up into her gap.
Tom. Don't. Please, now.
But why not?
She kicked herself upright,
retied her hair.
I have to go anyway.
No, you don't.
I think I know whether I do or not. Bye.

Discussion Ideas

- What do you make of the use of the word 'wriggling' in the first extract?
- Do pages 45-47 prepare you for the explosion of p48? Why is there no 'reaction shot' equivalent, why do we see the teacup smash and then nothing from the mother and father in response?
- Who has the power in the encounter in extract three? Tom, the girl? The writer, the reader?
- Christopher Reid said of *The Broken Word* that it shows 'what a verse narrative can do that a prose one can't. It's not just a matter of economy, telling a big story in a small space; it has more to do with the dynamics, the accents and the tensions' of the verse line.' What do you think?
- What does 'The Broken Word' refer to?

Adam Foulds was born in London and studied English at St. Catherine's College, Oxford and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. He is a poet and novelist and lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Roehampton. In 2008, his first collection *The Broken Word* (Jonathan Cape) won the Costa Poetry Prize and the Somerset Maugham Award. His novel *The Quickenings Maze* was shortlisted for the 2009 Man Booker Prize and won the European Union Prize for Literature. He was named as one of Granta's 'Best of Young British Novelists' in 2013.

If you liked Adam Foulds, try

- [Jamie McKendrick](#)
- [Owen Sheers](#)
- [Paul Batchelor](#)

The Mirabelles **by Annie Freud**



Annie Freud's pamphlet *A Voids Officer Achieves The Tree Pose* (Donut Press, 2006) swiftly followed by her first full collection *The Best Man That Ever Was* (Picador, 2007) announced the arrival of a fully formed, fifty-something poet; readers enjoying the friction between debut excitement and a maturity of voice. Her poems are funny, sly, unapologetic, rich in subject, texture and experience. Her first book's title poem is a risky dramatic monologue imagining in the interior life of a woman we think – though we are never wholly sure – is Hitler's lover.

The Mirabelles

A young poet visits an older poet
who has enjoyed fame and success.

In the street, a plum tree has scattered
its golden fruit all over the pavement.

When it's over, she'll come back and fill
her pockets with these Mirabelles.

She leaves the older poet's house;
night has fallen; she has forgotten

the plums. But the thought of them,
lying so sweet all over the pavement,

comes back to her and she remembers
them every day for the rest of her life.

The Carvery Experience

She wore a low-backed silken sweater
slung with many golden chains
that slid together when she laughed
and parted when she pulled a cracker;

and when the cracker's spark had flashed
a whistle fell into his plate;

he blew three notes into her ear
and crowned her with his paper hat.

The walls were hung with tapestries
of ladies in their courtly busks.
A boar's head was the centrepiece
with silver apples on its tusks.

I think that stag is watching us,
she said. *My tarte Tatin's gone cold.*
If we don't leave right now, I'll die.
They paid and went without a word.

Was the sweater *Dry Clean Only*?
Were the golden chains detachable?
Did the cashier say, *we've sold*
an awful lot of those this Christmas?

Maidenhair

They landed on the beach just before noon
and immediately he found a spray of maidenhair,
fossilized on slate, lying in a rock pool.
Out of habit, he looked around for more
but found nothing, at least nothing for him.
There were pebbles of a most sensuous white
and pieces of green glass roughened by the tides
that, as a younger man, he would have kept;
but he no longer had a desire for such things.

The skipper and his mate were scraping the scales
off the fish they'd caught, and began frying them
over a fire of tangled roots and grass.
The shingle was splitting and singing in the embers
and a delicious smell rose from the pan.
Saliva filled his mouth in an unwonted gush.
They sat and ate the hot sticky flakes and crisped skin
and the beer bottle passed from hand to hand.

The sun was hotter now and his trousers felt tight
and while the men busied themselves with the boat
he went and stretched out in a sandy hollow
between the tamarisks that grew close to the shore,
mobbed with hundreds of chirruping finches.
He pulled the slate from the pocket of his jacket
and lay in the posture of a girl in a painting
he'd seen the day before, naked on a bed,
staring in a mirror, encircled with pearls.

Discussion Ideas

- What does the young poet remember about her visit to the older poet in 'The Mirabelles' – the conversation or the plums? Why might that be significant? What do you think happened during the visit? What's more important – poetry, plums, or poetry about plums?

- This is the most famous plum poem of them all <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/just-say> Is Annie Freud's poem in conversation with William Carlos Williams' poem?
- Who is observing the experience in "The Carvery Experience"? Another diner? A waiter? A waitress? What conclusions are they drawing?
- 'Maidenhair' begins with a 'they' but ends with a 'he'. Who is the other person that combines with the 'he' to make 'they'? What sort of experience do you think that other person is having on the beach?
- 'as a younger man, he would have kept' [the pebbles and glass]. How old do you think the man is? Is this a mid-life crisis poem? Whatever your answer, why do you think that?

Annie Freud was born in London in 1948. Her father is the painter, Lucian Freud. Her maternal grandfather was the sculptor, Sir Jacob Epstein, and her great-grandfather was Sigmund Freud. Her first publication was *A Voids Officer Achieves the Tree Pose* (Donut Press). Her first full collection, *The Best Man That Ever Was* (Picador, 2007), was a Poetry Book Society recommendation and won the Dimplex Prize for New Writing (Poetry) in the same year. *The Mirabelles* was a PBS Choice and shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize in 2010. She is currently teaching at the Poetry School.

If you liked Annie Freud, try

- [Michael Donaghy](#)
- [Catherine Smith](#)
- [Lorraine Mariner](#)

Other books by Annie Freud

- [The Best Man That Ever Was](#) (Picador, 2007)

Here Comes the Night **by Alan Gillis**



'At first I thought I would write songs and be in a band, which never happened' writes Alan Gillis of his teenage years in *The Edinburgh Review*, a publication the Belfast-born writer edits. 'Poems came later'. Across three poetry collections, Gillis' adult self demonstrates the imaginative grip on contemporary culture that would surely have made him a notable lyricist, but he plays it out through the constraints of the sonnet not the 7 inch. 'Open Facebook and update / all trace of yourself' he exhorts in the opening to [*Here Comes the Night*](#), posting the status of the modern moment.

In a Nondescript Town

Gulls cawk and cry over rooftops and sirens,
evacuated schools, outraged streets, fire engines,
while families hunch and huddle in their drives
watching TV crews, news reporters gather.

Tight-lipped plainclothed officers sip coffee
on a floral sofa. A neighbour explains:
'When he stared at you. As if he'd cat's eyes.'
His mother slumps alone in the kitchen.

A tap drips. Light glades her still head.
Upstairs on the landing a detective
breathes deep, pushes the 'Do Not Enter'
sign of the bedroom door and takes it in

as if standing on the threshold of hell,
trying to make sense of a small made bed,
flat screen, consoles, notepads, posters,
so many books stacked neatly on their shelves.

In a Glass Darkly

Look into my eyes. You're vicious
letters on a furious page, feverous
black ribbons and ravens, dark angels
of cloud-scowl in the sky raining down

hatchets, spanners, Stanley knives, claw hammers,
each raindrop a dropped elevator's scream.

You're a smoker's lungs. You're beaten
meat: cleavered, hung. You're gelatinous
fat on a cold kebab. You're porno music,
a syringe beneath the railway bridge,
a weeping condom squished on the girders
glistened like a swimming lizard's skin.

You're a supermarket aisle packed
with pus-leached, glooping fruit
on shelves that ooze like rancid gums.
You're worms in the puke's tomatoey ghee.
You're an arse-licker's tongue. I'm your mirror.
Look into my eyes and love me.

You're the desert. You're the rizarred
skin and river blindness of the dying,
so you are, the rape of the foreign policies
of the west. I'm your diminishing bent
towards remembrance and kindness.
Look into my eyes and love me.

You're gonorrhoea. You're the beating time-
bomb behind the breast. I'm the dissolution
of all you hoped to be, and you hoped to be
the best, so you did. You're eco-scuzz.
You're all but excuses: 'Because... Because...'
Look into my eyes. Behold me.

I'm your ghost, so I am. You're the niff
of a turnip fart in a train carriage.
I'm who people think you are, but you'll never be
me, so you'll never. Yet when you go dead water
will drown me. Numb silence and lonely.
Reach through the glass and hold me.

The Blue-ringed Octopus Found on South-Australian Shores

It may bring music to the living
room and light,
but the electric cable lies calm across the floor
like slack rope,
like an eel adoze in waters barely living,
if eels ever doze.

Like a tentacle dangled from a dying
conch shell, having turned
the colour of the conch shell at low tide:
an octopus
is hidden like a lung. And he is dying,
who trod there,

toeing the strand's surf and suds and kicking
over speckled pebbles,
over the conch shell that lit to livid yellow
and sudden blue
rings that leapt and bit and left him kicking
his bucket in the sand.

And you skin was pale, but brightly,
like the living
room lit by that cable abuzz with the venom
of its voltage,
and your neck was tethered nightly
by the stark rope

of my self-regard, as I lay back to sing
Take That songs
until your tongue unlippped electric
and I crackled
in your milted eyes' yellow-blue rings
in the dark.

Discussion Ideas

- Which nondescript town? Dunblane, Hungerford, somewhere else? What is meant or implied by the phrase 'nondescript town'? What would be the opposite - a 'fulldescript' town? What would be an example of a fulldescript town? Manchester, Glasgow, London? Nothing meriting sirens and fire-engines ever happens there, surely?
- What might be contained in all those neatly stacked books? Does this poem suggest that writing – or description – a guard against 'the threshold of hell'?
- Alan Gillis is not the only artist or writer to have co-opted and adapted the Biblical phrase 'through a glass darkly' for his / her own purposes http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through_a_Glass_Darkly . What's happening in his poem? Is it thrillingly disgusting, or just ordinarily disgusting? Would a person – or a mirror version of a person – with this level of self-disgust lavish this amount of care and craft on the language used to describe his or herself?
- Read 'In a Glass Darkly' aloud to each other. What do you need for a successful performance of it?
- Blue-ringed Octopus facts - <http://www.uwphotographyguide.com/blue-ringed-octopus> . Is this poem an accusation or an apology (to the pale skinned person) – or something else altogether?

Alan Gillis was born in Belfast and lives in Scotland where he is Lecturer in English at The University of Edinburgh. His debut collection, *Somebody, Somewhere*, won the Rupert and Eithne Strong Award for Best First Collection in 2004, and was shortlisted for the *Irish Times* Poetry Now Award. His second collection *Hawks and Doves* was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation in 2007 and was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize. *Here Comes the Night* was published by Gallery Press in 2010, and his fourth collection, *Scapegoat*, is published by Gallery Press in October 2014.

Other books by Alan Gillis

- [*Somebody, Somewhere*](#) (The Gallery Press, 2004)
- [*Hawks and Doves*](#) (The Gallery Press, 2007)

If you liked Alan Gillis, try

- [Ian Duhig](#)
- [Tobias Hill](#)
- [Sinead Morrissey](#)

Her Birth **by Rebecca Goss**



Rebecca Goss' first collection *The Anatomy of Structures* (Flambard Press, 2010) was praised for its 'strangeness, sexiness and occasionally its yearning' (Robert Seatter) but it was [*Her Birth*](#) (Carcenet, 2013) which drew the attention of the Next Generation judges. A fearless write and a heartbreaking read, the collection honours the poet's baby daughter – not even eighteen months old when she died - with intense and crafted language, one precise and painful word at a time.

Palliative

I knew what it meant, but that didn't stop me:
I came home from clinic, early in her life,

sat on the stairs with my hardback *Collins*
solid as a baby on my knee, thumbed quickly

through papery leaves, whispering *l, m, n, o, p,*
to seek the word they said once

when discussing the flawed mechanics
of her heart. There, on a gauzy page,

its definition printed across shadows
of my fingers, I read '*serving to palliate*,'

(from Latin *pallium*, a cloak) and turned back
to find '*palliate*' vb 1. *to lessen the severity*

of (pain, disease etc.) without curing
and I re-read *without curing* until *curing*

didn't look like *curing* anymore,
it looked like *curling* and I clasped my hands

around my knees, pulled that book hard
against my gut. As a student I loved its reams

of indisputable fact, its ability to reveal
and make clear. Now I bury its bulk

on the shelves, swathe myself in hope.

Helpline

I've been told of women in their eighties
who dial on birthdays, their story drawn

from the receiver in small damp breaths:
'He would have been sixty'

and a voice wraps them in a blanket of vowels.
Somehow, a child has slipped from them.

They were unable to stop it, like sand collapsing
back down the hole, dug on that dry part of beach.

Last Poem

So extraordinary was your sister's
short life, it's hard for me to see

a future for you. I know it's there,
your horizon of adulthood,

reachable across a stretch
of ordinary days, yet I can't believe

my fortune – to have a healthy child
with all that waits: the bike, school,

mild and curable diseases.
So we potter through the weeks

and you relax your simian cling,
take exploratory steps, language

budding at your lips. I log the daily
change, another day lived

with every kiss goodnight; wake
relieved by your murmurs at dawn.

Come and hold my hand, little one,
stand beside me in your small shoes,

let's head for your undiscovered life,
your mother's ready now, let's run.

Discussion Ideas

- *Her Birth* is a book-length sequence of poems beginning with the poet's daughter's birth, her short life and her death from an incurable heart condition, and ending with the joys and complexities that come with the birth of another child. Who might the book be for?
- Why do you think the word 'curing' is repeated four times in 'Palliative'?
- What is the 'blanket of vowels' in 'Helpline'?
- 'Last Poem' – the book's final words – strike a very conclusive note. Does it ring true?
- What other narratives of loss have you read – poetry, novels or non-fiction? How does *Her Birth* compare? Is that even an appropriate question to ask?

Rebecca Goss was born and grew up in Suffolk. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Cardiff University and taught Creative Writing at Liverpool John Moores University for several years. Her first collection *The Anatomy of Structures* was published in 2010 by Flambard Press. Her second collection *Her Birth* (Carcanet) was shortlisted for the 2013 Forward Prize for Best Collection. She is now a full-time writer and lives in Suffolk.

<http://rebeccagoss.wordpress.com/>

Other books by Rebecca Goss

- [*The Anatomy of Structures*](#) (Flambard Press, 2010)

If you liked Rebecca Goss, try

- [Susan Wicks](#)
- [Jacob Polley](#)
- [Karen McCarthy Woolf](#)

Nigh-No-Place **by Jen Hadfield**



Prize judges were canny in awarding Jen Hadfield the 2008 T S Eliot Prize for [*Nigh-No-Place*](#) – since then, she has gone on to develop a body of work characterised by originality, astonishment and adoration, poetry that is popular but never populist. Her work is rooted in her adopted Shetland, in its bogs, tides and skylscapes, and reflects her experience as fish factory employee, a working poet and a classroom assistant. She says that ‘walking, and gathering wild food and materials for my visual art-works, are as important in my creative life as my language-based practice.’

Nigh-No-Place

I will meet you at Pity Me Wood.
I will meet you at Up-To-No-Good.

I will meet you at Stank, Shank and Sty.
I will meet you at Blowfly.

I will meet you at Low Spying How.
I will meet you at Salt Pie.

I will meet you at Coppertop.
I will meet you at Scandale Bottom.

I will meet you at Crackpot Moor.
I will meet you at Muker.

I will meet you at Dirty Piece.
I will meet you at Booze, Alberta.

I will meet you at Bloody Vale.
I will meet you at Hunger Hill.

I will bring you to New Invention.
I will bring you to Lucky Seven.

I will bring you from Shivery Man.
I will bring you to The Lion and Lamb.

I will bring you to the North Light.
I will bring you to Quiet-The-Night.

I will bring you to Hush.
I will bring you to Hungry Hushes.

I will bring you to Grace, Alberta.
I will bring you to Nigh-No-Place.

I will meet you at Two O'Clock Creek.
Will you go with me?

Paternoster

(for A.B.J)

Paternoster. Paternoster.
Hallowed be dy mane.
Dy kingdom come.
Dy draftwork be done.
Still plough the day
And give out daily bray
Though heart stiffen in the harness.
Then sleep hang harness with bearbells
And trot on bravely into sleep
Where the black and the bay
The sorrel and the grey
And foals and bearded wheat
Are waiting.
It is on earth as it is in heaven.
Drought, wildfire,
Wild asparagus, yellow flowers
On the flowering cactus.
Give our daily wheat, wet
Whiskers in the sonorous bucket.
Knead my heart, hardened daily.
Heal the hoofprint in my heart.
Give us our oats at bedtime
And in the night half-sleeping.
Paternoster. Paternoster.
Hallowed be dy hot mash.

Daed-traa

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

It has its ventricles, just like us –
pumping brine, like bull's blood, a syrupy flow.

It has its theatre –
hushed and plush.

It has its Little Shop of Horrors.
It has its crossed and dotted monsters.

It has its cross-eyed beetling Lear.
It has its billowing Monroe.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

For monks, it has barnacles
to sweep the broth as it flows, with fans,
grooming every cubic millimetre.

It has its ebb, the easy heft of wrack from rock,
like plastered, feverish locks of hair.

It has its *flodd*.
It has its welling god
with puddle, podgy cheeks and jaw.

It has its holy hiccup.

Its minute's silence.

daed-traa.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

Discussion Ideas

- Is the poem 'Nigh-No-Place' a spell? What makes you say so? What might it be attempting to conjure up?
- Could you examine your own geography, history and cartography and find similar rhyming pairs to create your own version of this poem? Who would you write it for, and why?
- "Paternoster" *Nigh-No-Place's* back cover blurb has it 'is the Lord's Prayer uttered by a draught horse'. Is that blasphemy, a theological experiment, or something else altogether?
- 'Daed-traa' means 'the slack of the tide'. 'I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide / to mind me what my poetry's for' – how does a visit to the beach function as a poetic manifesto? Is this poem just a 'note-to-self' for the poet, or does it have something to offer the reader too? What, if so?
- <http://rogueseeds.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/the-dominant-species-is-on-this-weekend.html> - this is a recent visual art project by Jen Hadfield. She says that 'walking, and gathering wild food and materials for my visual art-works, are as important in my creative life as my language-based practice.' Why make actual limpets, do you think, rather than write about them?

Jen Hadfield lives in Shetland where she works as a poet and writing tutor. Her first collection *Almanacs* (Bloodaxe, 2005) was written in Shetland and the Western Isles in 2002. Her second collection, *Nigh-No-Place* (Bloodaxe), won the T S Eliot Prize in 2008. She has also received a Dewar Award to produce a solo exhibition of Shetland ex-votos in the style of sacred Mexican folk art, incorporating rubrics of very short fiction. She won the Edwin Morgan Poetry Competition in 2012, and her most recent collection is *Byssus* (Picador, 2013).

<http://rogueseeds.blogspot.co.uk/>

Other books by Jen Hadfield

- *Almanacs* (Bloodaxe, 2005)
- [*Byssus*](#) (Picador, 2013)

If you liked Jen Hadfield, try

- [John Burnside](#)
- [Alice Oswald](#)
- [Fiona Benson](#)

The Striped World **by Emma Jones**



Born in Sydney and educated at the universities of Sydney and Cambridge, Emma Jones is one of a number of poets on the Next Generation list who have benefited from rights-of-poetic-passage residences at the Wordsworth Trust. It would be too simple to say that her poems replay the new world / old world tensions that arise from having a foot in both hemispheres, but her work is thoughtfully concerned with encounters and exchanges between systems. 'The bars were the lashes of the stripes / the stripes were the lashes of the bars' as she puts it in 'Tiger in the Menagerie'.

Waking

Here it is again, light hoisting its terrible bells.
As though a world might wake up with it –

the moon shuts its eye. Down in the street
the same trolley is playing the pavestones.

For twenty-five years I've been waking
this way. There was one morning

when my mother woke and felt a twitch
inside, like the shifting of curtains.

She woke and so did I. I was like a bird
beating. She had no time for anaesthetic.

We just rolled from each other like indecent genies.
Even the nurses were startled.

Now she says the world and I were eager
from the start. But I was only waking.

Tiger in the Menagerie

No one could say how the tiger got into the menagerie.
It was too flash, too blue,
too much like the painting of a tiger.

At night the bars of the cage and the stripes of the tiger
looked into each other so long
that when it was time for those eyes to rock shut

the bars were the lashes of the stripes
the stripes were the lashes of the bars

and they walked together in their dreams so long
through the long colonnade
that shed its fretwork to the Indian main

that when the sun rose they'd gone and the tiger was
one clear orange eye that walked into the menagerie.

No one could say how the tiger got out in the menagerie.
It was too bright, too bare.
If the menagerie could, it would say 'tiger'.

If the aviary could, it would lock its door.
Its heart began to beat in rows of rising birds
when the tiger came inside to wait.

Exhibit

On August 7, 1974,
Philippe Petit, high-wire artist,
who wishes to live very old,
took a bow and arrow and fishing line
and bridged the two towers
of the World Trade Center in New York.

He called it an artistic crime.
And onlookers said there was no wind
when he crossed the line, back and forth,
eight times or more. He just exhibited
the courage of those extraordinary steel workers,
who feel below them, swinging, vacant space.

Discussion Ideas

- 'Waking' is the first poem in Emma Jones' debut collection, a slot traditionally reserved for the poem which introduces a writer's poetic manifesto to the reading world. What might this poem prepare you for, what would you be looking for in a book which began like this? Reading the other two Emma Jones poems we've selected, or reading the whole book – do you find it?
- What wish might an 'indecent genie' be asked for, or grant? Are there any wishes in this poem? Who is asking them? Are they granted?

- If you are the menagerie, what is the tiger? If you are the tiger, what is the menagerie?
- Here's more information about Philippe Petit, as mentioned in 'Exhibit' - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Petit. Is 'he *just* exhibited the courage ...' a fair commentary on Petit's activity?
- Emma Jones' book was published in 2009, the World Trade Centre attacks took place in 2001. Do you think 'Exhibit' was written before or after the attacks?

Emma Jones was born in Sydney, Australia and studied at the universities of Sydney and Cambridge. Her first book, *The Striped World*, was published in 2009 and won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Best Collection and was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. In 2009-10 she was poet in residence at the Wordsworth Trust.

If you liked Emma Jones, try

- [Don Paterson](#)
- [Jane Draycott](#)
- [Jo Shapcott](#)

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](#)

Beautiful Girls

by Melissa Lee-Houghton



Staking the claim for the small independent press on the Next Generation list, Penned in the Margins' Melissa Lee-Houghton has published two collections of 'raw, anthropological and sassy' poetry (David Caddy). Her work does not shy away from the triggers and traumas of the mental distress she's undergone –her first collection *A Body Made of You* was written in and out of psychiatric hospitals – but through craft, compassion and wit, she transmutes difficult individual experience into something universally resonant. As Chris McCabe puts it, her work is 'a testament to poetry's force in overcoming'.

Beautiful Girls

In our graves we are all
beautiful girls. Our skin
is falling away like the tide.
Our bones are
long and slender,
all inhibitions gone. We're
lovely in the mud
that fit boys have dug
for a council wage,
not knowing how beautiful
we lay there
like honeymoon brides
anticipating sex,
not expecting death -
serene as pawns and queens
and home in ourselves
forever.

Sixteen

The red velvet coat meant I was not for sale, but bought.
Its fur trim was part of the illusion, and one month in
to my living away from home it garnered a stain
which no washing machine would ever clean. Just say
you were a doll and someone owned you and petted you
and you wanted to wake up but your eyes never closed.

Just say you were wearing red because you loved the sunset;
not because it clung to your body like a bin bag on a wet corpse
and your femininity was misinterpreted. Just say death
was in and out of your mouth. I wore black boots
that didn't need lacing, and I wasn't going anywhere.
They were no good for winter, no good for snow, no good
for running home. I remember I used to count up the loose change
for cigarette papers. I would go out in my red velvet
to the chip shop and barter for a bag of salted fat.
I was good for roasting. I was good for roasting.
My face was like a slot-machine. I make sure
we never drive through that town now, in case I see her –
a girl in a red velvet coat and boots that don't lace, thumbing
a ride. I wouldn't take her anywhere.
I wouldn't know *where* to take her.

That Afternoon We Listened to Sparklehorse And Thought About Dying

On the fourth floor we looked out at factories, Autumn's eccentricity
elevating the determination of grey. We couldn't
feel anything. We smoked until we were numb.
I fell asleep. The baby slept an hour and a half in the pram.
My head rested on your shoulder. You took my weight, held me.
I'd been to the weigh-and-save for a cup of sugar
and what little meal I could afford. You made me
a cup of tea strong enough to wake me;
played with the baby while I came round sipping at the steam.
There was beauty in every movement you made; your earphones
perpetually stuck in your ears to kill
or soothe the voices. How I loved you. How I
didn't care if you stole from the shop I worked in.
You had sex for your fix, though you denied it. Though you put
your arms around me. You existed in a parallel universe
I sometimes crossed over into. Your silences rolled around my tongue.
They were a language of their own – we'd roll and smoke cigarettes
in unison. Your neighbour had died from self-inflicted
stab wounds. You recounted the story to me
as though you had been in the room, smelt the blood.
His girlfriend had died at the wheel of a car.
She was going into labour, on her way home, Christmas Eve.
You know and I know how messy life can get
when you mess with it, when you push your luck.
I stepped out that day with clear eyes, a creased dress
and a hankering for sex and cigarettes and hot food.
As it was, I caught the bus and had the not-so-fleeting thought
that I might never see you again.

Discussion Ideas

- Who does 'Beautiful Girls' imply are the ugly girls? Is this the 'lovely', 'beautiful' and 'serene' poem that its language suggests?
- 'no good', 'no good', 'no good', 'good for roasting', 'good for roasting' – is 'Sixteen' a compassionate poem? Compassionate to whom – the sixteen year old self or the older poet self?
- Where and who were you at age sixteen? What would you say to your sixteen-year old self? Here's what others have thought - <http://www.dearme.org/>
- Sparklehorse <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparklehorse> and a song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjsUZRs770U> This is the last poem in the collection. Is it a happy ending?
- Consider *Beautiful Girls* alongside Rebecca Goss' *Her Birth* – both collections written from places of suffering and grief. What do their poems teach you? Is teaching a poet's – or a poem's job?

Melissa Lee-Houghton was born in Wythenshawe, Manchester in 1982. Her first collection, *A Body Made of You*, was published by Penned in the Margins in 2011, and *Beautiful Girls* was published in 2013 and was a PBS Recommendation. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in literary magazines such as *Poetry Salzburg*, *The New Writer*, *Magma* and *Tears in the Fence*. Her poem, 'Jim', was recently included in *Starry Rhymes*, a chapbook published by Read This Press. She is a regular reviewer for *The Short Review*.

<http://melissaleehoughton.wordpress.com/>

Other books by Melissa Lee-Houghton

- [*A Body Made of You*](#) (Penned in the Margins, 2011)

If you liked Melissa Lee-Houghton, try

- [Sarah Maguire](#)
- [Pascale Petit](#)
- [Jay Bernard](#)

Chick

by Hannah Lowe



A former English teacher, Hannah Lowe published [*Chick*](#), her first collection, in 2013, following an earlier pamphlet (*The Hitcher*) from The Rialto in 2011. *Chick* takes its title from the nickname of the poet's late father who, as a career gambler, was an elusive presence in her youth. The book's affecting poems balance the ordered progressions of childhood (piano lessons and ballet classes) against the myths and stories (the loaded dice, the hidden rolls of cash) which swirled around this charismatic man. Lowe is currently at work on a new chapbook for Hercules Editions.

Chick

We talked about you all the time.
Dan said he saw you ironing cellophane.
I said you'd let me hold a thousand pounds.
We found a hollow-soled shoe.

My cousins loved your tricks.
They'd follow the lady, search your sleeves,
blow luck into your fist. Mum called you a croupier.
At school I said you drove a cab.

Most days you were back at dawn.
I watched through a crack as you slept,
a hump of blankets in the purple light,
the smell of sweat.

I saw you once Dad, knelt over cards,
strewn on the floor, panic in your face.
For God's sake, Chick, you said.
You couldn't do the marks.

Then, each Tuesday, £16.30 – a paper,
tobacco, one hand of Kalooki. You sunk
into the settee like you'd been kicked there,
shouted in the bathroom, asked me for money.

At the wake, a ring of phlegmy men

with yellow eyes and meaty skin, told me
what your name meant, placed the ace of hearts
across your coffin, flowers shaped as dice.

Dance Class

The best girls posed like poodles at a show
and Betty Finch, in lemon gauze and wrinkles,
swept her wooden cane along the rows
to lock our knees in place and turn our ankles.
I was a scandal in that class, big-footed
giant in lycra, joker in my tap shoes,
slapping on the off-beat while a hundred
tappers hit the wood. I missed the cues
each time. After, in the foyer, dad,
a black man, stood among the Essex mothers
clad in leopard skin. He'd shake the keys
and scan the bloom of dancers where I hid
and whispered to another ballerina
he's the cab my mother sends for me.

Fist

When my brother put his fist through a window
on New Year's Eve, no one noticed until a cold draft
cooled our bodies dancing. There was rainbow light
from a disco ball, silver tinsel round the pictures.
My brother held his arm out to us, palm
upturned, a foot high spray of blood.
This was Ilford, Essex, 1993, nearly midnight,
us all smashed on booze and Ecstasy and Danny,
6 foot 5, folding at the knee, a shiny fin of glass
wedged in his wrist. We walked him to the kitchen,
the good arm slung on someone's neck,
Gary shouting *Danny*, Darren phoning
for an ambulance, the blood was everywhere. I pressed
a towel across the wound, around the glass
and led him by the hand into the garden, he stumbled
down into the snow, slurring *leave it out* and *I'm OK*.
A girl was crying in the doorway, the music carried on,
the bass line thumping as we stood around my brother,
Gary talking gently saying *easy fella*, Darren
draining Stella in one hand and in the other, holding up
my brother's arm, wet and red, the veins stood out
like branches. I thought he was dying,
out there in the snow and I got down, I knelt there
on the ice and held my brother, who I never touched
and never told I loved, and even then I couldn't say it
so I listened to the incantation *easy fella*
and my brother's breathing,
felt him rolling forward, all that weight, Darren
throwing down his can and yelling *Danny, don't you dare*
and shaking him. My brother's face was grey,
his lips were loose and pale and I

was praying. Somewhere in the street,
there was a siren, there was a girl inside
who blamed herself, there were men with blankets
and a tourniquet, they stopped my brother bleeding,
as the New Year turned, they saved him,
snow was falling hard, they saved us all.

Discussion Ideas

- Is 'Chick' a love poem?
- What are the full stops doing in 'Chick'? How does the emotional temperature of a short, one line phrase differ from one which winds over three or more lines?
- Read 'Dance Class' aloud to your group, but stop before you get to the last line. Does anybody accurately predict the content or tone of the last line?
- Some girls in the dance class are poodles, some are ballerinas, and the poet herself is a 'scandal' – what does the poem tell you about the groups and cliques into which young girls organise themselves? How does the 'scandal' among the 'tappers' relate to the 'black man ... among the Essex mothers'? Is this a poem about isolation?
- Is 'Fist' a religious poem?

Hannah Lowe was born in Essex in 1976 to an English mother and Chinese-Jamaican father. *Chick* (Bloodaxe, 2013) is her debut collection and was shortlisted for the Forward and Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prizes and the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize for Poetry. She has followed this with two pamphlets, *Rx* in 2013 and *Ormonde* in 2014. She is studying for a PhD in Creative Writing and her family memoir *Long Time, No See* will be published by Garnet Press in January 2015.

www.hannahlowe.org

Chapbooks by Hannah Lowe

- [*The Hitcher*](#) (The Rialto, 2011)
- [*Rx*](#) (Sine wave peak, 2013)
- *Ormonde* (Hercules Editions, forthcoming 2014)

If you liked Hannah Lowe, try

- [Leontia Flynn](#)
- [Pauline Stainer](#)
- [Colette Bryce](#)

Light Song of Light **by Kei Miller**



Over the last twenty years, the New and Next Generation initiatives have sought to introduce readers to the best poets currently writing. In this context, Kei Miller is represented for his poetry – in another context, he might equally be chosen for his novels, his short stories, his essays or his academic work. A prolific, wide-ranging and prize-winning writer, Miller creates poems notable for their clarity and grace, and he is an outstanding performer of his own work. His blog www.underthesaltireflag.com gives privileged access to a mind at work on matters of social injustice, race and gender.

The Longest Song

John Cage's composition 'As Slow as Possible' began being played in St Burchadi's Church, Germany in 2001 and is scheduled to end in the year 2640.

The longest song begins like a comma, a rest
that lasts for eighteen months. Long enough
that when the first chord is heard, surprising

as an extinct bird come back to life, many
cannot stop their tears. And one man
has told his wife he plans to weep

until the music has reached its next rest.
I suspect were we to pilgrim towards this
hymn, were we to sit in the hard pews

and only listen, patient through its months
of silence, our lives would be held
like a story my father tells me is true:

a man with a noose round his neck is allowed
one final song. He stands on the stage
and with a voice rivaling Franco Corelli, begins

ten billion green bottles standing on the wall.
And though this man has never lost count
of his bottles, all have lost count

of the years that have passed since,
the world outside the world of the song.
A hundred years at least they have stood still:

a man, his executioner, and the small crowd
of witnesses, all held as we too could be held
in a single room, our lives echoing

beyond their natural years, stretched
between clef and final fall, crescendo
and diminuendo, of one incredible song.

Unsung

There should be a song for the man who does not sing
himself – who has lifted a woman from her bed to a wheelchair
each morning, and from a wheelchair to her bed each night;
a song for the man recognized by all the pharmacists, because
each day he has joined a line, inched forward with a prescription
for his ailing wife; there should be a song for this man
who has not sung himself; he is father to an unmarried son
and will one day witness the end of his name; still he has refused
to pass down shame to his boy. There should be a song
for the man whose life has not been the stuff of ballads
but has lived each day in incredible and untrumpeted ways.
There should be a song for my father.

The Law Concerning Mermaids

There was once a law concerning mermaids. My friend thinks it a
wondrous thing – that the British Empire was so thorough it had
invented a law for everything. And in this law it was decreed: were
any to be found in their usual spots, showing off like dolphins,
sunbathing on rocks – they would no longer belong to themselves.
And maybe this is the problem with empires: how they have forced
us to live in a world lacking in mermaids – mermaids who under-
stood that they simply were, and did not need permission to exist
or to be beautiful. The law concerning mermaids only caused
mermaids to pass a law concerning man: that they would never
again cross our boundaries of sand; never again lift their torsos up

from the surf; never again wave at sailors, salt dripping from their curls; would never again enter our dry and stifling world.

Discussion Ideas

- More information about John Cage's composition 'As Slow As Possible', subject of 'The Longest Song' - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible. Miller uses Cage's space in which to contemplate ... what?
- The current performance of 'As Slow As Possible' takes place in a church, a setting which informs Miller's poem. It's not necessarily a religious piece of music though – what might the poem have been like if the piece of music was being played out on a fairground organ?
- What's the difference between 'There should be a song for my father' and 'This is a song for my father'?
- 'There was once a law concerning mermaids' – what does this storytelling-style introduction to the poem lead you to expect? Are those expectations confirmed or confounded? Think about your answers in relation to the tone, subject and intent of the poem.
- Many poets and critics tried to pin down the description of the prose poem, but there's no one set definition. Based on Miller's example, what's *your* definition of the prose poem?

Kei Miller was born in Jamaica in 1978. He read English at the University of the West Indies and completed an MA in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. His poetry collections include *Kingdom of Empty Bellies*, (Heaventree Press, 2006) and *There Is an Anger That Moves* (Carcanet, 2007). He is also the editor of Carcanet's *New Caribbean Poetry: An Anthology*. He has been a visiting writer at York University in Canada and currently teaches Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. His recent collections include *A Light Song of Light*, published by Carcanet in 2010, and *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcanet, 2014), which was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection.

www.underthesaltireflag.com

Other books by Kei Miller

- *Kingdom of Empty Bellies* (Heaventree Press, 2006)
- *There is An Anger that Moves* (Carcanet, 2007)
- *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcanet, 2014)

If you liked Kei Miller, try

- [Glyn Maxwell](#)
- [Maurice Riordan](#)
- [Olive Senior](#)

Division Street **by Helen Mort**



Helen Mort won the Foyle Young Poets Award five times, and poetry readers keeping an eye on her subsequent run of pamphlet publications from tall lighthouse and The Wordsworth Trust eagerly awaited her first full collection. [*Division Street*](#) arrived in 2013 and was quickly shortlisted for both the Costa Prize and the T S Eliot Prize, judges and readers alike connecting to her poems of conflict and resolution which thread an accessible demotic through precise form. Mort is a keen runner and climber, but when she's not doing either, you can follow her PhD research into contemporary poetry and neuroscience at www.poetryonthebrain.blogspot.com

Division Street

You brought me here to break it off
one muggy Tuesday. A brewing storm,
the pigeons sleek with rain.
My black umbrella flexed its wings.
Damp-skinned, I made for the crush
of bars, where couples slip white pills
from tongue to tongue, light as drizzle,
your fingers through my hair,
the way you nearly sneaked
a little something in my blood.

At the clinic, they asked if I'd tattoos.
I thought about the parlour
with its jaundiced walls, the knit-knit whine
of needle dotting bone, and, for a moment,
almost wished you'd left your mark;
subtle as the star I cover with T-shirts,
the memory of rain, or your head-down walk
along Division Street, slower each week, pausing
by the pubs, their windows so dim you see
nothing but your own reflection.

Miss Heath

At seventy, our dance mistress
could still perform
a perfect *pas de chats*.

Her French was wasted
in the north. We stood in line
repeating *parr-durr-shat*

or sniggered
as she waiting in the wings,
her right hand beating time

against her hip, her eyes
avoiding ours. She never
made the stage.

It took me twenty years
to understand. Alone tonight
and far from home

in shoes that pinch my toes
until they bleed, my back
held ballerina straight,

I wait as she did, too afraid
to walk into a bar
where everyone's a stranger,

see her glide
across the city night
to meet me, tall and white

and slim. A step behind,
she clicks her fingers. Elegant,
she counts me in.

Fur

Snow wants my childhood for itself.
It wants to claim The Blacksmith's Arms,
digest the Calow Fish Bar whole. Snow's tongue
has found the crevices of Eastwood Park.
It licks the war memorial, weighs down the trees

and everyone I knew is sinking past their knees.
On Allpits Road, the family dog is swallowed neat.
Snow gets beneath my schoolfriends' clothes
and touches them until they freeze, and still
it wants the long-abandoned Working Men's Club,

hollows where bar stools scuffed the floor.
It moves to fill each empty glass behind the bar.
On Orchid Close, I stand to watch it fur the driveway

of a man who's lived in the same bungalow for thirty years
and dreams of digging his way out.

Discussion Ideas

- How benign or malign a force is the snow in 'Fur'? It wants the poet's childhood for itself, does it succeed in its aims? What might the snow represent?
- Compare 'Miss Heath' with Hannah Lowe's 'Dance Class' teacher, Betty Finch. Are they two of a kind? Do you have a similar memory of a childhood dance teacher? Has this stock figure become a cliché ... and if so, is the cliché a useful shortcut to a consideration of the emotion or circumstance under examination in these two poems?
- 'It took me twenty years / to understand.' Understand what? Does it matter that the subject that is finally understood is not stated?
- 'you nearly sneaked', 'I almost wished' - note how the rhythm of those two phrases in 'Division Street' is the same, yoking them together and highlighting their importance. Is this a poem about something that happened, or something that didn't happen?
- What sort of clinic is under discussion?

Helen Mort was born in Sheffield in 1985. She has published two pamphlets with tall lighthouse press, *the shape of every box* and *a pint for the ghost*, a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice for Spring 2010. Five-times winner of the Foyle Young Poets award, she received an Eric Gregory Award from The Society of Authors in 2007 and won the Manchester Young Writer Prize in 2008. In 2010, she became the youngest ever poet in residence at The Wordsworth Trust. *Division Street*, Helen's first collection, published by Chatto & Windus in 2013, was a PBS Recommendation and was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize.

www.poetryonthebrain.blogspot.com

If you liked Helen Mort, try

- [Jean Sprackland](#)
- [Simon Armitage](#)
- [John McCullough](#)

Look We Have Coming to Dover! **by Daljit Nagra**



Deployer of more exclamation marks than any other contemporary poet currently at work, Daljit Nagra's exuberant approach is matched only by his intelligent perception of the realities of modern multicultural Britain. The London-born son of parents from the Punjab, he often fuses both the languages of home into his signature 'Punglish' to reflect on aspects of cultural and literary history – sometimes romantically, sometimes realistically but mostly with a squared-up humour. With the recent publication of his version of the ancient Asian epic *The Ramayana*, Nagra is currently turning his attention to long form poetry.

Our Town with the Whole of India!

Our town in England with the whole of India sundering
out of its temples, mandirs and mosques for the customised
streets. Our parade, clad in cloak-orange with banners
and tridents, chanting from station to station for Vaisakhi
over Easter. Our full-moon madness for Eidh with free
pavement tandooris and legless dancing to boosted
cars. Our Guy Fawkes' Diwali – a kingdom of rockets
for the Odysseus-trials of Rama who arrowed the jungle
foe to re-palace the Penelope-faith of his Sita.

Our Sunrise Radio with its lip sync of Bollywood lovers
pumping through the rows of emporium cubby holes
whilst bhangra beats slam where the hagglers roar
at the pulled-up back-of-the-lorry cut-price stalls.
Sitar shimmerings drip down the furbishly columned
gold store. Askance is the peaceful Pizza Hut...
A Somali cab joint, been there for ever, with smiley
guitar licks where reggae played before Caribbeans
disappeared, where years before Teddy Boys jived.

Our cafés with the brickwork trays of saffron sweets,
brass woks frying flamingo-pink syrup-tunnelled
jalebis networking crustily into their familied clumps.
Reveries of incense scent the beefless counter where
bloodied men sling out skinned legs and breasts
into thin bags topped with the proof of giblets.

Stepped road displays – chock-full of ripe karela,
okra, aubergine – sunshined with mango, pineapple,
lychee. Factory walkers prayer-toss the river of

sponging swans with chapattis. A posse brightens
on park-shots of Bacardi – waxing for the bronze
eyeful of girls. The girls slim their skirts after college
blowing dreams into pink bubble gums at neck-
descending and tight-neck sari-mannequins. Their grannies
point for poled yards of silk for own-made styles.
The mother of the runaway daughter, in the marriage
bureau, weeps over the plush-back catalogues glossed
with tuxedo-boys from the whole of our India!

The Man Who Would be English!

Just for kicks I was well in with the English race,
my skin matched the beef of their ruddy skin
as one by one a walk-in sing-along of familiar faces
from the lark-about days of school chucked back chunks
of smoke to reveal their manhood, I shouldered the bulk
as they broadened like brick houses to broadly take me in,
we plundered up gulps of golden rounds for the great game,
united at our local, we booed at the mounted screen –
at the face of the anthem'd foreigner when we were at home.
Then we chanted with heart and soul for God and Queen!

I was one of us, at ease, so long as I passed
my voice into theirs – I didn't *bud-bud ding-ding*
on myself for dropping the asylum side to sign up
for the bigger picture. I wasn't Black or Latin or managed
by a turbaned ghost. No distant land forever
with rights to my name... At an own goal, I pitched up,
caught my mother on the screen, as keeper, in our net
gloving the ball with lard, from the Mutiny, launching it
into my hands, ticking, at the end of the day, as I walked alone
to my wife – outside on a sideline of frost, kicking off:

D-d-doze err shrubby peeepall... !!!
D-d-deyy sprayyy all um ourrr valll...!!!
Venn hmmm veee g-gobbackkk...!!!
Lookk lookk ju nott British ju rrr blackkk...!!!

Look We Have Coming to Dover!

'So various, so beautiful, so new...'
- Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach'

Stowed in the sea to invade
the alfresco lash of a diesel-breeze
ratcheting speed into the tide, brunt with

gobfuls of surf phlegmed by cushy come-and-go
tourists prow'd on the cruisers, lording the ministered waves.

Seagull and shoal life
vexing their blarnies upon our huddled
camouflage past the vast crumble of scummed
cliffs, scrambling on mulch as thunder unbladders
yobbish rain and wind on our escape hatched in a Bedford van.

Seasons or years we reap
inland, unclocked by the national eye
or stabs in the back, teemed for breathing
sweeps of grass through the whistling asthma of parks,
burdened, ennobled – poling sparks across pylon and pylon.

Swarms of us, grafting in
the black within shot of the moon's
spotlight, banking on the miracle of sun –
span its rainbow, passport us to life. Only then
can it be human to hoick ourselves, bare-faced for the clear.

Imagine my love and I,
our sundry others, Blair'd in the cash
of our beeswax'd cars, our crash clothes, free,
we raise our charged glasses over unparasol'd tables
East, babbling our lingo, flecked by the chalk of Britannia!

Discussion Ideas

- The mothers, right at the end of 'Our Town with the Whole of India!', 'weep'. Why, after everything that has come before in the poem?
- 'The Man Who Would Be English' sites a discussion about what it means to be English, or British, in poetry, in the middle of a football pitch. Which is a more markedly English characteristic – the love of football or the love of poetry? Which of those two opposing sides wins in this poem? Are they in fact in opposition to each other?
- Google autocompletes 'The Man Who Would Be ...' to 'The Man Who Would Be King' – the Rudyard Kipling novella / John Huston film. What's the connection, do you think?
- The vocabulary of 'Look We Have Coming to Dover!' is pretty tough - 'invade', 'scummed', 'stabs', 'swarms'. Whose words are these? Where have they come from? Who controls their power?
- Here's Matthew Arnold's poem as quoted in the epigraph <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172844>. What are the two poems saying to each other?

Daljit Nagra was born and raised in West London, then Sheffield, and currently lives in London where he works as a teacher. His first collection, *Look We Have Coming to Dover!*, won the 2007 Forward Prize for Best First Collection and was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Award. In 2008 he won the South Bank Show/Arts Council Decibel Award. His second collection, *Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White-Man-Eating Tiger Toy-Machine!!!*, was

shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize in 2011. His last collection is *Ramayana A Retelling*, a tale over two thousand years old, which will be touring during 2014 and 2015.

www.daljitnagra.com

Other books by Daljit Nagra

- [*Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White-Man-Eating Tiger Toy-Machine!!!*](#) (Faber, 2011)
- [*Ramayana*](#) (Faber, 2013)

If you liked Daljit Nagra, try

- [Kathleen Jamie](#)
- [Henry Shukman](#)
- [Paul Muldoon](#)

Instant-Flex 718 **by Heather Phillipson**



Heather Phillipson was one of the 2009 cohort of Faber New Poets, and the candy coloured pamphlets produced as a result of the scheme were effective calling cards – Phillipson was quickly snapped up by Bloodaxe who published a full collection of the droll, intelligent work which catches both the writer and her readers red-handed in the act of thought. As she puts it in 'Relational Epistemology', 'Phenomenology at the dinner table was not unusual'. Phillipson is also an internationally exhibiting artist working with video, sculpture and live events.

Ablutions

The bathtub makes me weak –
my heartbeat under water.
Salts, oils, sodium laureth sulphate:
I am a mountain in a lake.
From the corridor, *The Romantic Sounds of Xavier Cugat*;
I synchronise my loofah.
My big toe turns the hot tap.
Oh God, the changing temperature of bathwater!
Hot and cold I understand;
tepid means less than ever.
How hard it is to get things right.
How devastating you looked today across Soho Square
in your pink cashmere sweater,
your man-bag over your left shoulder.
Like soap I am loquacious
and I give myself up trying to say it.
Who was it that first thought of washing?
Your eyes are blue, I have loved you
since I noted your lashes in profile.
I didn't do it deliberately –
I was distracted
the way foam is distracted from water
and clings all over my contours.

Red Slugs in Every Irrelevant Direction

You will be surprised by your red-headed children,
a yogi had foretold in Calcutta for baksheesh. And I was surprised.
Where had they come from and where were they going?

If, at that moment, I had held my breath
and waited for the sky to get a move on,
it wouldn't have made any difference to their progress.

They wanted to be everywhere, damn their chunky souls.
Wait, Mummy – let me in! They slunk up to the back door.
The clouds had given them permission

to secrete their protective mucus across surfaces.
As IF I was going to fall for this garbage –
my red-headed children, imagine.

Up close, the grass must sound like hundreds of blunt razors.
Good job you've got your tough skin from your father
(whoever *he* was), I thought, but didn't say

as the minty squall inside our troposphere
pelted the put-upon buds and leaves
and their thoughtless heads, if slugs have heads.

Some Kind of Memento Mori

Oh yes, the woolly mammoths are all gone.
For twenty three and a half hours a day I forget
and then a 40-watt bulb blows as I turn it on.
It's something unspoken, the burnt-out bayonet –
its filament no longer incandescent,
the electric current without an outlet, and I see –
not much has changed since the Pleistocene.
Removal of the bulb is a change of epoch.
These days, there are elephants in Africa, elephants
in India, the new gloom of silhouettes and table lamps,
new pearl bayonets in my cupboard in their boxes.
But the woolly mammoths are gone even in Siberia.
The glass bulb is spent, though shapely in its socket.
I've changed plenty of bulbs but this one's gone
and brought to light the shadows that go on in shadows
or, as I think of it, yes, woolly mammoths.

Discussion Ideas

- What is most specifically named and described in 'Ablutions'? What is described in vaguer terms? How would you describe the relationship that the poem looks at – in distinct or vague terms? Is it possible to pin down and describe *any* sort of relationship in distinct terms?

- ‘How hard it is to get things right’ – what do you understand by that phrase? Is the phrase a commentary, a resolution or a complaint?
- Reading ‘Red Slugs in Every Irrelevant Direction’, do you think it is possible to compare slugs to children, tenderly?
- ‘Some Kind of Memento Mori’ is a subtler *memento mori* than the standard still life of a skull and an hourglass. Does it still function for you as a piece of art saying ‘remember you will die’? Is it supposed to?
- The three Heather Phillipson poems we’ve selected look at relationships, child-rearing and death – the full hatch, match, despatch spectrum. Are they poems of observation, imagination or experience? Do they require the reader in turn to observe them or empathise with them? Are they more funny than truthful, or vice versa? Could they be both?

Heather Phillipson received an Eric Gregory Award in 2008, a Donut Press mentoring award and a Faber New Poets Award in 2009. Her first collection, [*Instant-Flex 718*](#), was published by Bloodaxe in 2013 and was shortlisted for the Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prize. Her text *Not An Essay* was published by Pinned in the Margins in 2012. As an artist, Phillipson exhibits nationally and internationally, including solo shows at the Serpentine Gallery, the ICA and the BALTIC in the UK, and Bunker 259 in New York, as well as being featured on Channel 4’s *Random Acts*.

www.heatherphillipson.co.uk

If you liked Heather Phillipson, try

- [Elizabeth Garrett](#)
- [Paul Farley](#)
- [Amy Key](#)

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)

If you liked Kate Tempest, try

- [Patience Agbabi](#)
- [Carol Ann Duffy](#)
- [Luke Wright](#)

The Brand New Dark **by Mark Waldron**



Mark Waldron's poetic self is as a guest at a demented cocktail party where he is surrounded by all manner of riotous and peculiar behaviour which will later be recorded and relayed with a deadpan indulgent smile. Both his collections [*The Brand New Dark*](#) and *The Itchy Sea* combine precise observation of previously overlooked circumstances and individuals with a surrealist's extrapolative imagination. 'The itchy sea' he writes 'being eternally discomfited, / seeks an original arrangement'. Waldron has also had a long career in advertising, notably inventing the classic 'Daddy or chips?' conundrum for McCain.

For Them There's Nothing

They can never ride from Karlova Ves to Spitalska,
watching other trams and pale stones of faces

sunk under the glass; they can't have an itchy insect bite,
an awful cold, or let their sleepy, humid gaze

rest upon their feet beneath the water in the bath.
The things we make, the TV shows that leave

these muted traces of their colours on our clothes,
the foreign films that float below

the stripped out letters of their subtitles,
the songs we listen to and sing, none of these are for them.

They don't go out to eat, not even in the sullen,
almost empty cafés, where the world's bright juice

runs in hell-bent rivers between and through the tables
and shines on the floor and goes out onto

the green-grey street where it will rain later
and the false ceiling of cloud is lit from above;

they can't go out into the garden and turn to look up
at the curtained windows of the bedroom;

they never smell the plain wood of the boxes

we install them in and never even see the only true dark.

My Friend Marcie is on the Insensate Beach,

or by the dinking pool, or in the triumphant park.
She's sliding over pages of a magazine,

her scent is the scent of the sun: that stark and naked mistress,
who in her blinding coruscation, burns off her very own bikini,

who'll flash off underwear, a business suit and overcoat
quicker than she can summon them, already smouldering, to mind.

She's up there, bare as you like, her hair blazed to ash
and ash itself, in this blank heat, flared back to scratch,

before a damp and follicled root could jibber, blinking, into life,
before the quick, initial sting could even muster

to the judging pole of self. The alopecia sun, her porn star muff,
buff as these soft dreams I entertain of her,

my immolating, self-cremating angel,
who turns my coal-black words to molecules of slag,

whose salted tears cannot even jig as spit upon a frying pan.
She's squatting in her protest, her hollered rage at me,

her blasphemy, is in the shine on the magazine.
Its gloss is bouncing up all over Marcie like a rash.

We Think We See Richness, Said Dougal,

but in fact it's as thin as... as thin as...
Paper? ventured Florence, crossing and winding
her pretty legs. Her dark eyes

are ovals of infinite charm.
And Dougal felt, as he often did,
that he might topple into them and be wholly unfound
and that he'd find in there the other lost mutts
who fly and go in undulating packs,
forgetting why and longing
in a putty coloured piece of brain,
to be owned again,
and be more than what they have become —
nothing but her foaming happiness
rising in her as a swarm of barking pooch.

No, thinner than paper, said Dougal sadly.
I'm afraid there's nothing there at all,
we make it all up,
it forms in front of us as we go.

Discussion Ideas

- Would you read 'For Them There's Nothing' at a funeral?
- What do the 'we' in 'For Them There's Nothing' feel about the 'them'? Sadness, guilt, something else? Is the poem an attempt to expiate those feelings? Does it succeed?
- Poet John Stammers (who calls Mark Waldron 'the most striking and unusual voice to have emerged in British poetry for some time') once said that he writes because 'I have an aesthetic that I am keen to explore to its limits'. Might something similar be going on in 'My Friend Marcie is on the Insensate Beach,'?
- Many poets use classical myths and legends to articulate contemporary experience; not many use *The Magic Roundabout*. What's the difference between the two approaches? Which do you prefer, and why?
- Re-introducing us to the characters of our childhood tv (here's a recap in case you weren't a *Magic Roundabout* fan in the 1970s <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcnKvqDMnKU>) could be an exercise in charm and nostalgia. Is that what's happening in this poem? How closely are Waldron's characters related to the actual characters? Where do the differences lie?

Mark Waldron was born in New York and works in advertising. His first book, *The Brand New Dark* was published by Salt Publishing in 2008 and his second, *The Itchy Sea*, came out in September 2011. His work appears in *Identity Parade: New British and Irish Poets* (Bloodaxe, 2010) and *Best British Poetry 2012* and *2013* (Salt). He lives in London with his wife and son.

Other books by Mark Waldron

- [The Itchy Sea](#) (Salt, 2011)

If you liked Mark Waldron, try

- [Matthew Francis](#)
- [David Dabydeen](#)
- [Chris McCabe](#)

New Light for the Old Dark **by Sam Willetts**



Although Sam Willetts has worked in many spheres, no biographical description of him can resist the detail that he is also a recovering heroin addict. Poems in [*New Light for the Old Dark*](#) do explore the 'use, cluck, raise, score, use' cycle of addiction, but the poet also takes a singular approach to episodes of twentieth century history a step beyond his personal experience. The book was shortlisted for all three prizes for first collections of poetry, and also for the T S Eliot Prize which is a rare achievement for a debut.

June 3rd

You don't stir when I unstick my damp chest
from your back – at that tiny sound,
an orange pulled open, or a kiss
reversed. You've slept through
the window's changes, through its dawning
on me that if I could stay just this far
from sleep, I might escape our years,
somehow make it over those rooftops,
blue in this hour's one blueness – over the drop
to Andy Andersen's backyard, with its litter
of rolled chickenwire, gas-bottles, toys left out;
over it all I'd go looping like a monkey,
from guttering to chimney and up around
that ventilator-stack. If my heels kicked
off a slate, you wouldn't hear it shatter
for your dreams. Sweetheart, you wouldn't
hear me for these birds.
And after that I'd be away,
clear of roofs and city, and moving now
at shaking speed into a day
that's opening like an orchard
and an avenue of that orchard
opening to me like another lover's arms.

Fur-Sorting

In the lit corner of this vast shed I work
like the rats by touch and smell as well as sight:

even the best synthetics crunch between
your fingertips, but real fur parts

down to the aromatic hide, spreads
as it would have when the living animal stood

exploring the wind. A low sheen runs across
silk-cursive legends – *Silvermann*

New Bond Street Guaranteed. Revenant
scents from collars and linings trail long-forgotten

assinations. The nearest thing to warmth here
is the radio's lost bonhomie, swallowed into

the dark. Sometimes the bad light yields
little shocks, like the dainty snarls on those four

foxes stitched into Siamese-quads; then my
own hide pimples, horripilates in sympathy.

The furs love lapsing from their pallets, to flood
the concrete in a lavish slump; some pieces,

somehow, keep coming back – that whole bear's skin,
macabre, scurfed with grit and sawdust, clacks

its claws like sad maracas every time.
Darkness of year's end and a mound of rags

remade daily. The radio yatters to the freezing air. Deep
inside the fur mounds, pink litters squirm for life.

Honest John

(John Clare, 1793-1864)

In confinement, imagined he was filling his pen
from an inkwell of his own urine,

saw the pale script fading as it dried
to the invisible ink of his obscurity.

Starving on the run, falls to his hands and knees
like Nebuchadnezzar to eat grass. Keeps

walking back to what does not exist:
long-dead first love, landscape of youth, back

to days before the Sunday best of his brief celebrity.

Thick-fingered daisy-chainer, he knew once

how to become very small, could enter
the tiny world of a ladybird in a high wind,

would read aloud the small names of God
he saw written through the songstruck woods.

Fugitive again, he knows the constellations and takes
their giant word in laying himself head-north, feet-south

to know his way before first light. But first light sees him
far down a wrong road, foul-mouthing the new land

and sky as they spin him in their cock-eyed compass,
misleading him from his way home.

Discussion Ideas

- If you were making a film of 'Fur-Sorting' would it be a PG fairy tale or a rated 18 horror story? What would the lighting be like, what would be playing on the yattering radio? Who would you cast as the fur-sorter?
- On the basis of this poem, would you apply for a fur-sorter's job? If someone were to write an equivalent poem about your job, what are the details they would focus on?
- What do you know about John Clare? How much do you need to know about him to appreciate the poem? Do you think there are particular connections between Clare and Willetts?
- What can a poem tell us about a named person's life that a biography can't – and vice versa? How far do you trust a biographer? What biographical poems / straight biographies / biopics have you enjoyed, and why?
- Why do you think the title is so specific in 'June 3rd'? What might June 2nd or June 4th poems contain?

Sam Willetts read English at Wadham College, and worked as a teacher, journalist and travel writer but became addicted to heroin at the age of 37. His debut collection, *New Light for the Old Dark* (2010), was shortlisted for the Forward Prize, the Costa Prize and the T S Eliot Prize, and contains poems about the years he spent homeless and addicted to heroin. Now free of drugs, his work covers everything from his mother's plight in the Holocaust to his childhood in Oxfordshire.

If you liked Sam Willetts, try

- [Michael Hofmann](#)
- [Robin Robertson](#)
- [Barry MacSweeney](#)

The Ninjas **by Jane Yeh**



'*Marabou* is fresh and surprising. If only all first books were this unusual' wrote the *Independent on Sunday* about Jane Yeh's first collection. [*The Ninjas*](#) went on to expand upon the themes established in her debut – Yeh dances between high art and pop culture, cutting lyrical beauty with a dark wit and the occasional slapstick pratfall ('Getting pelted with elaborate hairballs in the kisser' as 'Scenes from *My Life as Sherlock Holmes*' has it). An American writer based in London, her journalistic reviews cover as wide a range as her poems, she eyes the spectrum from sport to fashion.

Manet's Olympia

The orchid in her hair won't fold or furl.
The string at her neck is tied in a knot for safekeeping.
The stack of pillows she leans on is a towering pouffe, stiff

As a meringue; it means liberties won't be taken.
(Her maid hears everything there is to hear
From the other room, which isn't often.) The bouquet

Stays in paper, the silk-fringed shawl lies untouched
On the back of the chaise, the bedlinen keeps its disarray.
Her eyebrows frame a question that hasn't been asked. In her face,

Discontent and patience. The rest of the morning dangles
Like the opaline drop on her cuff – fire clouded over.
When will anything happen? The waiting

Goes on like a vat of amber being poured
Out slowly, coating them. The clock chimes faintly
From the other room. The cat in the corner rises

To the occasion – it hears something coming.
The maid thinks of cream cakes and breaking the rules.
Her voluminous apron conceals a multitude of plots,

None of them hers. She'll replay them later.
Her eyes betray nothing of her nascent rebellion.
Her hands shape quenelles into uniform spheres.

She doesn't want to sit in state like a pope, or simper in parlours.
Her attention to detail is wasted on mending.
She'd like to seize the day, but the day won't let her.

On Sorrow

This is as much space as I can spare to look at ferrets. My friend's ferret used to burrow into the red velvet cushions of her sofa, worm its way under the seats and into unretrievable nooks. Ferrets are mustelids, meaning their nearest relations are weasels and stoats. Take care! A pile of laundry might be hiding a napping ferret. My friend's ferret liked to crawl up the bootcut legs of her jeans while she was wearing them. Ferrets are crepuscular, which means they're most active at dusk and dawn. Some are adept at stealing small objects such as socks and unused tampons. My friend's ferret made a clucking noise whenever it was happy, like a sweet fur-covered baby. It would do a frantic hopping routine out of sheer excitement if you threw it a handful of toy balls (this is commonly known as the ferret war dance). One day her ferret just disappeared. It must've tunnelled through a gap in the ash skirting boards of the study and landed in unknown territory. I like to think it found its way outside and survived, but equally it might be rotting in the wall. Sometimes a ferret is just a ferret, but my friend said it was as bad as losing a child. Ever since then we haven't seen each other much. The truth is most people can afford to lose something they love. (My friend, for instance, still had her partner, and later a baby and dog.) Ferrets have a distinctive musky scent that some people find off-putting. The collective term for a group of them is a business of ferrets. Whenever I think of my friend's ferret, I remember its bright beady eyes.

The Lilies

The lilies whisper but no one is listening.
Their heads are filled with pollen and boredom.
In the gaps between them, something might happen
(But it doesn't). Their mouths are filled with sugar and organs.

In the parlour they crowd out the normal flowers
With their fussy ways and *pudeur*. It's a hollow victory.
They lean against the wall like spinsters on crutches.
They think about wishbones and what happened yesterday (nothing).

The lilies are throwing a party for themselves.
Their eyes light up at the thought of company.
There will be a finger buffet, with cocktail sticks for the squeamish.
Their stems will be filled with pity and vodka.

Later there will be parts falling off. The freakish lilies
Sulk and droop in their vases like limp spaghetti.
They don't expect much, but they're still disappointed.
The water they drink tastes sour like it.

Discussion Ideas

- Manet's *Olympia* - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia_\(Manet\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympia_(Manet)). Would this poem be better called 'Yeh's *Olympia*' – or even 'Yeh's Maid'? Who is looking at whom in the painting? And in the poem? What are we being shown? What are we seeing?
- Manet's painting caused outrage because of its brazen depiction a prostitute. Is there any trace of that outrage in this poem?
- Read 'On Sorrow' aloud to your group, but don't say the title – ask them to give the poem a title. How close does anyone come to the actual title? 'This is as much space as I can spare / to look at ferrets' she says, then goes on to fill more than a page, repeating the word 'ferret' 14 times. Is she protesting too much? If the poem is not actually looking at ferrets, what's it looking at?
- Find any magazine with a 'who's been to what party' photospread. Which people are like The Lilies, and why?
- Do you know The Furniture Game? It's a way of describing people – if this person were a piece of furniture, she would be a [chaise longue eg], if this person were a musical instrument, he would be a [kettle drum eg] and so on, the categories are endless. Play a round of The Furniture game, concentrating on flowers. What characteristics make someone like a rose or a sunflower, for example? What characteristics make someone like a lily?

Jane Yeh was born in America and educated at Harvard University. Her chapbook, *Teen Spies*, was published in 2003 by Metre Editions. Her first full-length collection, *Marabou*, was published by Carcanet in 2005 and shortlisted for the Whitbread, Forward, and Aldeburgh Festival poetry prizes. Her second collection, *The Ninjas*, was published by Carcanet in 2012. She has been the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship. She lives in London and lectures in Creative Writing at Kingston University.

<http://janeyeh3.com/>

Other books by Jane Yeh

- [*Marabou*](#) (Carcenet, 2005)

If you liked Jane Yeh, try

- [Moniza Alvi](#)
- [Gwyneth Lewis](#)
- [Helen Ivory](#)