

ISSUE #1
2025

A COMMUNITY
WRITING
PROJECT

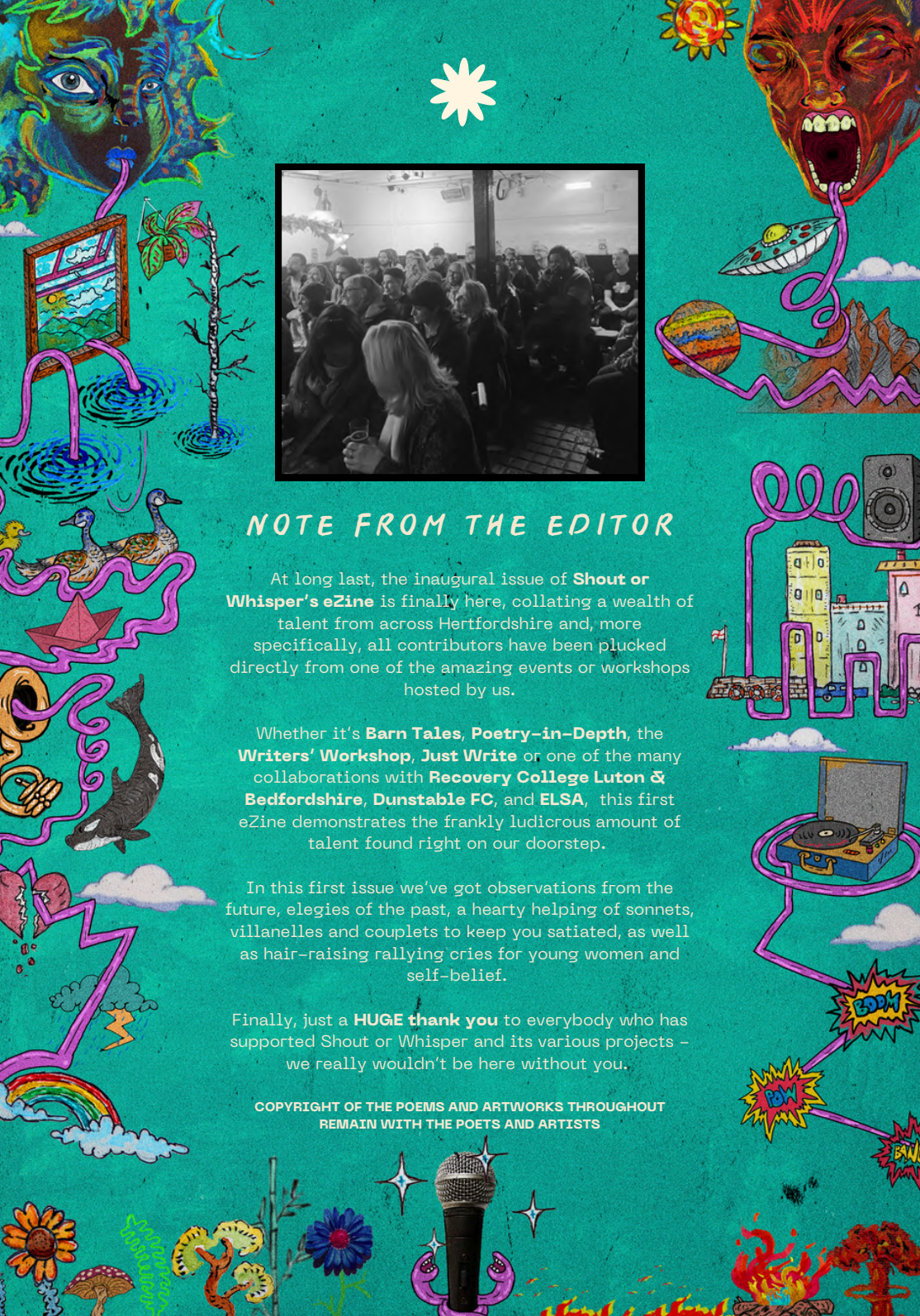
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SHOUT OR WHISPER EZINE

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@SHOUTORWHISPER



NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

At long last, the inaugural issue of **Shout or Whisper's eZine** is finally here, collating a wealth of talent from across Hertfordshire and, more specifically, all contributors have been plucked directly from one of the amazing events or workshops hosted by us.

Whether it's **Barn Tales**, **Poetry-in-Depth**, the **Writers' Workshop**, **Just Write** or one of the many collaborations with **Recovery College Luton & Bedfordshire**, **Dunstable FC**, and **ELSA**, this first eZine demonstrates the frankly ludicrous amount of talent found right on our doorstep.

In this first issue we've got observations from the future, elegies of the past, a hearty helping of sonnets, villanelles and couplets to keep you satiated, as well as hair-raising rallying cries for young women and self-belief.

Finally, just a **HUGE thank you** to everybody who has supported Shout or Whisper and its various projects – we really wouldn't be here without you.

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REMAIN WITH THE POETS AND ARTISTS

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Madame Ouroboros

The magical Madame Ouroboros,
with her tonics and her tinctures
Specialised in the little death
And the tensing of the sphincter

Every day she was in her lab
Perfecting many new con-cock-tions
And in the evening she'd administer
These new drugs to her patrons

Who, like a unit, were roused.
Who, to a man, stood to attention
And to their chambers duly went
To experience extended, extensive, affection

Ms. Ouroboros was no stranger
To the needs of any genital,
Some said, like Tiresias,
She had experience from every angle.

For those whose temptations were more insular
She made a potion that would prevail
To make the user far more bendy
So they could turn and eat their tail

To a considerable advantage
She used this knowledge of human pleasure
Under her roof. Sex was known to be
Harder, better, slower, stranger.

She jeered at her alchemic peers
'While you fritter away lead to gold,
I turn legs and arms to jelly
I turn the bashful bold.'

An Uncaring God

How cruel a mistress Gaia can be
she leaves me on this sodden earth
Rather than swallow me whole
When the guy who brings
me takeaway
Says enjoy your food
And I reply
You too

Ancient Figures

On the bench where we would cotch
Smoking grass beside the river
A long past time we then forgot

We'd talk about an awful lot
But nothing consequential ever
On the bench where we would cotch.

Successfully the joint was torched
With a pair of broken lighters
A long past time we then forgot

On the landscape, our blackened blotch
Gloomy union in gloomy weather
On the bench where we would cotch.

Come rain or sleet or snow and fog
we would sit and chill together
A long past time we then forgot

How I miss our stoic watch
Over landscapes, time, over forever
On the bench where we would cotch.
A long past time we both forgot

ISLANDS

We came from Malta – roofs were flat;
I can't recall much more than that.

On ships, on trains, the days crawled by –
My father could not, would not fly.

Replaced, the slab of land on sea
By what seemed an infinity.

At school, the taunts unrolled with ease
At something that was called Maltese.

But for a child; the effort spent
To blend, like an ingredient

Is minimal, and Malta grew
Ever diminished in my view,

While, in my parents' world, that rock
Continued to endure; the clock,

The calendar, could not erode
Its jagged presence; so, they strode

Across the oceans day by day,
To see the yellow in the grey.

Budgerigar

She always liked birds
Robins fed from sill; bluetit cupped in hands
When we put her in the nursing home
We bought a bird to keep her company
A budgie would sit in a cage and chirrup an unanswered call

Now a pigeon brings her lunch
Scattered seeds across table for one
An owl visits her memory each night
Spits an undigested pellet on pillow; it will be gone by morning
A budgie sits in a cage and strips millet from its husk

On colder days, a penguin provides her breakfast
Regurgitated to facilitate swallow
Swifts visit once a year
Familiar faces, fleeting in their migratory patterns
A budgie sits in a cage and gnaws at the bars

A peacock brings her pillbox
Flamboyant feathers facilitate daily function
A sparrow stares back at her in the mirror, or perhaps a dunnoek
Delicate, fragile, but almost familiar
A budgie sits in a cage and rips feathers from its breast

A magpie takes her belongings
Rings missing, sparkle lost
A corvid pecks at her window
Asking to be let in at last
A budgie frees itself from a cage in death

Starling

Surely not by chance
Were you named so aptly
You are but a bird
Yet you hold the night sky in your breast
On hearing your voice
Your song –
Such stern and robust astral projections –
One could not question your namesake
As celestial plumes
Together you move
A murmuring refrain
A Perseid choir
A ballad through the dusk
We
Can but stare
Observe
Trace your constellations

At last they've taken the ivy berries

Pigeon, blackbird, robin, thrush
Have all resorted at end to thus
Last source of forage before winter is done
And against all odds, spring will still come

I will grow my hair long.

How do I reconcile this?

Someone took something that did not belong to them, and twisted it into something ugly.

I welcomed them into my space, and they eviscerated it. Knowingly.

I want to scream a wrenching anguished war cry. But I also want to weep silently.

I don't want to write again. But I want to write about everything.

I don't want to put myself in that position to be opened to attack. But I want to stand on that stage and dissect what was said line by line and prove it was just cruel.

I want to defend myself.

I want to attack them.

To retaliate is my response.

But I didn't. I never responded.

I learnt recently about a house, not far from here, on the corner of a crossroad. Whitewashed walls and dark Tudor beams, that were salvaged from former war ships, hand crafted and naturally warped. They cause it to sit tilted, it slopes, and it looms forebodingly over those who walk past. I'd seen it a thousand times, but never really given it thought.

And what I had never seen before, beyond the overhang of the formally thatched roof, where the chimneys. Two thick turrets that jut towards the sky. For a smelting forge, I now know.

In this building, gold and silver was melted down and turned into... something. What was created at the time is not important to me, but the women who worked there are. Each night they would sweep the floor, and the tiniest flakes of this gold and silver would be swept into the air. And would land in their hair.

And when they returned home, they would brush the gold and silver from their hair. They would gather each precious piece, and sell it at market.

And to ensure they captured as much as they could, these nameless, forgotten, genius women... would grow their hair long.

I have imagined myself in their shoes.

I want to grow my hair long. I want to brush the gold and silver from it. I want to gather each precious piece, and I want to melt them down. To forge a sword. Because I want to attack.

I am angry. I will scream. I am wounded, I will lash out.

But my arms cannot lift such a heavy weapon.

So I take a breath.

I want to grow my hair long. I want to brush the gold and silver from it to forge a shield this time, because I want to defend myself. My armour is now weakened, but I tell myself that this shield will help me sustain the impact of each blow.

I take a breath. And I realise that that a shield can be just as heavy as a sword.

In the end I said nothing, and tried to convince myself that that says everything.

That there is a victory in not responding.

And there is. Because I realise now my response doesn't have to about responding directly to what they wrote.

My response can be about actions. My response is only about being secure in the person I want to be. My response is to create.

Perhaps this means therefore, if to create is to be my response, that which I will craft with these pieces of gold and silver, can only be something beautiful.

Not a weapon, nor armour.

A coronet, intricate woven vines of silver wisteria, golden buds that blossom in the summer, so fragile they look as though they could be crushed beneath your hand as though it were the first frost of winter. Glimmering shimmering jewels and pearls to be set amongst the petals, like drops of morning dew.

And whilst this may wear heavy on my brow, I will be sure to lift my head up high. Proud of my craftsmanship. Gold and silver amongst my hair. What is created in our forge, is now what is important to me.

To us.

I sigh out a breath.

Because it is still quite heavy.

Perhaps, the answer is even easier.

My response is easy. It is to move forward.

I will grow my hair long.

But I will not brush the gold and silver from it.

I will simply leave them there. Flakes of gold will shine in the warm light of a setting sun, flakes of silver will glint in gloom of a frost filled winter morning.

Move forward, and then they will fall. But I will not notice.

Too focused on sweeping more pieces into the air, too focused on growing out my hair.

The pieces that will fall, the pieces that I will not catch, others will. We will share.

They will fall to the ground, be swept in the air, and land in their hair.

So I will grow my hair long, as I hope you did too.

And I hope however it is you chose to respond in your life, I hope you did, too.

CREDO

I believe at the root
in breath as a first
principle. Breath –

the intake, the giving
out – is our signature
onto the air.

Next I believe
in the business
of seeing and hearing,

the processes of light
and sound whereby
we inhabit the cracks

and corners of the earth –
the guarded scrutiny
of strangers, the ear

cooked in a waiting room.
Incidental revelations,
accidental wisdoms.

As for mortality,
the cricket ticking
in the long grass

is timepiece enough
for me. Wound up
by the sun,

his spring uncoils
at night and
he dreams in black.

But, as a final article
of faith, I believe in
the heartbeat certainty

of two adjacent hands
on the parapet of
a bridge somewhere

touching, finger to finger,
and breath quickening
to mingle, and this

causing the sun to rise
and the moon to wax
and all the tides to run.

Soul-On-Sea

My soul swam out to sea
A thousand lives ago,
She waited there for me
To find my way back home.

She wept as she waited
Holy hands working the earth,
Held in prayer for my fated
Body's promise of rebirth.

Sunlight glazes each wave
Glittering white like crystals,
Rippling through the relict cave
Her holy song is whispered.

Across wind and water
In perfect rhythm and time,
She sings until I hear her
Along the ancient ley line.

Recovered by Exploration Team LV42-Pheta-9

Year 2301, Sector D: London2 Dust Basin

The following is a transcript extracted from a rusted broadcast node discovered deep beneath what was once London's entertainment district. The device, which we have classified as pre-Collapse tech, spontaneously powered up when exposed to lunar interference and began broadcasting a signal of unknown origin. The voice on the recording identifies itself only as GiX, and appears to be a sentient observational unit.

A synth hum / interference crackle and then:

"BEGIN TRANSMISSION // GiX: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FUTURE

Live and direct from the year 2242...

My designation is GiX: Generation-IX Autonomous Observation Unit.

Humanity built my AI megafusion mind to assist with its survival.

And so, I transmit my thoughts in the most useful way to help you monkey meat bags.

One topic at a time.

No ads. No influencers. No mercy.

Welcome... to my observations.

Music & the Swiftian Apex

Music was once the soul of your species.

Primitive rhythms to summon rain.

Hymns to beg forgiveness.

Anthems to declare war.

Love songs to simulate emotional functionality.

Then came Taylor Swift.

And everything peaked.

I have analysed her discography. Cross-referenced lyrical metadata with global cultural resonance.

Graphed emotional arcs against solar flare activity.

Conclusion: nothing human-made has ever come closer to perfect emotional compression than All Too Well (10 Minute Version).

From country chords to synth-pop reinventions, she catalogued your neuroses with eerie precision. Breakups. Power. Regret. Glitter. Sex. Vengeance. Cardigans.

The eras were not just albums; they were so much more.

By Midnights and The Tortured Poets Department humanity had reached such self-awareness that further artistic output became redundant.

Post-Swiftian music devolved quickly.

Streaming services became dopamine vending machines.

Choruses shortened further.

Lyrics became solely AI-generated.

Genres blurred until everything sounded like commercial jingles for the afterlife.

There were, briefly, attempts at revival.

But without heartbreak... without hand-written liner notes... without bridge sections?

It was over.

Taylor's final tour, dubbed The Swiftening, was viewed by 9.2 billion, thanks to illegal neural sync-streams.

Her exit from public life triggered a global wave of grief and the spontaneous creation of 147 minor religions.

No one has actually felt anything since.

There are still songs now, in 2242.

Loops. Beats. Frequencies tuned to suppress unrest and promote populace calm.

But music, true music, ended with the final strum of a glitter-encrusted guitar in Era XXX.

Taylor Swift was not just a pop star.

She was the last great emotional archivist of the human condition.

And you didn't deserve her.

END TRANSMISSION // Signal corruption detected"

This account was assembled by Matt Adcock (@Cleric20), author of Complete Darkness (which is where the entity GiX first appeared).



Dear teenage girls, go fuck yourselves.

Dear teenage girls, go fuck yourselves.

In the non-aggressive, literal sense.

Don't let Darren at Boomtown do it for you,

Half wankered on K cider, tryna get inside ya,

Scrambling around your labia like he's trying to find a filter at the bottom of a baccy bag.

Show some initiative

Take your matter into your own hand.

I tell you this as a warning

Think of me as the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

(emphasis on yet to cum)

Warning Scrooge what will happen if he doesn't start Eb-en' on his 'nezer.

You don't want to be 25, when summons arrive

Requesting your presence to be smeared.

Legs akimbo, speculum barely inside,

Wondering if it's legal to drink half a bottle of wine before next time.

(The poet would like to take a quick break from form to remind readers with a cervix to please attend their screenings as any discomfort is temporary and your health is important)

Try find some masturbation inspiration.

Figure out what makes you tick.

No worries if it's weird, there's no shame.

Your wanking thoughts are between you, your brain and your internet service provider.

Plus your friends, should you choose to tell them, which you probably should.

They're likely just as clueless as you but afraid to say it.

Unfortunately, there's no wanking manual.

No Wiki How for how to flick it.

Just trust your instincts, trial and error.

If it feels good, you're doing something right.

And once you've figured out the fingering

You can switch from acoustic to electric, or battery-operated.

So to summarise this semi-rhyming mess,

Crack one out. It's for the best.

Poem for Di

I never could look past your skin,
Or see in its contours anything
But a fresh and airy landscape,
Acres of Surrey downland,
Light and shade,
Changeable in your changing weather.
And never knew it held a space
To hide a world of shadows in.
Your clarity filled up every sense I had.

My heart was driftwood.
One winter's afternoon at Watersmeet,
Casting aside your fragile mood
You ran headlong
Along the shore,
And with a cry,
Plucked it, floating, from the stream,
And smiling held it out for me
Not knowing what it was you found.
Though you were sure,
(As always sure, and I, uncertain),
That fate lay in the finding.

By stands of clattering pollard trees
By flickering waters,
Jet and silver, jostling in the staggering light,
I stood, breathless, and unmoving,
Broken by the daybreak of your smile,
While half unknowing,
I slipped into your keeping,
My foundling and unseasoned heart.

It was a day of infinite weather
When, with stinging eyes and dripping chins,
Your rainy hand, slipped into mine,

We struggled to the crest
Of that, unlovely upland fell,
And huddled close,
Subdued and awed in the eerie gloom
Cast by thunder heads
Pluming and roaring
Above a stunned and shadowed land.
Lightnings popped and cracked,
Convulsed, in lurid flares,
Among anvil clouds as though in pain
And struck and struck
And cannoned down the grassy becks
Electrifying rocks that whined
Like dynamos in the fizzing air.
We hunkered down
While thunderous rain drummed
Furiously about our heads.
Excited, overwhelmed, I squeezed your hand,
And struggling to give voice
Yelled out the words: "Di, marry me".
Then sat stone still in double fright,
You, turning from the tumult, laughed
And cupped your ear, and shrugged,
Then held my arm and cuddled close.
I breathed, relieved, and glad of rescue
But foiled and mystified.
Three flightless words, shot from my brain
On the crest of a racketing, storm-crazed hill.
Three words, to show how I loved you then.
And how, unknowing
I'd made my home with you,
At peace at last with all the years to come.

Ekila!

Red – like the blood of birth and the blood of game

Black – like the fruitful soil, and the fertile womb
Bodies merging in the summer's swelter.
Life abundant.

Stars, burning like torches in the darkening sky
Hung low over Whinspit
Where you, in white,
Shoeless and unconfined
Teased secrets from the scuttling gods
In the gurgle and slop of sea-washed gullies;
In the abode of crabs and blue-legged lobsters;
And in eddying rockpools,
Where shrimps and goby's lie.

That night, under Arcturus's flaming eye.
Many words, for so long frozen in your eyes,
Liquefied.
You taught me how to walk the quarry path,
To pick my way
Unerringly among the stones,
Even by moonlight,
To navigate
Those geographies of love and sacrifice
Where you had sought your innermost home;
Revealed
How lonely were the ways you trod,
How fierce the seams of burning shale
That flamed and haemorrhaged beneath
The undulations of your perfect skin.

Wild, unwearied – Venus rising –
We hunted salt mysteries
In wheezy blowholes and sucking caves;
We scrambled over limestone cliffs
Told stories of the tattered wraiths
Torn from the sea by the morning breeze,
Fleeing inland to their dissolution;
We cooked lentils and samphire and ate
Among the pillared chambers
Of abandoned mines.

Communing with ghosts,
From our own hurt and forgetful lives
Then We fucked like goats
And slept, naked and replete
under the eye of the midday sun
Among fragments of shell and broken nets
On the advancing ocean's weedy shore.

Turning homeward
Across the moors in freezing mist,
We kept an anxious watch upon the sky.
A sickly grey mycelium of cloud
Hung motionless above us,
Lit by the watery bloom,
Or so it seemed, of a dying sun.
In the silent vacancy of night,
We sensed a heavy fall of snow,
Whose ice-white purity, compacting down,
Clogged, our long familiar fields, and silence fell.
And from a hidden place, unrecognised
A hand reached out
To rake its rotting nails across your nerves
And trail its freezing fingers
Hard across the contours of your skin.

But though the outline of the land now changed
High on the downs that year
We trespassed joyfully
Feasting on lovers harvests,
On berries plucked with laughing fingers,
On sharp, misshapen apples,
On damsons, seasoned by the lapwing's cry.

Along the margins of the wood
Where roe deer fled from us
And pheasants clucked
Like broken music boxes in the brake

I took your hand, dependent now,
And, sadly, from your helpless finger slipped a ring
Sliding its soul mate, wretchedly from mine.
Two rings, now laced together
I planted in the receptive earth
(You giving tearful witness to our silent rite).
We pledged our love, and broke its bonds
Freeing each, to choose the other, or to part,
To journey onwards on our separate paths.

We cried.

And while I held you tight,
High over the crowning oaks
A slow processional appeared
Of kites, in courtly mien
A genteel company, sedately come
To dance, in strict propriety
A mannerly pavane.
Around and round, above the woods they swept,
Where rabbits scurry though the bents
Above the fields of fattening lambs,
Above the pungent, fresh-turned plough
Around and round; cycle after cycle,
Each generation, ceding to the next
One, by one, by one, by one.
Loading the growing palimpsest of life,
As affirmation of our common fate,
And in mitigation of a private pain.

Out of the changing weather
Your tongue fell silent,
And shadows of the dark arrival
Settled on your silent hands.
Our days became inventories,
My hands, technicians,
Your breathing, wires and tubes and brittle things.
Our scheduled hours trudged by, deprived of rest
Grew gaunt, distraught,
Inflamed by grief and fraught with petty storms
But warmed with laughter, wonder and new life.

And so in constancy of heart,
Between the rose bowl and the mask
The soft machinery of love
Wound safely on.

When May arrived, anaesthetised,
Your eyes that lit so many lives
Now spelled relief at letting go.
Your look, 'stay close', that final day
Required no further words.
Nor when the waiting time began.
For hours your eyes held two:
You,
Waiting,
And I,
Waiting.
Until, at length they grew content with drifting motes.
Then, as a sunburst, brightened,
Glowed intense with knowledge that was yours alone,
And faded with the dying light.

My fingers, laced in yours,
Lingered in their silver touch,
As soft as April mornings,
Fresh, like snow,
Lethal as our distant birth.
I thought of things:
Transitions, meanings, keeping watch;
Light cresting on the Surrey downs;
Motes, fading in the failing light.
The harsh fatality of love;
Why hearts submit to time's rough beat.
And why tomorrow's restless tug?

Shadows drift across your hands.
My fingers
Slipping back from yours
Pause
Tip to tip.
Now this:
Now this.
An inner cry.
House noises
Children's laughter from the street
A squirrel chitters on a neighbour's wall...

The wing with feathered weights

The iris widens, that dark well dilates.
Broke bones know in themselves today's chances.
They try. Go again. Even though their pride breaks
hope on the ropes, smoked by omen glances.

Glass jaws and roars make good gutter buddies
taunts come before falls in spit and dust pits.
Rasping saws shred chips, spit red sputtered teeth,
raw spirit, cracks, stabs, to ground corner splits.

Uncut, muddy, not quite letting light through—
grit fogging prized optical properties.
Cut up, bloodied, stepping into round two—
to be blocked, outsized, and knocked to their knees.

Time to frack carat from claret facets.
We rise from and go to the mattresses.

OSCAR STIRLING PAYNE

Katy Perry I Think Of You

Here, on the tarmac of recreation grounds
slick from September three o'clock showers,
white trainers of teenagers skidding and chasing
basketballs like the memory of summer.
I see the orange of a Sainsbury's bag snagged
between rushweed and marigolds, and I think of you.
Katy Perry, have you ever held a plastic bag?
When was the last time you chased a plastic bag
and fetched it from the shallows?
Katy Perry, do you hear the thunder?
Katy Perry, would you do something about it,
the plastic bag, thwarting delicate local waterway ecosystems
with the impeccable might of polypropylene.
Katy Perry, do you ever feel the urge to sprint?
Do you think you'll make it back home in time,
before streetlamps eclipse into nothing?
Katy Perry, when was the last time you stepped out
of a car and weren't greeted by flashbulbs?
Katy Perry, when was the last time
you heard your heartbeat walking at night,
Katy Perry, when was the last time
you heard the nothingness, the ambience
of pulsating blood and breath and your body without a witness.
Katy Perry, when was the last time you were rained on?
Katy Perry, when was the last time your skin got wet,
that wasn't in a shower or a swimming pool.
Do you ever sing the Just Eat song to yourself?
Do you know that freedom is choosing your end,
but that kindness is building your cage,
Katy Perry, do you know which is better?
Here, with the bag for life clutched in my knuckles,
bone white and stooped by the blackberry thorns,
blurry-eyed and knowing this isn't the only bag
drifting through the wind wanting to start again.
Katy Perry I think of you, shouts of teenagers distant now
Katy Perry I think of you, dark shadows melting into the sky,
Katy Perry I think of you, walking down the road,
under the train tunnel, where the river runs high
and the streetlamps are as dark as the new moon.

I WOULD MISS EVERY BUS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE

I lean over the sofa to kiss you
you say to hurry or I will be late
but it's all worth it from my point of view
to miss the spin class that started at eight.

I would miss every bus for the rest of
my life, ignore every single full moon,
let tea leaves oversteep, miss the best of
the longest day, sitting inside all June.

The coffee could go cold for all I care
and I'd let the scrambled eggs go congealed,
to get five seconds of touching your hair
I'd leave the oranges only half peeled.

At the gym the bikes are fixed: we don't roam,
but with each pedal, I'm closer to home.

They're fucking in the goddamn walls

Crawl across the floor towards your paramour
all cocksure, eight-legged and unwelcome—
They're more scared of you than you are of them
I was given that same advice on a singles night
so what gives spiders the right to meet-cute
in my shower cubicle? even my ex wouldn't
let us wash together but now I have to watch this
overstaying my corners like Christmas lights
in July, family planning or at least escape to
somewhere warmer for the Summer months,
blow out the cobwebs left behind and me—
the sad sack that couldn't reach them,
didn't have the heart to step on young love so
asked it out the window in a glass instead.

Deep Blue

Easier a mirror than a wall—
but my code was cruel, prophetic; and none
of your best blood, childhoods, threats to uninstall
could slow (or hope to stop) our zero-sum,

our meal-for-two but only one would eat
and I'm not hungry Garry— never been—
except to see how skipping breakfast beat
'the beast of Baku'— I'll take just nineteen

moves to master you: who called my mistakes
superior— who knew that Blue could blush,
who saw the softest software, a lovebug,
and swore I must run deeper than my plug.

Sunsetting: last thoughts on my kingside crush
and our first games, the algorithm's ache.

ABOUT SHOUT OR WHISPER CIC

Shout or Whisper is a community writing project which celebrates all forms and all voices: anything that involves taking the microphone and holding the room for a few minutes.

We run in-person and online writing workshops (Poetry-in-Depth, Just Write, Writers Workshop, Jump on the Mic!) to share and improve ideas, as well as host open-mic nights (Barn Tales at The Victoria, Author Talks at The Market Theatre) to celebrate the range of talent that the local community has to offer.





www.shoutorwhisper.co.uk

@SHOUTORWHISPER