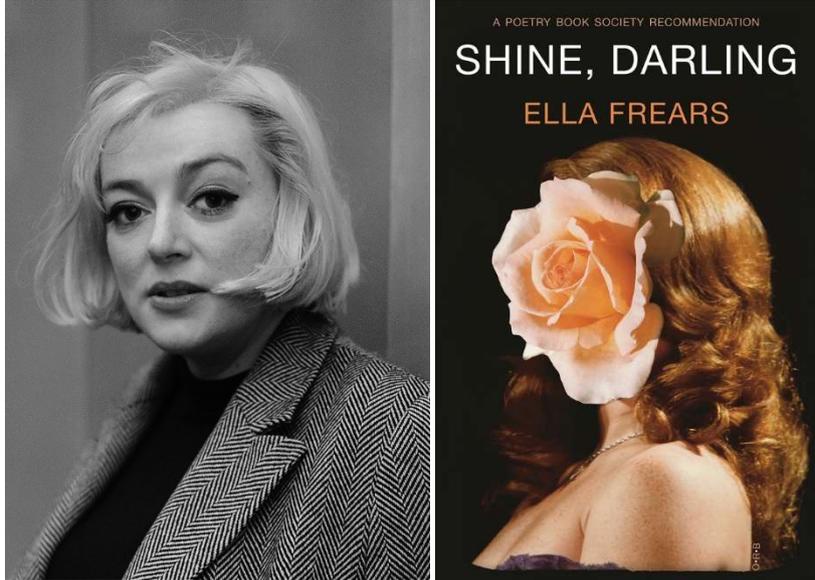


Shine, Darling by Ella Frears



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
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Ella Frears online

[Ella's Instagram](#)