

**2019
WINNER**

CREATIVE CRITICS



Lucy Thynne (winner), Katie Kirkpatrick and Anna Holland (runners-up).
Photo: Adrian Pope, with thanks to the Forward Arts Foundation

Winner:

- Lucy Thynne, Lady Margaret School, Fulham

Runners-up:

- Katie Kirkpatrick, Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
- Anna Holland, St Nicholas Catholic High School Sixth Form, Northwich, Cheshire

Highly Commended:

- Lyra Christie, Gosforth Academy, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Em Power, Esher College, Thames Ditton
- Chantelle Arangalla, Gumley House Convent School, Isleworth, Hounslow
- Isabella Bonnell, Rugby High School, Rugby
- Lily Rachel, East Barnet School, Chestnut Grove, London
- Naomi Thomas, High Storrs School, Sheffield
- Adelaide Whitelaw, Bedford Modern School, Bedford

Comments by *emagazine* Editors

This year's Forward/*emagazine* poetry competition for A Level students was a joy for those of us doing the judging! We decided for the first time this year to only offer a 'creative critical' response, given its success in previous years, provoking both really strong poems and excellent critical writing about the chosen source poem. We had over 100 entries, from schools and colleges up and down the country, from all kinds of schools. Our one regret was that so few boys entered. We know that more girls do English than boys, but next year we hope for a bigger entry from those who do.

The general standard of the poems written by the students, and the associated critical writing, was superb. Students chose poems that really spoke to them and in their commentaries were able to articulate the significant qualities of the poem that had most attracted and interested them. The students' own poems were often powerful, moving, witty and personal. Not only that, they also showed an impressive command over language and form. We have decided to highly commend all the shortlisted entries in recognition of their quality. We would also like to congratulate the many, many students who wrote extremely well but didn't quite make it to the shortlist.

Comments by Judge Daljit Nagra on the Winning Entry

A stunning, wise, structurally complex yet immediate and heart-stopping whopper of a poem, which is beautifully explained in the commentary. I love the way Ravinthiran's compact sonnets have served as source of influence to create a series of quatrains that look ahead to the absence of the mother, then return to the speaker's own birth, and then back, further back to the grandmother and the mothers before in a lineage of creation, 'like Russian dolls'. There are many striking achievements in the poem, including the precise diction, the assured tone and the lovely syntax as it loops around the lines and runs over verses. This poem is elegy, is dithyramb and ultimately it's a love letter to birth and life and death. The poem ends with a domestic rapture that in a darker reading moves both forward in time to convey the love of joy and communion, and of despair at the final breath, 'I love you, I love you'.

The Winner – Lucy Thynne

Responding to 'Dubrovnik' by Vidyan Ravinthiran

My mother, swimming

Sometime far from now I will think of this: you, a pale line
sketched into the blue, the waves holding you
as any daughter would want to be held.
The day slips past like water trailing through a child's hands,

and I want to be small again, swimming with you, not here,
but in the bathtub at home, sliding around like an egg-yolk
loosened from its shell. You'd put me between your thighs, opened
into curving brackets of skin, and I would not be thinking

of myself in the third person, but laughing in the way
I've now forgotten. There's something about arriving
in the rain and it all quieting now to this: the sea,
wine-dark, you, its drawing in reverse.

I don't want to think of when I won't be sitting here,
watching you swimming, so I think about your own mother instead –
how as she got older, her memory reached further back
into itself. How she told us that she remembered

being curled in the womb, the liquid, amniotic glow,
and later, the face of her mother after birth.
None of us believed her, but I think this is the same
kind of swimming: a kick and a breath, holding on,

her daughters and their daughters encased
like Russian dolls inside of her. We run home and in the dark
of the garden I dream of you calling to me from the sea,
your voice shouting as it throbs above us:

my daughter – I love you, I love you.

Commentary

Ravinthiran writes about watching both the present and the past through observing a loved one: an ambiguous 'you.' The poem is titled 'Dubrovnik', but is as much about the echoes of Sri Lanka later in the poem, described in beautifully evocative images and subtle rhymes ('bitten', 'smitten') that tie the poem together. I loved the idea of the observer that begins 'Dubrovnik', and so have tried to respond to this by creating my own, who watches her mother swimming and, much like that of Ravinthiran's, thinks of a past and future.

In Ravinthiran's poem, there is a strong sense of two separate places, with the act of swimming as a bridge between them. I decided to write about multiple places that intertwine as a result, some more domestic and maternal – our bath at home, and ultimately the womb, all told through the inherited family memories Ravinthiran also writes of. I really liked the significantly implied female presence in Ravinthiran's poem – he refers to two mothers – which I wanted to draw on myself, applying this to my own personal history of my mother and grandmother. I chose the same setting as Ravinthiran's poem – the sea – which seemed apt, as a kind of mother to so many other living things.

'Dubrovnik' above all touched me for its beautiful and deceptively simple presentation of time passing. The poem jumps from the present to a 'later' to the earlier memory of Sri Lanka, and even the possibility of being 'pulled in and under and lost forever.' Both mothers at the end of 'Dubrovnik' act differently as the antitheses of each other – but neither seems less loving. Like my own mother and grandmother in this poem, two very different kinds of mothers, this poem aims to recreate Ravinthiran's sense of tenderness in portraying loved ones and motherhood.

Runner-up – Katie Kirkpatrick

Responding to: 'Scenes for a Bright Town' by Helen Tookey

mosaic

in this shard
is the curve of his iris
dirty sea water grey
polluted with questions,
glinting, like sunlight on the crests of waves,
when answers are evaded

in this shard
is the inside of his lip
so vulnerable, so soft,
pink like the blush of your cheeks
every monday afternoon

in this shard
is the palm of his hand
with carvings that tell fortunes,
a life line to a time
just beyond the coastline

grey pink flesh
the shards are set in grout –
and still he looks up expectantly

Commentary

Tookey's poem made a lot more sense to me when I focussed on the final image: reconstructing a city using 'fragments'. For my poem, I wanted to take the theme of fragmentation but apply it to a person rather than a city.

I admired the way Tookey's poem is split into sections, each of which captures its own distinct image, and so decided I wanted to mirror this; rather than subtitles, I chose to use spacing to create the visual image of a mosaic.

The imagery in my poem is inspired by that of Tookey's: she focuses on nature and the seaside, and I decided to echo this by comparing features of the boy to sea water, waves, and the coastline, thus giving my poem a sense of setting. I tried to mimic Tookey's skill at conveying character and plot without explicitly mentioning it through details such as 'every monday afternoon' and 'when answers are evaded': she expresses so much so subtly in lines like 'not midnight exactly – three minutes past/by the kitchen clock'. These kinds of phrases also allowed me to mirror the uneasy, quiet tone of Tookey's poem.

The ending of my poem is intended to suggest that the shards of the mosaic are fragments of memory, and that the character referred to in 'your cheeks' is expecting too much from their memories. This was inspired by the way the final line of Tookey's poem pulls together the idea of the different images making up the city, and also makes readers question the language of the title: surely a 'bright' city doesn't need to be reconstructed? I tried to mirror this through the idea that the last line makes readers consider whether this is really a mosaic, a memory, or a living person.

Runner up – Anna Holland

Responding to 'Flowers' by Jay Bernard

Her

The streets will run red
Tonight
The stars will shine from a blood-soaked mirror
Tonight
The flowers will die
Tonight
The meadows will thrive on my beating heart
Tonight

You beg to know my
Crime
You assume I must be punished for my
Crime
You hunt me for my
Crime
You do not get the right to decide my
Crime

Why won't you help me
Escape?
We're crying and screaming, desperate for
Escape
But they won't let us
Escape
Because in Russia, hunting us is their
Escape

Do I have your attention now?
Will you come and save
Us, the innocent?

All I did was love her.

Commentary

Jay Bernard is an LGBTQ+ black poet who, through their poetry, fought to raise awareness of the suffering of black people in our society. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I feel that it is my duty to follow in their footsteps and fight to make the suffering of our community known. In Russia there is a website dedicated to identifying gay people, only so that they can be hunted and brutally murdered. Their only crime is loving who they want to. On July 21st, 2019, gay activist Yelena Grigoryeva was stabbed to death for trying to defend members of the LGBTQ+ community who had been detained by Russian police. This website turns the murder of LGBTQ+ people into a game based on the *Saw* movies, and Yelena found her name listed before she died. Despite numerous death threats, Yelena continued to fight for her community, and this poem is dedicated to her memory, and to the memories of all the LGBTQ+ Russians who have been slaughtered because of who they loved. Bernard's poem expresses so much anger at the murder of innocent people, who died because of something they couldn't change. 'Flowers' is an inspirational step towards breaking the silence surrounding the treatment of oppressed minorities, and I would like to follow in the footsteps of Bernard and Grigoryeva and tear down the extreme censorship we are held under. 'Flowers' actively accuses the general public of their ignorance, and I themed my poem, 'Her', around more directly accusing the reader of not doing enough to fight for us. Poems such as these are a call to arms to the people, and it is now their responsibility to respond.

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- Forward/*emagazine* Creative Critics 2018, *emagazine* 82, December 2018
- Forward/*emagazine* Young Critics 2017, *emagazine* 78, December 2017
- Barbara Bleiman: Writing About Poetry, *emagazine* 71, February 2016
- Malcolm Hebron: What Are Poems and What Do They Do For Us?, *emagazine* 85, September 2018