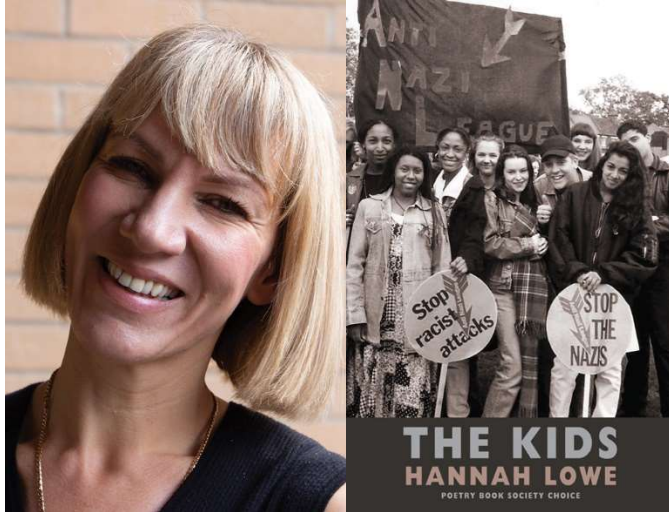


# *The Kids*

## by Hannah Lowe



Hannah Lowe is a poet, memoirist and academic. Her first poetry collection *Chick* (Bloodaxe, 2013) won the Michael Murphy Memorial Award for Best First Collection. In September 2014, she was named as one of 20 Next Generation poets. Her family memoir *Long Time, No See* (Periscope, 2015) featured as Radio 4's Book of the Week. Her second collection, *Chan*, is published by Bloodaxe. (2016). She has also published four chapbooks: *The Hitcher* (Rialto 2012); *R x* (sine wave peak 2013); and *Ormonde* (Hercules Editions 2014) and *The Neighbourhood* (Outspoken Press, 2019). She is currently working on a fifth chapbook for Hercules Editions about the old Chinatown at Limehouse. She undertook her AHRC-funded PhD in Creative Writing at Newcastle University, and now lectures in Creative Writing at Brunel University.

### Reviews

'The poems in *The Kids* fizz and chat with all the vitality and longing of the classes they conjure. Funny, moving, sometimes painful and always questioning, they capture teachers and their students learning life from each other in profound and unexpected ways. A joy to read.' – Liz Berry

'These sequences of stories are a refreshing update to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *To Sir with Love*. Each of Lowe's sonnets is a blackboard chalked with the tales of earnest teachers, of cheeky and lovable students, of being mentored to become a poet and of motherhood and learning to instruct again. Lowe makes the sonnet exciting for our age through its urgent, its compassionate, its wonderfully humorous address of the personal and the social.' – Daljit Nagra

## Mr Presley

Teachers' first names were secrets. I knew them all.  
Miss Crane was *Lynda*. Mrs Kumachi, *Rose*.  
And my teacher, Mr Polly, was plain old *Paul*.  
So why one day I called him *Uncle*, and worse,  
*Uncle Paul*, is anyone's guess. The words  
just slithered from my lips like a half-sucked sweet  
while my classmates sniggered and I heard  
that laughter squeeze around me like a trap net

or a draw-string sack. But why, the next week  
did Mr Polly take his scissors, and raise  
my plait to its jaws? For whose benefit,  
for whose applause? I could feel the silver blades  
and his hot chortling breath on the back of my neck  
as the kids around me chanted *do it do it!*

## Love

Love was the boy I broke up with years ago.  
He lived on a grey estate in Upton Heights.  
He bought me tins of cider and Marlboro Lights  
and sometimes carved my name in fried potatoes  
spelled out on my plate. One night he led me  
through the streets, past moonlit maisonettes  
and tower blocks, to dawn on Wanstead Flats  
and as though I were a bride, he made a bed –

his jacket on the grass, and swans in the marshes  
white as the pills we swallowed down with lager,  
our bodies pressing tight as a new book's pages –  
his T-shirt, his hands, his sweat, his tongue, the tower  
windows' blinking lights, the lifting sun,  
the body doing what it hadn't done.

## The Unretained

What happened in the end to Luke? So clever,  
so always utterly stoned he walked like weights  
were in his trainers, until his massive 'biftas'  
put voices in his head that made him late,  
then didn't let him out at all. And what  
about Amal, who slept on strangers' sofas,  
pyjamas in her rucksack, eating Kit Kats  
for her breakfast? From joker-in-the-corner

to never-answered phone, to mates-of-mates  
who may or may have not had seen her? What happened  
to Eliot who went to Feltham? And Martha,  
five-months-pregnant, quitting for her boyfriend  
and a flat, my cautions drifting off her  
like confetti as she strutted through the gates?

## Discussion Ideas

- Is 'Mr Presley' a poem which passes judgement?
- Did you notice the swans in 'Love'? What role do they play in the poem?
- 'The Unretained' is the only sonnet in this book of sonnets which doesn't have a strict left-aligned margin. Why does this wavy margin do to your understanding of the poem?
- Would this poem work as a teacher recruitment advert?
- What is the relationship of a teacher to his or her past students? Who are the teachers of your past, who – perhaps - are the students? How does this relationship change as you get older?

## Other books by Hannah Lowe

*Chan* (Bloodaxe Books, 2016)

*Chick* (Bloodaxe Books, 2013)

## If you liked Hannah Lowe, try ...

- Mimi Khalvati
- Jacqueline Saphra
- Liz Berry

## Hannah Lowe online

[www.hannahlowe.me](http://www.hannahlowe.me)