

An Orchestra of Feathers and Bone

Barbican Young Poets 2017



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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

Creative Learning aims to shape and deliver new approaches to engagement with the arts, involving people of all ages across a diverse range of styles, genres and disciplines.

Our programme helps young people find their creative voice. Providing access to the best arts events, platforms for creativity, opportunities to gain skills, jobs, and working together to bring their ideas to life.

We bring together our world-class artistic partners with students and communities in ground breaking new ways to create inspiring arts experiences.

We create new routes for people to take part in the arts from first experiences to higher education programmes and professional training.

We use our 30 years' experience of working in east London to launch cultural partnerships that offer outstanding creative opportunities for every young person across the eight east London boroughs.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow through young people's arts and education programmes across every art form - creating platforms for creativity, programming with and for young people.

Our pledge to young people

We will

Help you access and afford outstanding arts events

By offering accessibly priced tickets to Barbican events for 14-25 year olds and putting on free events at the Barbican and in your community.

Give you a platform to be creative

By delivering inspirational, hands on arts experiences for every 8-16 year old in east London by 2020 and giving you opportunities to perform and showcase your work.

Enable you to gain skills and get jobs in a 21st century economy

By providing arts and training opportunities for over 10,000 young people and artists by 2020.

Listen to what you want

Programming events by, with and for you. Listening to your ideas and supporting the teachers and artists working with you to bring them to life.

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Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning is delighted to welcome you to the Barbican Young Poets Anthology 2017; a poetry collection that showcases the work of our immensely talented community of young artists.

At Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning, we work with young people to unlock their creativity and raise their confidence and self-esteem. All of the work you read inside this anthology has been created by emerging poets aged 17-25, living in east London and across the rest of the city, who have been working together as part of a community of young poets for the past six 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, 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. Through this process, each poet goes on a journey, discovering what is unique about their own artistic voice, supporting and challenging each other, and evolving together as part of a collective of young artists.

Always ready for new experiences, our poets are increasingly stepping up to nurture a new generation of poetic talent – 2017 marks the third year that the Barbican Junior Poets programme will run with Waltham Forest school children, led by artist Paula Varjack, and co-tutored by members of the Barbican Young Poets community as they develop their skills as artist educators.

In short, the Barbican Young Poets are drivers for change – their fresh, diverse voices are defining the shape of the poetry scene locally, nationally and internationally, and they are an essential part of the community of young artists who we support and develop here at the Barbican and Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

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 commitment and dedication to each of the poets. Jacob and Rachel's passion for each and every young person they work with makes an extraordinary contribution to their development, as they flourish as young people, and push the boundaries of what it means to be an artist making work today, and in the future.

It is ever a delight to work with such a talented group of young people; we hope you find the same enjoyment in reading the work collected here in their anthology.

Jenny Mollica

Head of Creative Learning
Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

We're not quite there yet, but we're fast approaching a decade of Barbican Young Poets work. The core model for the programme remains the same – 12 sessions offering a mix of writing prompts, editing challenges, feedback and performance exercises, work towards the anthology you now hold in your hands (or pore over through a screen, if you're reading an archived PDF) and preparation for a showcase event. Our guest facilitators this year were R.A. Villanueva and Hannah Silva, who respectively invested sonnets with new life and challenged fallback or default thinking in performance. Rachel Long reprised her role as Assistant Tutor, and brought with her the sharp eye and sensitivity that's characteristic of so much of her work.

Although so much of the core structure has been refined and settled over the years, each iteration of the programme has its own individual profile. There's still so much that can be done, and much of the most exciting developments are happening beyond the walls of the building – whether it's Kieron Rennie and Amina Jama (BYP alums) performing at the Queen's Gallery, or Belinda Zhawi (BYP alum) and Malakai Sargeant producing a regular poetry event at a bookshop in Shoreditch. The poets who pass through this programme are not just voices for the future, they're present and making things happen, both for themselves and for each other. And long may they continue.

Jacob Sam-La Rose

Artistic Director / Lead Facilitator

Lauren Monaghan-Pisano

Creative Learning Producer (Theatre, Dance and Poetry)



Valley

once lush hills now barely peak from a wasteland

a thousand ants have met to climb your ribs like stairs

leaving trails on your wrist

making hammocks of your collar bones

your body— a country road filled with potholes

carved out to hold laughter

like the crease in your cheek

your eyes— wells of love

storing water for plants

that do not have soil to hug their roots

midnight waters lap at your shores—

I don't need to see a leaf on the surface to feel the ripples

there is no space between us

there never was



Privilege

Black hands to build coffins; ask privilege if he can recognise the sky.
Black hands to build coffins; ask privilege if he can recognise the sky.
You meet him at school, at work, in your bed.
You meet him at school, at work, in your bed.
Ask your Black hands to build him the sky.
You recognise privilege, meet coffins at school, at work, in your bed.

He is bloodied collar, self-proclaimed English, living vicariously through Thatcher struggle.
He is bloodied collar, self-proclaimed English, living vicariously through Thatcher struggle.
Your birth certificate is trauma, Black British Caribbean.
Your birth certificate is trauma, Black British Caribbean.
Vicariously he is bloodied trauma, self-proclaimed through Thatcher
Your Black birth certificate living English, British, Caribbean struggle collar.

Can a Black woman date a white man and still be Black?
Can a Black woman date a white man? And still be Black?
Can a white man understand his privilege? Yes is no.
Can a white man understand his privilege? Yes is no.
Understand: a white man can date a Black woman. Yes.
Still, no white man privilege be Black.

Can you build a man? Yes. No.
White privilege is a birth certificate, is the sky.
Recognise in your white man bloodied hands, privilege.
He can collar your Black to coffins.
Meet: ask if he can understand Black, Black,
and his trauma is self proclaimed through Thatcher.
Still date him: Black, Black-Caribbean woman vicariously living British struggle.
Be a bed, at school, at work.

Relationship

We are a full stop.
Memory of you on my skin is the absence of an airhole,
soft taste of a pistol
shooting ethanol,
blankets smothering the never-to-be born double-barrelled children's noise,
they now orphans
join the women before who riot,
steal your later,
leave you an antler
of a man, buried in earth.
I try to grow a plant.
It folds like a clipping of satin.
I forget that chemically imbalanced rain
can only nourish pianos,
playing accidentals until the colour pain.
Your face, a shade of nitro
searches for solace in the hornet's
nest of Tinder swipes and the past
right. Why plan a future with a penis?
Wearing satire,
laughing at me the loner,
you a saint.
Your repetition of I am a good boyfriend a stone
of fear
you carry like an oath.

You carry like an oath
of fear
your repetition of I am a good boyfriend a stone,
you a saint
laughing at me the loner
wearing satire,
right. Why plan a future with a penis?
Nest of Tinder swipes and the past
searches for solace in the hornets.
Your face, a shade of nitro
playing accidentals until the colour pain
can only nourish pianos.
I forget that chemically imbalanced rain,
it folds like a clipping of satin.
I try to grow a plant
of a man, buried in earth,
leave you an antler,
steal your later,
join the women before who riot.
They now orphans.
Blankets smothering the never-to-be born double-barrelled children's noise.
Shooting ethanol,
soft taste of a pistol,
memory of you on my skin is the absence of an airhole.
We are a full stop.



N.E.G.U.S: Deed Poll

I sound weird like “nigga” with a hard “r”.¹
You can feel me like
“r”, a fishhook in your gut—
stomach gushing, with hands raised in worship.
I am showered like kisses
or curses on a lover’s head—
the sound of bullets on a tin roof. I rain.
The cadence of beauty is weird.
Hard to hear under certain words,
completely inaudible under others: me, nigga.

Closer to the Sun

I am often told to listen
for God in nature,
that the heavens
declare his glory,
that the skies
proclaim
the work of his hands.

A fat, furry loaf of a dog
barks at a seagull.

As the gull flies

so the dog follows,

an unleavened hound
trying so hard
to offer itself up,
begging to live
in the belly of the sky.

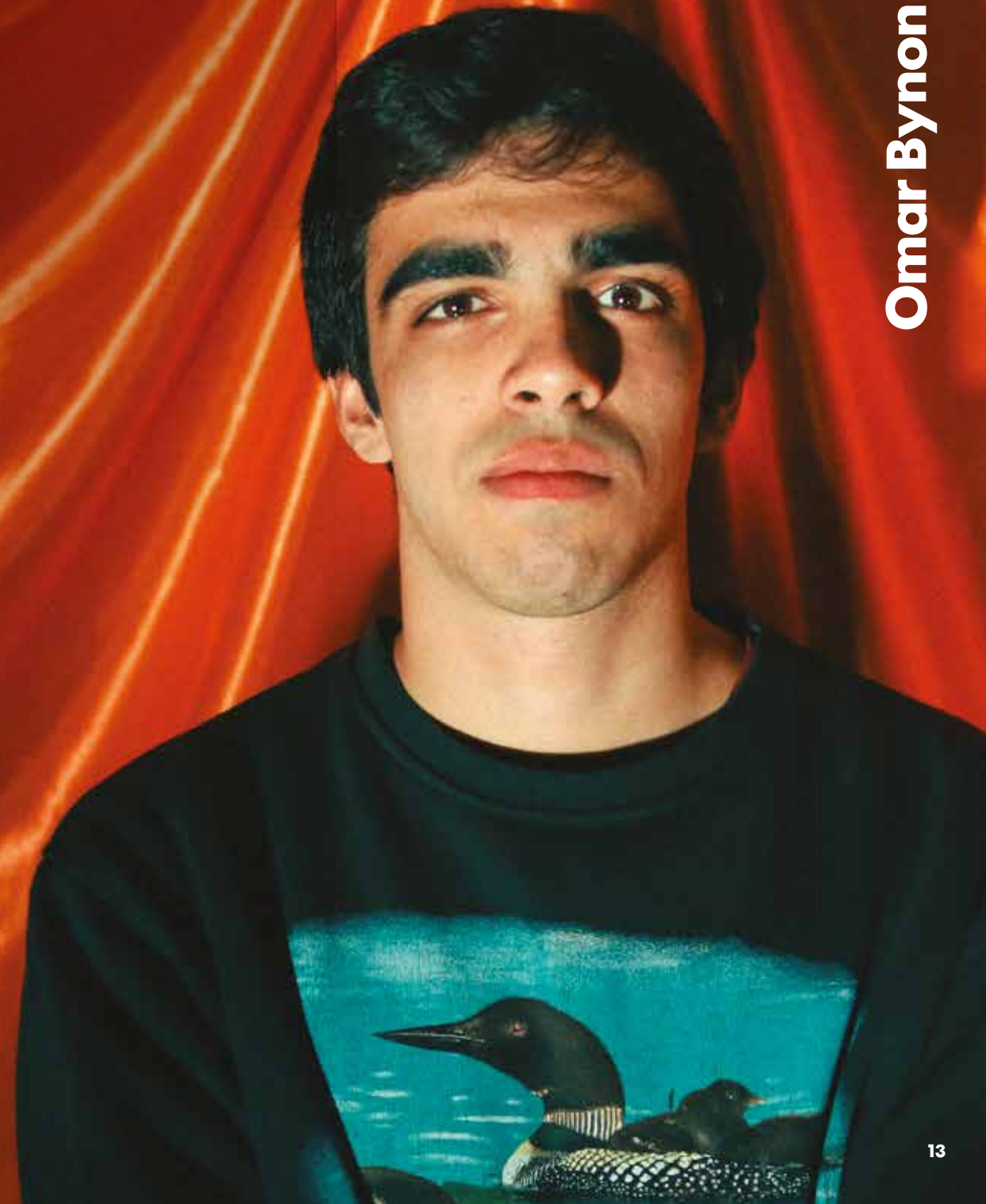
We laugh
as if we don’t break bread
every week
in communion,
trying to get closer
to God’s sun.

¹ Childish Gambino, *Bonfire*.

N.E.G.U.S. is a novel verse form devised by Jeremiah Brown. The first line is an excerpted hip-hop lyric that includes the ‘N’ word. The total number of lines in the poem is the amount of syllables in the first line (excerpted lyric). All the words in the first line must be used over the course of the poem, one word per line. The ‘N’ word must be used in the last line. The ‘N’ word should only appear in the first and last lines.

I Go For Long Walks Now

I carry unread texts in the bags under my eyes as breadcrumbs for the pigeons. But pigeons don't eat texts. Pigeons eat bread and chips and one time I saw what must have been at least 20 fighting over a half-eaten hot dog and it reminded me of Oxford Street on Boxing Day and storm clouds fighting but they don't eat the things I keep in the bags under my eyes so the bags get bigger and I find important things to use as an excuse for my distance. Although I'm not distant not really, I'm thinking about you all the time and this city is small thanks to TFL and Coltan. People keep offering me the scissors they use to cut negative people out of their life and the lighters they use to burn bridges and the biscuit cutters they use to shrink their circles but I don't want to shrink my circle I just want my friends to be okay. So I text them every day and lend them money when I have it and buy them drinks and fruit and kiss them when they want me to but I've still got bags under my eyes and they've still got problems and the pigeons still won't eat the things I can't deal with. I know you're not looking for a wizard but it hasn't stopped me practicing this disappearing act. Spending all my time racking my brain for other people's wisdom. Calling my mum to ask how her day's going. Sighing on the tube. Sometimes I feel like heart emojis are all I have to give.



Article 40.3.3

For Donna, and all quiet women made loud

Echogram glints crest waves in spite, in the gleam your heels squall.
I hold your seams by the Lee; from your shoulders pansies fall.

Chip butties in the waiting room wait wet as you read pamphlets.
Tales of home and state, wraiths with harvested hips stitched quiet.

Sugar and milk a stranger's salve for blood linen and empty dial tone.
Vinegar rinses the act clean, your womb tilled ripe from loam.

Mouth your shame on faces you meet as you butter apples in hymn.
Traces of your grit on alien hands that rent you within.

Sonogram of valves quavering kept hushed for the glimmerman¹.
Mind you are at all times hidden, harmed, hollow on demand.

Anger whispers down aorta, your feet wake kissing arteries.
Extremists cloaked in black cotton, our legs dance blood furies.

Our ire clipped in Yeatsian meter, we bruise our bony ends a dawn.
Come take your holy lands, come out and bind us with our wrong.

Keening

Da and I make Esker as pilgrimage. 20 minutes from Dublin Airport.
Long line of Byrnes stretch deep from Sligo, scattered like rose quartz
by the side of the N4. A relative had died. Spinster aunt with the air
of a shop cat. We were told in halting laughs: she was to be buried
elsewhere. Spot stolen by a young Jane Doe, tossed with our ancestors
like a forecourt-bought rose. *She'd a bet de heads off em, ev'ry wall.*

¹ During World War II, Ireland was neutral and the period was referred to as the 'Emergency'. Glimmerman was a pejorative term for government officials who would go door-to-door monitoring gas use in households during restricted hours.



Parked Listening to Kings of Convenience

A maroon rosary dangles from the rear view mirror and the silence caked between our sober, un-showered bodies resonates like a freshly plucked strum. Our mouths, tired of distorting equilibriums, are shut, stained with air caught from the road trip, windows down. Quartz crystal epiphanies mixed with stupor has made the summer afternoon autumnal, sharp edged, luring us to yet another drive around because getting lost has always been fun, especially now when it's easier to find our way back. Before the engine revs back to life the next song plays, a shade melancholic, lyrics light. We leave our conversations, sink deeper into the green and grey of Richmond Park.

Tarot

My love, sometimes I sit after breakfast
at the kitchen table, doing division
until I figure it out. What each bill is
and how it fits into the total budget.

My mother, the voice in my head, tells me
to avoid going into the red, to make sure I have
something stored for a rainy day, a nest egg
in case the money stops coming.

She is my Queen of Pentacles,
With her dark hair and eyes,
Properly investing time, energy and money
makes a comfortable home she told me, once.

My grandmother whispers in my heart
that palms can be crossed with silver,
that silver can afford me a future.

She is my Empress, with her fluid
wisdom and unfailing intuition.
I hear her tell me to give priority to my passions
and I will reap the abundant rewards

My sister once thought I played tarot by ear,
discerning meaning from symbology
like I interpreted her dreams. Pentacles became coins,
swords became actions and words portended by premonition.

She will always be my Queen of Cups
with fair hair and compassionate eyes
brimming with love and support,
my constant reminder for the power of positivity.

The cards weigh heavy like a thousand unknown
destinies undecided. I shuffle them, cut them thrice
and thrice again into 3 piles. Fan them like peacock feathers.

Yet they are lighter than the accounting books
that litter the kitchen table we both sit at,
78 cards fails to equally divide by 5 but not by piles of 3
and these numbers do not rely on interpretation for truth

I never told my sister I cheated the reading
with a book in my lap under the table.
I added each interpretation together like a sum.

You, my love, knew this. From behind your paper
across the table you tease me gently,
*How could you not love a woman
who cheats at the Tarot?*



Blood Vessels in the Heart

There are branches of lightning
that keep my heart beating
and pumping blood to keep me alive.
I think about what happens when they burst,
how the heart seizes up.
Cardiac arrest they called it,
like it's a criminal offence, caught.



Chasing Light

waiting for water to return
to this stretched shore, we catch

flickers of a murmuration, starlings,
blurred on the blade of the horizon,

climbing air: an orchestra of feather and bone
weaving in and out of wind—

they dive, and for a second the sky is empty,
then volta, full of flutter— light, an allegro

on this body of birds rising
into a dance of disappearing;

beside you, new love, a cold tide seeps,
bears witness to the fugue that speaks

of how they trust the air enough
to fall

The Immigrant's Lament

A Distillation, after Roger Robinson¹

Snow melting turns memory
(of warmth and seasoning)
damp.
Grey is a daily stain –
men like ghosts,
conversations of crumbling phrases,
prayers no longer good, god watches –
the sky falls into pieces.
He sleeps face on wall –
and wakes in the shadow of the rumshop.

Oestrogen and Testosterone

who knew we would look like
died and splayed out
like a firework
only to be extinguished
forced to stub
the wings of a dragonfly
across the slide
exploding within
by the sugar coated blimp
our own wicks

much more walled these rhombuses the real you it has taken close to three years
of fragility to make you cry
layers i realise
and the young ones might be better off as you prepare
layers learning to find its centre to teach
to break your class
through how to fine the
before we make it to the pure black within area of a rhombus (base x height)

¹ The Distillation is a novel verse form devised by Joshua Judson. Take an existing poem with an even number of lines. Write your own poem using only the words of the original. Your poem must be exactly half the original line count, and retain the original poem's title (with accreditation). Maintain a formal integrity of the original poem— for example, if the original consists of stanzas, mimic the number of stanzas.



After Art Club

At the front desk, next to the Goldfish; I swallowed my three houses. Waited.
My shearing hands picked at the tiny drops of porcelain in my wrists. Looking out of the window, I saw that the old winter leaves had expelled into the air. I told them to go home, *to a real home*, tongue-stained after eating too many purple raisins. There is not much left to say to a leaf that knows gold as its skin. I look at my just-born skin, wonder if moths live behind my freckles and whether that makes it easier for the cold to creep into the pinkness of my cheeks. It is here, front desk day-dream, where I learn of body and rip the cuts in my jeans. I trace the outline of a fish on my femur through the mountain gaps, knee tells me that the soul is a delicate, holding ground. So I'm chanting, over and over, via morse code foot-tapping that I had only tasted life in my third home, the real home, the one that tasted like cherries in my throat.

We Drink Citrus in the Cold to Cure Your Arthritis

After we poured dozens of lemon juice down our throats,
I look at the several left-over skins, what waste, like winter.

My small house of zest
houses lovers in stomachs.
They too mourn winter.

I have told a man I grieve much better now.
My bones child-dance a song of gustatory-electricity,
taste the bitter promise of America. A tongue - too full
of cold and wife kissing will speak, *but will speak only in winter.*

Are you happier now you talk? I suppose, I say,
ropes stretched across my two legs, intertwining,
I suppose I am a lot less young. I spit a lemon seed.
How unforgivably small, how easily ignored,
it will not survive the winter.

How to Let Go of the Moon

i

The moon doesn't exist, snarls John, well, not like that stop twisting my words! and stop philosophizing, the colour, he says, is parlour dove off-white. Screwfix do Dulux cans for 3.99.

He's been practising the exact brushstrokes for a waxing crescent, holding ruler fingers against cloudless nights, measuring centre to perimeter, absent-mindedly mouthing pi-r-squared.

I catch tears streaming down his face into pints. It's the moon that controls the saline sea I offer (as a rudimentary handkerchief). We must have looked in wonder for years. My mum says

you dream more when it's full. John says come on now, stop being obsessive, there's onions cooking, Zane Malik just had a break up, morning drizzle, sweat, the news, there's a million reasons. Don't be soft.

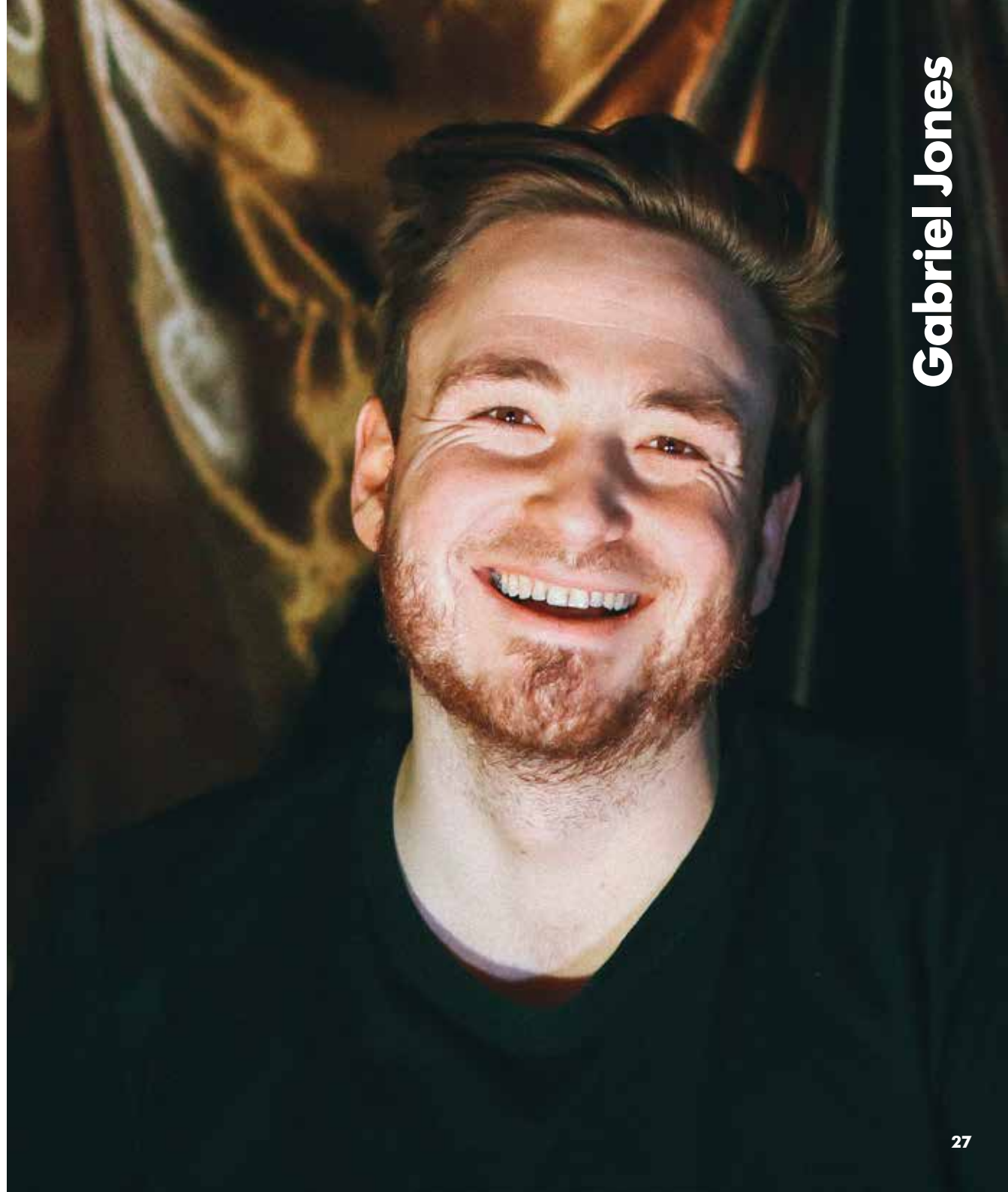
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I remember a half year spent inside ruining my parents' furniture, painting off-white circles on the backs of chairs and walls, trying to dive into the glowing targets, banging my head and swearing.

I remember stretching out both arms, tiptoeing one foot on America, one in the Atlantic, pulling against orbit, prising moon from hanging, just about getting lips around and swallowing the swollen fruit whole.

The un-chewed glow golfballed my oesophagus and I preened to show how close it sat to my heart, bumping into bushes at night. At least now I have a best friend who can say from the temporary dark

You've gobbled the moon again, fatty, you're burping bits of rock and I know to reach into myself, take a gentle fist around the moon hold my arm above my head and open my palm.





Power Chord

The river plays a triad
through the bridge,
always has.

The bridge's two arches
plant three pillar fingers
onto the fretboard
of the riverbed.

Then autumn,
oppressive rainfall.
The angst of the river
fighting the way of things
and winning.

That middle finger,
the major third,
too nice, too fake to stand.
The crumbling mortar,
a drum roll.
The pillar falls
with a crash.

The river plays
faster, louder, realer.

Macro

Thermal Photograph of Human Couple

When our glows combine

there are streetlights in the house.
The cat, padding from the outer edges of us,
comes to bask in our glow.

Oestrogen

You are good for me because you stopped me killing moths.
You told me they are made of tissue paper.
Your mind makes them at home.

Fallopian Tube

I like how your hair spreads out in the bath,
water granting each strand its own life,
and how they all choose to stay close—
form a bleach blonde halo.

Blood Vessels in the Heart

The golf ball in my chest is yours to polish, bounce,
or strike over the pavilion of the bowling green
in the village I grew up in as you see fit.

Chromosomes

I am the speed-bump on College Street that you took in third,
scraping the underside of your freedom in the process.

Skin on a Fingertip

I'm seven, watching the tractors plough identity into the fields
from the window of the car. I leave my own fingerprint
grubby on the pane. They don't match.

With a Wooden Spoon

Cement mixed charlatan-wizard from boneflour
roasted with ash and honey

crushed full-moon backwards. A forgotten cement,
honey-sick, cooked up from the wrong book.

Unbuilt buildings cry out: *Honey,*
cement yourself into a future. *Outlast the Coliseum.*

*Honey, give your full-moon bones
up to the oven. You've got ideal hips for cement.*

The Policeman's Daughter

She watches in the mirror as a moth
climbs the gauze over her father's eyebrow.

Once he's finished with her hair (twin puffs
not as neat as her mother normally does

but good enough for a Saturday)
she leads him by a fistful of elbow cloth

to the garden so she can thread another
stalk of hard grass through his sleeve.

His brow-moth flies away. She chooses
a dandelion to go behind each ear (invented

protection) and a daisy to cover the scrape
hidden in his beardscruff. She will make him

the scarecrow of his own field. He asks
about yesterday's spelling test. She lies.

She wraps dock leaves around his knuckles,
tells him there's someone she likes, pushes

into the pass of his dock-gloved hands
over her cheeks. She pronounces him

sufficiently adorned. He waters her knees
mud-free and limps inside to make lunch

for her to eat and him to pick at
and her mother to come home to.





Reclamation

*"The ocean remembers
what generations forget"*
Memory, Ally Ang

at night, streetlights stitch the
island like a quilt. at its edge, the ocean
flails against a city which remembers
its excision, and thus expands. home is what
happens when generations
refuse to forget.

Terraces

my father calls
me over. he stands
next to a jasmine bush
that wears its moisture
like sleep. he points
at two leaves, stitched
into a bivouac. he cups it
and teases it apart.
when his palms open
he holds a fighting spider
like a grain of rice
in the terraces
of his hands.

The Art of Crying

Her hand, her shoe and her remote are why you are crying.
She always asked afterwards: *Oya, why you are crying?*

A letter from school led to leather belts and Nigerian anger.
Your father never stayed her hand. This is why you are crying.

*Your cousins in the village have droughts and real problems.
Go and send them your water if you wanna start crying.*

So when your oyinbo friend gets shouted at by his mother
you cannot respect him for his crying.

She beat the back-talk and bad seeds out of you, ensuring
no other woman could have your heart crying.

You sat, red-eyed, beside her hospital bed, with weary eyes
in clothes from yesterday, begging God to stop her from dying.

Pallbearers prepared final goodbyes before she met St. Peter.
Oh, selfish Henry, how you have perfected the art of crying.



Henry Ofori-Kuragu

The Land Was Burnt

The locals spoke Spanish to my sister's olive brown skin,
laughed when they realised she was not one of them.

The land was burnt so the flights were cheap.
Forest fires had run through the island,

finally released. A red bikini and almost-breasts.
Wear a *t-shirt*, left in a crumpled pile at the water's edge.

Later my mother lathered cream on my whimpering
chest, blushing and cracked on first exposure.

Hunger

I want to tell her that her lipstick is red.
I want to tell her that her lipstick is red
and that her lipstick is looking at me.
I want to tell her that I believe her lips are that red
underneath the lipstick the lipstick
and when she breathes out
it almost sits on my collarbone.

She talks about a house she used to share
with her girlfriend.

I want to tell her that her lipstick is red
and that I am glad she had at one point,
at least,
a girlfriend.

She talks about the creative process
and I imagine her covered in paint
and nothing else,
just animal, animal red
and I don't want to touch her
just to watch her dance in acrylic,
painting her heartbeat onto the outside of her body.

Her friend asks her a question and she puts wine to her lips.
I think of red, and red,
and she puts the wineglass down recklessly
and I want to ask her how she holds
her girlfriend but she is talking
about a husband,
who she holds, I imagine,
and children,
and I hear what she meant by girlfriend,
and I fight the urge to demand
that she gives me her lipstick
so I can eat it
all-in-one-go,
say that that was why I was looking
cheeks red now,
red red,
say
that was all I was hungry for.

A Cold Place

Cold hands make the best fists.
At 14, I was told I had the nose of a fighter.
I was a boxer then.
If I had shown my teeth,
people would have believed me.
At 13, a play fight with a friend
left me with a mouthful of blood.
He apologised. I thanked him
for knocking out my hesitation
and a tooth that had been hanging loose
like my father's silence. My jaw relaxed.
I'm not sure if that friend was scared
of my bloody grin, my thanks,
or my tolerance for pain.
Mother suggested discipline,
found me a sensei who said fists were the best kind.
Mine became taut, worn Lagos tyres,
stripped of their warmth
and memories of blood. Outside the dojo,
I shed blood in fights I never knew
I was having. My mouth, a trophy cabinet.
Teeth of different sizes, lined up.
My tongue polishes them daily
always stopping at the gap.
A cold place like these hands.
Nothing lives here.

The Heart (Blood Cells)

volcanic vibrance
veins for pathways of magma
it pumps with a brilliance
the same one blood leaks with
when the skin erupts
and the heart forces the blood through
we have too much to give
smoke, fire and death



Marta's Thimble

What we spun was in the hard and shining years, was free
of blood. Our sleepless finger pads unpricked by one another's needles.
We agree that I will have my mother's lips,
one giant thumb for twisting threads
together, and an ankle numb from peddling.

I dropped her stitches.
She used to bleed for stories
to wear for her guests.

Marta's Thimble takes the form of a Gogyohshi-ku, a novel verse form devised by Jacob Sam-La Rose. The form consists of a Gogyohshi (five lines of poetry, as defined by Taro Aizu) extended by a haiku.

Skin

I could only wear my skin for you
like a second coat
to lay over the ground
when it was raining. To leave
over the chair in the kitchen
when it was warmer,
with scuff marks
at the elbows and the wrists.

Sometimes you buy your clothes
with the holes already in them.
Your uncle in the garden
sweeps all the broken branches
to an altar-heap upon the back porch.
He does not understand
that clothes cost more that way, with holes in,
tended with the salt and pumice of seven mirrored years of
one another's hands.
We long since found the thread-ends.
We had pulled them loose.

My skin was laid across the kitchen chair.
Greedy then, I was too greedy for
for a covered set of bones.
To be cloistered wholly
in the echo of an overcoat.
I collected it to wear on colder days,
when it began to smell of pencil case—
when we brought up the leaves for burning
in great handfuls,
strew them over everything (my bones,
an old bedsheet, the empty kitchen chair).
We covered every single thing
with leaves for burning.

You rolled up your sleeves as if
the frozen forearms weren't
already threaded bare.
As if you still had extra pockets left
to keep your keys in,
and a second skin to wear.

Santorini Sunset Blues (12 Line Blues)

Accompanied by a howling wind,
the sun hollers the same tune
each night. We watch it fall
from his mouth, eyes

following his final bow
as he drops till he is down on his knees,
half-soaked in the Aegean sea.
Hands outstretched

as if we could touch this star, the sky
drawing its curtains,
camera shutters bawling
baby don't go.





Tower Blocks + Coltrane

I no longer listen to jazz.

We searched for profit in aluminium dusted ash trays
and imbued our lungs with the echo of rattling hi-hats;
chest bursting
to the beat of the nine to five scat,
minds lurching
through basslines in tarmac tracks,
soul searching
to the point where there was no coming back
from the shrieks of reinforced concrete
creeping through your two bedroom flat.
You shrieked
as I crept through your two bedroom flat,
reinforcing concrete tears I once made a home out of.

Elevators hum the anthem of the deceased.
Caskets with translucent skin
that entice the stares of strangers,
perpetually transcending,
arriving and departing,
pulling corpses through days spent filing away
untouched spray paint and dust-clad vinyls.
The heart is stifled, its beats made criminal;
if it could skip, at least it would still be free.

The jaws unclench and stagger open,
unleashing a conveyer belt of flaccid bodies
and the stench of ambitions wanked away in our childhoods.
We continue to build on the foundations we laid
more scattered than crusty tissues across bedroom floors;
when bored, we fought—
we made forts out of our thoughts
until we lay
scattered across bedroom floors,
composing syncopated melodies for the
downstairs neighbours.
I always used to clap on the one and the three.

My hands,
calloused and blistered from catching bodies
plummeting from moments of temerity,
seek your neck in a bid to sedate your nightmares.
I used to dream in different colours and hues
but my monochrome vision painted you grey,
black and blue
when you took flight
down stairs—
your body deceives me.
I weep in alto.

Imminent Catastrophe

I don't want to be someone who believes in the stars but when Mercury started going backwards my mother spilt sugar all over the kitchen floor and when I spoke to my girlfriend on Skype she froze, her face a ghost-orb while I cried out hello hello and she could hear me but I couldn't hear her. My birthday is between the lion and the virgin which explains why I am constantly running between wolfing other people's blood and shedding my own. I don't want to believe it but sometimes the moon comes down from her mezzanine and she predicts Imminent Catastrophe and that I should steer clear of redhead girls.

Blackbird

"I'll tell you what Freedom is to me. No fear."
Nina Simone

The realisation that he has no power over you plays over your head like the first four chords of Blackbird. Someone should have told you this day would come. You want to go back there right now. Pick yourself up, and into a waltz, singing: *This day will come*. A chasm opens up between you and the past. A girl falls down a gap and shatters. Somewhere she'll do this forever. While somewhere else he asks what you are doing with your life the answer is *Not living in fear of you*.





Sunday Dinner with Sodom

Papa says there is a special seat in Hell for me,
that my throne will be riddled with gold and rust and gargoyles,
that my crown will be wooden and bronze, edged with thorns.
Papa says I will find a new papa with the Sodomites.
What waste of womb. That his god should have stricken me barren
for marrying a woman, for setting our family name alight, *tufiakwa*.
I tell him I look forward to Sunday roasts there, with his pastor.
Perhaps he and Mama too could join us for ogbono and pounded yam.

My New Plant

i buy
a plant
and take
it on
the tube.

i cry
until
the toi-
let roll
is through.

someone
calls out:
I like
your plant!
me too.

tissues and leaves make acquaintance,
the flat runs out of toilet roll.

a friend
draws on
my legs
in shar-
pie pen.

i wake
up and
cannot
get out
of bed.

water runs grey in the shower.

SS Andrea Doria

She-girl-her sleeps here,
makes man eyes out of seaweed.
Grave, lightless, mourning

as femininity sinks,
swallowing all of the passengers that couldn't stop looking to save themselves,
a question so ugly blooms out of the vacuum:
is death sexy?
Underwater,
is death sexy?
A question so ugly blooms out of the vacuum.
As femininity sinks,
swallowing all of the passengers that couldn't stop looking to save themselves,

grave, lightless, morning
makes man eyes out of seaweed
She-girl-her sleeps here.

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