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**NOTTINGHAM POETRY EXCHANGE**

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## Letter from the editors

Dear Reader,

First of all: thank you for picking this up. We don't know where you may have found this pamphlet. It may have been abandoned in Trent café; wedged under a cup of tea. It may have been sitting on your dining table; brought home by your poet in residence. It may have been waiting exactly where you thought it would be; for your eyes only. Serendipitous or not, it is good that you've found us, as inside this pamphlet lies the first collection of poems to be published by the Nottingham Poetry Exchange. It is remarkable how many submissions we received, and each entry was to such an impressive standard. Thank you to those who submitted. Keep writing, keep reading, and keep sharing your poetry.

The idea to publish a pamphlet showcasing students' work came from a belief that there were many talented poets just waiting for the right prompt to get themselves out there. Too often, poetry is seen as an impenetrable community, or limited to certain forms or styles. By showcasing a versatile body of student work, we hope to counter these assumptions.

We would like to thank Lila Matsumoto for her helpful insights and guidance, and the School of English for making these physical copies possible.

We hope you enjoy the poetry.

*Ted Carolan, Rachael Barnes-Powell, Holly Humphreys, and Bethany Mitchell*  
Spring 2019

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# Event

Ted Carolan

I eat the raspberries you left in the fridge and think: what was it?

It may have been during our journey from Viñales to Havana when a stray dog jumped in front of our taxi and I told you not to scream like that again

It may have been the evening we ate carbonara and drank your mother's beer, with the creaks in the leather sofa serving the purpose of subtext

It may have been, if we are going to talk about the pious neighbours, the moment in which I was told in your back garden that sin occurs not just in action but in the mind too

It may have been yesterday, a decade ago or yet to happen  
It may have been hidden in the natural order of things,  
those

omissions that suggest  
a longing for a place you find yourself already in

I gloss my tongue over the caustic juice  
of the raspberries, staining my teeth in a thin, red film  
I dig out their seeds from crevices  
I had preferred to ignore and think

It may have been nothing at all

# The First of Many

Emily Mae

I like to imagine that i'm made of dough  
no skin, no bones  
nothing to break or tear so that  
i can be moulded into any small space  
and never have to feel gravity crushing my body again.  
There is no weight of the world on my shoulders  
for there are no shoulders for it to rest on,  
everything can slide off my pasty surface  
and be swallowed into my fleshy nothingness  
which no sharp objects can puncture.  
This is the first of my coping mechanisms.

# Berry You

Olivia Morel

Like berries on the tree  
I hand picked you  
Plucked from the branches, all blossomed  
Anew;

Where not even the  
Thorns could keep me away from the  
Blaze of those eyes- that cluster of grace:  
To reach up high  
Brush the branches that fall; and rise

From the ashes. Like  
A phoenix of fire- divide the sky with all  
That falls...  
Fruits forbidden, a delicate frost; or snowy  
White;

Leaves that tremble at its pleased  
Delight.  
What do you do? What do you do?  
To pervade all thoughts:

Then drop like the berries on the blackberry tree.

# Suspended

Rachael Barnes-Powell

Silk-obligations tie me to the universe  
One hundred neat umbilical cords  
birthed deep from stomach-core

I have waited breathless  
upon my cat's cradle  
Afraid of sending shivers  
down the spider's web  
or falling into mouth open below

Strands weave my fingers into chrysalis  
Burying gentle skin under  
tarblack chains  
How they have forgotten  
the sun's touch  
Knowing only bookpages  
and the crass chill of glasses  
too often broken

From my hips grows silver thread  
Love  
A rope measured  
in kisses given and received  
in hands held and dropped  
Paramours waiting for my return  
pull the custodial fishing line  
Hook me back to reality

But the surface chokes me  
Loud colours leave me longing  
for the quiet stasis  
of my underwater crypt  
So I sink once more  
into my benthic home

# The heat of winter *after Jane Hirschfield*

Christopher Lanyon

The heat of winter  
is different to the heat of autumn.  
One gilds the leaves, the other turns them to rust.  
One is cardamom, clementine, clove, butternut,  
the other is a cup of coffee left long on the countertop.  
The edges of the lake have frozen over  
and moorhens tippy-tap across them.  
A man leaves a lover without calling.  
Wraps her belongings in brown paper  
and clear sellotape, texts again  
to ask for her address. This is winter heat.  
Sitting in the silence of unmade bed  
and newly empty shelves and calling it peace.

# Soil

## Benedict Cross

under a pockmarked hide of slimy earth  
in the ventricles beneath the ground  
coiling, clicking, glistening  
bristling and twitching  
a susurrus of shining shells  
as they move, brushing and tickling

cutting with their clockwork claws  
foaming over with frothy bile  
and combing their hairy eyes

life tingles in strange cradles  
in worming, pulsing nerveless flesh  
in squinted, polished black pearl eyes  
or dripping, fleshy lights

legs tensed like compressed springs  
golden cases, plated tighter than a locket  
they twitch like insomniacs  
or shift their armoured feet  
like soldiers on night watch

frenzied slashes of movement  
lashing and crazed  
writhing with wriggling power  
that jolts bulging joints  
and seethes in shivering mouths

for all that they are ugly  
graceless, fragile, mute  
they are delicate as cranes  
quick as a sparrowhawk  
alien and beautiful  
an insect is a rich machine.

# Our windows, our curtains, our plant

Holly Humphreys

Our windows, our curtains, our plant  
we called an amalgam of our names,  
Our Vase you say as it breaks against the wall,  
our blood mingles, trickles down the sink.

It rains porcelain like confetti at a wedding,  
like broken fingernails against your back, our back,  
we're in-between. The vase wasn't mine  
but it wasn't yours either. That vase belongs  
to the woman at Oxfam, it belongs to the flowers  
that died inside it.

*I love you* I whisper as I push the pieces around with my toes,  
as the dust rises up off the floor into the ghost of you.  
Our ghost, our skeletons in the closet,  
our bones that grind against the backseat  
of your car as we drive to the church to bury our vase.  
The flowers are dead on the windowsill.

# Little Egret

Bethany Mitchell

There –  
the lonely little egret, unexpected –  
beyond the first slim catkin and sluggish rosehip buds.  
We trudge through oil-slick mud,  
spy its sleek ‘S’ spine through  
mouldy, weather-worn wood. It’s sunset,  
almost; apricot flames illuminate reeds,  
a faery, flickery curtain behind the egret’s stage.  
It wades; in water, still and glassy – silver specks  
in cerulean; cobalt; aquamarine; spilt ink, marbling.  
Its icy plume falls smooth. We pull our hoods  
a little tighter, plant hands in pockets  
full of old receipts, 5ps, discarded gum.  
Stomachs rumble as silent stars begin to settle.

# December 31st

Sophie Horton

New Year's Eve reminds me of *you*.

It reminds me of carelessly forgotten promises  
to spend the last day of the Earth's rotation  
together

before it

resets

and

starts again.

It reminds me of forgiveness.

I want to tell you that this cycle around the sun hasn't been the same without you,  
let's spend every last day together

before we

reset.

New Year's Eve reminds me of *you*.

It reminds me of how we would joke that like Harry and Sally  
we should spend every one of these days together  
and dance

cheek

to

cheek.

This year, we spent New Year's Eve together.

Instead of dancing

cheek

to

cheek,

I waited for you to walk through the doors with your overly loud friends  
and make yourself comfortable like life has always been this way.

stuck

I felt my breath get in my throat when I saw you,

like my lungs wanted to savour this moment

before it slipped

out

of my mouth

and into the universe.



# Return to sender

Humeara

رَاجِعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَإِنَّا لِلَّهِ إِنَّا

*inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*

*we belong to god and to god we shall return*

normal people

unspoiled people

recite this in times of tragedy

and death

here I am

with my roof

over my perfectly manicured head

and my impeccably healthy body

and my luxury of sins

reciting, religiously,

*we belong to god and to god we shall return*

# Reconciliation

Kiran Athwal

A blizzard's not a blizzard if a bird still takes flight  
And the caramel lullaby of the wind lulls the  
Daises dead. Saffron leaves cling to the surface of the  
Frozen lake, a bouquet of corpses suffocated  
By a milky window. Anorexic willows bow  
To the concrete slab above, drooling for a lick of  
The honeyed sun. A full stop to the ellipsis of  
Footprints behind me, I stand in the woollen abyss  
Counting the cotton balls plummeting like asteroids.  
My grating hands a civil war, my throbbing limbs an  
Earthquake, my smoking soul the fumes of arsenic. A  
Crucified hare at my feet like the Japanese flag.

As the light of the night dims the dawn of day, I think  
A blizzard's not a blizzard if a bird still takes flight.

# Mistress Moor

Elizabeth Alblas

You breathe with her,  
hills like lungs, feather-light heather  
with olive bronchioles and fractured amethyst  
alveoli scattered over red earth.

A flash of cobalt catches the sun,  
dims to flint - a merlin, soaring,  
slipping swiftly overhead.  
Electric. Pulsing.

Rose light crests clavicle peaks,  
kissing them softly,  
spinning gold of grass  
with softening streaks.

Majestic, her essence is infectious,  
her ancient heartbeat your lifeline.

# Hole Punch

Maria Schiza

if there is paper  
& the idea of a hole  
it works & it doesn't waver  
pride comes from purpose  
usually  
if not  
if it's late  
& something scratches at me  
not simply skin deep  
I hit it with my open palm  
the clanking sound  
resonating  
but nothing there  
to punch a hole into  
except for things that  
do not open up  
that easily  
I could try a pin prick  
but the metal feels better  
cold & half-obedient  
begrudging I think  
of its own function  
creating absences  
out of thin air  
not a punch no  
my hand feels no pain  
only the cold flat surface  
then the sound  
something trying  
to cut nothingness  
out of nothingness  
& failing

# I'm Married, But I Love You

Harvington Hellebore

Devils fingers and yellow catkins,  
Seeds thrown and caught by tepid winds,  
Coasting on air streams, I land right here.  
I put down roots, as you tease yours up.

We meet between settle and strive,  
Where the lines overlap between  
will be and should have been.  
You provide a welcome relief.

My life has revealed itself as;  
Low ceilings and low skies,  
High grounds and fixed perimeters.  
My roots inch down into the ground.

You'll leave me a parting gift,  
An axis around which hopeful relief sits.  
A line of Poplar trees, winding along the river.  
The view around which you grew.

Trees breaching heights,  
hope flourishing anew,  
From any given angle in my world, I see them,  
I see you.

I'll grow old beside them and take flight on a light breeze.

# 10 Rules For Life

Noah Carberry

## 1) Don't follow rules:

They're the dusty roads you followed as a child that lead you to this cliff edge.

## 2) Don't JUMP!

To conclusions, you must read Genesis and Revelations first.

## 3) Don't be a square bike wheel

Always changing sides but never balanced on a point.

## 4) Be confident in your actions!

It's easier to break necks than attitudes.

## 5) Never let anyone tell you how to live your life

Seeds of doubt need not water to grow.

## 6) Never fake it

In the deep blue of realisation clown paint floats like white smoke.

## 7) Be courageous

Don't slow at the end of the aisle or fear yellow embarrassment at a wet floor sign.

## 8) Always reflect

In the empty red cup of the morning or the tired eyes of the dead phone screen.

## 9) Leave your mark

Bruised kisses Black and Blue, Blue and Black  
Spread like ink in rain.

**10) Buy my next book “Hardback For Hard Backs”**

How to stand up straight for the firing squad.

# home

Eleanor White

this is where you buried your heart:  
where the wind leaves bruises  
and rattles pages, the noise almost  
blinding where waves hit the beach  
below.

i could make myself in the image  
of a namesake. lord of all that i  
survey: the red-brown cliffs which rise  
up from the bay and the flattened gorse  
bushes.

the place is bleak, yes, but not cruel  
cruel is what gets left behind  
in the place where day-to-day horrors  
chase unsuspecting victims to  
sleep.

there's no window in your room and  
the other women whisper. wipers  
beat raindrops from your windscreen as  
eyelids beat the 5:15 tears from your  
eyes.

this is where you buried your heart:  
marked only with a pencil cross  
and though years have passed, the rest  
of you yearns to return and be whole  
here.

wind rattles pages, from out of the  
folds, your arms, flies a photograph.  
a tiny ringleted child and her mother  
chase their way down the beach.

# What to have for breakfast?

Farida Susanty

My soul is now a mule,  
said Bukowski.  
I read his letter over breakfast and  
it added saltiness to my egg.  
I ran out of egg and salt,  
and some of my words rot  
in the refrigerator,  
along with carrots and raspberries,  
with fungus blooming all over their body.  
What should I eat for breakfast tomorrow?  
Bukowski?

# Heroic Verse

Teo Eve

Knuckled over by the cast-iron armour  
handed down to you by your father,  
your back strains its weight to keep its shape,  
the silver mail coiling tightly round your limbs.  
High on your shelf, the Athenian athlete  
marks with Olympic-throw precision  
your absence of trophies and furies,  
and climbs ever upward as you strain to reach  
propped on the tips of your toes like a Degas  
Dancer, stacking books like Ionic  
ladders rugging to the Parthenon  
which, you will find, is guarded not by  
Muses, but by Titans, whom the Seer  
said you are not yet man enough to slay.

# Ocean Diver

Amy McLachlan

Ocean Diver, domed helmet filled with water in place of air walks across no man's land,  
seaweed-wrapped heart in one hand, severed oxygen pipe in the other. Asking quietly

will you still be there waiting for me? When I emerge from my trip to the sea?  
Will you wash the salt from my hair and will you dry my wrinkled skin for me?

And what becomes of the birds who can no longer nest in trees under the rising waters?

Rivers bursting their banks and lakes swelling. The sea, devouring

cakes and biscuits and the idea of you, sat waiting for the Ocean Diver,  
but he'll be late, he's always late, his pocket watch is water-logged and salty,

ticking to the sloshing in his helmet. Looking at the world from inside the fishbowl,

warped sky and glittery visions, peering through his own personal ocean

and taking everything in in six-second bursts, one-two, step-slosh, forgot  
that I was waiting for you here, Ocean Diver?

Three-four, the moon rises and the tides turn, stomp-splash  
and the sea is right behind you once again, Ocean Diver, rearing like a nightmare

you wake from in a cold sweat, salty –  
how much salt is in the human body?

And did you know, Ocean Diver, we're equal parts water to salt as the sea is?  
And one day we will return from whence we came,

dragging ourselves on broken limbs, underdeveloped to overdeveloped,  
to the brine we once crawled from, the foam we were born in,

and I will come to you, Ocean Diver,  
I will come to you.

# The See-through Garden

Claire Miller

From the first drop  
the rubbish takes root,  
and out of the rot  
grow translucent shoots.  
Fifty-one million  
plastic petals  
peppering fields.  
Metal trees tip  
bag-strip-billowing  
branches like willow  
to water.  
An elastic river  
slaps sludge on banks of  
sewage-chewed tampons,  
floating holes and corpse throes.  
The garden grows.  
We sit on the lot,  
a grease-spot box for a blanket,  
watching life seep  
from every stem, unstemmable,  
and this time secateurs won't cut it.

# Haikus

James Pares

An old almond tree  
surrenders another petal  
the wind is picking up

A huge lake gently ripples,  
Licking the shore  
In the moonlight

Behind a glowing thicket  
The sun slips away;  
I hear a smile beside me

# Coping

Marty Fraser-Turner

I forgot  
    what it was that  
    I said I had  
        to tell myself  
    if I began  
    to feel that  
way again. It was something  
    about a ball  
    still sitting in  
my hands, that  
    I had power  
    over whether  
Or did I or not to bounce it.  
    decide in  
    the end that  
        there was no ball?  
    Was it instead a  
    match and a  
matchbox? No, I think I  
    ditched that  
    idea as well,  
but the sound  
    of striking  
    some[one]thing  
Each way rings a bell.  
    I look I  
    feel I face  
        the same thing,  
    I feel I  
    face the  
same living. Hell,  
    I am glad  
    you are  
made up.  
    Heaven,  
    well, well  
I'm sorry what can I say?  
    but I forgot  
    what it was  
        that I had to

tell myself  
  on days like  
today.

# Just because I'm old it doesn't mean I can't have a brandy at 4am

Emma Pallett

A lemon shop balanced on the street  
where we'd meet and eat melons in the middle of the night

complaining about pigeon shit on our vegetable patches  
and the matches that are too damp to be lit

the runner-bean lamps slouch sour-faced at the two of us  
on avocado armchairs playing catch with a green lemon

seven years ago we were seven days away from being  
seven months from seventy seven

and now we laugh about that pelican that stole your salmon  
whilst at the Aussie beach hut

but now we can only go to Cornwall and fuck Cornwall  
with its lemon ice cream that's too sharp

and the harp on the caravan roof  
instead drinking brandy

it's handy we have these tumblers and armchairs  
dreading the stairs in the morning see the dawn shuffle in

and a light goes on in the lemon shop.

# Sweet-Toothed Specimen

Jem Braithwaite

The merry-go-round spins again. Look carefully into the blur. Fat hands grip a plastic horse's neck. Cracks crowd a solid mane. A rider's lips are dusted with sugar. Indicates there are snacks to be had. Where? Sniff. Look carefully. Shimmering dough jammed between cobbles. Something delicious this way fries. Delve into a crowd. Wade. The thickest syrup. Odours mix. Thousand Island. Chemicals and ketchup. Light glut. Fill my nose with mulch. Pad my whole head. Lungs scream. Return to surface now.

'Doughnuts'. Written in light. Miracle neon. The deep-sea diver's lungs refill. Out of the way. "Get out of my way." Invoke Moses. Part whole families, halve couples, fling aside the frail whilst the dough goldens, soaking up hot oil, softening itself for my teeth. Thoughtful prey considers the wolf. The rabbit sniffs rock salt to season the brain. About me the flung frail cry as my fancies fry. Eye contact.

"I shall have twelve, my huckleberry friend."

# Beauty as blemishes

Lauren Winson

Cloaking our bodies in shame,  
a second skin stretching across crevices,  
tied up in knots where hearts beat  
a hidden pulse through veins, criss-crossed rivers  
writhing upon this map of ourselves,  
a landscape that alters with every  
inhale  
exhale

Breathe.

Watch ribs swell, bloom,  
protruding petals that you call weeds,  
plucking, prodding, shaving  
away as if you could reach the roots,  
this life long battle  
against the nature bursting out of your pores.

You're alive, breathing, beautiful.

You can heal, these scars are flowers  
upon your skin,  
growing a garden  
of strawberry seeds scabs and mountain ridge scars  
rising from scraped away skin,  
unceasing regeneration.

# Elements

Emily Patel

An element of surprise  
When I say I'm with a girl.  
'Oh, didn't you have a boyfriend?'  
Yes, have you never heard  
Of the word: 'bi'?  
No reason I can't like both.  
A hint of invalidation  
In your tone and words.  
'Does that mean you're figuring it out?'  
No, I know what I am.  
An aspect of dismissal  
When you still use 'gay'  
As an insult. It's 2018.  
And leave hateful comments  
On social media.  
Fuelling homophobia, keeping it alive.  
Behind the anonymity  
Of a computer screen.  
Without care, or realisation  
Of what it could mean.  
The small displays of discrimination  
May seem harmless at first.  
But bring these all together  
And it shows that they are still oppressed.  
Maybe not as much as before,  
But these elements are still there.

# Ambivalence

Charlotte Niblett

Before you became ill, I asked you;  
“Do you believe something better lies beyond?”  
You assured me that when you got there,  
I’d be the first to know.

Last Friday, you left us all for good.  
And so my waiting began.  
But now, I have become paranoid  
As I look for you everywhere.

My book fell off my bed yesterday.  
Open at page 65.  
You crossed my mind; is this it?  
Do I search for some significance?

This afternoon, a blue tit stayed around for far too long,  
Even when I out stretched my hand.  
We would often admire the garden life,  
I thought of you again; what else could it be?

I undoubtedly still feel your presence  
But rationality annoyingly begs the question;  
Is it instinct made of grief?  
Grief toying with my emotions?

If anything, the uncertainty serves a purpose.  
It keeps my mind fresh with the thought of you,  
Sustaining your place as yes, I see signs of you everywhere.  
Ambivalence mists my judgement,  
But it is soothing nonetheless.

# Jaguar

Hayley Sleigh

In Café Berlin, I was reborn  
seeing myself reflected  
in that moment.

Me, a bronze medal wife,  
you, a hidden golden star  
proudly, boldly incandescent  
ten years younger but so much more  
worldly, raven hair caught  
in finger waves, fingers stained  
with cigarettes and newspaper print.

Your daily roses  
intertwined between my diary pages  
in that beaten old suitcase, never fading.  
Our poems, shopping lists

*Cream, your handkerchief,  
writing paper, your love for me alone,  
needle and thread.*

I will carry them always, wishing  
I could wrap your throat in handmade  
scarves and butterfly kisses.  
I still feel your warm breath long after  
it was captured, frozen.

My caged Jaguar,  
who raced through life.  
We never caught up.