



**ST. JOHN'S
COLLEGE**
POETRY PAMPHLET
2017



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Introduction

Sharing poetry is difficult. It can feel a bit like getting naked in front of a crowded room and doing a little jig. I remember an acute sense of self-consciousness when I first told my family and friends that I'd started writing. It was months before I dared to show anyone my actual work. And that's no surprise – poems are often deeply personal and revealing, so sharing them in public for the first time is rarely easy.

But it does get easier. The more you share your work, the more exciting and gratifying the experience becomes. And that is precisely what this pamphlet is about. It's a stepping-stone for those who, until now, have rarely shown their poetry to anyone, let alone had it printed. And I really do hope that they do go on writing and continue to share their work with others. Because writing and sharing poetry should be uplifting and satisfying rather than a source of embarrassment or shame. It helps us all to understand what it is to be who we are.

I hope you enjoy and take something away from reading these poems, all written by current students of St John's College. Writing verse in the same college that William Wordsworth attended is always going to be intimidating, but, as the poems in this pamphlet demonstrate, rewarding and fulfilling nonetheless. From the poignant and the personal to the lighthearted and the self-deprecating, every poem says something unique and special. They stand as testament to the creative, artistic, and poetic spirit that still thrives in the college today.

-Thomas Bailey, Editor

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Jun Pang

You are waiting

for the train to overtake you
and the feeling of waiting is stuck in your throat
like a cheap lozenge lodged just where you need
the traffic to ease. There are no words – but of course,
there are words – just none that you are willing to say aloud
in case they actually come true. You are waiting
for a train that you know is coming but another could
arrive early and so you stand below the screens
and gape upwards, willing the platform to reveal
itself, willing whatever it takes to speed up a train
into being, if only to get it over with. You wait and you wait
and you think, perhaps, that the river is a better way to go.
There would be no pain, no mess; only the slow
grind of gravity winding its way downstream –
only the predictable reaction of water against skin.

You are waiting and the book you picked up at the library
tells you that fear is something that passes you by
rather than something that eats you up whole; fear is
something birthed by proximity, not something that
blooms under your wrists, in your blood, spreading
in your body like sickness between small children.
The same book tells you that fear is not the hardest part.
It is the nausea that comes from lying in a hospital bed and
wondering how the world got so white and so red
so quickly. The banks are already bursting with flowers;
gravity is doing its quiet work – has always done,
will always do. You think to yourself,
the boats could stand to wait a little longer.

You are waiting and while you are waiting you think about your day at the Tate: “I am not being truthful enough yet.” You think about bodies clambering over bamboo rebar, about how those reinforcements could’ve passed as train tracks, or nests, or both. You think about the reclaimed harbour – reclaimed from whom? – and wonder if the ferries still run exactly one minute behind schedule.

You wonder if anyone else has noticed.

Your shoulders are aching now
but there’s nothing to do but to wait; you think to yourself, if you still lived there, you’d be home by now. You think, again, of rivers, of being washed away by passages of pale current – you think, more so than the river, that the harbour might prove a more challenging way to go – and you’ve never backed away from a challenge.
“Being here, I wish I was somewhere else.”

You are waiting for a train that you know is coming and you wonder if there’s someone like you, waiting, too; if they have an answer for where, or who, they think they’ll be in ten years’ time. If they have ever thought about running. You are waiting and you are thinking about bodies and water and how it would be so much easier to let those bodies have their way with you than to keep waiting on something to change.

You wonder if fear is just the way of things.

You look outside: canopies strain tight against bone, ribbed sails pull so close to one another that not even the heaviest of rainfall can puncture their skin.

At the end of the day, you think, at least you’re going somewhere.

Jun Pang

1.4.2017

“I thought it less like a lake / and more like a moat”

The tables have scraped the woodwork clean.
A sliver of light on these red walls,
green tea steeping in an untouched cup,
A simmer of light buzzing overhead.

In time, we will make things work,
and madeleines, for good measure.

Cameron Wallis

Moment

Impossible was this compositional task,
When residue so readily accumulates in this Internet age.
Since question, 'thou burnest us', we must ask:
How now can emotions be captured on the page?

When fleeting, flying, falling we must be,
Can thoughts possibly translate to fragmentary fossils?
How now, to aspire to be lithe and blithe,
When our heart's material, perishing, perpetually scuffles?

The challenge already was issued, we accepted:
Engulfing our papery predecessors, we would try.
But now, how can we feel when we must feel forever?
Feeling in the knowledge that decay will never set us free:

We're cripples in the modern age, limping barely,
Feeling scarcely, hardly hoping, stuttering j-just about.
Unfairly, we must wholly endure eternity on-scream;
A trolling lout today, a lyric tomorrow.

Anonymous

Be Kind to Me

I told the beast whose mouth I was inside.
Its Behemothic jaws worked my body and bones into a fine paste,
glistening, sticky with saliva.
This change will chew you up and spit you out.

Being lost feels familiar,
and the deep sick feeling in the pit of my belly
is like that greeting of an old friend.
The one who's long and sinewy arms linger a little too long,
a little too tight.

Make sure to gaze at,
the face of a boy who you call beautiful,
for the first time in his life.

I worry I don't think enough
or think deeply enough,
caught up in a constant need to.

And so, I blister my feet every weekend.
In the dusty morning light I ponder how
the stiff calloused skin is an armour
to remind me of beautiful times
when I danced on beautiful shores.

My hurried youth ended abruptly,
before all of its lessons could be learned,
left only yearning for kindness.

I can scratch my makeup off,
thick, gooey, beige underneath my fingernails
with the same vicious entitlement
felt towards my body.

Redefine my lip-line,
my life line.

My sponge, like mind, sighs,
soaking up everything which I tell it to
and everything which I do not.

Plum Schräger

Teenage Kicks

My dad-dancing isn't the problem –
New shoes wouldn't solve it at all.
I think he knows that I like him,
So I awkwardly stare at the wall.

And it's not like it is in the movies,
I'm not glamorous like Jerry bloody Hall,
But it's awkward and lanky and hellish,
And I feel like I'm right back at school.

So now I'm caught in 22 places,
Being torn into bits that are small.
I don't know if I want him to notice,
Or if I'd just look like a fool.

In the end we lie awake chatting,
I stare up at the ceiling and talk –
He thinks that I'm funny, sweet and kind –
Maybe it's best in my head after all!

Plum Schräger

Diary Entry, 23.11.16

dark, it seeps in from the edges
something darker calls from within
so cold that the lungs are left breathless
and the blood simply halts in your veins

then teardrops dapple the pillow
as the damp dampens your soul
and your cheeks are patterned with redness
that belie the pain of it all

it strikes in the quietest hours
when the rest of the world is asleep
and your self-control deserts you
so you roll over – give up – and weep –

Sam Willis

A Lecture

What is the point of poetry?
Ah, the poem is about, I
Hear you say, itself! Itself?
I say. So is there nothing
To talk of but shadow? Must
We light ourselves in shadow?
But that is absurd, you say –
It is not shadow, but the tuile,
The filigree basket of some
Delightful gem. Or orb.
But a gem is but a web
Of carbon and palls
If not for the smile that touches,
That infinitely small, that smile,
And sees in its glow I love you
I love you.
But you, you declaim, you
Cannot conceive clear: the smile
Is not a mirror here.
There is no jewellery here.
The case must be silent,
The web immense but small
And never touching. But itself,
Of course.

Sam Willis

Seasonal Dance

I see snow, it falls so
gentle in the dance of car lights

I see the descent of man
in that tender kiss, shy
of all the futures these
lovers may yet face, shy
of the traffic passing by

I see shivers – the branch
of the tree, bare, shivers,
clothed in the fantasies of eight-
year olds fired on sugar and cards
and those curious decorations
the school puts up every year

I see the spill of mulled
wine spilt; Heidi's
new and still feels
the heat of
service.
Watch! Not too fast!
The red stuff's known to scald

I see the shops closing
early, and see the
lazy loves and liquorice
lovers in the windows
of great department
stores; they say we're all
middle aged

I see the sirens sweep
round lonely buses, crying
for their cocoa, crawling back
to the quiet companions of
a lifetime lived for this

I see the season's lights, the
winter garb of boulevards,

lit with such fanfare, blazing
away against aeons of darkness. The
polis rejoices, tame jets hear
voices; then smiles and hugs and wishes
goodbye before the night truly sets in
I see the stations quake;
the part they play: 'tis
so great! They've learnt
the lines and cues and hope
to god they get it right; show-
time nears, and now it hits –
This is it! So much weight, such
expectation! What if – what if
the subtlety of their mood is missed?
or the mise en scène spurs no kiss?
(So go the woes of the extra, spare
to every romantic feature that
hits the big screen of life)
I see the daughter,
the mother – their embrace;
all love burns
in their affection; all
love clings to their
complexion
I see the person-past
running the tracks and
leaping the wire
I see the train,
the hearse-bone flyer
the town crier
The queen is dead. He calls:
The queen is dead.

Sam Willis

Colour is the City

Sky's eyes lift the light:
Silken city below,
My hovel home
Deprives my lovely lows –
And all I see: Enchanted smoke
Floats and strokes
The steamer's funnel
On the Thames,
Unfurls across the loathsome
Love – I run my mind,
My hands, my palms,
Along the seams, the streets,
Her city curling curves
Twist to the sea,
Near a shining tree.
Ah, in my mind
I am a titan to tear
The fabric coy and sensuous
Studs of beaming, bursting,
Bubbling life – your tongue,
Your cheeks, your tight taut
Vocal trill called speech . . .
Love me (please, oh please, oh please).
Do I smell hope? If so,
Smog – we're through.
And next I knew:
Carolling cabs,
Nightly choirs calling,
Carousing, pulling me
Down the red. And all
Life fell to saucers, pots
And pans left to the street,
The piles of refuse. You refuse,
I presume.

I heard you were in love
Today. Though not with me:
Unreal city; silken city; my
Lady of the Lake.
Just go – leave;
Leave me to my trees;
Dissolve now – dissipate;
Fall to a thousand grains
Of sand and glass,
Beads of steel, fall
To the stream that cleans
The Fields of London grey
And paints the world anew.
But did I ever wish
To ask so much, to beg
So much of you?
Colour is the city when
You sometimes smile,
And ringing bells
Your voice from spires:
And hope's not through;
Oh chiming spires,
Hope's not through.

Thomas Bailey

The End of the Line

I imagine you know nothing
of my fears and night terrors –
you were gone long before
they started. Knowing you,

you probably felt them too,
with your godless world and
your cynicism, half-tongue-in-cheek,
half-true. Still, perhaps you could

help me. If you could send me
some little hint as to where you are
and what it's like, I'd be extremely grateful.
It's actually the not-knowing

that scares me most of all,
and as you've got a first-hand view
I'd appreciate a short description.
You know, just so I know what I'm in for.

At the moment, I can only imagine
that it's rather like the end of the line –
Upminster or Morden, or even Ealing
Broadway, where *This train terminates*

in a robotic woman's voice. Are the platforms
always empty? Is the only sound a whistle?
Is there an abandoned coffee-stall,
boarded up, and lonely?

Thomas Bailey

Interned

We bury people in boxes
to ensure captivity.

Otherwise, wouldn't it be scary?
Forgotten, rotten people, walking.

They might just crawl back out the soil
and stroll into our rooms at night

to reprimand us
with their boggy teeth.

It's probably better
if they stayed underground,

to drink the silence of their coffins
like a relentless, endless hangover.

That's why we shut hearts
in rib-bone cages – we just

can't bear the screaming.

Thomas Bailey

Home Comforts

It was strange, being in a foreign country.
It meant we couldn't eavesdrop
on people's conversations.

Apart from the odd, well-known
phrases – *Buenas noches* or *¿Que tal?* –
there was almost nothing we could make out.

We were basically alone. Except,
every now and then, we'd pass some English couple,
discussing marriages that were doomed to fail,

or that man on the phone
who swore he'd sort out the plumbing
as soon as he got home.

Michael Reiners

The Duck of the Day

Due to the falling price of bread
recent research suggests
You can have it!

This is no foul up.
Nor is it what you need today. But,
you'll deserve it tomorrow. And the next.

It might come as a shock
to some. But, you can have
The Duck of the Day.

He is relaxed,
for a limited time only.
The Duck of Tomorrow,
today!

Oh! What mallardly bliss.
He fits the bill, but won't divulge
secrets nestled in down. And bread,
bears heavy on his digestion.

He may not be here next week.
So, while he lasts,
please – seize
The Duck of the Day.

Michael Reiners

I Want

I have been known
to want.

I wouldn't want you any less (should I be wanting to want any less).

I want to carry bags, of Ikea's finest polythene,
all filled with books that I think will impress you.
I want a 2500-word eulogy, scrutinised in broad daylight,
your eyes slamming shut – pale and tight.

Communion wine would make us sick –
I'll keep my lust in mahogany stalls
(just for me and my priest)
and perhaps someday,
confession.

But confession never comes,
an inertia, rings in my ears, like some strain of tinnitus.
Stings in my nose, fucks my nostrils
like some vulgar, Vicks inhaler,
freeing up the mucus of my filthy congested thoughts.

I want us to get into art forgery, perhaps piracy,
X will mark the spot. My Ex was always wrong
or so I thought.
(I never was very good at algebra after all).

They really ought to breathalyze poems like this.
But, sit with me in hospital halls, situated modernist stalls,
I'm not ill, skip the flowers.
I want you up against Powell & Moya's
late '60s ashlar limestone walls.

Slip me into the grooves of delicate French intaglio,
etch my back by your own hand,
commission me a full frontal,
identify my attribution.

And pulling pre-Raphaelite hair
breeds binding agent floods,
and soon, your legs contort,
porcelaneous,
statuesque,
contrapposto,
and suddenly
I feel like a mannerist sculptor,
and you
the work of art.

Clare Cavenagh

My Late Grandmother

With my late grandmother, I said rosaries.
Not that I'm a Catholic.
Well, not that I'm one anymore.
She would help me through the whole, blasted thing –
Twiddly bit in the middle included –
And I would get to pick the mysteries.
Sorrowful my guilty favourite.
'Hail', we said, and 'Kingdom' and 'Power' and 'Glory',
Stopping only to let the cat go out,
When, inevitably, he started to
Grizzle, around the middle of the third decade.
After rosary, tea. And Advice.
Bleach to remove stains on crockery,
Hot wax to remove bodily hair on skin,
A toothbrush to remove greenness on shower grouting.
Where marriage was concerned:
Do not whistle
Do not wear trousers more than twice weekly
Do not eat the last biscuit.
But there were other kinds of advice too.
Lace corset after clipping stockings
Testicular manipulations for the husband who might fail to please.
Urinate - always - after intercourse.

Clare Cavenagh

Fingers

I did not see the body, because I
Had never seen one before, and didn't
Know what to look for. But he had seen one.

I stepped, almost, onto its white fingers,
I only stopped when he said, "Look, down there,"
And pointed with his own deft, vital ones.

The fingers looked fine, except unmoving, cold.
And, all of a sudden, I felt afraid
Of the smallest hurt, on the living ones.

Daniel John Burton

A Sea of Roses

Imagine, a sea of roses
Red, so red, on the still calm water,
Blue in all its richest shade.
Each rose perfectly formed, floats,
As if hovering upon the thin membrane
Of a mirror, motionless and still.
Behold, there floats in that land,
Calmly gliding through
A body visible and pure,
Its eyes closed, the faintest smile
Becoming upon its lips.
It is in peace, the most exquisite,
Most delicious peace.
You look closer, dazzling your eyes,
You see the roses glimmer
Turning white, some blue
And red again, deepest blood burgundy,
When in the distance you hear running,
Running water, you are there.
You are floating, flying,
Sailing, soothing, dying,
You breathe, you smell
Nothing but rose and purity you can tell.
The water is warm, the roses silky,
The air cool and fine.
You take one blissful breath
And with that you sink,
You breathe in your death.

Anonymous

Czerwiec

I run, (for no remembered reason), down dim halls;
pine-paneled, lacquered walls, light-dappled, caught my eyes,
and split-second, observe a glance, half-stealthy, caught his look,
a boy I was in love with. In the silence, midday, June.

Faster, I run, (although) a lady strangles the strain in her lungs,
I catch the door, and thrust with a forced form of patience.
Half-dead – on youth narrowed knees, I rest small hands,
twelve-year old strands of hair flip from my forehead.

I slam my eyes, stick out my tongue.
Behind blind lids, amid the darkness,
patches of green stir to whiteness.

And sunlight, deaf, glares and tears
my arms apart, engulfed.

My tongue outstretched, a shiver of joy.
Taste air,
pierced with sun.

Ivy Hall

Birthday Visitors

I was 21 years when I wrote this poem. I am now
Recalling when my teacher said this poem
Has not yet found itself. I walk the tow-path to
Fen Ditton, past dogs and cows, but my memory
Is flat white foam, and as soon to deflate!

Burnished potatoes, a familiar reek of Brussels sprouts,
Burnt cedar, beef and sweetcorn,
I am tumbling, indeed traversing bouts of
Translating Whitman, and frying Quorn
For my vegetarian houseguests.

In the barge, my cousin Anatole chants melodious
Anti-fascist sayings plainly. Remember, body,
How I was the sophomore of us? How commodious
His holds, how easy to misconstrue.

And my father, all his poking about
The embers, as if this whole great life has been
Little more than some ash on the pant leg,
Nothing hard to get out. His song
Is on repeat: *She said I'll love you 'til I die.*

What does he say again, you will forget and know why?
Something to that effect. My eyes water
At nature's failed attempt to breed with me
(That is pollen if you think about it!) the tears of
This terroir flavouring us both - it *has* been too long!

Ivy Hall

Degas, The Orchestra at the Opera

“Don’t listen to me!” but the bassoonist ignores your protest.
The equipage of his discerning mind teases out the bassoon line,
Into something cool like a foreground, something universal like
trust,
While the stage lights go on and say ‘It’s not about us, it’s not
about’

Anything: let’s not be so reductionist as to call this a painting
About friendship. Let’s not be so reductionist as to call our friend-
ship
About friendship. There is noticing that is robust, and glinting
Noticing: friend-collecting and connoisseurship.
And in only one of these, is it your birthday,

Tom. So he’s painted it. Not, ‘I see just you,’
But that he just happened to, really just happened to,
While the dancer, pink with shut eyes, danced.

Oh, I do
Believe he would create a bassoon orchestra just for you, Tom!
Good bye - until circumstances change and flit about you,
So that a bassoon orchestra would be nothing laughable,
And laughter not something we have to.

Nick Collin

Someone's Birthday

Morning time, and a
Thin pen notes

This day will likely
Follow course.

Take a walk away
to the water tap, sink.

See the lemon rind sun
Rise splayed on the floor.

Look at yourself.
Talk to yourself.

The toothless threat
Of a tumour-sized throbbing –

The misaligned, unguided
Shame of the body

Had a Christian upbringing, probably.
No longer practices having left school,

I've heard, but keeps a copy in the desk by the bed.
Top drawer. Sticky notes for where it's read.

Donald Hobson

Optimists and Pessimists

In the great garden of life,
there are two kinds of people.

Those that always smell the flowers,
and those that never do.

The first kind see the second as unfortunate,
for they know not the carefree summer joys.

The second kind regard the first as fortunate,
for they know not the pain of inhaling a bee.

Donald Hobson

Seasons

When the river floods
and the water flows
and the great stones are left
as the rest washes away.

When the summer comes
and the flowers boom
and we pack up some lunch
to picnic one day.

When the squirrels come out
and search for their nuts,
but not in a rude way.

When a poem that you thought
started off good
ends in a crude way.

Anunita Chandrasekar

Midnight at my Window

Already, the page is shrinking
To a rigid black square,
A few stylised points
Of constructed twinkling
Though blood is still sinking
Through clouds in windows somewhere -
Windows with watchers, panes,
A wandering eye that paints
What is lost in blinking.

The world is too full of things!
Their corpses, ghosts and wombs.
My hands are so small,
So filled with nothing soon
That I must let, distant, fall
Dark honey from the stars' combs
And enjoy my little slice of moon.

Katie Thompson

CANNOT Take Direct Object

I.

I'm looking for your cold water
I'm looking for your cold water

I'm looking to be placed –
for my cold ankles
for my half tongue

Dirt isn't an impurity
it comes from outside the body
The only crudity is to transgress the skin

You're in danger of being naked before God

But I see your movement on the street
You still dream of martyrdom

And I don't enjoy lesbian porn
but I like to watch girls fighting in shoe shops
And I never thought I could hurt a girl before I saw an advert

I've seen you dragged through mud
I've seen your hands behind your back
I've seen you falling to the floor

To feel my forehead on the stone
To place myself on top of a rock
To let the water into me
To let the water into me

II.

I cut my teeth
I let them drain
Cut them to dry
on the kitchen sink

I cut my teeth
I let them drain
Cut them to dry
on the kitchen sink

Imbibe but don't impale

Touch me
It's a pure process

III.

Guilty dreams
I touched your skin

Hamartia is to miss the mark

To sin is to attempt
to sin is to hurt yourself trying

Guilty dreams I let you touch me

I go by the river to sit by the shore
I sit by the river

I don't touch the water

IV.

And yes I did cut my teeth

To bite the stone

To bite the rock

You were

born onto unto into

What's a tooth to a stone

A break in the skin is a pure process

I let you bleed me it's a pure process

Two bodies are a

pure process

You were never a body

but I felt your touch

You felled me into chaos

I felt your touch

Katie Thompson

to be smaller

oilcloth touch me twice
no shape
no shape
a new train station in Warsaw

one hole in one hole out
there should be no smoke

sculpt plastically
fall from this organically
there is no land
so we become a nation of sailors

who is the vessel?
a new train station in Warsaw





The image features a complex abstract composition of overlapping black and white geometric shapes. A large white square is centered within a dark grey frame. Overlapping this white square are several black shapes: a large triangle on the left side, a smaller triangle at the top left, a vertical rectangle on the right, and a horizontal rectangle at the bottom right. The text is positioned in the white area, overlapping the large black triangle.

DESIGNED BY MICHAEL REINERS
EDITED BY THOMAS BAILEY