

ARTS UNIVERSITY BOURNEMOUTH

**INTERNATIONAL  
POETRY PRIZE**  
DIGITAL ANTHOLOGY



**2022**

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# FORE

We are delighted to share the fruits of a successful second year of the AUB International Poetry Prize. As last year, we have had a large number of entries from seventeen countries including Ukraine, India, Singapore, Kenya, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the USA, Ireland, Italy, France, Belgium, Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, Cyprus and the UK. Our 2022 anthology showcases prize winners and longlisted poets, with special recognition of the ten Highly Commended entries, two Runner Up Prize Winners, Perla Kantarjian and Elena Croitoru, and First Prize Winner, Susan E Thomas.

Special recognition also goes to our BA (Hons) Creative Writing students, Ben Whit-

tall and Evie Molyneux, who read from their work at our online prize-giving ceremony in October and whose poetry we are grateful to include here.

This year the topic was Choice and poets responded to it using many interesting shapes and forms, with voices ranging from the personal to the political, some promoting debate or offering a reflection on the nature of choice, others quietly and beautifully capturing the poignancy of a specific moment when the act of choosing has profound implications. The freedom to choose can be a privilege, a democratic right, but, as we know from history and recent events, it is a freedom that can seem fragile and that car-

ries huge responsibility. Many of the poems entered for the competition look Choice full in the face and capture the seriousness, and at times the humour, of moments of decision that can involve so many questions and leaps of faith.

I invite you now to enjoy a rich collection of poetry that we are very proud to publish in our 2022 anthology.

Elizabeth Woodgate (Editor)

# WORD

# COMMENTS FROM

## Judging Panel

The longlisting judges had a wonderful time going through these poems and meeting to discuss-advocating on behalf of our favourites, revisiting others' picks with fresh eyes, and ultimately reaching common ground. Many of the poems here (and also others that didn't quite make it) have found their way into the landscape of the mind, like all good poetry does. Well done to everyone who entered, and we look forward to reading more fine poetry next time around.

## Chair of Judges, Glyn Maxwell

Once again, the Arts University Bournemouth Poetry Prize has cast up a terrific crop of new verse, sent in from far and wide, thrilling, imaginative, provocative and memorable. Ten superb (and commended) poems accompany the three individual prize-winners.

Susan M Thomas's *End of the Night Shift* manages to feel both timeless and as if it happened any morning, this morning, tomorrow's. The scene, the loneliness and melancholy of a hospice at a dawn, is softly and subtly laid. The poet never specifies hospice, but the end-of-life status of the fellow in the poem breathes raspily throughout, in his cheery gallows suggestions for how the nurse might finish him off, in his protective scarlet smoking cape, in *You're an angel*, in his own fresco – most of all, perhaps, in the sublime mushroom damp morning, which reads as if the earth, in the mysterious person of the wise fungi, is offering a merciful compassionate embrace. His character is richly drawn,

compacting earth into treasure, and so is the nurse's, her simple kindnesses incandescent to him, and to us.

Elena Croitoru knows that once you're through the impossible porthole into writing a poem, life and memory and dream are all made of the same substance. *The Man Who Swims At Night* plays these three chords masterfully, as the eponymous Man swims through a dream we can see as if it's happening, a mother's voice that swims up right beside him, a room of strange lights that is more dreamlike than the dream, and a day's work that makes him seem a shadowy extra in Kafka or Fritz Lang. This poem is a brilliant disquisition on a human heart - all human hearts – that despair of borders and are trapped within them, making his lonely imagined escape at the close all the more glorious for being the soul trying its hardest to make believe.

liz tells me *OnlyFans* pays in USD is wild and funny and disquieting, all three states of mind rolling through the mind together like unmixable colours. Perla Kantarjian superbly renders a pressured consciousness getting through these woeful times, as world news (all bad) and the shrill notes of a friend battle with basic kitchen tasks for attention. The tone is a toxic brew of restlessness and lost hope, and the poem is beautifully structured too, the move to tercets effecting a turn of the page as the speaker boards the bus and keeps on doom-scrolling, a vivid thumbnail sketch of how every damn one of us looks right now.



## Chair of Judges, Glyn Maxwell

Glyn Maxwell's books of poetry include *How The Hell Are You*, currently shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize, *Pluto*, which was shortlisted for the Forward Prize in 2013, and *The Nerve*, which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize in 2004. In 2012 he published *On Poetry*, a popular critical guidebook for the general reader, and in 2016 its fictional sequel, *Drinks With Dead Poets*. He is also a playwright, librettist and novelist. He has taught at Princeton, Columbia and NYU in the USA, at the University of Essex and Goldsmiths in the UK, and currently teaches on the MA at the Poetry School.

# THE JUDGES



FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE

# Susan E Thomas (England)

FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE  
FIRST PLACE FIRST PLACE

The choice is yours –  
he sits in his wheelchair in the centre of the room  
a protective scarlet smoking cape draped  
around his shoulders like a cardinal.  
He raises his index finger - Giotto di Bondone  
she bends to arrange his feet on the footplates  
and fetches his cigarettes.  
The choice is yours, he repeats  
you can either put a pillow over my face  
or throw me in the river nurse.  
We would never do that she says  
No! come on - make the choice, he urges impatiently  
as she wheels him over the door frame bump  
into the garden, embracing the mushroom damp morning  
for his first light  
Cup of tea? She offers  
he nods  
Sugar?  
Yes he says, two  
She is a non-smoker but kindly lights his roll up as he sucks on it.  
With the mornings choices de-escalated, he contemplates  
as he exhales a cloud of smoke through cork dry lips  
You're an angel he says, looking out over the courtyard  
painting his own fresco in the air

End of the Night Shift

# RUNNERS-UP

**liz tells me OnlyFans pays in USD**

*Perla Kantarjian (England)*

**The Man Who Swims at Night**

*Elena Croitoru (England)*

you bake banana bread whenever you're  
pissed. the morning you come back from  
beirut,  
liz swings by. says *damn, somebody's all frisky today!*

the kitchen smells fucking good.

she has no idea. makes you guess what she  
was up to during christmas break. exploring your  
sexuality?

i cannot but guess. *sort-of*, she says. *more*

*like monetizing it lol. so how was your vacay?*

you light a cigarette until the yeast eats  
the sugar. you don't wonder what her  
username is. in another sphere, you know  
what yours could be.  
belladonna of the mideast slash  
vibe-kill. siren with anxiety. you  
go to the store.  
a group of climate change protesters pass by you  
with slogans.  
*THIS IS THE GREATEST THREAT TO OUR EXISTENCE*

you get the essential. take the bus home.

overhear small talk. 14-year-olds discussing  
condoms. colleagues making plans to jog.  
you check how much this ride would cost  
in liras today.

you scroll. BREAKING: Lebanon's Lira  
Hits Low of 30,000 to a Dollar Amid  
Severe  
Crisis. you are atrophied into guilt for not walking.

scroll. BREAKING: Beirut Port Blast Probe  
Suspended for Fourth Time. 5£ today is 203,000  
liras. BREAKING: Lebanon Grapples With Drastic  
Electricity Shortages

and Internet Cuts. 5£. 2 bags of bread. kilos of  
lemons and eggplants and apples. scroll.  
BREAKING: U.N. Says at Least 1M Children in Danger

of Violence as Crisis Intensifies in Lebanon.  
5£. a sachet of tylenol. lexotanil. half a gram of  
weed. you stop scrolling. breaking.

in your tote bag, discounted valerian root  
capsules sit with their *stress-relieving*  
*properties*.

Anyone flying to Beirut soon? you tweet. secure

the transport of the gift. but no one's  
going back. you return to the kitchen.  
knead your rage  
into the unready dough.

there are hungry animals everywhere.

*Perla Kantarjian (England)*

**liz tells me OnlyFans pays in USD**

# The Man Who Swims at Night

*Elena Croitoru (England)*

Ever since he's seen the photograph of the man  
    wrapped in swathes of barbed wire,  
after they fished him out of the Danube  
    he's been having the same dream  
over & over again. His mother tells him that  
    if he swims across the border,  
she'll remember what it was like to love  
    the living. The first thing he sees  
when he gets up is the carpet by his bed  
    & the silhouette of General Mao  
woven with phosphorescent thread  
    & glowing in his coffin.  
He gets an ersatz coffee before  
    he goes to work to listen in  
on what people say before they leave  
    the ones they love. Sometimes,  
they don't mean anything  
    by living, yet still, he has to make

something of every ordinary conversation.

    It took him a while to realise  
that a mockingbird means a radio  
    a red house is the kind of house  
you enter for the last time,  
    a mirror dance means someone  
is watching, but the word 'awake'  
    appears too many times to mean  
anything & sometimes he wishes  
    everyone would stop talking.  
& when he opens lovers' envelopes,  
    he looks for dots that are out of place  
& pauses that don't belong.  
    At home, the tooth-white porcelain  
Stalin watches him as he lies stomach-down  
    on an ottoman & begins to swim.  
He practices for hours & halfway through,  
    he cuts imaginary wires  
& then, he's somewhere else.

**for the Bayraktar  
drone on the night of  
the Turkish invasion**

*Matthew Broomfield (England)*

**Seven Feet of English**

*Jonathan Edis (England)*

**the fever**

*Ewan Monaghan (England)*

**Advance decision**

*Alison Binney (England)*

**The Hope Of Birds**

*Clare Starling (England)*

**Solomon**

*Jonathan Edwards (Wales)*

**East Coast Story**

*Paul Stephenson (England)*

**All clear**

*Christopher M James (France)*

**Those Who Don't Exist**

*Sam Szanto (England)*

**A winter loose with cruel  
dissolve**

*Phil Cassidy (England)*

**HIGHLY COMMENDED POEMS**

# for the Bayraktar drone on the night of the Turkish invasion

*Matthew Broomfield  
(England)*

we hate how we are made to beg for it all  
what we scabble after  
what we thirst for as it spills

we hate how dear friends have unbuckled themselves  
how centripetal the weight of the times we have  
failed

we hate the way we kiss on both cheeks  
to check how much meat  
remains on the bone

and how grateful we are

for the extra hour snatched  
below blankets in the safehouse  
the beans slow to come to the boil

for our paths which, though threaded  
through black gaps between checkpoints,  
nonetheless contrive to coincide

for the drone which pins us down  
in this culvert together  
heat-seeking the burning of our thighs

despite all pressures to the contrary, then,  
we have nonetheless contrived to be alive

We few were convinced  
that we could read the signs  
the lion's share dismissed:

a broken twig  
trampled leaves  
the skittishness of horses

the tang of woodsmoke  
on the breeze that heralds  
the creep of enemies unseen.

They rolled their eyes at us, so  
we make a stand and choose  
our seven feet of English ground.

If we are right,  
I shall hold the line  
like Horatius at the bridge.

If we are wrong for breaking  
ranks, deserting,  
I shall dance the hangman's jig.

# Seven Feet of English

*Jonathan Edis  
(England)*

crossing Putney Bridge you remember  
last January two young men  
climbed its smooth stone wall and fell.  
for a heartbeat you imagine  
your body breaking the reflection  
of the well-lit red-brick flats  
that tattoo the river's skin.

remember the orange lawnmower cord?  
accidentally cut, vibrating in clippings  
with a thin distant mosquito humming.  
while a sliver of a second peeled away  
you imagine live copper on your tongue  
how the blue shock would taste  
then, like you'd just started awake  
cry 'turn it off - turn it off!'

there was just one time you meant it.

remember Tufnell Park?  
he'd told you about that family friend  
their walk, how it just happened  
how tenderly you took your frangible heart  
southbound down the escalator  
but couldn't hold on  
you'd have needed an Aldi bag  
to gather those exploded chits

so, you walk the length of platform two  
to the end by the tunnel's dark eye.  
waiting. an electronic display counts down.  
three tube trains pass and you refuse  
their brightly worn embrace.

where had the school trip come from?  
suddenly they echo down the platform  
slip around you like a closing net  
hold you in a cupping palm of chatter.  
their toylike February uniforms -  
remember the toggles on their coats?  
and you couldn't do it.  
not in front of them. the fever broke.

## the fever

*Ewan Monaghan (England)*

I inherited that from you, you know,  
the knack of doing two things at once,  
so I don't think you'll mind  
that I didn't let go your wooden spoon  
when the phone rang,  
even though it was dad's GP,  
but I was making a roux  
and it was time to add the milk,  
little by little, like you showed me,  
so I carried on,  
one hand stirring,  
the other tipping the jug,  
phone tucked between collar and chin,  
just glad someone cared enough  
about dad's left hip,  
and the stick he pretends to use,  
to call on a Tuesday night,  
but when she asked,  
in the kindest way,  
how your husband would like to die,  
that bit, did I get it right?

## Advance decision

*Alison Binney (England)*

## The Hope Of Birds

Clare Starling (England)

At this time, birds seem more important than ever  
With their punctilious eyes and pointed beaks, they  
have  
less tendency to expire like punctured bagpipes  
than their fluffy animal comrades, they are  
more aware than the insects, glumly battering against  
the glass

Meanwhile, we creep on, like lichen over an inscription,  
slowly stifling our bearer. Sticky pests, incessant,  
bubbling up a sybaritic war, the indulgent roar  
of planes, we're teeming with clean tech, and below  
rot blooms, we're eating pink marshmallows now, and  
meat

We think we have a choice to stop, but ants don't stop  
sucking the beans dry with their farmed blackfly  
We cram our mouths full, hoping that in  
sixty million years we might be here, shrunk tiny,  
hopping around, hands turned to wings, furious

*So cut the kid in half. So cut the kid  
in half – that's what they say I said, the blokes  
who wrote me down, who made me this,  
the thing I am forever. I remember*

a warmish day, sun sparkling through the world,  
this little brat, this stinky prune-faced dude,  
whose wailing made my room a room  
to echo through. *So cut the kid in half*

they say I said, the books, to both of these  
yummy mummies, her who said *Go right  
ahead*, and her who sniffed and said  
to give him to the other. *Cut the kid*

*in half's* the reason why you speak of me  
in kitchens of the future, when you need  
a tale to stand for wisdom, truth  
or love. *He knew his shit, that guy.* But what

if it was none of that? A warmish day  
and me still full with last night's wine, and all  
his wailing made my skull a room  
to echo through. What if I meant *To hell*

*with all of you?* I look to there from here,  
at what my tale might mean to you, but what  
if I meant none of that? And what  
if I meant just this: *Cut the kid in half?*

## Solomon

Jonathan Edwards (Wales)

## East Coast Story

*Paul Stephenson (England)*

The seal felt that being a seal was silly.  
Silly seal to think being a seal was silly.  
But anyway. Now it's a bottle opener for  
beer. It spends most days on a porch in  
America.  
It makes itself useful on hot days  
and when people gather for barbecues.  
Other busy times include sunset.  
You're probably wondering how it opens bottles.  
It had surgery, a series of metal injections  
and a small hole the shape of a heart  
cut out of its tail. A tail that serves it well.  
There are times the seal misses the other  
seals but they can't visit because the house  
is too far from the beach for them to shuffle.  
And being a bottle opener, the former seal  
has to wait around to be handled by others.  
Sometimes the people leave the porch a  
while to spend the afternoon on the beach.  
It's on those days that you'd think the  
seal that's now a bottle opener could  
look over to see its old friends in the sea.  
But it can't  
because it gave up its eyes and nose and  
face. It can't see all the couples with cooler  
bags lifting out bottles of chilled white wine.  
It can't see the seals that chose a different  
path, the seals that chose the life of  
corkscrews, lifting their arms and waving as  
they plunge in.

No-one talks except the staff,  
trained to overcompensate.  
A nurse fills out my details.  
I give her papers, raw data,  
minus all the blazing dawns and dusks  
of every moment counts,  
then sit among zipped faces  
in the small, resonant silence  
they have wrapped in coats. Where are we  
when we are not yet called?

I think of the traffic on the way in,  
the proliferation of speed bumps  
we learn to see coming,  
then centre on the narrative text:  
the MRI scan will be me again  
with different words. I'll take  
the poor pastiche anyhow if it flatters,  
with no blobs or splotches, or  
at worst, a smear with a known name,  
a telltale with a stutter.

A man is leaning, elbows on knees,  
searching, abdicating his thoughts.  
A thread of an infant unravels hopefully,  
her mother pulls her back  
onto a single purpose seat. So,  
living is long, bland, staggered,  
stretching like an unworldly peace  
where everyone has their turn.

Finally, mine is up,  
the doctor's back and I can go.  
There's the one intact moment  
when he forces a smile,  
hands me my X-ray – that thin acetate  
which thieves open doors with.

## All clear

*Christopher M James (France)*

Yesterday the woman called a hotline, asked for Jane and talked long  
as the making and baking of bread, today as the sun prods knives  
into her face she invisibles past cherry tree sentries, avoiding  
the rollerskating child and young girl toiling with a pram,  
trembling her hand

against an unmarked door, she is supported down chattering steps  
to a cellar, where they blindfold her so she cannot bear witness  
to those who don't exist yet will perform what she's chosen,  
the hands of a school teacher gentle her to a bed  
and she gasps at the speculum and cold paste

hands consoling hers the whole time, at the end the woman  
hands over all she can, more than they asked her for,  
as she staggers up there are shouts and  
crashes, the house penetrated by blankly angry  
men, the woman strips off her blindfold, body

cramping, as the Janes swallow cards imprinted with names  
and addresses she is seized too, handcuffed and thrust  
into a car, at the station she sheds clotted blood,  
nobody chooses to hand over information,  
the woman is released

*The Jane Collective was an underground network of amateur female abortion providers that  
launched in Chicago in 1965.*

## Those Who Don't Exist

*Sam Szanto (England)*

A winter loose with cruel dissolve,  
Wet in every crevice or pore,  
Gunnel or gargoyle spout:  
A stained glass mote, architectures  
Soft, touched with rust, and rejected  
From black boughs of each silhouette:  
Their reach drooping in a sopor  
Tied to the hues of death,  
Sustained in those decaying silks.

A parchment of limes, elm and birch  
Where all inks are freed up,  
All creatures left or hid in fog:  
All but degrees of duns and greens,  
The flesh of some bright muse  
That rings this canvass out  
From behind daguerreotype beams  
Scratching this matted art.  
Dawn teems in fresh, a chalice glint  
Of freezing eye that sees- as if  
This, a sacred church set  
For return of our lost causes,  
For weddings to be blessed on earth,  
Heaven if one chooses.

## **A winter loose with cruel dissolve**

*Phil Cassidy (England)*

# LONGLISTED POEMS

## **a lesson in rosewood**

*Laura Theis (England)*

## **Adulthood**

*Michael Brown (England)*

## **The Labrador Dojo**

*Thomas Hutchinson (England)*

## **Infinite Possibilities**

*Thea Smiley (England)*

## **Of Shining Brass and Copper**

*Roger Elkin (England)*

## **One of these days I'll do like David Hockney**

*Paul Stephenson (England)*

## **Trigger**

*Noemie Cansier (England)*

## **I DNR Order, Still Life**

*Arthur Allen (England)*

## **At the beginning of the war, my mother buried her laughter**

*Atma Frans (Canada)*

## **Whitby**

*Wes Lee (New Zealand)*

## **Supreme Atavism**

*Marie Catchpole (England)*

## **Strays, Thailand**

*Christopher M James (France)*

## **Rite of Passage**

*Sandra Galton (England)*

## **Nobody held a gun to your head**

*Joe Meredith (England)*

## **Kestrel Encounter/ The Windhover**

*Terry O'Brien (England)*

## **Fireflies & Ice Cream**

*Jonathan Greenhouse (USA)*

## **Silent Bells**

*Sue Norton (England)*

## **The Headcarriers of Seelampur**

*Christopher James (England)*

## **Hold On**

*Imogen Wade (England)*

## **Meeting Mr Emme**

*Keith Chandler (England)*

## **But what is privilege**

*Gerald Onyebuchi (Nigeria)*

## **Dowsing**

*Jeff Phelps (England)*

## **The Right Medicine**

*Nicole Charleston (England)*

## **What a joy it is**

*Isobel Roach (England)*

## **Wicked**

*James Armstrong (England)*

## **Diving into Paint**

*Rachel Carney (England)*

## **Blue**

*Scott Elder (France)*

## **An Unreal Feeling**

*Thomas Hutchinson (England)*

## **Thunder Music**

*P.A. Bitez (England)*

## **The Memory is a Second Grave**

*Blake Auden (England)*

## **this is when**

*Laura Theis (England)*

## **Shostakovich's fifteenth**

*Christopher M James (France)*

## **Warning**

*Harriet Jane Breeds (Belgium)*

## **Learning to Live in the Forest**

*Rachel Carney (England)*

today we are sad  
my non-existent daughter  
says and squeezes my dry hand  
with her sticky one

I nod and smile but  
she shakes her perfect  
non-existent head of curls and  
tells me to smile more sadly

when I oblige  
with a quivering lip  
a quiet stream of tears  
she still isn't satisfied

*no no like this  
look at me  
you have to wail  
because you mean it*

she tells me sadness is meant to be  
audible to those around you  
that it should be  
a summons

she has always been my best teacher  
she has been smarter than me  
since she was a zygote  
who refused to enter this world

as a girl  
with briar in her chest

**a lesson in  
rosewood**

Laura Theis (England)

**Adulthood**

Michael Brown (England)

Somewhere in the mid-nineties by a gate,  
across a shapely bridge of stone, he waits  
for you, his wife of days. In a film of rain

you are tilting your red hair to sky,  
to north-north west as if to guess  
the way ahead, through

the set-in gloom to him.  
Like skittery deer you both begin  
the climb from shadow

to track the Wharfe to the fell  
where high on a worn-down path he turns  
to make out your ludicrous blue anorak.

*No going back* he said and yet  
that day you did, exposed, newly-wed, half  
a single skin. For years to come

the pages of the map would stick,  
become a blurry paste of names, a risk,  
places that even now are mist, rising breath.

You want to say *Ribblehead, Yockenthwaite*,  
that imminence of where you never went.  
Too late to wish you'd pushed on blind, anyway.

Wax around the blazing pyre  
folds into creases down my side,  
as I pause beneath the overhead light,  
and relay my daydreams to its cracked, pale face;  
short stories on the weather changing,  
and my body, adjusting  
in its wiry gaze

I fit between the opening scenes  
and their patiently framed textures,  
dancing spritely amongst a hundred flecks of dust,  
like I am every bit as malleable as the cast,  
and can be so vivid  
as to burn my form into the fading throw

The edges of my face expire  
just short of my hairline; candlelight encroaching  
while I eradicate the lengths of myself

To mould, again, as my glass house is passed,  
the TV screen becomes a memory,  
with its broken pieces lost amongst the settling flesh,  
and the cast shadows, drawing on my body in rest,  
fit perfectly over my lonely shape,  
as I wait for day to break

## The Labrador Dojo

*Thomas Hutchinson (England)*

## Infinite Possibilities

*Thea Smiley (England)*

For all I know, this one could be  
a descendant of the wild rock dove,  
grey, white, with two black lines,  
which uses the Earth's magnetic field,  
gravitational pull, or the contours  
of hills and rivers, to fly back to me.

Or it might skim on scythe-shaped wings,  
as accurate and rapid as an arrow,  
screaming over rooftops before diving  
under tiles or into woodpecker holes  
in the wilderness, or drifting off mid-air,  
and migrating when the weather turns.

Or maybe it will soar over the wood,  
rising on thermals, tracing rings around  
the trees, triggering explosions of rooks,  
ignoring the double bang of gas guns  
in the fields, and piercing the day  
with a cry for distant mountains.

Or perhaps it will hang in the sky  
above young crops or coastal meadows,  
flickering in wind like a paper mobile,  
releasing a stream of rolling notes,  
which rain down on those passing below  
and insist they squint into the infinite.

Mum plumped for Gran's choicest pieces in '35  
the year she bagged Dad's hand in marriage.  
(He also had a car – remember.)

She'd come from nowhere: her family wealth  
a Zebra-leaded range with cooking hob, iron pots,  
aluminium pans and nicked enamel tins, so things  
that gleamed and shone were worth possessing.

The tranquilments and ornaments (Welsh women-bells,  
wise monkeys, bear money-box, nut-crackerdile)  
were pushed to younger daughters-in-law, *fillies of girls*,  
while Mum wangled the biggish things, the practical:  
like Gran's brass jam-pan with metal handle-strap that  
was put to bubbling and phutting through June to Autumn  
with berries, currants, plums to keep us jammed  
all year, the surfeit for church bazaar and friends.

Mum also scooped up the gallon copper kettle, envy  
of the Mothers' Union, and reason why she planned  
those WI trips to Midland towns with antique shops:  
*It's worth a mint. A sort of working man's gold.*

Hers too were what Granddad filched in First War France:  
three copper candlesticks from splintered village altars  
(his protest against *all that Popery*) and a brass shell-case  
Mum used as poker-stand beside her new Rayburn.  
(How he'd stuffed this booty in his kit-bag to lug it home  
no-one knows, but it took nowhere near the space it took  
to empty his mind of carnage, then replace it all with silences.)

Not to be out-lawed, Mum buffed and shone her wealth  
fortnightly, the Brasso smudging her pink fingers and  
soiling her shaped nails. She saw it sacrament to class,  
done chewing her tongue, silently. She'd convinced  
herself *Some folk, knowing nothing, have nothing. Brass  
and copper are signs of arrival. Worth handing down.*  
That's how I come to have shell-case and gleaming kettle.  
(My brother, strapped for ready cash, sold his jam-pan.  
God only knows where the candlesticks have gone.)

Two generations on, our kids have managed their arrival.  
Offered copper and brass, they glance down at hands, then raising  
heads, silently smile as if to say, *Shine on, Dad! Shine on!*

## Of Shining Brass and Copper

Roger Elkin (England)



## One of these days I'll do like David Hockney

Paul Stephenson (England)

and move into a timbered farmhouse in rural Normandy  
where I'll live with a much younger man called Jean-Pierre  
who is not my lover but my technician, archivist, assistant.

I'll wear thickest rims of tortoiseshell and a flat cap  
over my blond mop, tell politicians they're dreary and  
smoke like a chimney. I might even try on the  
Bradford accent.

Likely, I'll turn my back on young men taking showers  
without pulling the curtain, sprawling naked in socks  
on a day bed in Earl's Court. I shall fall in love with pixels.

I won't be fussed about swimming pools in Saint-Tropez,  
busy brushing the heat haze far-off in the distance.  
I'll walk with a stick, be done with trying to make a splash.

My fill of parties and people and white cats called Percy,  
I'll have boxed up the contents of my California condo,  
left a glossy veranda far behind, taken the colour with  
me.

I'll get a sausage dog and call her Ruby, sit in a deck chair  
on the grass verges of Bridlington, attentive to, consumed  
by, the billowing of blossom. I shall speak only in  
hawthorn.

## Trigger

Noemie Cansier (England)

More than my body can swallow  
Chirps the mouse at the shriek

Did Leda lie in her own sick  
When the Swan heaved out and away  
Concrete in her tummy  
And tides to ebb the ache

Mummy clutches her teddy  
On a field trip to Prometheus  
Poor girls' organs never take

Squatting  
A golden egg swelled in my brain  
Slipped from my  
Tender skull  
Burned my  
Dry heaved throat  
Beat up  
My sternum  
And made a stranger of my cunt

Writhe in a chipped basin  
Slimed in ransom gold  
Screeching at the porcelain  
You're trembling, I'm cold  
Mama did you know?  
On the Classroom floor  
Mama did you know?  
Troy doused in oil  
Against Cassie's toil

Vomiting at the scholars  
When dreaming spires  
Could never make  
A butcher bird  
whole  
(Mama? Mama did you know?)

Even if you do not recall  
the talk with the doctor  
it is still your destiny,  
but W-  
do not look at it.

Do not compel yourself to know  
what is lying on the hall table; it is there  
solely, crucially, for the instruction of others.

An instruction to inaction.  
A shard of paper  
among papers on the table.

Your fate suspended on the table  
like Aslan (I think in brighter moods) or  
something set mid-aspic (in the gloom).

II 'Is My Nan Going to Die?', CBBC

To alleviate the pandemic anxieties of children  
kids' TV is hastily responding to coronavirus,  
but it's hardly Mr Rodgers explaining:  
'What does assassination?' mean  
after the death of Bobby Kennedy.

Children have very deep feelings,  
he said, just the way parents do,  
just the way everybody does

and his plea was simply: do not leave them  
to the mercy of their own  
fantasies of loss,

but strive to understand  
and find their feelings with curiosity  
like little books you haven't read.

Not for the first time  
I note down something I do not understand:  
How do we nurture new attitudes to death?

and my gran continues to die  
so gently I barely know  
I am stepping off  
the crest of her life.

## I DNR Order, Still Life

Arthur Allen (England)

Streamers hang motionless in the kitchen doorway. Just outside their brightness, flies buzz.

Inside, my mother peels potatoes, her silence cutting my skin.

She drops the discards on a newspaper spread out on the table.

My mother is a Greek sculpture. Only her hands move.

She picks up another tuber, turns it around, says,

*In the war, we didn't throw away anything.*  
Her knife scrapes the sandy spud, a grating sound

like the scratching of squirrels in winter, paws searching the frozen earth.

**At the beginning of  
the war, my mother  
buried her laughter**

*Atma Frans (Canada)*

Her sharp factory face.  
Her fag outside, leaning on the brick.  
She is sixteen, and he, a foreman going places.  
I want to tell her to walk now  
but what else does she have.  
She does not know of the castaways  
she will create.  
The children banging on the windows  
of a sealed house  
while he travels to the pub in his slippers.

There's a shine in the brick.  
Sun slanting across.  
The terrible hold of mustard gas.  
Her father sending her  
into the deepest pools for crabs.  
Stepping off the rocks  
holding her breath  
water up to her armpits,  
she couldn't protest  
she couldn't show fear  
or he'd send her deeper.

She does not know,  
forty years later,  
this will be the only time her daughter will  
see her cry,  
staring at a photograph of the rocks  
at Whitby.

**Whitby**

*Wes Lee (New Zealand)*

A draconian abomination was delivered today, in the USA.  
A newborn judgement, even now noxious and ravaging.  
Clinics closed; women told no and muscled into motherhood;  
Girls aghast that the extemporaneous spark within cannot be extinguished,  
And that the life, they did design and dream of, is to be terminated;  
Children, woefully unprepared, forced to bear children,  
Whatever their condition, choice forbidden.  
Fear and fury felt at fertile choice denied.  
Pregnant with privileged choice for 50 years,  
Gustus granted, now in retrograde.  
Betrayed and dismayed, women haemorrhaging power  
With nothing to anaesthetise their pain.  
Disempowered, when global equity is overdue,  
Not antiquated equality, surely...  
My body. My choice. My voice. Not new, in 2022.  
Coat-hanger wielding veterans, vexed and raging at lost labour,  
Have nightmares materialise before their seasoned eyes.  
Power torn as from those that came before the law.  
Backstreet abortions forced to reproduce once more.  
Virgins and veterans alike, now fight for the right to choose.  
A swelling, of support, thus induced:  
A tumult of tension, born of old-fashioned repression.  
But still, added aggravation and aggression,  
Words used as weapons aimed at women's antenatal choices.  
Impotent words.  
Now, what next? Remove our arms and legs?  
Suddenly, Atwood's dystopia seems far less ludicrous.  
Consider this: No parallel, pernicious situation,  
For a disempowered male population, can be conceived of...  
Seeded consequence, is thrust upon the female constitution.  
Not to decry the life and death decisions we debate,  
Each alternative cardinal and indelible.  
Yet no-one, no state, should choose for Us,  
Deciding the fate of My uterus.  
There can be no free will, no future authenticity,  
When fundamental choices are forsaken.  
Blood sisters, we support Your cause,  
And pray that this is no precursor;  
Because if it is, ladies, we're all fucked.

## Supreme Atavism

*Marie Catchpole (England)*

## Strays, Thailand

*Christopher M James (France)*

Well, so-called strays, you said.  
They criss-cross, regroup,  
trot suddenly lock-eyed  
stirred by some juiced discharge,  
an advancing jaw with a fresh objection.  
I know them best deflated on their sides  
moored without moorings,  
one's drooping teats  
coating the tarmac,  
too un-puppyish to truly like.  
When the sun takes a turn  
they rise up slowly,  
front legs first, learning to walk again.  
A known quantity  
in a limited liability world,  
prompting only our art of walking by,  
jamming brakes, feigning  
indifference.  
Monks alone  
trail a hand as they pass,  
enticing them to whiff  
the promise of oneness  
as if intriguing a return.  
But at night  
they're on a home run  
along the unlit road to a restaurant.  
You often told me  
spirits make up the whole picture  
and things go around. Here, now,  
ocular glints beyond my beams  
see me guessing them;  
I'm pinned against  
the windscreen's shallow light,  
wary of harm  
I could do to them, or  
by ricochet, you say,  
what might befall me.

**Rite of Passage**  
Sandra Galton (England)

She is being offered a pen.  
Sign here please says the woman.  
Is she being offered choice?

**choice** ■ **n.** an act of choosing between two or more possibilities ›  
the right or ability to choose.

Should she accept the pen? What does it hold?  
Time, perhaps.  
Can time be held?  
Time is always moving, we are told.  
If she does not move, does time move anyway?

She sees herself dangling, chin on hands, over a ship's railing, trying to imagine  
the difference between a self on the deck or one that's lost in the unlit world below.  
Father is right beside her. She sees herself falling – *what would you do if I fell in?*  
*Jump in and save you*, says Father, and he would, because it is what he is best at –  
saving lives. She stares at the horizon; her face, caught by a sudden gust, floats up  
like a sheet of paper, but then spirals down to the unseeing surf. She waves at it.  
*Come back.* It blinks. Gulps a mouthful of ink. Sinks.

The world is holding its breath. Parents, theirs.  
She is here, she remembers.  
Where is here? She will learn.  
**learn** ■ **v.** acquire knowledge of or skill in (something)  
through study or experience › become aware of by observation.

In her hand she is holding a pen. In her mind, an ocean.  
The high-ceilinged room echoes with drowned souls.

*Sign here* says the woman – and she does.

You chose to watch,  
in a room lit like the moon  
by a screen — a stream — a window.

You wanted to gorge  
on the flesh of truth  
beyond the Red-Top headlines  
of “massacres” and “sprees”  
buried by tomorrow.

So you clicked to see  
the vital pulp of  
pummelled *fruit* —  
split into the daylight,

black treacle gushing  
from gutted sacks,  
hung like scarecrows,

sand quenched by  
eyeless coconuts  
drowned on dry land,

fly orchids blooming  
beetroot-purple  
flower crowns.

You saw the Web of vultures  
wassailing as the soil grew fat  
in this harvest of plenty,  
in the land of tzompantli,  
in the Cradle of Humanity,  
in the Caucasus and the Donbas  
and the churches and the mosques.

You clicked to hear  
ungodly prayers  
and the gargle of communion wine,

in a room lit like the moon  
by a window — a stream — a screen;  
you thought truth was better felt,  
but what is seen cannot be unseen.

**Nobody held a gun  
to your head**  
Joe Meredith (England)

(For Primo Levi – on the anniversary of his birth, 31 July)

*“The choice is between forcing the description of the world so that it adapts to our intuition, or learning instead to adapt our intuition to what we have discovered about the world.” - Carlo Rovelli, The Order of Time*

I

Far corner of the marsh: a newly marked path. Rough channel cut through shadow cover of shrub, opens again, to moss brown carpet of dried bog. Boot-sucking wetland, sun-baked to sound-dumb cushion. White-painted posts, pegged ten metres apart, like blind men’s sticks, prodding; and perched on one, a kestrel, conducting a post-mortem. No-longer vole viced between dark razor talons.

Forensic eye flicks to step-frozen intruder. Then brute surgeon resumes his dissection. Strips fur from flesh, rips meat from bone, turns cadaverous husk to scant skeleton.

Nearby, and away, a gaggle of joggers jagged lope around spalled sea wall margins. Strident lead figure barking some dictum on heart rates, and cadence and personal best. While one puce-faced, breath-stolen straggler, all luminous sweat and diaphanous vest, considers, perhaps, a kestrel-like hack upon her vociferous tormentor.

Though none seem to heed the feeding falcon or stranded man, in coincident space, meeting. One indifferent, one fascinated. One out of place. One territory certain.

II

*Easy to marvel at the kestrel’s thermal control.  
To honour the wind-defiant, time-hung, hover.  
To ponder the falcon’s fierce beauty and extol  
the prayed-for transcendent force you’d uncover.  
We fall for the spell of priest’s sprung-rhythm hymnal,  
its alliterative flight and assonance dance.  
Though, truth to tell, doubt lours delight, grounding  
the chance I might find, in this instinct incarnate, some  
heaven-sent template, some presence divine.  
Mind slips from a script supernaturally bent  
when raptor tears the heart from a rodent. Still,  
I’ll confess, soured conscience admits:  
No falcon enslaves; no kestrel, however cold-willed,  
could author the horror of Auschwitz.*

**Kestrel Encounter/  
The Windhover**

*Terry O’Brien (England)*

# Fireflies & Ice Cream

Jonathan Greenhouse (USA)

- *After Frost*

Some say the world will end in fireflies,

some say in ice cream:

From what I've tasted from the skies,

I hold with those

who favour flavours

like butter-pecan

or mint to savour;

though thinking back on stranger treats,

a flapping incandescence of the two

might be the right amount of sweet

to guarantee destruction, too.

## Silent Bells

Sue Norton (England)

Snowdrops swung silent bells  
along the path to our neighbours' front door  
and the corkscrew hazel, which I'd always loved,  
twitched green-gold lambs' tail catkins, until

workmen arrived with spades  
and snappers in their van.

How swiftly they lopped the hazel and shredded it  
to a hillock of woodshavings,  
dug out the bulbs and levelled the garden, to slab it  
in flags of Fossil Grey sandstone.

Now, sleeping beauties of seeds will never  
rise at the kiss of sun. Rainfall, unable to soak, will rush on.

Once, the dwarf hazel sank a little carbon and breathed out  
breaths of oxygen. Now, on hot paving  
someone's chucked a Wispa wrapper, and a Pepsi can  
rolls, this way or that, this way or that?

## The Headcarriers of Seelampur

Christopher James (England)

We are the makers of a New Delhi:  
the headcarriers – the women of India  
who balance whole cities on our heads.

Six bricks on a ring of cloth, but still  
we cannot help but dream and watch

Mynah birds picket the tea shops  
and Dhabas; steal chur chur naan  
from the boss man's hand.

At the mercy of the sun, we walk barefoot.  
Our saris are the colour of terracotta.

We feel the weight of history; the burden  
of centuries that tell us we've no place  
in the schools or towers we build.

Now, sisters, is the time to use our heads.

Your stepdad said you look too skinny  
but I think you look like Jesus on the cross,  
poised between life and death  
with your eyes on the stars.  
You know something good's coming  
in the last outpost of your mind,  
when you've given up food  
and you sleep on the boards.

If I pushed you off an English cliff,  
would you cling onto the edge?  
I can imagine you bobbing, face up  
on the rocks after your death—  
“things are good from down here,  
there are no people to please  
and no meals to eat...”  
Then you'd float off into the sun  
and be swallowed by the light.

## Hold On

*Imogen Wade (England)*

Sweeping to and fro  
over the kitchen tiles like a detectorist  
with my V11 'torque drive' vacuuming machine  
out of the corner of my eye I saw  
running in from under the French window...  
what?  
Kneeling to the floor  
I scoped you close-up -  
wasp-waisted, wire-legged, waving elbowed  
antennae  
as if to consider the sticky trail  
I had spilt at breakfast - how joyous it would be  
to carry at least one boulder of sugar  
back to your palazzo under the patio.

Yes, I should have paused, but edging closer  
with my roaring red-triggered hand-held nozzle  
deliberately just for the hell of it  
sucked you into its vortex.  
Poor tiny ant. Poor Mr Emmet.  
I hope you didn't suffer long  
or try too frantically to escape  
from that transparent dust-upholstered prison.  
Did you cry out with your very last pheromone  
warning fellow workers  
against Giantkind, our treachery?

Mr Emmet, forgive me.  
We share at least 40 percent of our genome  
but, unlike me, much of your DNA  
is to do with unselfishness, pure servitude.  
I hope when it comes to my final judgement  
by some vast unknowable Spirit of the Universe,  
some Sweeper Up of black holes, dark matter,  
intergalactic dust, supernova spillage,  
my case will take longer to be considered -  
murder? or ant slaughter? -  
before being added to the pile  
of human cruelty, our  
littleness.

## Meeting Mr Emme

*Keith Chandler (England)*

Cw: trans & homophobic slur, death

watch this, you said, clutching it to your chest, watch this:  
a boy sits by the riverside/ and molds his heart into an origami  
of shapeless things // his tears/ the wine that oils/  
his mashed cravings/flowers that die at the break of dawn  
/& what is worse/ to want the things you want so badly/like listening  
/to your lungs cry/ for air in a sealed jar/you can't reach for  
the lid/ you can't reach/because there are eyes and eyes and eyes/ like floating ribbons / like a  
fucking graffitied wall/watching /& mouths/minute/mute/mad  
// wide /flirtatious/ daring/unbearable/thorns/ sapping/the  
warmth/ off your body's song/till the garden of your heart becomes/  
a waste land/skyrocketing a soundless hum of grief/from your throat/  
it was sunday/the day the lord died/i asked my  
smiling mother /if she knew what the body sings in the dark/  
*what do you mean?*/ she said/standing before a mirror/  
adjusting the gele to sit on her head/*please*  
*don't come and spoil my easter for me*// i'm dying,  
was what i said/ this is not my body/ i am a she/ not he.  
i know it/ many centuries ago/ in a past life/this soul has lived  
before/but in a different home/**her** smile vapourised/  
dread and scorn solidified on her face //next day she erected a  
cathedral in my room/& planted a huge crucifix on the wall/ above my  
bed/ to ward off the demon of homosexuality /see i wish i could play  
a better video for you/ than the one in my head/ but the only thing  
you'll get in this city/ is a mob/& a flame/eating the bodies of boys  
contorted in geometries of love & grief & silence/ like penance/

## But what is privilege

Gerald Onyebuchi (Nigeria)

belching them as smoke/ into God's face/ memorial./it isn't you that i mourn/  
it is time/of those things we would have become/  
the birds in my chest sing/ the elegy of shruken hearts/the clash of  
hands/drumming a burning river /forgive me if i bore you to  
death with my crazy ramblings/there's a dog barking  
softly at the grave of my head/ i don't know what it says/but i know  
what it sees: /the faces/of boys powdered with darkness/  
their lips trying to repair the broken harp in their eyes/  
these aren't some fucking lines you pick from/ jazzy's rap song  
and scream the roof down/ oh fucking christ/christ isn't the one  
burning here/it's me/it's the choir of voices in my head/singing an opera of  
longing/when i sleep/what i am saying is/i wear my sequine gown  
and sashay into a room full of flowers/ into a room/ i swear/  
i wish i could cook this poem into something/ something you  
can swallow/ without feeling the ache/in your throat/ to shove this  
picture/ of my becoming/ the things/my mother dreads/ in the world's  
face/to become a bird / & sway with reckless abandon/  
daring the wind to lift a hand / i fucking hate this regimen of plucking eggs  
from the sky/ in my dream/ and never see them hatch into wings /  
have you seen the drowning ship in my eyes?/ a girl says, inching  
towards me in a bar/ a poem is just privilege/ she adds,  
sipping her drink/*just privilege/it is the only way you conceal*  
*the pain in pages mildewed by the sun/ in bodies of lovers you can*  
*only caress in a land of shadows /but what is privilege/*  
when it only sings behind a mask? i ask/ *watch this, she says/watch this/*

A water-loving twig is best:  
Y-shaped hazel, alder or goat-willow.  
It is wise to keep your mind liquid as you go.  
Hold both gently – the stick and the purpose -  
fingers up, for springs have a sense lodged  
between taste and touch and hearing.

You must never demand money  
for your work, for water has no currency  
and may be insulted by transaction.

Choose your field. Cross it over and over  
until the branch twists towards the urge.  
Some days it is so powerful it will  
leap from your hand, bend carpals  
desperate to find its origin.  
On others it will curve gracefully  
as if a bird has landed on its memory.

This is the source. Recalibrate.  
Stop here, the end of your divining  
where it is most alive,  
where the map is silent.  
Do not ask me how to do it.  
You must find the way yourself.  
Hold the branch lightly; dig, dig.

Your limbs crossed; she binds you  
with her hair  
it coils, the right way.

Her sweat seals your remains in  
the casket, it's oval like her thighs,  
she places your hair, the right way.

And covers you in petals from the waistband of  
her skirt, she speaks  
at a frequency that flutters through the dirt.

All the things I untangled with my fingers  
will be set, the right way.

## Dowsing

*Jeff Phelps (England)*

## The Right Medicine

*Nicole Charleston (England)*

to wake with the city,  
choose sunrise over sleep—

morning takes flight on the wings of a plane,  
stretching shadow limbs against the lavender wall,  
through the porthole window of a home  
that is not quite mine.

Out of dreaming,  
I am startled by the possibility  
of that great rumble.

The engine of dawn;  
keys in ignition,  
heads on pillows,  
sleepers at the wheel,

the small miracle of coffee.

And us; twin stars in a terminal night,  
the gemini curve  
of your body into mine,  
not stirring for a siren.

What a joy it is  
to hold daybreak between us,  
to ease the labour of your breathing,  
to birth a new dawn into being.

## What a joy it is

*Isobel Roach (England)*

## Wicked

James Armstrong (England)

I cycled into an unquestionable emptiness; the sky, a nothing of fog-light and mist-mizzle. No movement or change of temperature on my skin. The off-hand clamp of cold fixed my face and the wicked iciness tacked still to everything, damp-close, like asphyxia  
.....Column Break.....Murk

must be. All, then, owl-flight silent. A table of up-folded, turd-brown clods, side-swiped in light- blue snow, extended in plough patterns, endlessly. All horizons found evasive, slipped behind houses and farm buildings, and beyond all  
.....Column Break.....Spoked

ambitions. Low, in a dyke, water spread, sheeted and umbrella- spoked with ice. Up ahead a few spindled trees, like worn- thin brushes, demarcated this man's land from that. The crust- submerged water, soil and the murk, and all the lurking  
.....Column Break.....Edict

wild life knew nothing of this subtle edict. 'Mine: theirs' Only, they laid in wait for the sun, - a white moon-disc setting behind guaze that day- to slide beneath their world; return to face them a day later, an inch nearer to a permeable Spring.

*after Degas, or Cézanne, or Water, Perhaps*

We try to break through the solid frame of everything – to drag the tension in, sink down beneath the surface of the water, of the world,

but it is only when we pull the other figure in – the jilted lover, or the viewer, or the man who knocks, without warning, at the bathroom door,

and hold our breath, hold every speculation out for anyone to see, to read with us, to *sweat, thud, tingle, splash*, and then *lie back* again...

for the moment when rivers grow to lovers, or brothers, and some of us jump in, while others stand there, dripping, on the shore.

## Diving into Paint

Rachel Carney (England)

In my dream she was blue  
a patch of sky before a storm  
electric ready to crack

the train, too, was blue  
stations flew by like lost sparrows  
every sign repeating the last

Croydon...Croydon...Croydon  
Croydon...Croydon...  
Croydon...

Maria read each aloud  
the words spun off  
and sullied the tracks

the tracks were everywhere  
coming and going as might a stranger  
in a revolving door

*why 'blue'?*  
my daughter asked  
I looked straight into her eye

*that was before, I replied*  
*Maria was sick from the beginning*  
*'a bad seed', they'd said*

my daughter looked aside  
she'd had enough  
every glance bore a mortal wound

I touched her cheek  
but she kept fading  
my palm and fingers, too

**Blue**  
Scott Elder (France)

**An Unreal Feeling**  
Thomas Hutchinson (England)

Miniature strings move my soles to the ceiling,  
where the arches swallow the lightbulb whole,  
and its internal screams fall on deaf ears,  
the blistered skin across my heels, dreaming  
of the pulse that moves through them  
staying long enough to keep me there, suspended  
in the blood-running sentence;  
waiting for the hold to pass, and for  
my unbelievable hands to try, finally,  
to fit the pieces of my flesh together,  
and spread the weight just evenly enough  
to get my body back to the floor,  
where it can revel in the sudden emptiness,  
itself, now a conch shell, screaming  
blissful things if you listen,  
but remaining silent,  
as the shadow of my flailing limbs passes,  
and I remain, stubbornly, ignored

God carves the cosmos eons bound into an animate manuscript,  
The beginning and its conclusion jolt the same

Like Luna pregnant and bleeding the black clotted sky.  
At the window of my mother's car moon stalks the darkness

I can't name evening longing maims my heart. The same dream where I am  
Running towards my father only to end up snubbing his arms

For disco lights and open curtains a clapping audience.  
We're all fountains of emotion wanting someone to drink us

So, we can be quenched I ran into you like a drunk driver to a pram,  
Or a plump baby eaten by a bomb a circus in flames. Charm is often narcissism

I watched you arson the world for a buzz  
while inhaling a puff of crack Memory is having a post-mortem for love

Ours lasted for months on life support both of us on autopilot  
Like the city Busker strumming Bjork's Quiet with no pennies in his cup  
Only happy when dream paused in clandestine dawn.

You etched my initials into your left arm after our first wildfire,  
Used my tears to wash the wounds your penned tattoo

Every time you dismembered me you called my entrails beautiful,  
Like a painting of a nude angel weeping a puddle

The sunset playing Comptine d'un autre été, as heart bent swans' circle  
The deep naval of the earth's core we were born into brilliant noise.

Sometimes thunder is music often disasters shake us alive,  
Like the tornado kiss that leaves a whole district destroyed.

We clutch our kids start from soil to cultivate a new life.  
Hold onto the small but significant moments of choice

Dance in the thunder find bliss in bass music.

## Thunder Music

*P.A. Bitez (England)*

## The Memory is a Second Grave

*Blake Auden (England)*

you are so much more  
than the story you tell yourself,

and to be haunted is a matter of choice,  
a soiled relic in the crypt of your palm.

turn your head, love,  
and look with me.

each ending is a beginning,  
and the sun shines orange if you let it.

this is not just a picture  
this a moment in time before it all -

it is a moment in time  
it is a blue sky

ferns in the heat  
at the height of their unfurling

this is the minute  
before you ask the question

and I am forced to detonate my reply  
into the quiet frenzy of greening

one two-  
letter word

it feels worse  
than just causing a fracture

it feels like dropping  
an entire mountain

onto a a near-extinct bird's only remaining  
miniscule egg

## this is when

*Laura Theis (England)*

## Shostakovich's fifteenth

Christopher M James (France)

*"the hum and clatter of hospital machines" Tom Service*

Violins arch skywards,  
percussions rattle bones...

the loose change of his body –  
in whose pocket? – is art unplugging

the halo from its own dear cause.  
He's on a high wire, nervous

as always, his pole a quill  
scratching the rarefied air,

quoting others in homage, with  
no more scores to settle. Petrograd's

young man with Lenin's cap,  
ever officially optimistic, a paragon

for the motherland, though it filled  
with crow's feet, medals like dentures,

thick uniforms colluding in tribunes.  
There's crowd here still, only

his simpleton has changed, and music's  
the art of the drunk sobered up.

They named an asteroid after him  
but how high would he go, and

who dare ask: what of God?  
Listen – the halting breaths, spaces,

ledge by ledge, the question  
there at the end.

## Warning

Harriet Jane Breeds (Belgium)

That buddleia bush out there has been whispering.  
A great sea of grievance breathes in its branches.  
It sings by the bins, sibilant insinuations  
simmering. Wego about our deaf days.

Blue-lit, as listless as polluted fish, I click  
while delicate cymbals insist and the leaves drop

and the dry sound of death scuttles across concrete.  
Maybe there was a moment when God burned in that bush  
but, no Moses, I never did hear the crackling  
commandments. Honestly? If the hot sap hissed,

if the shrubbed livid red at the gold evening's end,  
I must have been busy with other deadlines.

## Learning to Live in the Forest

Rachel Carney (England)

You'll be scrolling through the trees one day,  
and something familiar will catch your eye.

You'll click on the link and come across  
the bare pattern of yourself –

a map of every knot and hesitation,  
etched in twisted lines of black and white.

You'll stop and look again at every memory,  
stare at every canker of doubt.

And the branches above you will creak with relief  
as you trace those words

from tree to tree,  
and find a path that leads you out.

\*

As soon as you think that you're clear of the trees,  
you'll look up and realise

the canopy still hems you in:  
familiar yet strange.

Your body knows  
each gnarled old trunk,

each shrivelled twig, each wilted leaf,  
each still and eerie glade.

And the tendrils will grope towards you,  
silently, and slow.

They'll wrap around each fragile hope,  
and re-create the forest's shade.

\*

Don't let them catch you in the mire  
of what they think, or what they say,

just search again, through brier and bramble,  
stunted bracken, oak and pine.

Go back to the place where it began,  
and let lies fall away like rain.

Take the truth and hold it high.  
Let it guide you. Let it shine.

This forest, with its ferns and fungi,  
birch and ivy, mud and grime,

with all its hidden heart, its thirst,  
this wood of woods is yours to claim.

# AUB (BA HONS)

'creatives do nothing'

*Ben Whittall*

'You need to let it go'

*Evie Molyneux*

# CREATIVE WRITING STUDENT SHOWCASE

they asked me why I believe  
capitalism slamming against your outlets  
like a dam holding back a river  
is beneficial to the madness  
our aspirations welling up behind, because  
*time equals value*, monopolised  
like that early business rise n' shine culture  
no, more like *rise n' grind*  
until your paper meets ink so forcibly they could be magnets  
as if paper meeting ink is a phenomenon so unnatural  
*you have passions that won't transfer to your bank account?*  
*wow, sorry for asking!*  
this anti-art, free-willed human's become a culture-vulture swallowing ideas  
while some methodical, melodical AI's writing television scripts  
for passive income on the side

so, *time equals process*  
as they told me  
and in my writer's block I must have forgotten it, because  
*time equals profit, right?*  
well no silver or copper gold shines up here  
cause my mind's chocka with full-force white rapids  
and this dam's holding back my inspiration like brackets  
and I'll tear and scrap at ideas 'till cracks emerge  
and I'll write and scribble and scream  
'till the flood gates shatter and I'm heard  
and now my throat is hoarse and dying through all these  
words and tears and poetics, be it  
*Wordsworth* or *E.A Poe* through to  
*McMillan, Max Porter, Inua Ellams*  
washing into existence with  
a sea of notes, fivers and tenners

they asked me why *creatives take time*  
and I'm reminded how they'll scurry like rats  
at any reference or opinion divine, because  
*time equals minutes*  
and I'm watching minutes passing by -  
so *take THIS! take THAT!*  
with words that smash apart your sanity  
like magnets slack-tight  
'till you've got some kind of analogy  
a dash of lacquered-paint political context  
and pen ink's flow is back in fashion  
*you're a creative for what reason?*  
fuck, if only you trusted my passions!  
cause if *time equals 'tory government funding the arts'*  
we're selling England by the pound

all this artistry held back  
by a ten-tonne dam of cuts and lies, while  
this culture's a riverbank overflowing with potential and yet  
they ask -  
*they ask me why.*

*creative people need time  
to sit around and do nothing*  
'because nothing amounts to something,  
just you wait, you'll see why'

and now  
my empty pages  
fill to the brim with words and rhymes  
a journey,  
my own success story,  
a finalised product to sell and buy, because

creatives do nothing. enjoy.

## 'creatives do nothing'

*Ben Whittall*



It starts with a rush.  
A cacophony of movement,  
So intense it makes me slip out of rhythm,  
As the air in my lungs notices it's moving faster than the air outside of my body.

The substance feels claggy on my face,  
It's in my eyes, dripping through my hair  
Sliding along the crumpled folds of my skin  
Leaving behind stains of dappled mauve.

A low tone begins to ring,  
Muscling it's way into my throat and into my ears,  
Forming a block, a cold cement,  
A forceful and seemingly un-ending weight.

Maybe this is my most honest state,  
I am forced to feel it right into its corners.  
As I squirm under something so potent,  
I find a vulnerability that is almost peaceful,

for it won't be bent, or pushed round to the back of my brain  
It needs my energy. It needs my attention.  
It needs my hours sat in the shower,  
Coated in beads of salt and water and sweat.

Something in me gives it the go ahead,  
Every time.  
'Hold me too tight'  
'Don't let me squirm away.'  
'Cut off the airways.'

It slowly loses oxygen and retreats,  
Slinking back behind me,  
Folded between my torso and my shadow,  
Moving seamlessly in time with my body, waiting.

## 'You need to let it go'

*Evie Molyneux*



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