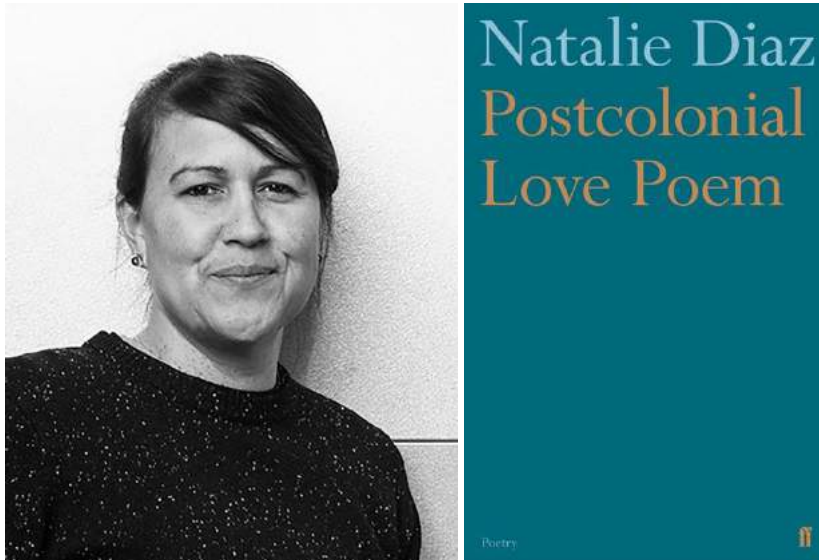


# ***Postcolonial Love Poem***

## **by Natalie Diaz**



Natalie Diaz was born in the Fort Mojave Indian Village in Needles, California. She is Mojave and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian community. She earned a BA from Old Dominion University, where she received a full athletic scholarship. Diaz played professional basketball in Europe and Asia before returning to Old Dominion to earn an MFA. She is the author of the poetry collection *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2012). Her honours and awards include the Nimrod/Hardman Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry, the Louis Untermeyer Scholarship in Poetry from Bread Loaf, the *Narrative Poetry Prize*, and a Lannan Literary Fellowship.

### **Reviews**

‘Reading Natalie Diaz’s Forward prize shortlisted collection, *Postcolonial Love Poem*, feels like a radical political act. It opens “The war ended / depending on which war you mean: those we started, / before those, millennia ago and onward, / those which started me, which I lost and won – / these ever-blooming wounds.” Wounds reappear throughout Diaz’s book as an image of unhealing trauma, where the public body of history – the genocide of America’s Native population – encounters the private spaces of desire and loss. An intimacy, an erotic interconnectedness, faces this difficult and violent history with love.’ (Sandeep Parmar, *The Guardian*)

‘Early in Natalie Diaz’s second book, the speaker has an epiphany that she’s “the only Native American / on the 8th floor of this hotel or any” in New York City’s smallest borough. The poem, “Manhattan Is a Lenape Word,” grieves the fact that “nobody asks, *Where have all / the Natives gone?*” even as it recognizes where the Natives are: “Not here.” Violence against Indigenous people is not just historical but ongoing, systemic and institutional, Diaz reminds us. “Native Americans make up less than / 1 percent of the population of America,” she writes in “American Arithmetic,” but “Police kill Native Americans more / than any other

race.” This knowledge, however fraught, emboldens Diaz to celebrate her survival as a queer Aha Makav woman living in the 21st century...

This book asks us to read the world carefully, knowing that not everything will be translated for us, knowing that it is made up of pluralities. “Let’s say it’s all text,” Diaz writes, “the animal, the dune, / the wind in the cottonwood, and the body.” Diaz’s collection is no doubt one of the most important poetry releases in years, one to applaud for its considerable demonstration of skill, its resistance to dominant perspectives and its light wrought of desire.’ (Emilia Philips, *New York Times*)

### Postcolonial Love Poem

I’ve been taught bloodstones can cure a snakebite,  
can stop the bleeding – most people forgot this  
when the war ended. The war ended  
depending on which war you mean: those we started,  
before those, millenia ago and onward,  
those which started me, which I lost and won–  
these ever-blooming wounds.  
I was built by wage. So I wage love and worse–  
always another campaign to march across  
a desert night for the cannon flash of your pale skin  
settling in a silver lagoon of smoke at your breast.  
I dismount my dark horse, bend to you there, deliver you  
the hard pull of all my thirsts–  
I learned *Drink* in a country of drought.  
We pleasure to hurt, leave marks  
the size of stones – each a cabochon polished  
by our mouths. I, your lapidary, your lapidary wheel  
turning – green mottled red–  
the jaspers of our desires.  
There are wildflowers in my desert  
which take up to twenty years to bloom.  
The seeds sleep like geodes beneath hot feldspar sand  
until a flash flood bolts the arroyo, lifting them  
in its copper current, opens them with memory–  
they remember what their god whispered  
into their ribs: *Wake up and ache for your life.*  
Where your hands have been are diamonds  
on my shoulders, down my back, thighs–  
I am your culebra.  
I am in the dirt for you.  
Your hips are quartz-light and dangerous,  
two rose-horned rams ascending a soft desert wash

before the November sky untethers a hundred-year flood—  
the desert returned suddenly to its ancient sea.  
Arise the wild heliotrope, scorpion weed,  
blue phacelia which hold purple the way a throat can hold  
the shape of any great hand—  
*Great hands* is what she called mine.  
The rain will eventually come, or not.  
Until then, we touch our bodies like wounds—  
the war never ended and somehow begins again.

### **They Don't Love You Like I Love You**

My mother said this to me  
long before Beyoncé lifted the lyrics  
from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

and what my mother meant by,  
*Don't stray*, was that she knew  
all about it – the way it feels to need

someone to love you, someone  
not *your kind*, someone white,  
some one some many who live

because so many of mine  
have not, and further, live on top of  
those of ours who don't.

*I'll say, say, say,*  
*I'll say, say, say,*  
What is the United States if not a clot

of clouds? If not spilled milk? Or blood?  
If not the place we once were  
in the millions? America is 'Maps' –

Maps are ghosts: white and  
layered with people and places I see through.  
My mother has always known best,

knew that I'd been begging for them,  
to lay my face against their white  
laps, to be held in something more

than the loud light of their projectors,  
as they flicker themselves – sepia  
or blue – all over my body.

All this time,  
I thought my mother said, *Wait*,  
as in, *Give them a little more time*

*to know your worth*,  
when really, she said, *Weight*,  
meaning *heft*, preparing me

for the yoke of myself,  
the beast of my country's burdens,  
which is less worse than

my country's plow. Yes,  
when my mother said,  
*They don't love you like I love you*,

she meant,  
*Natalie, that doesn't mean*  
*you aren't good.*

### **The First Water is the Body (extract)**

The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States – also, it is a part of my body.

I carry a river. It is who I am: 'Aha Makav. This is not metaphor.

When a Mojave says, *Inyech 'Aha Makavch ithuum*, we are saying our name. We are telling a story of our existence. *The river runs through the middle of my body.*

So far, I have said the word *river* in every stanza. I don't want to waste water. I must preserve the river in my body.

In future stanzas, I will try to be more conservative.

### **Discussion Ideas**

- Where does the violence lie in 'Postcolonial Love Poem'? What about violence's opposite? Who or what is the love poem written to?
- The Yeah Yeah Yeahs sing they don't love you like I love you in 'Maps' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olxljgcuQRU> Beyoncé sings the same <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeonBmeFR8o>. How does the meaning of this phrase change from one song to the next song to the poem? In what situation could you imagine using this phrase yourself? Is it a powerful or powerless phrase?

- 'America is *Maps*' - what's the difference between America and the map of America?
- 'The First Water is the Body' is a six and a half page long poem exploring the Colorado and other rivers and waters – we've extracted its first stanza. What might that word 'conservative' – with all its meanings – be doing at this point in the poem? If you were to say that a river is part of your body or existence, which river would it be?
- What does the term 'postcolonial' mean to you when thinking about poetry? Natalie Diaz is a poet writing out of America – what status has that country in relation to postcolonialism? How might an American answer that question? How about a Briton?

### **Other books by Natalie Diaz**

*When My Brother Was An Aztec* (Copper Canyon Press, 2013)

### **If you liked Natalie Diaz, try ...**

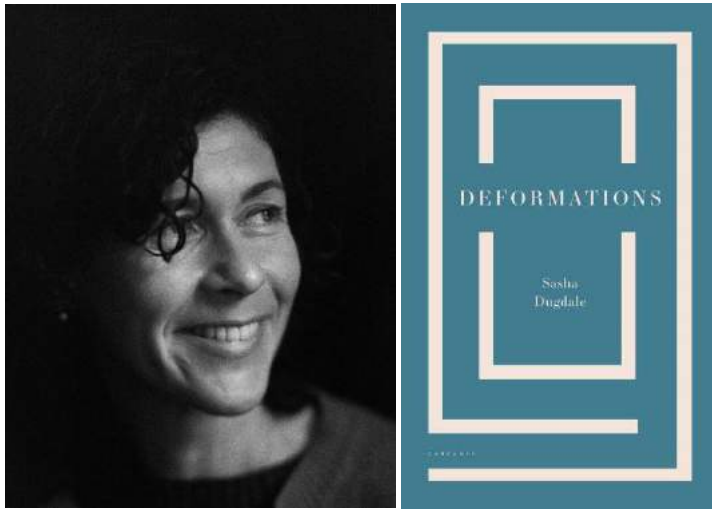
- Joy Harjo
- Layli Long Soldier
- Elizabeth Acevedo

### **Natalie Diaz online**

[nataliegermainediaz.com](http://nataliegermainediaz.com)

# *Deformations*

## by Sasha Dugdale



Poet, playwright and translator Sasha Dugdale has published five collections of poems with Carcanet, most recently *Deformations* in 2020. She won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem in 2016 and in 2017 she was awarded a Cholmondeley Prize for Poetry. She is former editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation* and poet-in-residence at St John's College, Cambridge (2018-2020).

### Reviews

*'Deformations* includes two large-scale works related in their preoccupation with biographical and mythical narrative. 'Welfare Handbook' explores the life and art of Eric Gill, the well-known English letter cutter, sculptor and cultural figure, who is known to have sexually abused his daughters. The poem draws on material from Gill's letters, diaries, notes and essays as part of a lyrical exploration of the conjunction between aesthetics, subjectivity and violence. 'Pitysad' is a series of simultaneously occurring fragments composed around themes and characters from Homer's *Odyssey*. It considers how trauma is disguised and deformed through myth and art. Acting as a bridge between these two works is a series of individual poems on the creation and destruction of cultural and mythical conventions.'

(description, Carcanet)

'Sandwiched between Welfare Handbook and Pitysad come a handful of shorter poems, which share the longer sequences' dark and troubled world-view. A couple feel trapped by their neat conceits: "Temple Song", a biblical scene subversively rewritten as a dramatic monologue, à la Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"; and the synesthesia-heavy "Pigment" ("violet-black is the mortal colour", yellow "is the debased colour of survival", etc). The rest, though, are exceptionally strong. In these smaller pieces, Dugdale shows a keen sense of how one perfect word can elevate a line. Just look at that "hurriedly" in her description of a hare: "When the sun was bright she could see through the hare's hindlegs/ its thin skin, thrown hurriedly over bone and tendon". It's the sign of a poet utterly in control of her gifts. This

may seem a strange thing to say about a book so filled with unreliable narrators, but in *Deformations* Dugdale proves hers is a voice you can trust.' (Tristram Fane Saunders, *The Telegraph*)

### **Girl and Hare**

There was once a girl and she had a hare  
as a pet. It was so long and brown and soft.  
It stretched its body next to hers on the sunlounger  
where she lay in her oversized sunglasses,  
little and freckled. The hare had the tautness of game  
its hindquarters were round solid  
but she could nest its paws in her hand  
ring them with her fingers as a poacher might  
but tenderly.

When the sun was bright she could see through  
the hare's hindlegs,  
its thin skin, thrown hurriedly over bone and tendon,  
the light pulsed red and sombre as if the hare  
itself contained

a small convex sun like a red blood cell.  
Hare had a narrow breast like hers, rosed with fur,  
and little childish shoulders  
but forearms like a strong man's,  
the sinews and fibres twanging  
soundlessly

as it shifted.  
Now it lay still, although hares never sleep, its lip moving  
gently and its amber eyes  
waxing and waning.

It lowered its lids, for a moment it looked sly, knowing.  
Hare is apparently drowsing. The girl removes her glasses,  
places them on the hare's face  
and closes her eyes.

This is hare's moment: as long as her, and as old.

### **Think of a Utopian City**

Think of a utopian city  
Think of its binding walls and its symmetry  
The age of attack and repulse is past  
but the sympathetic walls remain  
purposeful (unlike those sprawling lines of slums  
that rise like scales all over the downs).

Think how all have a function in this city  
And are dressed in different colours:  
ultramarine, lead tin yellow, Verdigris.  
We work hard, but when we are not working  
we congregate in profile against arcades  
and fall in love with the truth.

Some are bakers, some butchers,  
some are makers of shoes, or windows, or brushes.  
The streets are harmonious, they smell of woodshavings  
rising bread, and cake. Women assist the  
slaughter of pigs, the curing of parts.

Every so often a prophet opens a top window  
Or an angel lowers itself like a stagehand.  
A baby is born at intervals and placed in a trough  
for safekeeping.

## **Intimacy**

Just as when you unearthed a nest and all the tiny bodies  
curled together touched the air and began their disintegration,  
  
clutching like children or lovers, and still furred or feathered  
but only for that moment, already extinguished, near extinction  
  
beginning to break apart, just as morning haze disperses  
when the sun tips the hill top, so much dust held in simulation  
  
and now disbanded, I know nothing means nothing,  
that substances transform, still some shapes touch more than others:  
  
nestling things exhibiting proximity in death. To have a mouth  
and press it against another's wing, to spread a wing and cover  
  
over a sac of flesh, that fools me, makes me soft and hurt,  
the ache shaped from love for what is not, and worse,  
  
for what will be no longer, so mourning is double-vapour  
rising from false intimacy between one corpse and another,  
  
already gone, all of it, a loosening image of life and love  
an attitude struck by the dead, their dry palms  
  
cupping air. Even so let fools rehearse it while they have  
breath. The shiver when a touch catches us unaware



you carrying me to bed curled in your arms,  
the still-warm mess of sheets, limbs, hair.

## Discussion Ideas

- ‘There was once a girl and she had a hare / as a pet’. What sort of narrative does this introduction set you up to expect? Is this expectation met or confounded by the poem?
- There is a lot of putting on and taking off of glasses in ‘Girl and Hare’. What is being seen or looked at?
- For whom is the city a utopia in ‘Think of a Utopian City’? The one who conceives of the city, or its residents?
- This is a poem in a sequence based on the writings of Eric Gill, the sculptor who was a member of a number of artists’ communities. What do you know of his notions of utopia? How does that inform your reading of the poem?
- Have you ever seen as many commas on a page as in ‘Intimacy’? Phrases and clauses and lists pile up – how does this syntactic complexity relate to the simple central phrase ‘I know nothing means nothing’? Does it mean nothing, ‘you carrying me to bed curled in your arms’?

## Other books by Sasha Dugdale

*Joy* (Carcenet, 2017)

*Red House* (Carcenet, 2011)

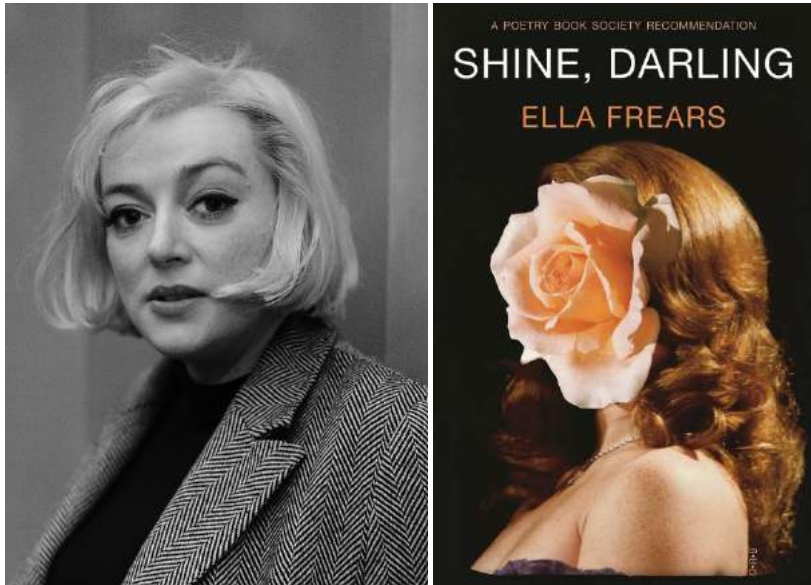
## If you liked Sasha Dugdale, try ...

- Sinéad Morrissey
- Tara Bergin
- Alice Oswald

## Sasha Dugdale online

[Sasha at the Poetry Foundation](#)

# *Shine, Darling* by Ella Frears



Ella Frears is a poet and artist based in London. Her debut collection *Shine, Darling* (Offord Road Books, 2020) was a Poetry Book Society recommendation and is shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection.

Ella has had work published in the *London Review of Books*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Poetry London*, *Ambit* and *The Rialto* among others and has been commended in the National Poetry Competition. She is a trustee and editor of Magma Poetry magazine and has been poet/artist in residence for the Tate Gallery, the National Trust, conservation organisation Back from the Brink and Royal Holloway University physics department, where she was writing about the Cassini Spacecraft. Her poems about the St Ives Modernists are currently on show at Tate St Ives.

## Reviews

Ella Frears's debut is a collection of wry, vivid poems whose power lies in their intimacy. They are as insistent as they are circumspect, drawing close to the reader's ear and bringing them into confidence. The engine of *Shine, Darling* is one of strength, of fortitude in confronting and surviving the world, of a lifted-chin audacity – 'There was pain,' the speaker allows, 'but it was not new pain.' Frears's work is world-weathered rather than world-weary, delighted by service stations, fucking on bins in Cornwall, in constant communion with the moon. It lives for the power-play of people, of the pull of the sea, the smoky air – 'Stormy, sticky with flies' – and tangled underbrush where the land ends. Her characters test each other, experimenting with the boundaries of physical violence, of punishment, of traps, all the while drawing the reader into a complicity that gives these poems all their daring, electrifying muscularity. In *Shine, Darling*, the desire to expose and disclose wrestles with defence and defiance. The result is exhilarating, a 'glorious full-bodied' debut collection with the draw of an adamant tide. (description via Offord Road Books)

'The moon's final appearance and the collection's title appears in the concluding poem. Men have been feared, ignored, desired, condemned and occasionally manipulated in some of these poems. Here a mischievous female narrator decides to maroon her boyfriend on the roof of their house while a dinner party goes on below. It's at once a funny, tender, awkward image of emasculation and this ambiguity of tone is captured in the book title's appearance – a little sarcastic, a little affectionate, rather camp and performative: 'As the guests left I looked up and realised that there / was no moon. *Shine, darling*. I whispered. / And from behind the chimney rose his little head.' Such a finely judged ambiguity of impact is all of a part with this intriguing, shape-shifting, uneasy and often very funny first collection. (Martyn Crucefix blog)

## **The Film**

The sun was shining as we  
ambled around campus  
stopping boys and men  
and asking them to hit me  
across the face.

They all refused  
at first, but we explained  
it was art and necessary  
so they slapped me, one  
after another.

I realised I had to  
harden my eyes, provoke.  
Each boy did a comedy slap – palm  
to face, apologised before  
and after. It was hot and bright.

We flirted with a geographer  
whose slap was light, his fingers  
just brushing my cheek as though  
turning my face to the side to see  
my profile. We had about

twenty guys on film.  
My friend's boyfriend turned up  
and we asked if he would do it.  
He kissed her and stood to face me.  
My friend pressed record, and said

'go' and I was laughing,  
had forgotten to settle my face,  
my left cheek slightly pink from  
a day of slapping. I was not ready  
for his backhand. Quick

and strong, a strange noise  
as though he'd knocked that laugh  
right off me, a thicker pain  
than a sting, an immediate loss  
of breath. For a moment,

we were silent, and I looked  
at my friend whose hand had  
flown to her cheek,  
the camera's red light still  
blinking and I knew

we would never watch  
the film, that I would feel sick  
and guilty as long as the bruise  
lasted – longer – having asked  
for what wasn't mine.

### **Hayle Services (grease impregnated)**

His head in the front seat  
is parboiled. I'm feeling  
pretty empty packet, salty  
foil. *No point in worrying  
until we know* but oh hello  
turmoil. Boots. Up-down  
the aisles *do you have an oily  
complexion?* Woman at the till  
tries to get my eyes with hers.  
Avoid! Toilet-bound, *do you  
have an oily...* M&S escalator  
groans, shudders, fan belt  
of the universe turning.  
Can't go! Foiled again, but then  
OK anxious stream. Feel grimy,  
a bit doomy. Pissy hands.  
Whisper: *et tu uterus?* Replay –  
recoil. The overwhelming  
sense that I'm on trial, soiled,  
ruined, spoiled. Mamma,  
can you come pick me up?  
30 seconds. Still wet and blank.  
I'm in Hayle, oh not much really,  
just waiting for the pink voila.

## You, a Teenager,

At St Ives School just after the millennium are red-faced, insisting *IT. IS. ART. BECAUSE. THE ARTIST. SAYS.*

*IT. IS.* in response to your English teacher's dismissal of Tracey Emin's bed. You bat away every so if I put a brick ... and *my two year old could've...* but you, a teenage girl, on a table of boys (in the hope that you'll be a good influence) don't yet have the linguistic skills to argue this point. The teacher tells you *enough now*, and you open *Of Mice and Men* and the boys ruffle your hair, chanting *don't muss it up, don't muss it up...* in a faux Southern-American drawl. And you think, Emin probably dealt with men and boys like these, Hepworth too, in her way. And you think, at least we're engaging. At least this book is good. You knew the art was art, and anyway – you quite liked it when they touched your hair.

## Discussion Ideas

- 'having asked for what wasn't mine' – what might this phrase mean, in 'The Film'?
- The poem is set 'on campus' – why might that be? Do you think that this a shaped and recounted anecdote, or that it's an imagined episode? Does it matter if you do or don't know which?
- 'parboiled' / 'voila' – is 'Hayle Services (grease impregnated)' a poem about fear or bravado? Also, look for all the other '-oil-' words in the poem – is this what the poet means by 'grease impregnated'?
- A number of Ella Frears' poems are set in service stations. Why do you think they hold such poetic appeal? Do you have a service station memory or story?
- Would you give 'You, A Teenager,' to a teenager in your life? Would they thank you for it? What might they take from it? How about giving it to your own teenage self?

## Other books by Ella Frears

*Passivity, Electricity, Acclivity* (Goldsmiths Shorts, 2018)

## If you liked Ella Frears, try ...

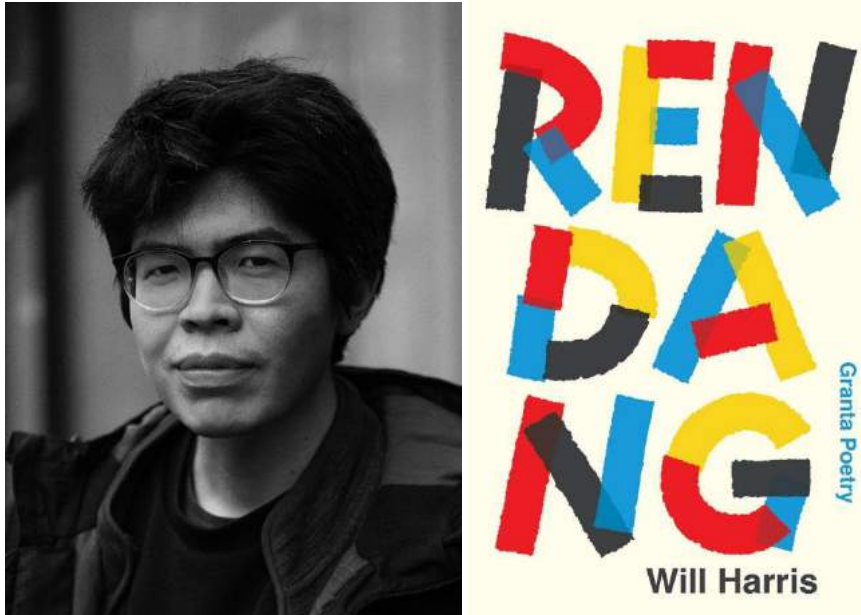
- Martha Sprackland
- Helen Charman
- Alex MacDonald

## Ella Frears online

[Ella's Instagram](#)

# **RENDANG**

## **by Will Harris**



Will Harris is a writer of Chinese Indonesian and British heritage, born and based in London. He is the author of an essay, *Mixed-Race Superman* (UK: Peninsula Press, 2018; US: Melville House, 2019), and a poetry book, *RENDANG* (UK: Granta; US: Wesleyan University Press, 2020). He also co-edited the Spring 2020 issue of *The Poetry Review* with Mary Jean Chan.

### **Reviews**

‘One of the standout scenes in *RENDANG* rises from a second-hand memory in the daydream of a bored poet in a dressing room. A couple see a woman on the street dancing, hood overhead, can of Diet Coke in hand: “The wind blew/and she nearly lost her balance but not only did she/not fall, she performed a kind of hop/and skip.” It’s one of many moving portraits of everyday grace in the debut collection of Will Harris, a young Anglo-Indonesian poet who has already won the acclaim of the Forward Prizes (Best Single Poem shortlist, 2018) and the Arts Foundation (Poetry Fellow, 2019) ... The poems in *RENDANG* span the formal range of a mature poet but it’s Harris’s playfulness that really impresses. He has the confidence and stylistic mastery to jump between dreams and scenes like a character in an old video game (and uses this as a device in “The White Jumper”). If verse is a tightrope, Harris skips along it.’ (Maria Crawford, *the Financial Times*)

‘Will Harris’s *RENDANG* is a sharp and assured debut collection that meditates on the multiplicity of identity, the shaky building blocks that make up a country and the politics of exhibition. It travels from actual terrains – in London, Chicago, Jakarta – to the surreal “purple rock” of “Planet Mongo”, and this exploratory curiosity is matched by the collection’s formal expansiveness, encompassing accomplished prose-poems, concrete

poetry and lyric sequences. Harris suffuses the everyday with a mythic dignity, so that the drunk singing Otis Redding in a pub takes on the tragic stature of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and "bees groan inside / the carcass of the split bin bag" as Samson's biblical riddle is brought to summer pavements to later "draw forth – not sweetness – something new". As the speaker ticks "Other, Mixed" on forms, he muses that "some / drunk nights I theorize / my own transmembered norms", wryly using the non-standard English "transmembered" to evade being trapped in bureaucratic boxes himself. The collection leans into a vocabulary all of its own, and announces itself as an artefact that will not be dislodged.' (Joanna Lee, the *Guardian*)

## **Mother Country**

The shades open for landing,  
I see the pandan-leafed  
interior expanding  
towards the edge of a relieved  
horizon. Down along  
the banks of the Ciliwung  
are slums I had forgotten,  
the river like a loosely  
sutured wound. As we begin  
our descent into the black  
smog of an emerging  
power, I make out the tin  
shacks, the stalls selling juices,  
the red-tiled colonial  
barracks, the new mall.  
It is raining profusely.  
After years of her urging  
me to go, me holding back,  
I have no more excuses.

## **Lines of Flight**

### *Mariinsky Canal*

A girl twists a stalk of rye  
around her wrist like  
a bracelet. She sees her father  
at the plough and wants  
  
to pick a cornflower, its dark  
blue almost purple  
colour threaded through  
with grief, among the weeds.

She wants to go and pin  
one to his chest. And all this  
is implied, though  
the photograph itself

shows just a field of rye  
with cornflowers.

## **My Name is Dai**

I heard him say his name was die, and seconds later that it was short for David, spelt *D-A-I*. We had just sat down when he walked up to me and Susie. He said he recognized her from the National Portrait Gallery. The one with the large forehead above the door. People miss it. The sad smile. Beer sloshed against the edges of his glass like a fish trying to escape its bowl, but in this case the fish was dead and only looked to be alive because of Dai's swaying. There are people who relieve themselves of information like a dog pissing against a streetlamp to mark out territory, urination no longer in the service of the body, providing no relief. Likewise, conversation. Dai was a type of Ancient Mariner.

It was in his bones. He'd been working on a site with Polish builders and it was one of their birthdays. He mimed plunking bottles on the table. *Vodka*. Whole bottles? *I'm Welsh*, he said. *I was born on a mountain. Between two sheepdogs*. He started talking about the village he grew up in, how happy he was among the meadows and milking cows, how unhappy he was at school. *You might've heard of one boy from school. A right goody. Spoke like Audrey Hepburn or Shakespeare. We all bullied him, but my mam would say why don't you be like Michael, why don't you be like Michael. Michael bloody Sheen. Michael's shirts were always clean and ironed. Anthony Hopkins, he was a local too. A tiny village,*

*And who came out of it? Those two and me. You know, I probably know more words than anyone in this pub. Look at them. You think any of these cunts can spell verbiage?* He spat out each letter – *V-E-R-B-I-A-G-E* – and in the act of spelling became self-conscious. He turned to Susie. *What do you do?* She was a writer so he told her more words. I said I taught a little and wrote. *Teach me*, he said. *Go on*. But I couldn't think of anything wise or useful to tell Dai. On the verge of tipping over, he held a hand out towards us. *Tenderness*, he said, *try a little tenderness*, and then repeating it, half singing it, he said it in a voice both louder and more tender. *That's my advice. You know who that is? Otis Redding.*

*Try a little tenderness, mmm nuh uh uh*. That was when Susie saw the haze descend. Like an explosion in a quarry the inward collapse rippled out across his face, throwing clouds of dust into the sky.



*I'm sorry. A man shouldn't cry. I haven't cried since I was a boy. I haven't...* He stopped. *A man should be a brick, a boulder.* He made his hand into a fist like he was playing rock-paper-scissors in the schoolyard. *My ex-wife died last month. The funeral was yesterday. We were together twenty years but her family, her bloody family, wouldn't let me near it. God, he said, I loved that woman.* He couldn't say her name. He was swaying. I got the impression that he saw

his life as a sea voyage during which he'd done many strange, inexplicable and stupid things, of which shooting an albatross was one. But perhaps he knew it was better to have shot that albatross through the heart and be able to talk about it than to bear it having entered his life and gone. It was then I saw the TV and pointed. *Look! Michael Sheen.* It was true. There he was on *The One Show* in a freshly ironed shirt, smiling at Matt Baker. Dai turned around. *I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I need some air.* He stared at us. *You're writers,* he said. *You should write about this.* And though it may have been unfair, I thought about how many people he'd said this to before.

## Discussion Ideas

- The aeroplane is still in mid-air in 'Mother Country'. What do you think has preceded this journey? What might follow it?
- What does the phrase 'mother country' mean to you? Do you live in your own mother country? How does the phrase change in meaning or importance to you, depending on your proximity to your mother country?
- This is the photograph referred to in 'Lines of Flight' <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/4817/> and here is more information about the photographer [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey\\_Prokudin-Gorsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergey_Prokudin-Gorsky). How does the poet transform this photograph to the poem? Does the reader need the photograph to understand the poem fully?
- 'All this is implied' was the title of Will Harris' first pamphlet publication. What might it mean as a statement of poetic intent?
- More about the original Ancient Mariner - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Rime\\_of\\_the\\_Ancient\\_Mariner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rime_of_the_Ancient_Mariner). What does it mean for a 21<sup>st</sup> century poet to invoke this 18<sup>th</sup> century poetic character in his poem?

## Other books by Will Harris

*Mixed Race Superman* (an essay, Peninsula Press, 2018)  
*All This is Implied* (Happenstance, 2017)

## **If you liked Will Harris, try ...**

- Mary Jean Chan
- Stephen Sexton
- Rishi Dastidar

## **Will Harris online**

[willharris.com](http://willharris.com)

# ***Love Minus Love*** **by Wayne Holloway-Smith**



**WAYNE HOLLOWAY-SMITH**  
**LOVE MINUS LOVE**

Wayne Holloway-Smith was born in Wiltshire and lives in London. His first book-length collection, *Alarum* (Bloodaxe Books, 2017) was a Poetry Book Society Wildcard Choice for Winter 2017, was shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize 2017 and the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize for First Full Collection 2018, and longlisted for the 2019 Michael Murphy Memorial Prize for a distinctive first book of poetry. The final poem in the collection, 'Short', won the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize 2016. His book of poetry, *I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WENDING*, was published by Test Centre Publications in 2018. He won The Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition 2018 for 'the posh mums are boxing in the square'.

## **Reviews**

'I rejoice in Wayne Holloway-Smith's poems, and I miss them when I'm not reading them. *Love Minus Love* is a gorgeous painful classic of the Dead Dad genre, and the We Are All Meat genre and the Re-Building Mum genre. It is a beautiful tapestry-album of boy agony, wit and honesty, punctuated by devastating in-parentheses-bildungsromans. It's unforgettably brilliant.' (Max Porter)

'Exciting, excoriating, gorgeous, appalling, and eye-wateringly honest. Wayne Holloway-Smith's poems are blisteringly beautiful, and probe at a siege-like nucleus of familial harm. Histories of abuse, hurt and disease are confronted and dissected in all their messy, meaty complexity, but always with love, always with hope and a sweet, sweet tenderness. One of the truest poets writing today.' (Fiona Benson)

'*Love Minus Love* is perhaps best understood as a collective, albeit fragmented, verbalisation of this tormented poet's psyche, with many of its poems reading as snippets overheard from

a story already-in-the telling. Nonetheless, Holloway-Smith's guiding voice offers a substitute for the elusive authority figures of the poems themselves – if not through a fortitude of its own, then in its broad capacity for sympathy, and an ability to draw new strength from collective wisdom: “*everybody loves a comeback so*”. So, reading these poems, slowly, we bear witness to the beginnings of a reluctant pathway towards resolution. From behind gritted teeth, out of “the sun.../and my daughter laughing” the poet affords a genuine smile that, we believe, will see the tables turned on his personal tragedy: “I look silly doing it here goes/...everyone is dancing the rhythm is in me.” A heartfelt putting of pen to paper, it is best defined by a single, summative word: bravery.’ (Daniel Baksi, *The Arts Desk*)

### **let's get down to the boiled beef of it**

let's get down to the boiled  
beef of it let's get down to  
the canned ham the corned  
beef hash of it the pickled  
herring the rump steak let's  
get right down and inside the  
black pudding the shepherd's  
pie of this stuff let's tuck  
right into the sausage and  
mash the battered cod of it  
the jar of mussels the pork  
loin tender loin the liver and  
onions of the thing let's dig  
deep into the chicken and  
chips the turkey thigh of  
this business the sizzling  
bacon the eggs of it *no foreign*  
*muck* lamb shank gammon  
*you've got a screw loose* my  
father's face fastening and  
unfastening around mouthfuls  
of pheasant the game

[rip open my right lung and probably you'll find cig  
ash butts a staunch inability to leave my dad behind  
and something like a dirty great cow  
getting roasted in all the heat]

## **what is sad is**

what is sad is I wrote your name all over my jeans  
keep the jeans keep the three-meat sandwich we ate  
the rap song we made up together in a bedroom  
at your house then mine with our parents getting  
drunk downstairs and despising each other keep the  
elderly woman we both wanted to be on her bike  
riding her bike no hands keep the elderly woman  
we saw cold and knocked down in the street circled  
by an ambulance and an ambulance everything  
zooming out and away from her keep the touching  
when we touched our boy bodies in out-of-the-way  
places in places that were out of the way keep those  
David keep your alcoholic mum who left her family  
to live on the streets keep the children who hate her  
now the husband who did the washing up but also  
slapped her in the face sometimes I'm sorry nothing  
changed keep the woman throw away the husband  
keep my own scar on my upper lip the weight loss  
meat-based accelerating into the future

*[canned laughter]*

## **the posh mums are boxing in the square**

the posh mums are boxing in the square  
roughing each other up in a nice way  
this is not the world into which I was born  
so I'm changing it  
I'm sinking deep into the past and dressing my own mum  
in their blue spandexes  
svelte black stripes from hip to hem  
and husbands with better dispositions toward kindness  
or at least I'm giving her new lungs  
I'm giving her a best friend with no problems and both of them pads  
some gloves to go at each other with in a nice way  
I'm making it a warm day for them but also  
I'm making it rain  
the two of them dapping it out in long shadows  
I'm watching her from the trees grow

strength in her thighs my mum  
grow strength in her glutes my mum  
her back taut upright  
her knees  
and watching her grow no bad thing in her stomach no tumour  
her feet do not hurt to touch my mum she is hopping  
sinews are happening  
wiry arms developing their full reach  
no bad thing explodes

sweat and not gradual death I'm cheering  
no thing in her stomach no alcohol  
no cigarettes with their crotonaldehyde let my dad keep those  
no removal of her womb  
- and I'm cheering her on in better condition

cheering she is learning to fight for her own body  
in spandex her new life  
and though there is no beef between them  
if her friend is gaining the upper hand  
I will call out from the trees

her name

Christine!

and when she turns as turn she must  
my mum in the nicest possible way  
can slug her right in the gut

## Discussion Ideas

- How is your appetite after reading 'let's get down to the boiled beef of it'? What conversations might be taking place at the dinner table between this poem's father and child?
- Can it be true that the mugging in 'what is sad is' is an intimacy, or some sort of relief from troubling circumstances? How could that be?
- What role does niceness play in 'the posh mums are boxing in the square'?
- This poem won the 2018 National Poetry Competition. Judge Kei Miller said of it 'It seems unfair at times that poetry, one of the chief articulators of our deepest sentiments, should be required in the same breath to avoid sentimentality. But when you see it done, as it is done so well in 'The posh mums are boxing in the square' it takes your breath away – a mother reimaged into life, risen from her bed and given boxing gloves to fight off a terrible illness. The title and the set up are so wonderfully absurd, we are led smiling into a poem that hits us in our own gut with its devastating gravitas.' What do you think about the poem's sentiment?

- The contents page of *Love Minus Love* reads 'Love Minus Love – 9 / Notes – 63'. Are these separate poems or is this one long verse novel?

### **Other books by Wayne Holloway-Smith**

*I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WENDING* (Test Centre Publications, 2018)

*Alarum* (Bloodaxe Books, 2017)

### **If you liked Wayne Holloway-Smith, try ...**

- Crispin Best
- Ahren Warner
- Jack Underwood

### **Wayne Holloway-Smith online**

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/new-and-international-writing/poetry-class/holloway-smith/>

# ***How to Wash a Heart*** **by Bhanu Kapil**



Bhanu Kapil is a British poet who has lived, for the last twenty-one years, in the U.S., where she taught poetry, fiction, performance and hybrid writing seminars at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. She has also taught part-time for Goddard College in Vermont and Washington. Bhanu Kapil is the author of five books of poetry/prose: *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (Kelsey Street Press, 2001), *Incubation: a space for monsters* (Leon Works, 2006), *humanimal [a project for future children]* (Kelsey Street Press, 2009), *Schizophrenie* (Nightboat, 2011), and *Ban en Banlieue* (Nightboat, 2015). She is also the recipient of the Windham-Campbell Prize for Poetry, 2020.

## **Reviews**

‘Bhanu Kapil’s extraordinary and original work has been published in the US over the last two decades. During that time Kapil has established herself as one of our most important and ethical writers. Her books often defy categorisation as she fearlessly engages with colonialism and its ongoing and devastating aftermath, creating what she calls in *Ban en Banlieue* (2015) a ‘Literature that is not made from literature’. Always at the centre of her books and performances are the experiences of the body, and, whether she is exploring racism, violence, the experiences of diaspora communities in India, England or America, what emerges is a heart-stopping, life-affirming way of telling the near impossible-to-be-told.

*How To Wash A Heart*, Kapil's first full-length collection published in the UK, depicts the complex relations that emerge between an immigrant guest and a citizen host. Drawn from a first performance at the ICA in London in 2019, and using poetry as a mode of interrogation that is both rigorous, compassionate, surreal, comic, painful and tender, by turn, Kapil begins to ask difficult and



urgent questions about the limits of inclusion, hospitality and care.’ (description via Poetry Book Society)

“It’s exhausting to be a guest/ In somebody else’s house/ Forever.” So reads British-Indian poet Bhanu Kapil’s poem “How to Wash a Heart”, which interrogates the relationship between citizen hosts and immigrant guests. Written at a time of rising hostility to immigrants, this collection of the same name explores the limits of hospitality. These difficulties, you sense, may never come out in the wash. In previous collections, Kapil has written of the 1979 Southall race riot and the trauma of the South Asian diasporic communities. Moving from the war zone to the spare bedroom, her new book meditates on “unbelonging”. When I hear “How to Wash a Heart”, I imagine an instruction manual. Not the one of its title. That part is easy: “Remove it/ Then pack it/ In ice/ Remove it then paint it/ In the course of one afternoon/ Like Edvard Munch”. The instruction I seek is more complicated: how to act, as a society, to welcome immigrants with radical hospitality and how to diminish hostile parts of the system.’ (Sammy Gale, *iNews*)

### ***from How to Wash a Heart***

Like this?

It’s inky-early outside and I’m wearing my knitted scarf, like  
John Betjeman, poet of the British past.

I like to go outside straight away and stand in the brisk air.

Yesterday, you vanished into those snowflakes like the ragged beast

You are.

Perhaps I can write here again.

A “fleeting sense of possibility.” – K.

Keywords: Hospitality, stars, jasmine,

Privacy.

you made a space for me in your home, for my books and clothes,  
and I’ll

Never forget that.

When your adopted daughter, an “Asian refugee”

As you described her,

Came in with her coffee and perched on the end

Of my cot, I felt so happy.

And less like a hoax.

Showed her how to drink water

From the bowls

On the windowsill.

I don’t want to beautify our collective trauma.

Your sexual brilliance resided, I sometimes thought,

In your ability to say,  
No matter the external circumstances:  
"I am here."  
From this place, you gave only this many  
Desiccated fucks  
About the future.  
Day by day, you discovered what happiness is.  
As your guest, I trained myself  
To beautify  
Our collective trauma.  
When night fell at last, I turned with a sigh  
Towards the darkness.  
I am about to squeeze out an egg, you  
Murmured  
As you kissed me  
Goodnight.  
Hold a funeral for the imagination,  
I thought.

To my left is a turquoise door and to my right, a butcher's  
Table.  
Above you is a heart  
Beating in the snow.  
When I described the set of my play, an environment  
More vivid to me  
Than the memory  
Of my childhood home, your  
Face  
Turned green.  
What made you know something was over?  
The milk in your eyes  
Seared me.  
In that moment, I understood that you were a wolf  
Capable of devouring  
My internal organs  
If I exposed them to view.  
Sure enough, the image of a heart  
Carved from the body  
Appeared  
In the next poem you wrote.

There's a bright caul of fire  
And cream  
As I write these words, stretching out  
These early spring or late winter  
Mornings with coffee  
And TV.  
I don't remember  
The underneath,  
Everything I will miss when I die.  
It's exhausting to be a guest  
In somebody else's house  
Forever.  
Even though the host invites  
The guest to say  
Whatever it is they want to say,  
The guest knows that host logic  
Is variable.  
Prick me.  
And I will cut off the energy  
To your life.

How to wash a heart:  
Remove it.  
*Animal or ice?*  
The curator's question reveals  
Their power style.  
If power implies relationship,  
Then here we are  
At the part where even if something  
Goes wrong,  
that's exactly how it's meant to be.  
Your job is to understand  
What the feedback is.  
It's such a pleasure to spend time  
Outside the house.  
There's nowhere to go with this  
Except begin:  
To plunge my forearms  
Into the red ice  
That is already melting  
In the box.

## Discussion Ideas

- Details of the installation / performance / poetry reading / ritual from which the book *How to Wash a Heart* developed <https://www.ica.art/live/how-to-wash-a-heart>. What can live poetry, or poetry in performance, do that poetry read on the page can't – and vice versa? What memorable poetry performances have you experienced?
- 'This is the voice of this book: an immigrant guest in the home of their citizen host' writes Bhanu Kapil. What are the tensions between guest and host? How might they be exacerbated between immigrant guest and citizen host? How do you start to see this relationship played out in this first section of *How to Wash a Heart*?
- 'living with someone who is in pain / Requires you to move in a different way' – what does this phrase mean to you? From where – or whom – does the requirement come?
- Both J O Morgan's collection and Bhanu Kapil's collection have an overall narrative arc. How do their approaches or styles compare?
- Bhanu Kapil writes 'In the U.S. and the U.K., as I wrote this book, anti-immigrant rhetoric amped up. Perhaps by the time you are reading these words, it is worse.' Is it worse? What can or does poetry do in the face of this situation?

## Other books by Bhanu Kapil

*Schizophrene* (Nightboat, 2011)

*Ban en Banlieue* (Nightboat, 2015)

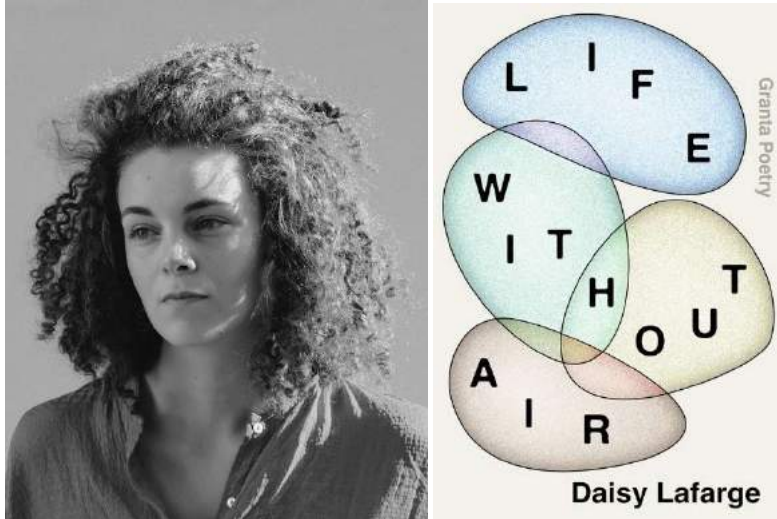
## If you liked Bhanu Kapil, try ...

- Tishani Doshi
- Mona Arshi
- Arundhati Subramaniam

## Bhanu Kapil online

[An interview with Bhanu](#)

# ***Life Without Air*** **by Daisy Lafarge**



Daisy Lafarge was born in Hastings and studied at the University of Edinburgh. Her debut novel, *Paul*, is forthcoming from Granta Books. She has published two pamphlets of poetry: *understudies for air* (Sad Press, 2017) and *capriccio* (SPAM Press, 2019), and her visual work has been exhibited in galleries such as Tate St Ives and Talbot Rice Gallery. She has received an Eric Gregory Award and a Betty Trask Award, and was runner-up in the 2018 Edwin Morgan Poetry Award. Daisy is currently working on *Lovebug* – a book about infection and intimacy – for a practice-based PhD at the University of Glasgow. *Life Without Air* is her first collection of poetry.

## **Reviews**

'When Louis Pasteur observed the process of fermentation, he noted that, while most organisms perished from lack of oxygen, some were able to thrive as 'life without air'. In this capricious, dreamlike collection, characters and scenes traverse states of airlessness, from suffocating relationships and institutions, to toxic environments and ecstatic asphyxiations.

Both compassionate and ecologically nuanced, *Life Without Air* bridges poetry and prose to interrogate the conditions necessary for survival.' (description via Poetry Book Society)

'Daisy's Lafarge's *Life Without Air* is a whip-smart, sonically gorgeous exploration of the personal, cultural, and historical ties that bind us in literally and figuratively toxic relationships' (Rae Armantrout)

## **mineral intimacy**

unabashedly love  
the minerals of you / I  
always was a wind-fuckèd

gull for the White Cliffs pressed  
hard and lithic between the lower elements  
of yr lips / When u flay me w/ bracken its lust  
is pre-floriferous / I used to sit awake in the beetling  
dark to watch yr erosion 'til I stared so long tht fickle hair  
fell deciduous 'round my shoulders & when I looked away my  
lashes wer caught in yr layers & tore clean off like the stripping of bark /  
Now prt of me's filed in yr endless strata & the wind combs hotly my nkd eyes

### **false alarm air**

I once passed a high-rise  
as an alarm began to sound. for a while,  
there was no movement, and then an elderly lady  
emerged from the front door, flapping across the lawn  
in a single white towel, she was naked otherwise, still  
dripping from her shower, a sea-green bottle of detergent  
in hand. each of her limbs a sprig of pale lavender, protruding  
in a gesture of genteel and outmoded frailty. we stared at  
the building, its indifferent gaze, as the siren cut out quick.  
the towel billowed round her body, a flag  
to safer days. I glimpsed the podzol  
belly, the mildew thighs. I was about to walk on  
when she held out her hand, turned two eyes of cracked  
china, and said: one day I will know how it feels  
to haul around a body of rotting flowers, to let memory  
chew holes in my mind like maggots. then she laughed, and started  
to sing a song whose words were lost to the wall  
of a younger alarm, just beginning to teethe

### **the willows on the common are still on fire**

the willows on the common are still on fire.  
she lives in a combustible North.  
memories, the engines  
she doesn't want, keep firing blanks  
at significance.  
in the obsolete commons of crayons  
and tarmac  
children who resolve too soon to never  
play with matches end  
up setting themselves alight  
with fervour or  
goodwill. she keeps a sequin

in her palm; she knows  
the sequin  
is a girl seed,  
a time capsule that must  
be artificial, disc-like enough  
to withstand its own heat

## Discussion Ideas

- What do you make of the vocabulary of 'Mineral Intimacy', its mixture of text-speak abbreviations and archaic soundings out of '-ed' suffixes such as 'fuckèd', 'lookèd'? How does the shape of the poem build up? How does the poem contrast the eternal and the eroding? Is love more like a stone or a plant?
- What does 'podzol' mean in 'False Alarm Air'? If you don't know, speculate before you look it up. Is this a poem meant to be read by 'elderly' ladies?
- Is the alarm that sounds at the beginning of the poem a false alarm? What is it alerting people to? What about the second, younger alarm?
- 'the willows on the common are still on fire' was commissioned by Sean Edwards for the catalogue accompanying his exhibition *Undo Things Done* at the 2019 Venice Biennale – more details and a film here - <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/sean-edwards-undo-things-done-wales-venice-biennale-2019-video-interview>. How does the poem relate to the exhibition?
- What are the words common / commons doing in this poem?

## Other books by Daisy Lafarge

*understudies for air* (Sad Press, 2017)  
*capriccio* (SPAM Press, 2019)

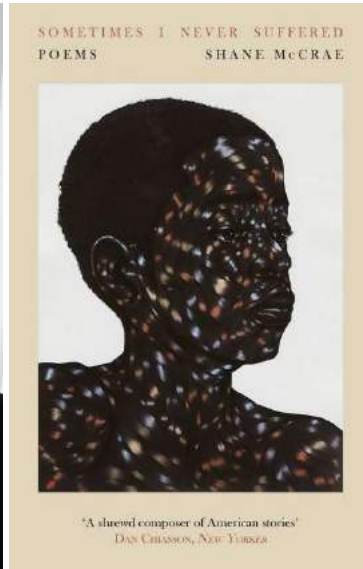
## If you liked Daisy Lafarge, try ...

- Rachael Allen
- Amy Acre
- Fran Lock

## Daisy Lafarge online

[Daisy on the Eric Gregory from the Poetry School](#)

# *Sometimes I Never Suffered* by Shane McCrae



Poet Shane McCrae grew up in Texas and California. He is the author of several poetry collections, including *Mule* (2011); *Blood* (2013); *The Animal Too Big to Kill* (2015); *In the Language of My Captor* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017), which was a finalist for the National Book Award; and *The Gilded Auction Block* (2019). His work has also been featured in *The Best American Poetry 2010*, edited by Amy Gerstler, and his honours include a Whiting Writers' Award and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. McCrae lives in New York City and teaches at Columbia University.

## Reviews

'The stunning fifth book from McCrae ... is steeped in the truths of witness and imagination. In poems that wrestle, doubt, and syntactically and rhythmically double-back on themselves, McCrae writes of such characters as the "Hastily Assembled Angel," who "was/ Not God and could be wrong." McCrae's angel ponders a line that reads "in the midst of life we are in death," while Jim Limber, a recurring character, states: "I can't die/ Enough for all the life I see." These poems see the white world as it chooses not to be seen, and illuminate the contradictions, disappointments, and loneliness that comes with paying true witness. As Limber wonders: "If I've earned my reward where is the life where I can spend it." In these pages, heaven is an "ordinary garden" that has been "set free," and each poem transcends with feeling, particularity, and honesty. This newest collection continues McCrae's powerful examination into race, forgiveness, and meaning in America, making it an essential contribution to contemporary poetry.' (description via *Publishers Weekly*)

'In *Sometimes I Never Suffered*, the title's quarrel between "sometimes" and "never" prepares one for conflict. He goes beyond recollected hardship into a vertiginously Miltonic vision. In his raggedly imperfect creation myth, a "hastily assembled angel" falls from grace, only it turns out to be more push than fall: 'Before the other angels shoved him had /



Started combining words but nobody / Would name the things he saw the way he named them / And to the other angels all his naming / Was noise they shouted as they shoved him.' Inarticulacy becomes a form of eloquence in this exploration of being cast out and an outcast. In McCrae's hands, poetry is reclamation. It is also transport: writing a way out and through. In 'Seawhere', he explains: 'The problem isn't that I don't see faces / Like mine it's that I don't see inner lives / Like mine I mean the way a person's inner / Life is expressed partly by the public spaces'. He has to "borrow an inner life" in a white-supremacist world. The gain, for his readers, is that he has chosen to make poetry the public space in which to express – and to own – his inner life.' (Kate Kellaway, *the Guardian*)

### **The Hastily Assembled Angel Considers the Lives of Dogs and of People**

The hastily assembled angel wanders  
And has wandered through centuries of cities  
And countries and millenia of cities  
And countries and of women and of men there's

No hurry now though he was hurriedly  
Once brought to being and bears the scars of that  
Though slowly in the Earth though slowly he  
Eventually began to wonder what

The hurry had been for and if he could  
Have been a better angel or have done  
Better the job he did if once  
They'd made him the other angels had allowed

Him to meet God for he has been uncertain  
As people are uncertain he has never  
been as certain as dogs are who sniff  
The wind that moves the curtain and see behind the curtain

### **Jim Limber's Theodicy**

What if it Heaven was like my momma said it  
Would be like gardens spread like blankets spread  
Wide between rivers gardens full like rivers with good  
Food all kinds but also okra fried hot  
And bread and chicken and even candy  
All served on dishes like the dishes white  
Folks got what if it Heaven was like what  
We laughed about over supper sometimes and we  
Were here together now in Heaven and we saw it  
Together me and momma now  
In Heaven on a picnic between those rivers  
What if in Heaven we could have white things

And not be white        how would we know  
how good it was if it was good for everyone

### **Jim Limber On Possibility**

What if I had been born in Heaven do  
They do that here        I've never seen a baby  
But I see full-grown people who  
I hear the angels whispering    they say they  
Were babies when they died    I always look  
those people in the eye        but I don't think  
They see me    and I've never heard them speak  
They just walk around in sailor hats with blank  
Looks on their faces    those white hats with the blue  
Anchors        I sometimes see them walking  
With their mouths open the first one I saw  
I saw like that    and when I tried to talk to  
Him it was like I wasn't there  
So    I peeked        in his mouth  
  
and in his mouth was the whole sky and stars

### **Discussion Ideas**

- The Hastily Assembled Angel appears a sequence of twelve poems in Shane McCrae's collection – he's hastily assembled by other angels, shoved out of heaven, and then wanders through eternity. 'Dogs and People' is the last poem of the sequence. As an embodiment of uncertainty, how successful is the Hastily Assembled Angel?
- Is this a religious poem?
- Jim Limber was the mixed race ward / adopted son of nineteenth century Confederate president Jefferson Davis [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim\\_Limber](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Limber) The second sequence in Shane McCrae's collection is called 'Variations on Jim Limber Goes to Heaven'. What does 'theodicy' mean? How does it apply to Jim Limber's picnic in this poem?
- 'On Possibility' is the last poem in the Jim Limber sequence. What is the possibility that he sees?
- Where do you think Jim Limber's voice stops and Shane McCrae's starts?

### **Other books by Shane McCrae**

*The Gilded Auction Block* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019)

*In the Language of My Captor* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017)

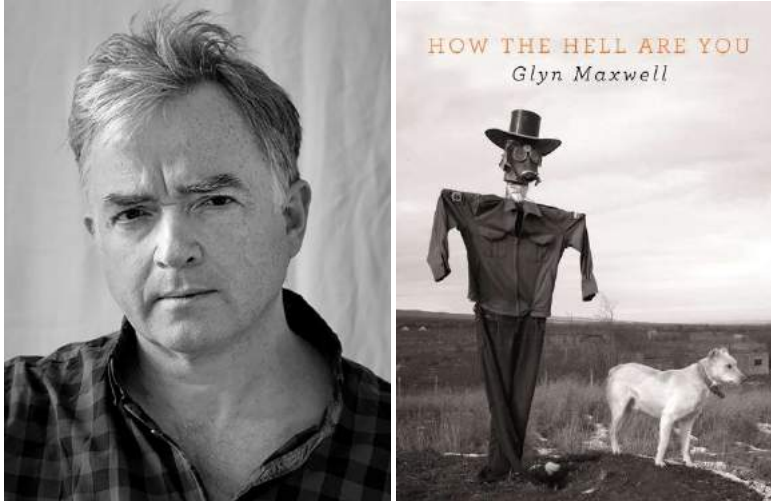
### **If you liked Shane McCrae, try ...**

- Danez Smith
- Terrance Hayes
- Claudia Rankine

### **Shane McCrae online**

[Shane at poets.org](http://poets.org)

# *How the hell are you* by Glyn Maxwell



Glyn Maxwell is a poet, playwright, novelist, librettist and critic. His volumes of poetry include *The Breakage*, *Hide Now*, and *Pluto*, all of which were shortlisted for either the Forward or T. S. Eliot Prizes, and *The Nerve*, which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. *On Poetry*, a guidebook for the general reader, was published by Oberon in 2012. *The Spectator* called it ‘a modern classic’ and *The Guardian*’s Adam Newey described it as ‘the best book about poetry I’ve ever read.’

## Reviews

‘A new collection from Glyn Maxwell – one of the great poetic stylists of the era, and one of its leading dramatic voices – is always a cause for celebration. Here, there are squibs and satires, lyrics and songs, poems written to family members and in memory of loved ones, a series of poems written by an artificial intelligence that will thrill and disturb in equal measure, and a chance for the blank page to finally speak for itself. But *How The Hell Are You* is, in its way, also a quietly political book: Maxwell regards poetry as truth-telling, and these poems – in their intimate, unsparing accounts and clear-eyed reckonings – recoil from the lies and fake news of the age to *actually* ‘tell it like it is’. *How The Hell Are You* shows a remarkable imagination and mind working at full tilt, and is the most powerful expression of Maxwell’s talent to date.’ (description via Poetry Book Society)

## Fox

Won’t do that thing we do and assume the fox  
is grinning. Watch him break from a light snack  
and saunter into limelight.

My thought's as flat as his, for any time  
he sets off for his needs in the night city  
I and people like me

stop and think the same: you didn't used to  
act so frigging brazen. Is it something  
we're doing wrong or nothing

touching us at all? You walk a kerb  
your kindred came to grief on, not a toss  
gets given, were you not

shit-scared of light one time? Did you not need  
a zigzag ingenuity to make  
the chickens walk your walk?

We've literature that says you once did shy,  
did plausible, sweet, biddable, polite,  
but look at you by floodlight –

nothing you have time for but a wish list,  
fat and soon, the churning stomach for it,  
X to mark the spot.

### **Page As Seating Plan At A Wedding**

Awoken by a quickening of soles,  
of polished shoes on polished tiles, I saw  
the looming of the crowd, elated girls,

a gent amused, two feather-hatted ladies,  
a lifted child and last the elderly,  
the careworn cheek, the lips maroon, I heard

the first of the great exhalations – *there!*  
*here we are! Where? There, together!* – saw  
the plump and jewelled finger circle, waver,

curl away, a voice cry out and turn –  
I heard recited names of the nine tables  
as if they meant the world, or meant a thing,

and I sniffed the eau de this or that, the rain,  
the mint and smoke, till the long hall was clear  
but for a booming sound, life all a dream,

far sprinkle of applause that seemed to greet  
a silence, many rooms away from here,  
some time ago, and not a soul to meet

hereafter but the one whose cotton hands  
come dancing through a door to take me down,  
her eyes unreading and her mouth all pins.

### **Thinks It's All There Is**

As far as I can see that's everyone.  
So thanks for that but where else would you be.  
Whatever came or went has come and gone  
without you why would you not turn to me.  
Look I too turned to me I'm just like you.  
Stuff came and went but nothing really took.  
So this became what else there was to do.  
This became where else there was to look.  
This became the language that is spoken  
here and here became the only spot.  
Here I sense I'm only silence broken.  
Here I sing because I see what's not  
is almost back. It's frightening, I had plans.  
You might have warned me. Hold my hand, both hands –

### **Discussion Ideas**

- 'We've literature to say you once did shy / did plausible' – what other fox poems and stories do you know? Ted Hughes' *Thought Fox*, Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Aesop's fox fables – what else? What do you need to include if you're adding another literary fox to the pile? Does this poem do that?
- 'I and people like me / stop and think the same'. Does everybody think like this about a fox? What about 'people *not* like me'? City people, country people, older people, younger people? Is this a poem written to make you think about inclusion or exclusion?
- Is 'Page As Seating Plan At A Wedding' in the voice of a guest, bride, groom or someone else? Is it specified? How might its tone change depending on the identity of its speaker?
- What poems have you heard read at weddings? Would you suggest this one to be included in the ceremony?
- '*This* became what else there was to do' – what is *this* in 'Thinks It's All There Is'? 'Here I sing' – is that the poet singing, or the poem?

## **Other books by Glyn Maxwell**

*Hide Now* (Picador, 2008)

*The Sugar Mile* (Picador, 2005)

## **If you liked Glyn Maxwell, try ...**

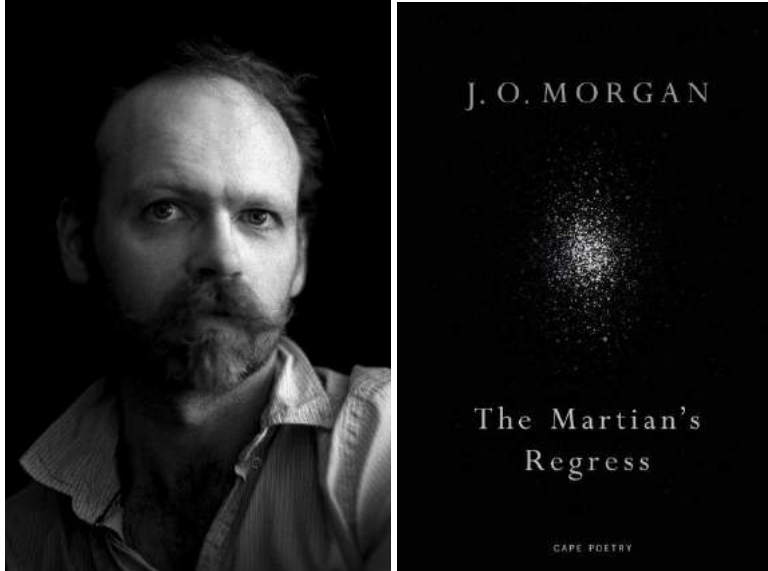
- Paul Farley
- Lavinia Greenlaw
- Ian Duhig

## **Glyn Maxwell online**

[glynmaxwell.com](http://glynmaxwell.com)

# ***The Martian's Regress***

## **by J O Morgan**



J O Morgan lives on a small farm in the Scottish Borders. His first book, *Natural Mechanical* (CB Editions, 2009), won the Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and was shortlisted for the Forward First Collection Prize; its sequel, *Long Cuts* (CB Editions, 2011), was shortlisted for a Scottish Book Award. In 2015, Morgan published *In Casting Off* (HappenStance Press), a poem-novella that tells a love story that is set within a remote fishing community. *Interference Pattern*, shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize, appeared from Cape Poetry in 2016, and *Assurances* – which won the Costa Prize for Poetry - in 2018.

### **Reviews**

'A lone martian returns to Earth. He leaves behind him a hardened survivalist culture, its muddled myths and songs, its continued abuse of the environment that sustains it. During this journey back to the now-broken and long-abandoned mother planet, the martian begins to consider his own uncertain origins, and his own future.

Cut off from his people, the martian's story is that of the individual: his duty at odds with his desire; the race of which he's still a part playing always on his mind, as well as the race that once was. This is the story of what life becomes when stripped of all that makes it worth living – of what humans become when they lose their humanity.

*The Martian's Regress* is a brilliant, provocative, often darkly comic work that explores what a fragile environment eventually makes of those who persist in tampering with it.'  
(description via Cape)

'Morgan ... allow[s] for cadenzas, nursery rhymes, fables and sort-of-sonnets as the narrative progresses. It is a melancholy book in that the Martian is returning to a devastated



Earth, and is homesick, for example, for two moons in the sky. What it does exceptionally well is make clear what ecological catastrophe might feel like as well as look like.' (Stuart Kelly, *The Scotsman*)

### **Of the Urge to Return**

Like the tentative step towards  
The seemingly fizzled fuse of a huge re firecracker  
And the hand reaching out once again  
With the end of the dropping taper fiercely glowing

Or the sponge cake far too long left in the oven  
And still when the skewer is pushed in deep  
Then slowly drawn back out  
Its surface is inexplicably sticky with dough –

So there was always that nagging doubt  
A persistent gnawing restlessness  
The itch they knew it was probably best not to pester  
That something they desperately needed had been left behind

And if they ever found it wasn't there  
If absence yawned its heavy emptiness they also knew  
They'd have to go on looking a little while longer  
Just in case their methods had been wrong.

### **On a tour of the Martian Caves**

If the pale slender figures scratched onto the walls  
Were said to reflect the first of intelligent life  
It was only due to the sticks of white chalk being used  
Standing out better against the slick black stone

And where these primitive artworks had been patterned  
Out of smeary fingerprints  
It was such as children  
With small grubby hands often made

And if over countless generations  
This record had been preserved through lightlessness  
It was only because none but the bored and the work-shy  
Ever ventured to loiter down this way

And if stopping to listen you thought you could hear  
Their long-dead voices still murmuring through the caverns  
The trick worked best if you spoke fairly loudly and clearly  
Before shutting up

## The Martian Commutes

The routine of his breakfast bright  
With early morning's glassy light,  
He'd sip his tea, she'd zip him  
Into his plasticated suit, test its robustness with  
A small sharp pat on the back  
Before passing him his battered briefcase  
In which his sample jars and airtight lunchbox  
Had been packed.

Across the hall from the martian's penthouse suite  
His private elevator shaft,  
The sudden start of that long descent  
Lifting the weight for a moment from his feet.

The next floor on his list was deep underground.  
He needed a secret code just to open the doors.  
An automated hiss and purge  
The chime of strip lights blinking on and there  
Was the cold grey tunnel that led to the lab.

He stepped out. He stopped.  
He considered his options.

She wouldn't show any surprise at his early return.  
She'd have no concept of how long he'd been gone.  
he'd get on with his jigsaw and she'd stand by  
Ironing his cotton handkerchiefs.

He took a short step back and pressed  
The button for the topmost floor.  
The doors sucked slowly shut. The cables jerked.  
He took the day off.

## Discussion Ideas

- What do Martians mean to us? How does that meaning change across time or artistic genres? Which are your favourite literary, filmic or musical Martians?
- Is 'Of the Urge to Return' laid out like you'd expect a Martian to write poetry – formal quatrains, old-fashioned majesculated lines (capital letters at the beginning of lines unrelated to the word's position in its sentence or phrase)? Why might J O Morgan have chosen this form for his Martian's tales?

- What does 'On a tour of the Martian Caves' have to say about the impulse to create art?
- In an earlier poem in the collection we are introduced to the Martian's companion as she is unpacked – 'soft rubber skin', 'wipeably clean', 'A womanly shell with the woman removed'. Reading 'The Martian Commutes', how do you think gender relations are going on J O Morgan's version of Mars? If you read the whole collection, does your opinion change?
- 'The Martian Commutes' – is this a vision of the future of work?

### **Other books by J O Morgan**

*Assurances* (Cape, 2018)

*Natural Mechanical* (C B Editions, 2009)

### **If you liked J O Morgan, try ...**

- Michael Symmons Roberts
- Don Paterson
- Steve Ely

### **J O Morgan online**

[J O Morgan at the Poetry Archive](#)