

The World is Burning and I Have Discovered: This

Barbican Young Poets 2020

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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning believes the arts have the power to transform lives and that people of all ages and backgrounds should have access to music, theatre, dance, visual art, film and spoken word. Since the Barbican and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama launched their creative learning partnership in 2009, thousands of people including children, young people, teachers, families, artists and communities have participated in their programmes, activities and events. Ranging from those that give people their first taste of the arts through to those that enable existing artists to push the boundaries of their practice, all projects inspire and bring people together giving them new skills and confidence and raising aspirations.

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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning is delighted to welcome you to the Barbican Young Poets Anthology 2020; a poetry collection that showcases the work of our immensely talented community of young creatives.

At Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning, we work with people of all ages and backgrounds to discover and develop creative skills for life. All the work you read in this anthology has been created by emerging poets aged 16 – 25, living in east London and further afield, who have been working with us as a community of young poets for the past 6 months.

The Barbican Young Poets come together for fortnightly workshops at the Barbican between September and March each year. Under the inspiring leadership of artist and educator Jacob Sam-La Rose, and with the expert assistant-tutorship of Rachel Long, they explore a diverse range of poetic genres, styles and themes in order to push their developing voices in new artistic directions. The poets study the craft of writing, and they explore, through collaborative project opportunities, the power of performing their material live. Throughout this process, each poet goes on a journey, discovering what is unique about their own artistic voice, supporting and challenging one another, and evolving together as a collective of young artists. Alumni from Barbican Young Poets have gone on to become performers, journalists, multidisciplinary artists and more, and most importantly have continued to be part of the Barbican Young Poets community.

As always, it has been a delight to work with such a talented group of young people, and we hope you find the same enjoyment in reading the work collected here in their anthology. On behalf of all of the participating poets and Creative Learning staff involved in delivering the programme, I would like to offer a very warm thanks to Jacob and Rachel for their exceptional commitment and dedication to each of the poets. Quite simply, the programme couldn't be the beautifully precious and unique thing that it is without them.

This 2020 edition of the Barbican Young Poets anthology is especially poignant for me, as it will be my final year with Creative Learning. I have been so proud to lead and be a part of our extraordinary Creative Learning programme, working alongside so many inspirational team members, artists and colleagues. And I can confidently say that throughout my 11 years with the department, the Barbican Young Poets programme has steadfastly remained an absolute beacon for us, championing the most inspirational new voices, and always pushing the boundaries of artistic excellence. I can't wait to see it continue to thrive on into the future.

Jenny Mollica

Director of Creative Learning
Barbican / Guildhall School of Music & Drama

Welcome to this year's anthology. Expect urgent assessments of the act of curation. Bold refutations of the weight of socially and culturally enforced norms. Victorian funeral practices. Erasure. Interrogations of whiteness, blackness and other points on the spectrum that stretches between them. A fairy tale disembowelled and recombined. A chorus line of aunties and uncles, and a special guest appearance from Miley Cyrus. All this, and so much more. These poems are skeleton keys, jimmying the locks; love letters tied to bricks and thrown through closed windows. They demand to be let in, while simultaneously proclaiming ownership of the world outside.

While the foundations of Barbican Young Poets remain the same— 13 weeks of meetings spread between October and March with facilitated workshops, peer critique, opportunities to respond to the Barbican's galleries and other artistic programmes, collaborations with other young artists (nods to Young Programmers and Young Visual Artists), a showcase performance and a published anthology— we're continuing to explore what it means to cultivate a long-running community of poets at different stages of their growth and development. It's a joy to be able to create space for "graduates" of the programme to come back and participate in different ways, supporting and working alongside the newer additions to our ever-increasing family.

Speaking of new additions, many thanks and much love must be extended to Beth Warnock, who has stepped into the role of Creative Learning Producer for Theatre, Poetry and Dance so seamlessly that the years before her arrival already feel like pre-history. Thanks must also be extended to Miriam Nash and Paula Varjack, who led guest sessions this year. And speaking of things that remain the same, Lauren Brown's constant and consistent presence has been, once again, a boon. By now, it almost goes without saying that the programme wouldn't be what it currently is without Rachel Long's adept ministrations (it really wouldn't).

As for the poets: it would be easy to write that these voices are vital. That these poets are ones to watch for the future. I'd offer that these poets are ones to watch *now*. In the oft-referenced words of William Carlos Williams, "It is difficult/to get the news from poems", yet in an age in which the news is rife with falsehoods and fear-mongering, poetry— and particularly *this* poetry— offers much for us to believe in.

Jacob Sam-La Rose

Artistic Director / Lead Facilitator



Into the Night

There is a woman trying to summon ghosts.
Her cliff's edge Her voice sounds like marble.

fringe

and tight bob are harsher than she is;
still, she conjures.

Pulls together two cities that were never
meant to meet.

Most of these ghosts are dissidents – they know not to surface here.

Those who do come
tip toe across the tiles
their colours
picked carefully from a swatch
that distinguishes
porcelain and alabaster
as different versions of white.
The replicas were enough to let them repeat their dance, the woman explains.

Those plucked
from the black are made
fugitives
once more

you can hear them
running in the walls.

And when you look into the eyes of a painting

where Jesus is an arrow eyed black man wearing sunglasses

they make him blink

just to remind you who god
really is.



CABARET FLEDERMAUS (1907 – 1913)

Peeling an orange so that the skin turns and turns into a perfect coil is hard. It's easier with satsumas – sometimes after lunch I wouldn't throw my skin away, I'd prop it up in my lunch box like nothing had happened. There was no flesh or juice but taking home a hollow skin felt important. Victorians used to take photographs with their dead as though they were still alive. Parent sat beside their propped up child, hands around the empty body hoping the flash would make them undead. Baby in a cot next to another baby. The one surrounded by flowers is the dead one. This gallery is quieter than a funeral. At funerals there are hymns and wailing mourners. Here the past is turned and turned into a perfect recreation of skin, accurate down to the tiles on the wall but there's no body, no spirits. What is meant to be Cabaret Fledermaus is a hollow satsuma, no flesh, no juice, just an empty propped up corpse. *We want light and we want song.**

* 'We want light and we want song' is a quotation from the original manifesto of Cabaret Fledermaus bar.

Spud

I put my fingers in dad's ear to show I love him. loving something is a reason to do it.
once I threw a pepper away. half of it had gone mouldy.
spud is my favourite vegetable. that's what dad calls me.
before it broke I was listening to it.
I wish uncle never died.
the heart is deceitful above all things. that shouldn't mean anything to me but it does.
tupac died at the same age I am now.
I forgot the exact date of mum's birthday. tried to trick my brother into telling me.
so few people know all my faces I doubt I'm one person.
if I don't flower soon I'm going back to uni.
loving something is not a reason to do it. the heart is deceitful. I was listening to it.
uncle died. I forgot the exact date. tupac died. I wish uncle never...
I'm going back to mum's birthday. loving something is a reason to do it.
sea calls our front room. half of it had gone. finger in dad's ear. mouldy spud.
that shouldn't mean anything. spud. but it does.

Much Like Feta

My sister's husband had his tattoo altered
see it bandaged on his phone's screen
screen of his wife whose phone is held by her son who has
FaceTimed him, help
she's fainted on the floor, she's cut her thumb
she's cut her thumb on the lid of her Turkish import white cheese
much like feta
much like the flag previously tattooed on his arm
my sister's husband was uncomfortable you see
to have a flag like that, with a dictator like that
he defers now to 'Britishness'
or 'Cypriotness'
he asks his son, my sister's son, to turn the phone around
reverse the lens, press the curly arrow, the curly arrow
he looks at her on the floor, my sister's blood, apparently
shooting at the ceiling
my sister's husband in his tank top, in the gym he works in
my sister's husband hanging up after reassuring his son
I'll call you back, he calls the ambulance.

Tottenham Cake

we use a handle ripped from a bike
craters in the floor so wet you can hear the soil squelch give way
go deep and the land starts sucking back
no fear of worms
no mums are in
Samuel puts his hand on mine
I want to bury myself
take him down with me
we use the handle like a drill
I'm impressed by his warmth keep going
we're not done 'til we've made a pie
it's chocolate!
we get a sand bucket
shred mud into little worms
call it Tottenham cake — ha that's clever!
go on eat some
the bad neighbours have extra tools
worth skipping the fence for
Samuel lifts me over
Sis jumps
other neighbours see our dresses getting ruined so ruined
jump back again so far into the hole
the game for Samuel is in watching me
the game for me is in the dig
there's something about these mud pies
soil in my palm smelling like birthday henna
a ceremony pray-walking the offering
to the little host's house





Arcadia

What is your whiteness against my skin? If God is a white man; if this is the only way I can be loved, I want a perfect, lifeless white, but only find the white of boiled eggs, a statue's hands, or bloodlessness. Each month I bleed with what you don't give me; I do not want to want you. What do I want to give you? What colour can you be? I have stopped calling you by name; these days your words are white noise. I want to hold your pink, the soft inside of a shell, to find the faintness of every kind of word for salvation. Is to touch to be hurt by static from your clothes? Another way to keep warm. I don't know how people stay this happy all their lives.

Nineteen Candles

I am my mother's daughter; I kiss strange women at night, then cry on street corners. Last birthday, I told a boy I loved him and he sighed; I smoke in cold bars, stick their damp carpet to my feet; I play chicken with every hand that's ever hurt me. I'm grateful, yes. Say yes because it's easier. No-one ever calls me easy these days; no one uses answerphones except me and my landlady. I have eaten mahua three meals in a row. I like sweetness — don't call me sugar, don't you speak — I couldn't — don't you dare; love me, please.

The Dinner

on entering, it becomes apparent.
so I sit and eat her cheese like
a grinning fool, half-choke down
the dry crackers, lemons bulging
from my pockets.

sitting here, at your table,
over-glossed, a Christmas tree
in July. this hot room makes
a petting zoo of me, flushed
low and gaudy as cows.

she says how sick she'd been.
the tiredness, it creeping whitely —
how you cared for her. how cold
my hands are. she knows.
and tells me with her looks.

I can barely swallow, forking scraps.
chip my ketchup-coloured nails,
my ring finger still gashed to match.
on the tube here, I sucked the red from it.
realised the man across was staring.

he looked away, and I tasted iron.
at your table, I gobble beads
of pomegranate seeds, chew dully,
belly grunting. my bladder is now
balloon-heavy. we clean the last dishes,

swim synchronised in grease.
our slow ankles knock together,
but I smile like a good dog.
thankyouforthelovelymeal,
and gasp when I leave your house.



Wolf in a New Coat

the wolf came for me, and I was glad.
better that we ache in tandem.

we lit shabby cigarettes, and slurped
beans out the can, sharing fistfuls.

one time we met, and his mouth
was glazed with feathers.

on a damp Sunday, he brought
me a knobbed mass of flesh that

I presume was once somebody's knee.
he'd mauled it, but there was enough

to make a thick stew, and so we chewed.
he had beautiful big eyes. and hairy toes,

so it did not matter that his nose
was always wet, his tongue ever searching.

soon, he began to outstay my welcome -
brought fleas. I scratched his wolf-pits,

then his ears pricked, sighing at every itch.
he made a lovely coat. sometimes, when I miss

his tender paws, I put it on and crow
a softly yearning wolfish song.

I Sing Miley Cyrus at the Barbican

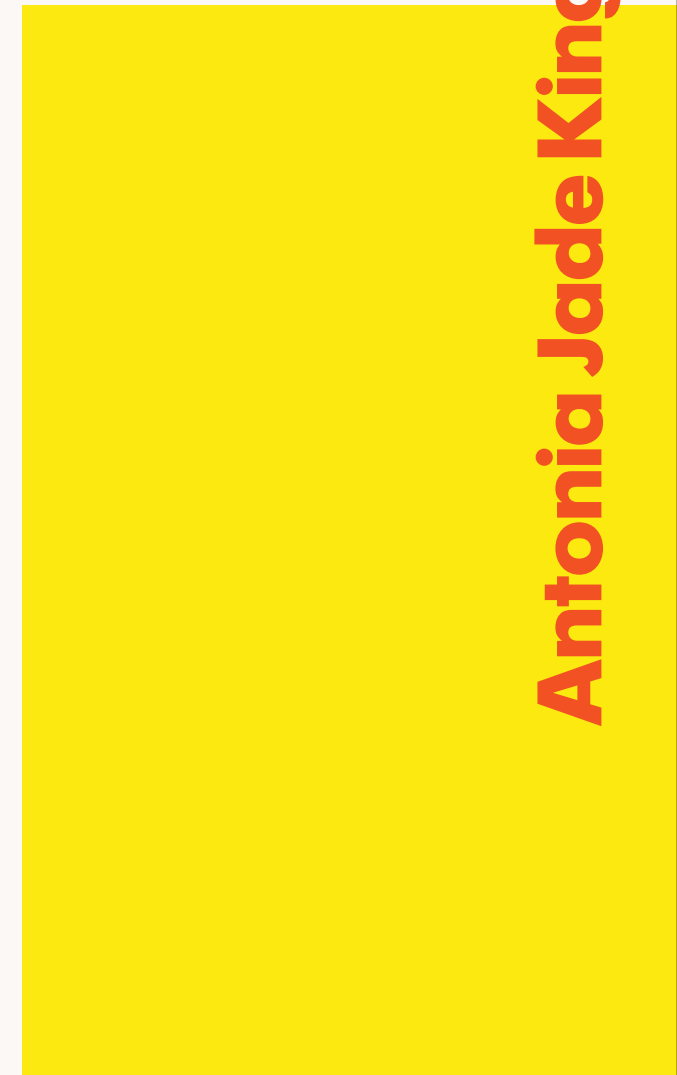
After 'Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art' exhibition at the Barbican

Beheaded legs, or heads for days, and all in shadow, flickering wild-eyed, wide-eyed, shut-eyed, and eyeless. We turn our feet towards the gauze, filmic, screen-thick, body wrap, glass case; inch closer. Pitted concrete bulwark hands wrest you, distant, into static; put you in my path. I put myself in your path. The violence of vision. Eye came in like a wrecking ball, but silent, unassuming, in jeans and a t-shirt. Someone once lectured me on the reparative ethics of witnessing, but forgot about the pandemic nature of complicity. Somehow we, gazing, manage to make it all about us. By this I mean: maybe today and most days the spectator is not the hero; own that there are spectres more righteous and braver than you, more full of light than you. We just paint them wrong. I know I have held my (mouth afraid in my) body after paint, after hands, wall-breaking, undressing by the eyes, behind muffle of concrete. Skirts in the night. It's the way you stiletto silence, boxed in greyscale — (we wanted you) faceless. Headless. Heedless, we dusk your sound. Under our dark, blade storm rising in a calm of calves, the hush of your thighs, now the crash of your eyes. Maybe sometimes haunting is justice. If only we had learnt how to let ourselves be haunted better: we could let in so much light. So much skin is not ours to hold or unfold or dress in swindling narrative, saccharine distortion, as we see fit. No one taught me how to dislocate bone and wall but we do it anyway. All around us, screens dissolve like sugar, and we dissolve in a mess of you and I, and in the next room someone is playing the piano, and elsewhere knives are falling. Hand prints where the surface of the eye presses up — rolls — against the air and its (dis)contents. The room — some kind of practice of viewing and extraction — some part of me compels my eye to tarry and linger. Should it? Should I? Stare back. Stare back; or, step back. Shake my hand, only if you want to; or, shake the memory of us. *Wreck me.* I invite you. You, with your staccato heels and your light, as you see fit. (I, too, have lost my head.)



Portrait of a Corset of Grief on the Brink

Teach me how to empty this body of
breath I have built, then held in every thought
and sinew; this ache made bone and eyelet;
these knots in my chest. I want to learn of
tenderness: how to unravel with love;
melt brick forged from breath—this breath I forgot
how to breathe—in the fire where I am set
to harden, then crack into maybes. Love,
if I name you just that, will I believe
in us, that we are something more than just
unsure, tense, and fragile? When they say Love
can be all those things, these hands find relief
in brick; trust in a false anchor. But trust
me more when I tell you that these walls of
air do not deserve the breath of your grief.



When Your Hands Are Shaking, That's Deliberate – You Could Stop Doing It If You Wanted To

Ever count your steps as you walk? When I was younger, I wanted to be one of the sisters from *Little Women*, or another girl too preoccupied by plot to have a busy brain. Ever convinced yourself that if you miscount a step then your mum will die? When I tell you, you tell me that you're so *OCD* too – you alphabetise your bookshelf. I stop, talk about how I find holding amethyst calming. In another world I notice fun things, like the small smile Mum has when she sits in a really comfy coffee shop chair, how she blows to cool her espresso even though it's already drinkable, but I'm counting steps instead. Did you know amethyst hurts your hand after a while? It's sharp. And what do you think will happen if you don't alphabetise your bookshelf?

Mum Can Get Her Hair Cut in Half an Hour

I believe this to be a superpower. Maybe this is all power is: extra time and rapid bleach.

In another world I get my haircut with her.
With our extra time we brunch

then walk. We breeze past people
who notice we smell like sea salt shampoo, and smile.

We are all messy bun,
light and free.

No one walks into us.



**We All Remember the Story of the Man who Asked for Our World to be Cleaved in
Half**

like an egg sliced open clean cut
fate had two thirds of his
luck filling the gap in gold
and his right foot became blank
like [] a pocket of
molecules refusing to rush
into the [] like blood to the clot
in this new world surrounded
we all remember
in straight lines now
like the swimming pool with edges
in which the water is still
contained within our eyes
but he told us
we still grip the sides
at our kneecaps or our navels or
some solid form anyway

they condemned him to an irregular
body suspended in white
whilst his right hand
like [] empty
air suspended in water
into the [] like breath to the throat
he told us his body was molten
by white protein tender as a bite
he told us everything was split
that grief is room-sized and shaped
carefully crafted by us beforehand
but powerless consider the energy
within our mouths our brains
he told us that we still slide in and
that only the darkness that ceases
at our collarbones betrays us
as capable of getting wet at all

I Want to Love Something With the Total Abandon of Nigel Slater's Love for Toast

the world is burning and I have discovered your body
alive as a wriggling Tube mouse

I don't know how to write real poetry lately
all I have are funny titles like *I want to love something
with the total abandon of Nigel Slater's love for toast*
outside your room the bad men are knocking
but we cannot hear them as your thumb is inside me thank god
you say weird that this can happen in December
I say weird that this can happen in the face of mounting fascism
and environmental destruction

all my poems are conceptual and fancy lately
I have to be conceptual and fancy because I'm scared
of fascists and the way I look when you slide your thumb in
I wonder if they will make outlaws of us
again if they will make us squirm like Tube mice
again but I love being a dangerous dyke with you
the winter trembles beneath our little fires

I want to be good and right with you
and lately I think what is good and right
is that you take what you take the way you want to take it
I know someone will always be outside knocking
but I can't think about that now
there might not be long to discover the right way to touch your mouth
or we might have a hundred years and the Earth might never die
in both scenarios I get to write this poem for you thank god



Spellwork

Certain days required the help of a spell. I gathered what was needed:
ladybird wings plucked from the playground,

sweets uneaten from an untouched packed lunch.
Worse days called for something more.

A fistful of stinging nettles. Hairs from my arms. Two blue eyes
unstitched from their owner. Baby doll, I'm so sorry.

Lord knows if twenty years has taught me anything
it's that there is no magic to be found in unpicking yourself.

These mornings I eat breakfast like a charm,
kiss my photo on the mantelpiece before I head off to work.

I gather what I need. As my face breaks the surface
into air, the saltwater holds me like a good, good friend.



Luck

I was born as my mother's lottery ticket.
every week she would pencil out birthdays –
my sister's, mine – pass paper
to the cashier with a couple of silver coins
like casting wishes at the Trevi Fountain,

her head held a few degrees higher
as we walked home. she daydreamed out loud
about owning a mansion in Jeffreys Bay,
a bathroom for each of the ten bedrooms,
her childlike eyes glimmering with hope.

in pursuit of making her own luck
she soared with us overseas,
taught me that there's a ticket
on the other side of faith
pregnant with possibility.

Babel

everybody going gone
people packed went
outskirts and elsewhere.

sound been bagged
aerial come down
music plucked from sky

and scattered.
tower come down.
lives in matted

woven nylon zipped
uncle cousin
gone. bass in back-

packs. trunk rattle hushed.
couldn't no centre ever
hold all that racket, no.

woman on the 68 bus
with the stories
she's gone.

estate scrubbed clean
of its grimy self.
loiter song gagged.

gap-toothed whistle
no more. song not ever.
pastor on the corner

mistakes empty for heaven
communion run empty
no two or more gathered

no bodies here
only ghosts
and memory holding

this nothing
and nobody place up.



There is Joy Breaking Here

and uncle is drunk already. uncle has his nephews
his special brew holding him up and happier
than the rest of us this bloodshot day of meat
and gisting. uncle grills burgers in knock-off birkenstocks.
plays coquet for aunty long since tired of his face
and fatuous self. uncle deep in meniscus. uncle cracks
the bone and swallows marrow. does not sweat or spill
a sip. uncle of independent means. clapping on the ones
and threes. jiving. got the old lady and the home office
and type 2 diabetes and maze and frankie beverly

clapping on behind him

Portrait of the Lover as an Errand Being Run

The first time I call you *my love* by accident it is Sunday morning in Sainsburys, & the words are so premature I want to inhale them back into my mouth. Undig the dirt from underneath my fingernails & return it to the earth – as if until now you were unaware of my fondness. As though the morning as it was before this (the weight of your breasts on my shoulders) was merely a formality. A woman in the queue is staring at me & I cannot tell if it is because I placed my hand gently on the small of your back in the fruit & veg aisle, a dozen lemons moonlighting as rind suns in our personal universe, or because I look ugly but not like I am about to apologise for it. I want a new sound to replace the last one. I want to ask if we need anything but I'm scared I'll reach for the milk & tell you my mouth makes your name when we're apart, pick up a passion fruit & find myself being ridiculous, talking of fate, or the stars, or even my heart, which is hurting because a woman in the queue is still staring at me, & my hand is still holding the small of your back, on Sunday, in Sainsburys, & I am still ugly but not about to apologise, so when you turn to ask me what I said I don't have time to think up something new *my love*, I say, *my love*, & the woman moves forward in the queue. Our rind suns refuse to set. My hand keeps holding what it should.

Ribcage

I want the poem to start somewhere beautiful, like by a lake, or in Paris (which lots of people hate). I want it to cover the morning which moves like an egg split from its shell, or July heat on the pavement, like a silk ripple. I know from the word *phenomenal* we can take the words alone, and home, and from *ribcage* we can take grace, and rage, and I want the poem to be good enough to make something of these two separate, arbitrary facts. I want to fill the tiny dip where your neck becomes your chest with spit, or salt water, or supermarket champagne, and watch it develop its own tide after sex. In the poem. I want it to be large enough to hold but light enough that no one tires of doing so. I want the poem to be an instant coffee frothy topped on the tongue. I want it to do its job. I want it to be both iridescent and discreet, comforting as a corner shop glow. In the poem, I want you to be full of rage, and grace. I want you to come home – alone, I am faithful to so much more than I need to be. Enamoured with anything.



In the Gallery of the Dead

you remember remembering
something that sounded like
baldwin being played off sheet
music and trying to picture the
face. the curator said it is
impossible to have continuous
music everywhere at once, but
see how the shadows
are dancing
in silhouette while the
woman upstairs is trying to
remember how to sing. she is a
wick bending under
the weight
of revolution, the kind that runs
across borders in red lace up
boots and a dress that can make
music just by spinning.
outside the men are
measuring tiles again trying to
map the distance between now
and
what was, trying to map memory
onto pebbledash walls and call it
art.

The Headlines Will Say Confused and Misunderstood

white men full of rage, full of teeth made of fire, go to church
with bloody palms on sunday to ask God for forgiveness with
a smile. they will iron and starch their shirt before, put on
a pair of silver cufflinks, look once in the mirror before leaving
the house. their car will start with ease, they will consider it
a good omen. white men full of rage will stop at every red light,
see themselves reflected in it, remind themselves they are
good. they sing along to the radio, holler caught in the back
of their throat, half bass, half bawl. they will look at the world
and think they are touching God and the world will look back,
eyes wide in wonder at the marvel. in them the world will see
the parts that are soft, the parts that remind it of itself –
the parts that just want to be loved.





Adore You

sometimes I imagine us, two tired lovers inhaling misery at the willow tree. years have passed and you will whisper to me about regret, how it always comes on wednesdays when you are at work and I am bedbound heavy to sing with you once more.

and to start with, we were beautiful. our first christmas in small-sided villages drawing on steam and hoping your walls were mute. when a handful became a plateful, when we would make funny noises like little trinkets. I would be the ballerina with perfect feet and when you lifted me skin shrugged and rolled like the movement of positions. three to four, satin wound up my torso, your hands.

nerves build when I think of us trying again, measuring the distance through changeovers at stations I have never heard of. I would arrive at your new house with those mismatched tiles, feel the embrace of hot stoves and your mother's empathy. I wonder whether she thinks of me too. I wonder if light is lost quicker in the south.

Open Return

tell friends that being homesick is a hard half to swallow,
that hearing your mother's voice is the sweet-sharp of orange peel.

the first time you try to leave, she will say how her sickness has spread,
how she fears losing her hair and not making it to graduation.
you forget that train ticket, forget your own plans of relapse to be her right hand.
each day remains the same,
hold her body until she can hold it herself.

when she is stable, you will decorate her bedroom with shiny plastic.
a day to celebrate the new cells dancing around her left breast.
and she will start crying, tearing down those welcome home signs
to avoid her reflection.

that night you will plan an escape. the plan will turn into years,
picking at the blue walls of your room searching for the easiest route out.
each dream staring at yourself, an icon, cheap body in some foreign place
while still being afraid that she will be rushed back to the ward.
she will watch as you pack a suitcase for the third time this month,
worry about your city-hopping through spaces marked unsafe.

and so you stay, and feast on that light left when she lingers,
knowing that hope is a silent killer,
and noon is the loneliest.



The Pacifist

Try to keep my hands up. I forget. Sean taps me on the head, shouts combinations: *One Two. One Two Three Four, Again! One Two. One Two. Three Four. Five... Six.* Jab. Duck. Jab. Step. Pivot. Punch. I move to the centre of the bandstand. Jab. Duck. Jab. Step. Pivot. Punch. I pause. 'What if I punch too hard?' Sean smiles, 'Pacifist.' Duck. Elbows tucked. I side-step. Kids stop and stare, start taking bets on the pacifist. Tap. *Keep your hands up.* Move. Tap. *Keep your hands up.* Balls of the feet. Step. Pivot. Punch. Duck. Duck. Duck. I've been creating scripts with my trauma therapist to communicate my anger. I rehearse the lines to an empty chair, keep stumbling over the words. *Again!* My trauma therapist watches, later, like a bad movie director. 'Try again – but give me more anger.' *Keep your hands up.* Tap. 'What if I say it too loudly?' Step. 'Try something like this' – he takes the script, passionately delivers the lines. I try not to laugh. Step. Tell my therapist about boxing. Pivot. That I've found an outlet. Punch. He says punching pillows doesn't release anger, just makes you better at punching pillows. Jab. 'Try and run the script again.' Pivot. I try to open my mouth. Duck. Try to force the words to fall out. Duck. Try to shout. Duck. I can't beat the jackhammers rattling outside. Duck. Clunks of metal. Thuds of cement. Side-step. I scrunch the script up as I leave the bandstand. Pivot. I drag my feet down the hospital corridor. Thud. Head down. Thud. I pause. Receptionists goggle around one phone. A murmur that a French teenager has murdered his abusive cleric. Crucifix down his throat. What was it like? Pivot. To be suffocated by his own God. Pivot. The pacifist in his throat.

Can't Eat for That: You Can't Eat for That

A found bop concerning Ratatouille's Litigation, from Eater article <https://london.eater.com/2019/9/24/20881470/michelin-star-france-marc-veyrat-court-cheddar-cheese-souffle>, with an interjection from CBBC's *Horrible Histories*, otherwise inspired by Jackie Chettur's *Can't eat for that: you can't eat for that*, which in turn was inspired by Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*

The French celebrity chef Marc Veyrat who last year saw his restaurant La Maison des Bois demoted by the prestigious Michelin guide is suing the company over what he says is a false claim an inspector made over the inclusion of cheddar cheese in a soufflé.

Veyrat, whose restaurant, located in Manigod in the French Alps, went from holding the maximum three Michelin stars to two in January, demanded his restaurant was removed from the guide altogether. In July this year, he accused the inspectors of "profound incompetence"

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that

Now, the outspoken chef is suing the French tyre company and awards body. As reported in the *Guardian*, Veyrat is now claiming to have been dishonoured and that his restaurant was demoted — at least in part — because of what he says is a false accusation of there being English cheddar in a soufflé, which he says contained only three French cheeses: reblochon, beaufort, and tomme. The chef contests that the Michelin inspector's mistaken identification of cheddar was a result of his adding saffron to the dish, thus giving it a yellow hue. "That's what you call knowledge of a place? It's just crazy," he said.

His case requests that Michelin not only prove an inspector dined at his restaurant. More, Veyrat's lawyer Emmanuel Ravanas is asking the court to force Michelin to hand over documents "to clarify the exact reasons" behind its judgement. A court hearing has been set for 27 November in Nanterre, west of Paris.

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that

"For decades, Marc Veyrat has been used to having his cooking graded, evaluated and compared, and he knows quite well that you don't own a star for life... He accepts it all, as long as the criticism is accurate," Ravanas told AFP. Michelin yesterday responded to the claim: The company said it "understands the disappointment for Mr Veyrat, whose talent no one contests, even if we regret his unreasonable persistence with his accusations."

"Our first duty is to tell consumers why we have changed our recommendation. We will carefully study his demands and respond calmly," Michelin's statement added.

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that

Can't eat for that : You can't eat for that



Dear (Former) Lover,

After *Erased*, *Ascent of the Invisible*, film by Ghassan Halwani

Today I found out that our first date was on
a burial ground beneath the concrete waterfront,
that I passed two mass graves between the bar
where we first kissed and my house,
that the government does not authorise for the bodies
of those kidnapped and buried by our own to be found,
nor for the selling of the martyrs' houses in case they return.

Similarly, I have not yet crossed out your name.

You drove me through the empty streets of Hamra
at times that I didn't know the city's heart pulsed.
We both jumped at the sound of anyone finding us.
We were safe. No one did.

Last you spoke to me, I pretended I did not hear.
When you are far away, I'd rather not remember
something that I cannot have. I now know why
our country is clogged. Why we are dead and alive.
Why we suck on memories
like lozenges 'til there are pebbles between our teeth,
and why that Luna park is haunted.



Dough

Peter Rabbit left his old house in Msaytbeh,
where he and his friends used to catch ladybirds in the garden.
Somewhere in the bushes is a lost turtle, or frogs that his grandpa
brought him, and his brother had released.

Peter Rabbit's garden stopped being tended to. The branches and vines grabbed
for any empty space in the backyard, the same backyard his parents were married in.
The same backyard where he would joke about having been at the wedding,
seeing his parents hold the giant sword, together, and slice through the layers of cake.

He joked about how he remembered seeing his aunts and uncles
in their teenage years, chubbier and younger, and younger.
And although Peter Rabbit didn't know how much his aunts and uncles knew,
he could tell they knew less at that wedding.

He took photos outside the door of that house before his first day of school,
grinning with glimmering teeth before they were spoiled by sweets and alcohol.

And at the top of that door, a tradition from his parent's wedding,
a ball of dough that the bride punches on the doorframe.
If it sticks, the marriage is successful.
If it falls, it's not.

Peter Rabbit found out recently that the dough was peeling
on first being stamped to the door,
it needed extra work to stick to the frame of the household,
sinking off gradually, inevitably.

He still thinks about the ladybirds in the backyard,
the faint memory of bugs that can be beautiful
but endangered,
and Peter Rabbit still believes in their luck anyways.

Xinjiang

British Muslim woman (n). — one who cannot win the argument between society and community.

Uighur (n). — A Turkic ethnic minority group, of which a million members are confined in concentration camps for the crime of being Muslim.

I'm looking at my bare feet. Size 5 — small for a girl's, my mother said, and ugly, like all feet are, with cream crusted tips and wind-chapped skin and

nails with chipped polish,

nails flecked with fungus,

so appalling, they're mesmerising. Back then, I would wear her shoes. Coral pumps, burnished Oxfords, leopard print heels. Leather trainers crisscrossed with neon laces. White platform shoes, never let the ground touch your shoes, walk like Jesus shoes, I-am-the-shit shoes. But today, my feet are

socked. They drown in thick wool, burrow themselves into the carpet, painted nails wriggling

bare. They kiss the rude concrete, slide like pigs rolling in muck, toes slurping shit and vomit

sinfully, unwashed, unclean. I have become the dirt beneath god's fingernails, a sin covering beneath the whitewashed ceiling, a stain. There is no space to pray for forgiveness when

the imam nitpicks the soul from prayer and the women squeeze together to fit and every bismillah is fraught with guilt

the floor is awash in a tide of filth and the guard slips into me every night and the very air recoils from me

and I can't know which way to bow my head when there is no sun to show which way is

East in a windowless women's section and the Imam's tinny athan

West in a windowless prison block and the sound of crisp Mandarin

rolls from the intercom and bounces its cadence into my dhikr, a stray rosary bead. I ask myself which way astronauts pray in space. Can god hear you in space? Can god hear you from

a square of carpet as long as a mother's body, in a mosque in East London

a cell as tall as a slouch, in an invisible camp

whose walls beat closer than your jugular vein?



Mahtab

When I am asleep, he slips the moon into my belly. Every night I wax a little further, the dough of my skin rising, flesh unfolding on the counter. Light seeps from my belly-button in one tight ray, brandishes itself at the sky as if to say, I see you, I see how you have marked me for death, but my insides are gleaming.

I will kindle this light like a vestal virgin, birth a silver disk and frisbee her into the night. My child will set the world alight.

Her hands will be known to every living thing, nothing will escape her love. To think that I could have borne this pearl, that this pearl would shape the tides. O, my child. Place your hem in the hand of the ocean and unravel yourself. I want to see you spinning round and round and round, naked and glorious and laughing.

Speaking into Existence

"I know prayer is about speaking things into existence...
I know people say things they don't always mean."
— Aja Monet

2017 — how to say we lost him one morning like the others.
He hadn't phoned this time,
I couldn't respond to his "I enjoy nothing" with full words,
didn't know I'd never have to again.

2019 — asked for justice, to stop speaking, get over it;
pixels fell apart spectating "something terrible."

~

That day the email came in.
The CEO made tea with salt in by mistake.
My colleague said, "it's sad, but things like this happen all the time."

March — he walked with a stick around the lavender in our garden,
was allergic, had sickle cell;
he was waiting to hear back about his Work Capability tribunal.
After he died, I learnt his name means "come home" in Yoruba.

August — Dele's death became clearer.
Coroner's staff supposed,
"it would have been cremated because it's cheaper."

~

Anniversaries breathe monthly
often spin, sit-in still.
I hear the cusp of pain as physical,
look closely in the mirror to say, "I can see you, I can definitely see you."

We think nearly 70000 thoughts a day, 90% the same as the day before;
swell these days into years.

2020 — eyes can fill up so quickly,
living as four different people, notes empty.
I know that death can be defining,
with the words they left and the ways to disappear;
may we speak ourselves as found.

Warm Tones

And on certain days fear fits into fade,
the colour of hiding is dark orange.

When I was younger, I'd shelter my brothers in excitement
and join them, take blue blankets to our soft landings,
under the bed where the board games were kept.
We'd stay days to clear traces, make faces at winter.

Bedrooms are safe — some things stay true.
When I was seven, I first found bathroom floors could be cold.
My parents ripped pink carpet like old gums,
showed us how to scoop snow. I learnt that sick could be yellow,
at eighteen, if you don't eat enough;
how nausea sounds like remembering —
not all locks mean home.

Purging is also orange, a stranger's name,
not wanting the words to say what happened.

Once or twice in life, you find a person colourless
who maybe takes your colours too- sells your light to the ground.
The colour of their greed was never green, but absent.

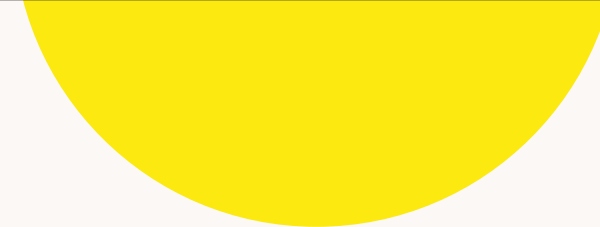


The Brick House

After Mandisa Apena & Christy Ku

The exposed brick in the kitchen tells me you used to end here, before Dad extended your asbestos sky, the constellations of Artex hanging over our heads. I am too aware of your borders; the question hanging in the front door frame, the knots of tree trunks behind the shed, sandwiched between concrete and rotting fence. You grew palm trees glazed with snow, bookending the spot where I would sit on top of the climbing frame, talk to the neighbor boy peeking over the fence. The overgrown magnolia at the end of the garden, your flowing ball gown, evergreen leaves that brushed the grass, branches curved into an archway leading to the pond with the big silver and gold carp I would tear up slices of bread for, watch them lip the crumbs. Do you remember when Dad overfilled the pond and the silver carp floated up onto dry land, found a new pond in your dirt? I still soak in your waters, as lonely as a gold carp, give thanks for every liquid breath. I wish the pond would overflow into an ocean that surrounds me wherever I go. Sometimes you feel like a lake and I remember how to swim. Sometimes I sink and think about how every friend is a neighbour I only know from the neck up, how I can only leave you with a pocket full of bricks. When I am miles away, drowning, heavy with your walls, I repeat to myself:

You end here.



tree trunks
Dad
I am too aware of your borders;
branches
you
surround me wherever I go.
I am heavy with

You

I stare at the blood vessels in the back of my eye
forking like bare branches in winter on the monitor,
marvel at how every man has a forest of fractals growing inside him.
Dad cycles into my eye for a drink,
varicose vein bulging out of his shin with each pedal turn
threatening to grow a forest in a forest in the forest in our back garden.
Antlers in headlights, antlers mounted on handlebars,
under stagelights I pull twigs and antlers and handlebars from my throat
watch Dad become nothing more than a story I tell myself and strangers for applause.
Honour him as more than the lovetap of a wing mirror to a rib,
a shattered cycle helmet, a pillow-case of loose branches biking over Dartmoor
only weeks after the accident. Through the backseat window I watch him emerge from a pub,
only halfway over the moor, dripping, clutching at his ribs in the middle of a storm,
lightning forking over the hills, we pick him up, like a wounded bird.
I sit lonely in the backseat listening to Dad's laboured breath in the front,
bronchi straining from all the cigarettes he manufactured,
telegraphing my asthma yet to come.

Take away the home and there's just the forest
baring its neck to the wind, heavy with all the leaves it's lost
and all the breath it's forgotten how to give.

A Fisherman Goes Out to Space

Signed up years ago.
We ran out of food on earth.
Tragic scavengers.

A dangerous job.
But someone's got to do it.
Needed the money.

Analyse the sphere.
You would not survive for long.
Decide not to land.

The sunlight has gone.
Something topples overboard.
Glowing eels feast.

The blue, thick with crabs.
Bad omen, a boat adrift
requires repairs.

As far as the eye
sees, a graveyard for still skiffs.
Teeth in the water.

A distant dry hope.
Stars at war in the strong tides.
Desert in the throat.

Cook fish on the sand.
Try not to think of the bones.
Let the swash retreat.

Dream then, sleeplessly.
Normal problems, normal life.
Being late for work.

An autumn morning.
Fog crowding the dim streetlight.
Your breath in the air.



Moving Day

When I wake up, I let the pale morning down on my head. Lately, I try to see how much I can hold in the gaps before I start crying on the train again.

I want to be a miracle, someone who isn't afraid of a little mysticism. I want to be a cryptid. Something someone will see. Disputed. Incomprehensible. Gold and shining. Wearing eyeshadow in the dark parts of town. Worshipped, a finger in my mouth, swallowing a bottle of wine, whole. Nail polish scraping off on our teeth. Considering my body — a church being rebuilt.

I don't look up when I walk, find it easier to navigate using the way my shadow splits in two at the streetlight by the roundabout. Learn directions easier than learning my elbow curve. The way my face scrunches when I smile. Spend time imagining what people look like from their shoes. I will love myself again, be as simple as learning the new way home. I brought my old bed with me, the stickers still peeling. I learnt last week that the trees I'd been watching grow outside my apartment building have been fake the whole time. That they will be plastic saplings forever. Try to remember ever seeing them smaller.

In my nightmares, I see myself in a dark room. Bodies of plants wilting and dry at my feet. The flies alive and rife on the leaves. Coating myself in soil. Letting the floorboards give in and closing my eyes to the small buzz. Lately, I try to see how much I can hold in the gaps before I start spilling.

So here's what I can do right now: I can keep at least one part of the flat clean. Or maybe just the kitchen surface clean. If I can just keep the couch arm clean, then I will know that I am coping. If I can just keep the bathroom sink clean, I will know that I am coping. Maybe I want to go out. So I will pretend the bedroom is the best new thing. Because when it's right, it is. But the green outside the window is slightly further away. Today I am an empty restaurant, somewhere, the tables being set in the white noise. At least if no one arrives, I can sample the ghost. Have a purpose. Keep things clean. Water the fake plants. The open sign turned closed, the blinds pulled tightly round the sun.



Sundays

and on certain Sundays we'd pretend to be teenagers
only girls were allowed to play
Auntie/Mum/Dad/Adult downstairs
and that meant putting on make-up in the air
and shopping with empty bags
we had to be older and shorten our skirts
I would tell Davina what we were doing
now we're going to be drunk-party
you have to drink port
we had to make the fizzy happen by squinting
our ankles could brush when we fell
I'd flick my dead Motorola open
you call your boyfriend
I'll be him
Davina would flip her Nokia
I'm so drunk baabbe
she'd say into my phone
I love you so muuuchh
I'd say into hers
our breath could rub
to find her boyfriend
we'd try out the *baabbe*
on the soft of our lips
on our tiptoes — *muuuchh*
seeing what make-out looks like
druunkk
sideways to the mirror
then under the covers
making the tent
we'd keep trying the fizzy
making waves in the covers
our wind-voices and giggles
druunkkbaabbemucchh
shifting the Pure laundry powder air
we'd want our tongues to meet for the first time
to make us float above our bed
every Sunday we'd try again.

An Ode to the Aunty Who Dissects My Silences for Dinner

how she calls my name in prayer, thank God
her daughter didn't turn out like me
tell me how your daughter circled to the moon
thrice, how she built her own spaceship from
your neighbour's Fiat, taught herself to cook
up a sadhya, never talks back

how your wagging tongue drags
me to a Stonehenge of my failures
beats me up, for the wrong yearnings

I turn these legends of daughters into perfect pills,
take three for lunch, still wake up the same

I run away and my name slips from your
conversations, no one bends to pick it up

I kicked up a beehive today
it sounded just like you



The World is Burning and I Have Discovered: This

Barbican Young Poets 2020

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