



THE  
**TERRY  
KELLY  
POETRY  
PRIZE**

2023

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## Terry Kelly and The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize

Terry Kelly was a much-beloved Tyneside poet and journalist who spent his life reporting for Jarrow. A passionate lover of art, Terry was also an enthusiastic member of the Philip Larkin Society, reviewed for countless magazines (including *Poetry Review and London Magazine*), and wrote articles for *The Bridge*.

Commemorating the life of Terry Kelly, The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize is an annual poetry prize for young writers aged 25 and under in the North East. As Terry was a lover of poetry and proponent of creativity, the Prize encourages young people to try poetry and provide an entry point to the thriving North East poetry scene.

This is the eighth year of The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize. In past years, the Prize has involved a physical awards evening, complete with live music and the voices of our young poets. This year, we have decided to produce an exclusively online digital anthology, complete with custom illustrations for each entrant's poem(s)!

As the physical poetry world increasingly meshes with that of the digital, the ability for young poets to promote themselves online and signpost to a creative portfolio is crucial. We hope that this anthology will demonstrate the vibrancy and intrigue of North Eastern poetry, and continue to encourage and inspire all poets, new and old.

## The Judges

**Tahmina Ali** is a British-Bangladeshi Geordie spoken-word poet who tells stories of identity, culture, trauma and grief. She uses her words to penetrate stereotypes and misconceptions, creating art from special moments and celebrating their longevity. Tahmina also delivers writing workshops, sharing the plethora of skills and experiences she's picked up throughout her career. Her goal is to leave a legacy: poems which will resonate with people long after Tahmina is gone, to give back by helping others discover their passion for creative writing. Tahmina hopes that everyone who writes knows that their words hold weight, and that they too can silence a room with the power of poetry.

**Tom Kelly** is a Jarrow-born poet with a storied career. From working in the Jarrow shipyard Time-Office, to writing the BBCTV musical documentary *Kelly* with Alan Price (of *The Animals*) and writing songs for artists such as Marianne Faithful, Tom's work is anything but predictable. He has written a number of full-length stage plays produced by The Customs House, including the award-winning *I Left My Heart in Roker Park*, and his musicals written with John Miles include: *The Dolly Mixtures*; *Geordie*; *Tom & Catherine*; *Dan Dare*, and *The Machine Gunners*. In 2016 Tom was a runner-up for Writer of the Year in the Journal Culture Awards, and had his eighth poetry collection *Spelk* published by Red Squirrel Press.

**Donald Jenkins** is a performance poet, writer and workshop facilitator from Newcastle upon Tyne. His work has been featured in *The Writer's Cafe* magazine *New Word Order*, and in 2018 he won the Great Gateshead Poetry Slam. Donald has also performed at Glastonbury Festival and the Royal Albert Hall! Donald is a qualified youth and community worker and English teacher with twenty-two years' experience engaging young people from hard-to-reach communities in a variety of educational settings. He has delivered workshops for organisations including *Curious Monkey Theatre*, *Skimstone Arts and Apples and Snakes*, and is the Director, Manager and Facilitator of *SlamFresh*, a poetry CIC.

**Amy Langdown** is a writer, facilitator, producer and artist based in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Amy is primarily a poet who writes about the current political climate in the UK and the wider world, but also on topics such as mental health, introspection, family, grief and landscapes. Amy started writing as a way to express difficult and confusing feelings in an artistic way and it is now an intrinsic part of her life. In 2022, Amy started the *Out of Your Head!* poetry night and continues to run it monthly, both finding a place in, and growing the local poetry scene. Amy shares poetry and other artistic projects on Instagram at **@amylangdown**.

## The Editor/Illustrator

**Quinn Clark** is an award-winning author, poet and researcher from Newcastle upon Tyne. As a disabled and neurodivergent practitioner, Quinn often intertwines themes of trauma, mental health and disability with humour and wordplay in their work. Quinn has written for *BuzzFeed*, *ArtWeb* and *NaNoWriMo*, and has to-be-published works with *Ladybird Publishing* and *Unbound*: the former a children's colouring book, and the latter a collection of essays on chosen childlessness named *No One Talks About This Stuff*.

Within the arts scene Quinn is also an Access Support Worker with *Arts Council England* and other institutions: helping disabled and neurodivergent creatives secure arts funding. This year Quinn is funded by a *Developing Your Creative Practice* (DYCP) grant with ACE. As a prior runner-up for The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize 2022, they are incredibly excited to have edited and illustrated this year's anthology! Quinn is presently working on their ACE-funded science-fiction novel *Out of Your Depth*, about a man who grows tentacles when he touches saltwater. You can keep up with Quinn's work via their website linked above, and on their Twitter [\*\*@adashofseaglass\*\*](#).



## Introduction

Us North East poets are bound by a common sense of home. No matter what town we're from or what scenes made up our childhood, we see familiar themes cropping up again and again in our poetry. We write poems about perseverance, and beauty, and that impossible sense of longing which can only be satiated by the comforting sight of a Go North East bus, or the mild cosmic horror of an omnipresent Greggs.

It is my pleasure to introduce a fantastic and eclectic collection of poems, brought to you by some of the North East's finest young poets. The poems are divided into the categories of *11 and Under*, *12-16*, and *17-25*, and each winner is marked with a special sticker. We also have an additional category of 'highly commended' poems (also marked with a sticker) where our judges felt that a special mention was deserved! However, every poem was felt to be written with the utmost heart.

Myself, our lovely judges and the excellent folk at *The Customs House* are bowled over by the talent each poet featured in this anthology has. We hope that this anthology will continue to hold up the ethos of Terry Kelly, and inspire young poets to pursue their craft with excitement in their minds and adventure in their pens. Go forth and get thinking, young poets—we can't wait to see what you write next!

*Quinn Clark, Editor/Illustrator*

**POETS:  
11 AND  
UNDER**

# You and Me

*(a poem about a daughter and her mother)*

*by Alice Brooks, age 11*



We are complete when we are together, you and me.

We share the same dreams, you and me.

I'll never be too old to hang out, just you and me.

We never fight or argue, you and me.

We care for each other, you and me.

We love each other, you and me.

But most of all I love you, you and me



# **POETS: 12 -16**

# grown up

*by Isabella Davison, age 13*

yes, i know i've grown up to fast,  
and if i could run back to the past,  
i'd tell myself to let my childhood last.

don't beg for the teenage years,  
embrace every happy tear,  
bedbugs and heights; let them be your only fears.

i've grown up too quick,

and if i could go back in time i'd tell myself to not pretend to be sick,  
and don't cry over the days of my tests when i didn't get a red tick.

i've grown up so much and i wish to still be playing with my barbies and toys,

have my parents tell me i'm making too much noise,

but instead im crying over boys.

if i could go back i'd go back to that y6 algebra class,

listen to my teacher to make sure i'd pass,

but instead i daydreamed of growing up and now i've gotten here to fast.

i wanted to play outside with a huge group of friends,

instead of that one person who always waited for me after a school day came to an

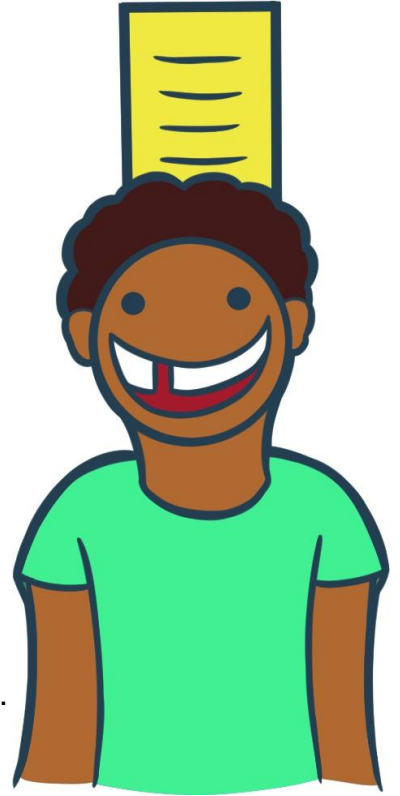
end,

and now i want to tell him that i'd die to make amends.

i miss drama club on thursdays after school,

i miss the year four swimming at a secondary pool,

i miss the days i got awards at assembly and standing at the front feeling like a fool.

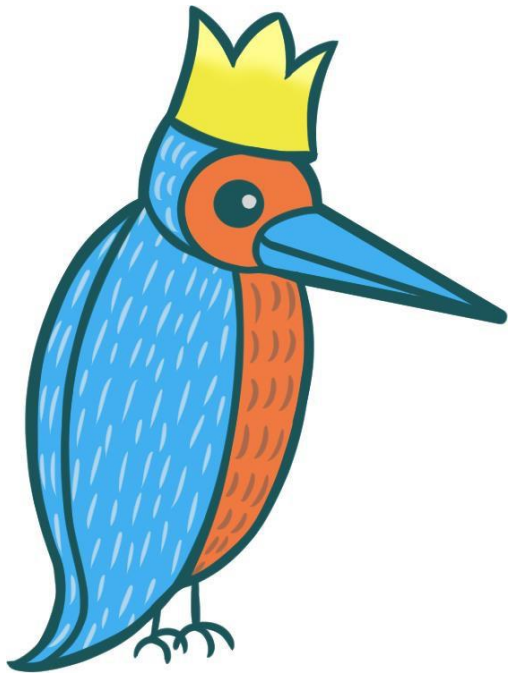


i miss that belly aching laughter of jokes,  
i miss getting excited when i was allowed to order a coke,  
instead i go shopping for no reason and end up coming home broke.  
i've grown up too fast,  
i wish i could change things in the past,  
to make my happy childhood last.



# A walk in the park

*by Gabrielle Morgan, age 15*



Did you see that?  
A kingfisher, a flash  
Of blue and gold as it plunged  
Beneath the silver water's surface  
And emerged  
Holding a fish –  
A stickleback, perhaps  
Or an anchovy, gleaming like a wisp  
Of smoke from a fire  
Golden as its plumage.  
Do you hear that?  
The gentle hum of wind  
As it stirs those trees –  
Willow, perhaps, or ash:  
Twirling sycamore, crumbling dandelions  
And makes laughing ripples in grass.  
Do you remember?  
Those days are gone  
But clear as the water.  
Is your mind too hurt to recover?  
Memories swirl beneath your eyes  
Like the fish that bob to the surface

And almost wish for death  
Or a razor-sharp beak to take them  
In their brazen quest to see the sun  
One final time.  
Let them surface  
Though you know it is worthless  
To try and recall the taste of blue sky  
And the golden clouds touched with pink.  
Deeper, deeper, they sink.  
A whisper.  
Will the wind help you remember?  
The touch of its fingers  
On your face, it lingers  
And leaves an impression too marked to be mistaken.  
A memory past formed, sanity taken.  
Will the water help you awaken?  
Watch its ripples as the sunbeams dance  
And sparkle on its blue surface, how it enchants  
Passers-by and how it bewitched you.  
Remember its scent  
At night, like a thousand  
Flowers had suddenly bloomed  
And sprayed their perfume  
Into the air  
While the woodcock and the owl and the rat and the hare



Scurried by, ignoring your sigh  
Of content as you watched the moon  
Reach deep down inside the soft silver pool  
A jewellery box, a precious gleam of gems  
Unknown to those with all the fortune in the world  
To buy diamonds and rubies and sapphires.

Stars.

Watch it tumble down  
Moonlight lost in a starlight shroud  
And fall into the oblivion of swirling murky peace.  
Will you ever return from that dark, gentle place?  
Your eyes reflect the sparkling falls  
That spilled with rainbows in a thousand fractured droplets.  
Leaves swirl around us like they wish  
To carry us up into the eternal open sky  
And free us.

But beneath us the water  
Will run on forever  
With dipper, wagtail, kingfisher  
And so you are lost.  
Gone is your delight in the silence and stillness that frost  
Brings as it settles over the world and turns it, sparkling, icy blue.  
No earthly beauties can now retrieve you.  
Unbroken white snow upon the highest peaks;  
Grass in the morning with dew so sweet;

Forest filled with millions of hushed giant trees;

Or waves crashing on a lost, lonely beach.

Now you are gone.

All that remains is the bittersweet

Of memories.

Only memories.



# Bus 900



Is life just a cycle of dissatisfying breakfasts,

An occasional croissant or spooning soggy egg,

Onto my flailing tongue?

I scour residual sludge and every conversation I regret remembering,

Into the basin each morning, the glare of the sink

White, sterilised into insanity.

Maybe it's trudging back and forth past the streams,

Of charity shops and nail salons,

Metal shutters clenched shut, in some sort of

Sick funeral procession down the high street?

I could once trace the steps, but they have,

Drooled from my decaying head, lulled into

Straying aimlessly.

I can't help but wonder how I end up,

Is it curled bare in a bathtub,

Limescale puckered around the plughole,

Or is it shrivelled and withered from,

Slurping seawater from the mouth of the

Toilet bowl?

Perhaps I shall ride the 900-replacement bus,

Endlessly,

Submerged into the window seat on the second storey,

A cavity of cadavers nodding their heads in,

Syncopated synchronisation with one another,

Writhe as I feel the feverish whisper of

Candyfloss vape on the back of my neck,

Clouds of billowing pink swaddling me,

Into a syrupy pink womb.

I've grown fond of the sticky scent –

I stopped off at Chichester-

It reminds me of when I was going somewhere.

But maybe next time,

I'll just cycle

# Skin

*by Charlotte Dougal, age 16*



My armour is tender,

Loosely linked chain mail

Etching, criss-cross

On my skin.

A war of cold philosophy rages, watched on by youthful eyes.

My armour is tender,

A dull knife was pulled through

Porcelain

Crimson exhumed and my armour

Pulsated.

But everything is calm now, through these

Rose tinted glasses,

As the summer moon drips candle wax above us. We dance to the petrichor,

And you never leave.

You trace circles on my cerebellum, create art on my occipital and tidy your

bedsheets within my brain.

And we dance, my consciousness grinding to a powder, the colour of

Fire.

My armour is tender, but together, we could defeat an army.



# **POETS: 17-25**



# The Beadsman

*by Isaac Gorman, age 18*

Between the ashes and the aisles  
the shadows dance.

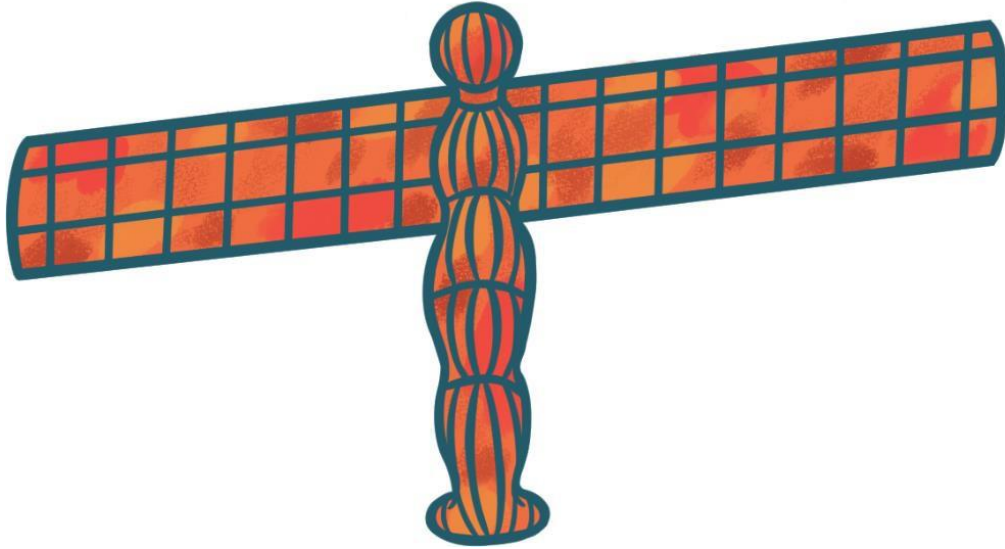
Tomorrow will bring such absence  
as no prayer can reconcile.

No weariness will understand  
these heavy hands.



# Angel of Rust

*by Michael Athey, age 22*



Nothing brings an angel down to earth more than being named 'North',  
her oxidised steel, speaks our friction,  
refusing to glisten, it gristles mutton.

However upon genuflection,  
did we miss our chance to hit F5, refresh the page?  
The new century was beckoning on the cusp of this hill,  
only two years away.

Ordaining this hill with our rusted angel,  
may have got us looking up,  
but not looking forward.

Our burdens could be eased by her parapet wings,  
instead they bar like the arms of a social mobility bouncer,  
“try again another time mate, tonight ain’t your night.”

Saying our Northern air corrodes,  
to live here is to have smoker’s lungs.

And angels don’t lie.

So we look up,  
not forward.

Ash to ash, rust to rust.

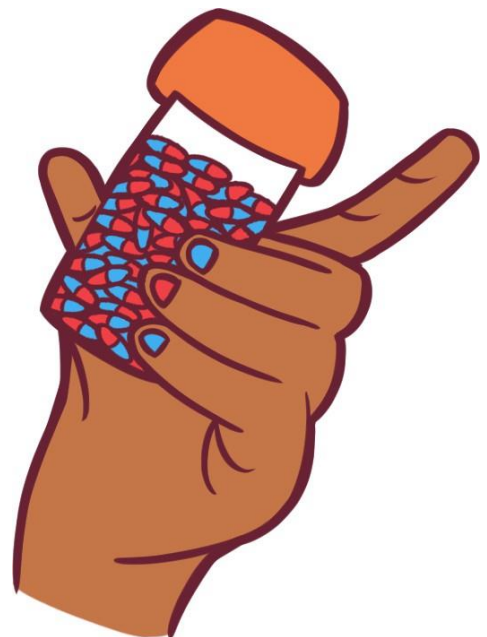
# Do you pay for your prescriptions?

*by Michael Athey, age 22*

When you enter  
my heart bursts to say - "well done"  
reaching our mucus lit  
plus shaped street sign  
couldn't have been easy

Evicting yourself from your bed's hibernation  
for an hour's gauntlet  
when eating, showering, had proved too troublesome  
like the pile of leaden linen, fortifying your floor  
nose running in the winter air  
the errand itself a reminder  
of your susceptibility  
to your tar filled thoughts

Door alarm signals you're back  
attracting unwanted attention  
stepping to the counter  
you feel you're on trial  
you recite  
you confirm



Name

Address

I read

Sertraline 150mg

My eyes

trying to say - "I care"

behind a patient confidentiality stare



# I Want to Be Soft

*by Hope Caitlin, age 22*

I want to be soft  
in the howling wind,  
to break bridges with the weight  
of my spine as storms  
sweep by my side.

I want humanity to see what  
remarkable gentleness can be,  
what whispers shout louder.

But I also want to be messy.

I want my eyes to tell ugly stories  
and not to be brushed in mascara  
that brings out the best in me.

I want my hair to be wild  
and my soul to be breath-taking,

I want you to see me burn  
the world bright and know  
there is power in me.

I want you to see what can be made  
of un pretty things.

I want you to see what I have never owed you,  
but I want my words worn  
on my face still.

For my bones aren't made of glass  
they are made of broken things  
and they are the most formidable forms imaginable. Picture a girl,  
beaten from the war,  
honey suckle on her tongue,  
she carries daises in her bullet wounds  
and paints poems  
with red stained fingers.  
She is beauty and pain,  
gentle strength and  
a little too much sarcasm for most.  
Little and fierce,  
sun and moon,  
girl and woman.



# Memory Substitute

*by Ilisha Thiru Purcell, age 24*



If I was to eat meat again the only meal I'd have  
would be a lorne sausage in a white bun,  
with lashings of butter and ketchup.  
I'd eat it with my hands  
until all that was left were flecks of flour on my cheeks,  
I'd eat it all and lick the plate  
and with it  
I'd eat the drive up north,  
my brother's head lolloping in sleep  
as the mountains wax and wane above us,  
I'd eat the cairn in my dad's heart  
that is finally complete  
when he sees the outline of his parents at the window,  
I'd eat the door of the oven  
that had to be kept open as the sausages cooked,  
my grandma telling us to be careful,  
as one side of our faces were gently heated  
in their home that never had the heating on,  
I'd eat the pools of grease on our matching plates,  
I'd eat the extra chairs wedged at either side of the four-seater table,  
I'd eat the kitchen roll that would be torn



in half so as not to be wasteful,  
I'd eat the red dots on the brown wood  
that my colourblind grandfather thought matched  
and I'd eat us all sitting round the table, each a different shade  
I'd eat my grandad learning to cook after my grandma's heart attack  
and the care he takes to boil a carrot,  
I'd eat how he tells a story,  
how minutes later the scene is still being set,  
I'd eat the way my grandma's face is lit from within  
when she hears our voices on the phone,  
love travelling across telephone wires.

If ever the day comes when I forget the taste of the above  
I'll set aside my morals for one meal,  
make myself a lorne sausage sandwich alone in my kitchen,  
bite down  
and swallow it all.



# Canary In the Coalmine

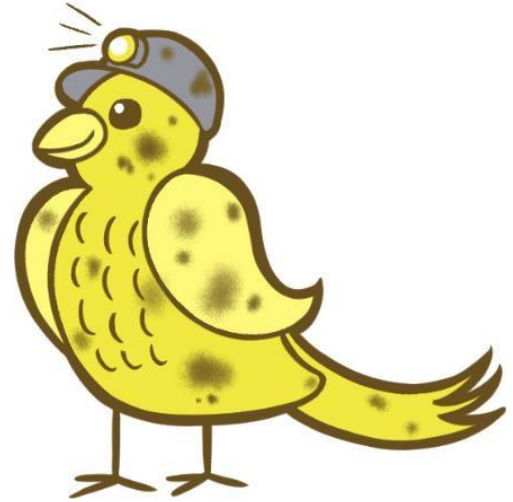
*by Ben Douglass, age 25*

Canary in the coalmine  
Working hard the whole time  
Mining coal with love  
For the Geordies up above

In walks Jim from legal  
Who happens to be a seagull  
Alongside Mr Deagle  
Who, you guessed it, is a woodpecker

"Word just in from parliament  
The owls are calling for disarmament  
Of our basic worker's rights  
So the kittiwakes, terns and kites

Rooks, penguins, geese and the like  
Are going on a country-wide bird strike  
We won't go quietly into the night  
And we aren't going down without a fight."



Canary pondered long and hard  
About his colleagues above in the yard  
And what might become of his beloved North East  
If they fell fighting the mighty beast.

So Canary went home to his wife, who's a pigeon  
And tried to relax with some nice television  
He turned the knob on the wooden TV  
And tuned straight into the BBC  
(Which, in this magical bird universe  
One of the B's stands for Birds)

And who should appear on this channel of culture  
But Mrs Thatcher the evil vulture  
She squawks a laugh while Rome is burning  
And says "this birdy's not for turning"

Canary had a thought like the sharpest splinter  
"Wealth doesn't trickle down south for the winter!"  
To stand a chance at saving his neck  
He'd have to fight, all wings on deck!

So, there they stood in quiet Shields  
Facing an army of riot shields  
Murderous crows and unkind ravens  
Diplomacy's out, it was blood they were cravin'

A year long struggle, no surprise  
That the rich southern vultures took the prize  
Thousands of fledglings fell from the skies  
Reduced to ash where no phoenix could rise

And as for our canary, well, he was stifled  
Sniped by a spiteful snipe with a sniper rifle  
Bleeding, spread eagling on his back  
As the grey North East sky turned to black

As the fat aristocratic ducks sat back  
And quacked "screw you, you mucky brats!"  
Thatcher the vulture killed two birds with one stone  
The canaries in the mine and their nest eggs at home

But out of their nests the cuckoos flew  
Where eagles dared to fight for you  
The chickens ran across the fields  
To kill the mocking birds blocking their yields

As Vera sang, there were bluebirds under  
The Tyne, Wear, Tees, Tweed and Humber  
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush  
But they're worth much more when they stand up and push

I've used lots of birds in this feathery tale  
I even found a place for the quail  
But the birds in this story that took to the skies  
That fought for their jobs, that met their demise  
The ones that live on in young Geordie eyes  
Are birds of a feather... and they are magpies.

**FEEDBACK  
FROM THE  
JUDGES  
+  
ADDITIONAL  
POEMS**

## Feedback from the Judges

This year, the competition was incredible! As a result, our judges wanted to provide personal feedback for each poem:

### **You and Me by Terri Brooks, age 11:**

- **Tom Kelly:** 'Simply and warmly expressed and could be a lyric for a song. Well done, Terri!'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'A simple but effective love poem which could be applied to many loving relationships, not just a daughter and her mother. Great and efficient use of repetition helps drive the message of the poem. Interested to hear what Terri writes next.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem was nothing but lovely - I felt like my heart knew this poem already.'

### **grown up by Isabella Davison, age 13**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'The message in this poem is uplifting and meaningful. It follows a pleasant rhyme scheme, making it easy and enjoyable to read. It is impressive to see so much self-awareness from a writer 13 years of age.'
- **Tom Kelly:** 'I really enjoyed reading this poem as it has such a believable feel that is maintained throughout.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'Was impressed by a young writer's ability to reflect on the topic of growing up too fast. I really identified with and visualised the examples she gave of her memories of primary school 'y6 algebra class', 'days I got awards at assembly and standing at the front feeling like a fool. I would be interested to hear more poems by Isabella Davison.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem was really nostalgic, we've all felt this sort of way at some point, the rhyme scheme is brilliantly consistent.'

## **A walk in the park by Gabrielle Morgan, age 15**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'Excellent use of description and metaphors in this poem. Gabrielle describes the fish really well and connects it to memories and experiences seamlessly. This is a well-written poem and made for an enticing read.'
- **Tom Kelly:** 'A good mix of strong images that avoided diving into cliches: well done.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'The cycle of life is captured beautifully in this poem that moves seamlessly to focus on different aspects of the park's eco-system. A great rhyme scheme and luscious vocabulary assist the transition of perspectives. Keeping with the cyclical feel of the poem I felt drawn to read it again and follow nature's journey.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem felt tender and careful. I could almost feel the movement and scent of the dandelions in this poem. It is really, overall, impressive.'

## **Bus 900 by Evie Alam, age 16**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'There is strong imagery throughout this whole poem. The way Evie describes food, feelings and the general surroundings shows great use of descriptive language. I am particularly fond of the ending, the emphasis on the cycle of life by using the reference of cycling instead of taking the bus, very cleverly done.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'An enjoyable stream of consciousness piece filled with some vivid imagery that superbly captures the mundane repetition of traveling on a bus or travelling through life. I particularly liked the line about being vaped on- 'Clouds of billowing pink swaddling me, into a syrupy pink womb'.
- **Amy Langdown:** 'I felt that this poem, specifically the line 'Clouds of billowing pink swaddling me/Into a syrupy pink womb' describes something so mundane in a way that I'd never thought of it before, and that's hard to do.'



## **Skin by Charlotte Dougal, age 16:**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'An extremely powerful poem, the description was visceral and even triggered a physical sensation on my own skin as I read it. It is incredibly impressive that Charlotte is able to evoke so much emotion through the words in this poem.'
- **Tom Kelly:** 'Demonstrates strong language skills which featured throughout and the poem's conclusion echoing the opening really worked: 'My armour is tender, but together, we could defeat an army.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'A very visceral poem that I enjoyed more and more with repeated reading. It takes the reader on a journey through the vulnerability and strength of flesh with good use of some high-end vocabulary and imagery. I enjoyed the line 'You trace circles on my cerebellum, create art on my occipital and tidy your bedsheets within my brain.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'You trace circles on my cerebellum, create art on my occipital and tidy your bedsheets within my brain' line stuck in my mind. Every word in the poem felt intentional and clever.'

## **The Beadsman by Isaac Gorman, age 18**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'The imagery of shadows dancing is very strong in this poem. The poem is quite short so leaves me wanting to know more.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'Short ominous poem which made me curious with its various interpretations.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem almost feels like a prayer to me, or a mantra. It is short and concise and it says so much in such a short amount of lines.'

## **Angel of Rust by Michael Athey, age 22**

- **Donald Jenkins:** 'As someone who is old enough to remember when the Angel of the North wasn't there, and then appeared on the skyline close to where I used to work, I really identified with his poem. Initially I didn't like the Angel of the North – it seemed like an unnecessary eye sore made for the Millennium. I enjoyed how Athey created the image of the Angel as a 'social mobility bouncer' and obstruction to progress.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem plays on the mixed feelings about the appearance of the Angel of the North, while also acknowledging that it represents home, nonetheless.'

## **Do you pay for your prescriptions? by Michael Athey, age 22**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'The vivid description of the messy bedroom and the person's challenging circumstances is incredibly encapsulating. I love how the length of the poem reflects the fleeting interaction between patient and caregiver and the page layout is cleverly thought out.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'Precise, efficient poem that flips the perspective on depression and in doing so, makes us feel more empathy towards those who are medicated due the state of their mental health. No word is wasted, form is sharply experimented with. Great writing all round.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'A deeply important poem which I, and many others will, relate to. The line 'like the pile of leaden linen, fortifying your floor' spoke to me. This poem is on a subject I've read lots of writing about, but it takes a new narrative, a strong narrative.'

## **I Want to Be Soft by Hope Caitlin, age 22**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'This poem felt like a breath of fresh air. The use of language is delicate yet strong. I am particularly fond of how Caitlin brings across the strength of gentleness.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'Nice contrasting images are painted in this poem where the duality of the writer's identity is revealed. From soft and gentle to messy and fierce, the need to feel empathy in world that is fragile, harsh yet beautiful, is central to this poignant piece of writing.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'The narrative of this poem is strong, it embodies being both soft and formidable, I think encompassed by the line 'I want humanity to see what remarkable gentleness can be' / I want my hair to be wild and my soul to be breath-taking / I want you to see me burn.'

## **Memory Substitute by Ilisha Thiru Purcell, age 24**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'The use of 'eating' as a mode of transport through memories in this poem is extremely clever and creative. The visual description and language is easy to follow and relate to. Ilisha describes her personal experiences of family and togetherness in a way that would be relatable to most people, even if their experiences weren't the same. There is a strong feeling of presence in this poem.'
- **Tom Kelly:** 'A strong visual opening and the mix of food and family relationships is really strong, and once again the symmetry at the poem's conclusion is so effective.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'As someone with elderly Scottish relatives, who have now sadly passed, I really identified with this poem. A strong voice is maintained throughout the piece that starts in our bellies with Lorne square sausage and ends in our hearts. We are with the writer every step of the way in a narrative poem that reminds me

of the work of Jackie Kay. Tremendous writing—I really look forward to hearing what Ilisha Thiru Purcell does next.'

- **Amy Langdown:** 'This poem made me think of my Grandparents and the love I felt in their kitchen, eating their food. This poem is expertly put together, each word and phrase belonging exactly where it is.'

### **Canary In the Coalmine by Ben Douglass, age 25**

- **Tahmina Ali:** 'Ben's use of birds and humour to describe the strive of miners is very clever. There is a strong build up throughout the poem making it exciting. The flow and rhythm of the poem make it enjoyable and easy to read.'
- **Donald Jenkins:** 'A humorous bird-ridden take on the miner's strike. The writer messes with the expectation of the rhyme scheme to comic effect in this piece of regional stand-up poetry.'
- **Amy Langdown:** 'A funny, powerful, comedy-forward poem which explores the North's mining history in a new and clever way.'

# Mothering the Mother

*by Tahmina Ali*

The sleeping bug is cuddled, swaddled in clouds of cotton.

Fed on cue,

with fast feet rushing to soothe each coo,

while tired eyes and sore feet carry on.

Hold the mother not the baby,

rub the back that has carried life into this world

because even 5lbs and 10oz get heavy after a while.

Create a haven,

where you talk about everything or nothing but allow her the space

to breathe.

Breathe with her.

Notice,

how in a room full of people her thoughts echo.

She doesn't recognise the sunken eyes that no longer drift into daydream.

Nor the shoulders that slouch and the feet that drag.

The greeting cards by the fireplace are collecting dust

and her Peace Lilly has curled in on itself.

Be present,

put down your phone and put on the kettle,

pay attention to the silences and

read between the pauses.

If you stay long enough you'll see that she is anchored by numbing nerves

and tall shadows that linger

So, hold the mother not the baby

remind her that she is the force of a tornado.

She has broken the crust of the earth to birth another human from her very bones.

She is the bellow from the lungs of the lioness.

She will mould this new beating heart with silk hands and walls of granite

She will protect, she will teach, she will defy gravity to raise her child.

But right now,

she is running on reserves, her undone errands trail behind her

and that cup of tea still awaits to be poured.

If you're going to hold the baby,

then do it while she rests her eyes,

maybe drifts to a place where the clock ticks slowly

and the weight in her heels

are lifted.

# Say it loud

*by Donald Jenkins*

Sat in a hipster eatery at the Monument,  
grazing on a poke bowl with edamame beans,  
the dwindling noise of a city centre protest  
plays out in front of us.

Viewed through a bay window,  
this corporate spectator box  
has the disconnect of a telly browser  
stumbling upon some panoramic action.

-Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcomm—

Till transactions drown out the megaphone,  
chants are muffled by slurps of udon noodles  
as muted mouths are turned away in Dover,  
bellies left empty in overstuffed hostels,  
bodies forgotten in graves on our ocean's floor.

-Half listening, part-time supporting—I chew on,  
cringe at attendance figures,  
remember when it was all about  
boots on the ground.

-Do my comrades of old, ever think—  
Where did he cop out to?  
A march from A to B—

what did it achieve beyond a feel-good factor,  
meeting like-minded hopefuls,  
the sound of my own ego shouting  
till voice turned hoarse?

-Say it loud, say it clearrrr—

—Can we have a Geordie Springs?

My wife says the British protest in orderly queues,  
sign permission slips, seek written approvals to riot.



We need to take inspiration from the Arabs, the French,  
spark a revolution by setting ourselves on fire.

On my phone - unread petitions clutter inboxes,  
outrage flexes on timelines owned by billionaires

whose ideals I do not share,

an old propaganda poster

turned macro-meme is circulated

of a parent, children sat on lap, at his feet,

asking, impressionably

-Daddy, what did you do

when they removed our right to protest?

# SQUIRM

*by Amy Langdown*

fingers drummin' on tables edge, energy surges, yu cannit detain, cannit  
refrain, yu'd like to reach into ya brain, coil ya fingers around the  
metastatic maggot of it and wrench it out, kickin' and screamin' and fussin'  
and buggin' and squirmin' and drummin' and whack it intu quaran'ine;  
isolate it from all other parts of yu, 'cause it is—unrelentingly, undoubtedly,  
undeniably and facetiously a part of yu, yu'd like to keep it hidden, under  
wraps, held down with straps in the shadows of the hill of yu, yu'd like to  
leave it behind, let your ankles finally get dry so ya fingers will stop the  
constant, incessant drummin'.

# Old Castles Belong Too

*by Quinn Clark*

Once, I stood at a bus stop.

My usual bus stop, you understand.

And out of hand a gentle-man approached

And he too, like the bus, stopped.

Nothing unusual there.

The green hair tends to draw the odd bemused stare

So I smiled and greeted him with spoken flare

Only to watch his eyebrows launch into the air.

"You're from Cork, aren't you!" he declared,

And if I were better at accents

I would imitate his characteristic Irish drawl:

A soup-like supine twist over vowels, hiccupping into a folkloric siren call.

"No sir, I'm a Geordie," I said,

Already prepped with a long-winded speech

Because this is a beseechment I know well

But it's too late to rescind my vocal tell.

"I don't believe you!" he said,  
"No Geordie sounds like that.  
You travelled round the world, in fact!  
Or were brought up as a military brat!"

"No sir, that's not the case," I cried,  
"Why lie, just to save face?  
I'm not ashamed of *my* voice or face  
Any more than I'm ashamed of this Geordie place."

The conversation stilted, nasty:  
A vastly uncomfortable blank  
Which this man I did not know tried to  
Stuff my small, queer, odd-voiced self  
Into his medium, straight, normal-voiced bank.

I camouflage consistently,  
An amalgam of identity wrapped up in something  
even more Northern than my parents could've given me.

I'm Northern in nothing but mutual intelligibility.  
A stranger's refusal does not remove that claim.  
Yet still I hold onto the consummate wanderer's shame.

## Conclusion

That's a wrap on The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize 2023! Thank you to each and every one of the magnificent poets who contributed their work to this anthology. It is clear that every single one of you has a bright future ahead in the poetry world; don't let anything stop you from writing that next poem!

An enormous thanks to *The Customs House* for hosting The Terry Kelly Poetry Prize 2023: in particular Fiona Martin, the Deputy Director of Learning and Participation! Without her tireless dedication to supporting young artists throughout the North East, this anthology would not have been possible. Thank you also to our wonderful judges: Tahmina Ali; Tom Kelly; Donald Jenkins and Amy Langdown, for lending their time, expertise and words!

Thank you to our funders: *Arts Council England; The Community Foundation; The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust; South Tyneside Council; The Barbour Foundation and The Fidelio Charitable Trust*, whose support ensures that young people are able to access the arts.

And of course, the biggest thank you to Terry Kelly. Without his passion, vision, and the enduring impact which he left on the North East arts scene; countless young poets would never have felt they belonged in the world of poetry. Let this anthology be a testament to the power of inspiring others, and a monument to the legacy which Terry leaves behind.

*Quinn Clark, Editor/Illustrator*

# THE TERRY KELLY POETRY PRIZE

## 2023

*PRODUCED BY:*  
**THE CUSTOMS HOUSE**

*EDITED AND ILLUSTRATED BY:*  
**QUINN CLARK**

*FEATURING POEMS BY:*

**MICHAEL ATHEY    TERRI BROOKS    TAHMINA ALI  
ISABELLA DAVISON    BEN DOUGLASS    EVIE ALAM  
ISAAC GORMAN    DONALD JENKINS    QUINN CLARK  
AMY LANGDOWN    ILISHA THIRU PURCELL  
CHARLOTTE DOUGAL    GABRIELLE MORGAN  
HOPE CAITLIN**

Fidelio Charitable Trust

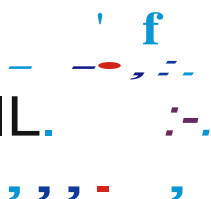


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