

WHAT CAN HOLD EVERYTHING



POETICS LAB ANTHOLOGY 2025

LEWISHAM
BOROUGH of
LITERATURE

London
Writers
Centre 

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Preface

by **Courtney Conrad**

It is with immense pride and joy that we present the first anthology from the London Writers Centre's Poetics Lab project. This anthology stands as a testament to the courage, creativity, and growth of a remarkable group of young poets who have spent the past four months exploring the power of language and self-expression. These poems highlight the talent in South East London - Lewisham, Bromley, Greenwich, and Southwark.

Guided by the wisdom and generosity of esteemed poets Nii Ayikwei Parkes, Roger Robinson, Fiona Benson, Pascale Petit, Victoria Kennefick, Alycia Pirmohamed, Anthony Anaxagorou, Malika Booker, and Caroline Bird this cohort has blossomed in ways both profound and inspiring. Some arrived with experience, while most were trying poetry for the very first time. Yet, each writer has stretched their creative muscles, discovered new depths within themselves, and found the confidence to share their truths with the world.

This anthology is more than a collection of poems—it is a celebration of emerging voices, of stories told with boldness and vulnerability. These poems pulse with curiosity, honesty, and a hunger to explore what it means to be alive in this moment. We are so proud of this body of work and the poets behind it. Having witnessed their passion for poetry grow first hand, I have been deeply moved by their dedication and the way they have supported one another on this journey.

We hope you find in these pages not just words but windows into the hearts and minds of a new generation of writers who remind us of the power of poetry to transform, to heal, and to inspire. May their work invite you to write, to reflect, and to connect more deeply with your own story.

The London Writers Centre would like to thank our generous anonymous donor for assisting us to create this opportunity for young people in South East London.

Enjoy.

Introduction

by **Courtney Conrad**

In this anthology, voices bloom in unexpected places like snowdrops pushing through frost, fragile yet insistent. These poems explore the tension between emergence and vulnerability, appetite and restraint, belonging and estrangement. They speak from the body: hungry, bruised, on fire and from the places we inhabit: city skylines, kitchens of powdered sweetness, train platforms, postal doorways, and transient homelands. Each poem holds a quiet rebellion, a soft insistence that the ordinary is never truly ordinary.

Here, intimacy unfolds not just in the softness of a kiss or a ring left at the door, but in the way a skyline swallows a sunset, or wildfire becomes both desire and destruction. These poems evoke transformation not as a triumphant becoming, but often as a tender, uncertain one: overwintered, reshaped, remade in the mouths of others, in migration, in memory, in the brittle architecture of love. Together, these poems form a landscape of human restlessness, our desire to be seen fully, to build something out of what we have, even if just words, fruit, fire, or memory.

This anthology marks the first publication for many of these emerging poets, most of whom are at the beginning of their creative journey. Having explored diverse literary forms, they now share their debut work with courage and clarity. London Writers Centre is proud to provide a safe space that empowers young voices, giving them a platform to share their truths, confront complex subjects, and shape new understandings.

Happy reading.

Introduction as Snowdrop

by Ahana Banerji

Not sure how to be hungry
after my stomach has been distended
by cold for so long.

That word again, overwintered,
I keep hearing it on the rich trod
of the soil as footsteps capsize it:

a sort of massive worm dance,
tousling up the earth like easy hair. Where
was I again? I have forgotten

how to lie still I'm so full of it. Two girls
kissing where they think no one can
see them. I suppose, I, sleepless, scentless,

have the small privilege of unbecoming
passionlessly. Talk forward, mythomania,
dreamfat curdling in my stem. What was I saying,

no, before this. Oh, of course
I will not be legible long. That's the business
of ghosts, or limpet snatchers, or the colour blue,

or anything else more important than I am.
I am here and that's enough. Don't think
I have never known an appetite

like yours or a restlessness like emergence.
I am here and I've had enough. Some springtime
this has turned out to be.

Walnuts

by **Bhumika Billa**

Muskaan used to drive with a towel on her thighs
as the men on signals drooled for some cake.

Khushi stopped her lessons as instructor bhayia sat
with her didi at the back and licked some cake.

Muskaan grew up dodging security guard uncles
school pac-man, she a bright lemon cake.

Khushi perfected the tight-bra method
to ice glaze thin, not a fancy cake.

Muskaan never smiled at strangers on streets
a seedhi kurti barfi who never liked cake.

Khushi tied her hair, a cute little kanjak
a padhai wali bachi, not yet cake.

Ache ghar ki ladki, Muskaan and Khushi
remained achi bachi till they tasted the cake.

The moon that night was a party paper plate
the world all theirs, a giant coffee cake.

As the brown sugar clouds cushioned pulsing laughs
two dilli girls camouflaged on the cake.

Canned Cocktail

by **Taylor Beidler**

You'll want / the suckling sound / of the cranberry /
coming out the can / that's flavour / eat the shapes /
down the freezer aisle / Mary Jane / and margarita
mix / Jell-O powder makes / good punch / lemonade
stand fixings / all powder and no rind / ambrosia /
like the salad / fruit of the gods / blood of the youth /
real startup / you say / cracking 'nilla wafers / with a
plastic spoon / what do we make / out of this / mud
pie / meal worms / used to get / bellyache / from
bendy straws / dissolve the tongue / new shapes /
mouth blue / like raspberry bubblegum / like marker
sniff / grape / who knew / fruit / came from trees /
orange crush / styrofoam cup / name things small /
cut the shapes / until they make / you whole

The Pear

by Caz

I
have
been
known
to stand
taller than
expected,
shown curves
and freckles
firm, recklessly
rotund in duck egg
shell or simply brown.
But what can't be seen
is that I bruise so easily
once I've been plucked:
one word about my
shape and I am
almost crushed.

Pantoum for Predators

by **Jay Mitra**

Heels suctioned by wet sand
A fish glimmers in a sunlit wave
Shredded foil on the crests
I watch the men watching me

A fish glimmers in a sunlit wave
Amber dyed blue and gold
I watch the men watching me
When I walk, I am followed

Amber dyed blue and gold
Shredded foil on the crests
When I walk, I am followed
Heels suctioned by wet sand.

Wildfire

by Annabelle Sami

From here you're beautiful,
oils splashed on green canvas
eat up the pages burning alive,
full of desire, crimson and ochre,
demolish whole forests
in a single bite.

Seep into me,
becoming then becoming,
quadrupling and quintupling in size.
Each passing moment, more of you is
more of me, baby
I'll stoop down to meet you as you rise.

But now the breath's stuck in my throat
and I'm choking.
Now my clouds are heavy ash
carrying big black tears.
Now they're sending in the choppers
and we're headline news, thinking
surely this is it, time for the big finish
but you're on a roll,
running wild, gnashing teeth
solid smoke on rushing feet
looking for more to eat
fuel
oxygen
and heat

baby.

And I'm looking like
raw meat.

29

after 'Ave Maria' by Frank O'Hara

by **Lauren Hurrell**

I thought I learned all about love in the backseat
of my hometown cinema.

It's a Waitrose now – past lives
lost to the baked goods aisle.

Until I see mangrove trees,
ribs rising, bartering earth for air

so hummingbirds can gossip
in their atriums, far from the silt banks
of the Avon or Thames.

I lay the paddle down, keeping balance
as I rise above the mosquitoes, gifting love bites

to watch paradise unfurl in the humid fever dream
the sun wanes around a bobbing coke bottle rim
then slips beneath.

New moon's dream works plankton in crests
at my fingertips – I draw a life line like a sparkler

telephone wires fizz above, night sky spills champagne
no chemtrails, just the Milky Way

on the back of a truck, mouths agape
her hand in mine; the ice is melting

rattling backwards from the past, eyes fixed
on its molten core, behind us now like petrichor

when did you last think of morning and feel relief?
people drift through my head, stared at the sun
too long

we learn resilience in hindsight –
earthquakes; that's your life changing

I carry death on my shoulder like a child
walking soft to keep it dreaming

my father's final breath suffocated the room to silence

as snow mutes a city

I leaf through the hope of an afterlife
trapped on the other side, toying with a Babybel

his life, a whole universe
slips away, melts to air
and leaves a portal in me

I stand like him now on train platforms, hand in pocket
a rustle of change, solitude pitched to a frequency
only dreamers can hear

love renews to fill cracks with gold

playing cards by cerulean blue, lapping over
bailing out my drowning heart like a passion fruit.

Bus stop stand Y

by Eliezer Gore

Uncle looks at my braids
asks *Do I know where this hairstyle started?*

Somewhere in Africa, probably
where the first child was caught in a bush

that's how their father found them
kneeling, palms out with comb-toothed fingers

untangling child from branches
tying the hair to itself, pouring oil

coloured wishes into each braid,
Uncle laughs and says *no*.

He tells me of men in grey tracksuits
between each other's legs

handling each other's hair
gentle hands and taut fingers

guiding each strand till rivers of black curls
are laid flat. To him, that's how gangs are formed..

Stoned

by Simone Eligon

You remember your first time,
right? Deep inhale before

the release, that cool joy stuttering
in my chest. My lungs still burn

for it on those days when a chisel cracks
my skull in two. I pass it to you, neat,

but, no, our cravings aren't the same.
I remember your first time,

a metal fence dividing us,
a deep inhale before the release

of the rock swaddled in your pale palm.
You aimed,

again and again,

black belly licked
by your sharp edged rot.

You love this game.
If you could draw blood, you would

use it, my red on your white,
to paint those flags that hang

like senile ghosts, forgetting
the sun has set on this past

you can't resurrect. Stones cleave
my tongue. I wet my lips and wonder

what it would taste like if my appetite
beat yours. Empty myself of your rocks,

bury you beneath my landslide, tired
of the world coddling your whiteness

in soft coos and false histories.
I swallow these daydreams whole,

weighty stones swelling in my stomach,
engraved with all the things I wish

I would say. I'm still burning.

Blankness Insists

by **Julia Motcho**

A blank piece of paper becoming white? I've wondered if whiteness is a colour or a permission. Even the former scares me. What can hold everything must first empty something. I've noticed the air's emptiness. Suffocate me in the corporate cubicle office. 'Hey guys' turns to careful 'good mornings'. I mislay pieces of myself scattered in every vowel I sand down. My voice is so shaky that I'm not sure I even said it. And that's when I think about the artists who can paint light without touching white. And yearn to imitate them. Wanting to make myself acceptable without altering a shade. Turning my black sheet blank without a stroke of white on the brush. A hundred white pages sit in a row, untouched and belonging. I feel them leaning away from my edges, as if the ink might bleed. Those whose smooth pages I touch, their hot-pressed satin raises a friction against my cardstock finish. The printers could've made a mistake. In my being there, their fingers hesitate on my surface, unsure whether to turn the page or correct it. If I were blank, my difference would've been created then celebrated. My blackness becomes an error that disturbs the comfort of their hands. A black pen is never used on a black sheet, not because they cannot write, but because they refuse to read what requires effort. No colour other than black is used on an exam. They whisper; paint the black sheet white. Appears blank. Ready to print. Maybe that's what they mean by being "ready"

light left unpainted
still, the ink does what it must:
writes into silence

EdEx Long-Term Placement:

by Lily Steve

4:30 pm

wonder: the physics of how more can be taken than there was to give

8:30am - 3:15pm

witness: soft bodies pressing into cross-legged lines, limbs fusing allegiance to moulded plastic chairs,
slow defection from flesh.

witness:

the lineage of people who swallow nerve signals, discard the batteries of their sirens and

now: lying adult in silence

wonder: why not - felt the shock - that made the wave

before: in stillness (yet again)

storms this cellular flood

progress measured in regulation

be: assimilation to *what is*

over: dysregulation's clamouring *why still this*

over-exposure leaves most who've grown numb but

some still feel the ringing as the stinging it first was

yet: more energy forever spent on | realigning | what flies
out of line

instead of: let's *always build dimmable lights*

see: sensitivity as system's canaries

for: the tender flee what makes all, in time, *deplete*

still we teach to cope without

teaching: how to ask why

of places whose normal stifles divergent minds.

Mail

by Izzy Radford

I found out who had been sending me love letters. It was the man downstairs.

“Too cliché!” I shrieked at the postman. I sent him back downstairs with my own note. It said things like *I am done with fantasy and use the doorbell if you're hard*. The next morning the postman returned, this time with a hate letter. “Should I be worried, as a woman?” I asked. “You never know who people are. For example, I could be Cyndi Lauper,” he replied. He suggested I send a note back. We made it extra venomous. The next morning, he returned with a jar of spit. “That yours?” But he was not foul. Oh, the man downstairs had somehow gotten even lower!! I gave the postman a loaded gun. At 9:15pm I heard two shots. Then I remembered I was watching ‘John Wick’. Things remained ambiguous. The next morning, I received a ring. It was so pretty and glamorous. It was like a heist movie ring. I felt cosmic. I started crying. It had gotten out of hand. I didn’t even know what was real and what wasn’t anymore. “You’re not Cyndi Lauper, are you?” I sobbed to my postman. He comforted me but didn’t answer. Then he took out a small, gold scroll and read from it: *You are the most beautiful person I've never met. I can tell by your foot plodding. And the way you sing. I'd like to meet you. I am foolish. Forgive me. The man downstairs.*

I’d never understood anything more. All my life I had waited by the door. I just had to go down.

I'm On My Way Home

by Mamour Touray

from the dealers land
silk glove robber's palm
posturing in the light
no shadow by his side
feet goring into ground
roots with crimson arms
his breath is fog
skull eyed and clown smile

i'm on my way home

grinning stitched smile
singing songs of other land
pierced through by wind
raisin skin desert palm
squeezing rain from fog
mining shadows for light
these oak tree arms
resting wreaths to one side
of prayer mats on the ground

i'm on my way home

soul yearns for cotton ground
curved lips the river's smile
shore breeze waltz side to side
ears against the pulsing land
the youth of these arms
calloused by wind

dancing under soft light
slice air with dagger palm
inhale the sneering fog

i'm on my way home

to hold candle to the fog
melt clouds onto ground
cuddle sunshine on palm
whistle 'til the canaries smile
bend water into light
tower stones to one side
whirl any daring wind
away from this bruised land
its wrinkled wilted leaf arms

Stock Market Skylines

by **Dianne Danquah**

I never get to see the sun leave entirely
when it starts to set.

I only ever get to see it go halfway,

blocked by glass eyesores, shaping
our future, displacing our present
and rewriting our past.

Train station platform lovers forced
to settle for the car park. Fighting
for an eternal goodbye, even though I'll see them tomorrow.

J.P. Morgan Chase away the sun.
Stock market skylines are their only offering,
burning pounds and pounds of flesh.

No wonder we never get to the end of the rainbow.
It is waiting for the laughter of the young ones
at the back of the 177.

But the roadworks and diversions
means we never arrive, and all the gold
is kept in private equity.

Aunty, who parts my hair with calling cards,
prays she'll be back soon. But I never felt blue
magic on my scalp again. God only honours *their* devotion.

Trading our dreams for shareholder value
and matcha. We've found new paths,
untouched and unloved.

New builds had replaced the ones
we wrestled with, ones we'd never
be able to afford.

Full of half islands and half meals.
Iceland sees me more than my neighbours do,
frozen in time for dinner. No more peeling,

no more chopping and crying for onions.
Our tears never moved *them*
and their bulldozers always crushed *us*.

Bones are the foundation. We are refugees
with citizenship huddled at the top of the Greenwich Observatory,
on our tippy toes to watch 3/4 of the sun's journey home.

(Un)making a (Home)town

by Yuwei

Before we part, like stars sprouting on hills,
God asked us to build a world. We picked up
a grassland, bare like our hands. Seven days:

the first day in Deptford,
my sister, made by migration, closer than lineage
watched our mother exchange cash for cash,
international fees for art school drained her to skin.

Day two in Deptford, people marched Free Gaza,
while graffiti walls said, for all single mums. M U M S.
Below, another small line screamed in black - M O M S.

On the third day, I grew up in the wind.
Mum taught me how to fight a boy back. Two-year-old me
barefoot, wobbly, clumsy. The boy was taller, stronger,
face flushed into rain. He threw away my baby bottle.
Mum asked, *he's a boy- does that make you afraid?*
"Mum, where are my siblings?"

Here. Days four and five are twins. Their braids firm,
tied together, swaddling sun and moon from the east
end of grassland. Stars watch over our innocent eyes,
still unknowing of love and war. They hold my hand.
A dark street unfolded. Where young faces craned their necks.
Bright and clean. Make it easy for death to cut them all off.
Souls died like wheat being harvested. Street flowed
through three thousand years, from Beijing to Hong Kong,
from my ex-girlfriend's mother to herself. Can people drop
guns like they betray their mother's tongue?

Silence.

The city's skin peeled off.

Swallow-birds flew over bodies— dead salt.

Until songs from a beloved land pull us back. Mothers' prayers remade us from burning ripples, with half-turned necks. Eternal.

On the sixth day, our forehead shone; God witnessed in the past life: we kissed in the dark. Long. Drenched.

The seventh day landed as an angel with shell.

I sat opposite my therapist, who told me God rested today.

She asked, *Did you tell your Mama? Her fingers held an angry tide, like a real God.* The flood returned. All tears, voices, blood,

each tongue a broken stair. Rising. Mama—

the Tower of Babel, rooted us back as one until every sound was home.

BIG EASY CRAB

by **Magdalen Simões-Brown**

At night Canary Wharf draws my attention like a screen.

It shimmers silver and white gold, blinks red in wet spark and reaches up

in jagged line breaks, a poem turned on its side; from Lewisham I see

the whole unshelled thing, quivering. The O2 is off to the right,

a soothing curve of cooling egg snug in the crook

of the Thames, toothpicked like a Christingle. Sometimes the audacity

of a cruise liner blends in stilled jut against the glimmer, a silent slot machine.

Never at ground level I slink through it all on the DLR with bodies

that smell like hot pennies and for months I pass a lit-up sign saying BIG EASY CRAB:

do they have a mascot? Do they want a mascot?

What if I walk in and say I'll be your big easy crab. Pinch and snip

in sideways grab at clients moved to tears by the sign outside; tell them

they can be just like me, scuttle under tablecloths to molt, make paper chains

from napkins dropped in horror. It's fixed to *Big Easy Bar.B.Q & Crabshack* one July

and I am a person again, eyes unstalked, soft on both sides.

As one season dies, another

by Pallas Yiu

Wet nose pokes between grilles of a ground floor porch.
He's thin, poor thing. Glass door steaming up with each breath
and heat from an oven. Nose sniffs for something beyond the black
bin bags, beyond November's mulch. *Don't touch, he might bite.*
Foxed face and two paws study a concrete ledge. Behind,
blazers shivering with malaise of the firm's final quarter.
Traffic light blinking cadmium green to track time
and safety – a squeal from a throttled throat, claws
through it all. Ears twitch. He starts left, right
below a window. A squeal – a rat's tail cuts
through light and hurtles its body out of the black
corner. On cue, his rust-red body follows: a gasp
through the rails. The rat never looks back. Two
bodies in flight and fight. And frozen, us
watching behind grilles. Slip back
into blinking screens. And out
of the city's maw, his small
limp of autumn.

Untitled

by **Leon Ray-Fernandes**

Like the remnants
Of a much-tinting seduction
Or the rounded syntax
Of his worshipping,
An orogeny of effort
Traced dreams,
Drank the animals' nature,
Coloured the lake with accurate love,
And the scene with staffage.

Desirable purity
Behind the effort:
The warm pluck of action;
The composite sun
Of a dozen days work
From the mouth's altar
For:

The never estimable,
Auspiciousness-loving
World without end.

Magnets

by Alice Foxall

Magnets take the path of least resistance
like us, even if they tear through a child's
intestine after an accidental swallow
or through drywall like fists.

I spend my days trying to avoid eye contact
with people who look most interesting. In case
I too, fall off the precipice of reality
into a place where monarchies are ablaze
and the sultry smell of petrol is permanent.

I wonder
if it can be taught,
magnetism.

If this affinity for one another is built in
or ingrained by absent fathers, I've trained
to have the same force as my mother.
Spent years unpicking my own calculations.
Still, I tucked my loved ones into tuppaware

and stored them in the fridge next to a soiled bag
of spinach and a half-finished pesto jar. Until
the fatal moment, I ran out of lids
and faced my stepfather's wrath.
I spent more hours than coins on

the girl who once smelt like Thursdays,
who now tasted of coffee grounds for compost.
Still, I couldn't wait for her to tell me how I felt.
I liked the feeling of a stranger's knee on mine,
on the tube or the cinema or the funeral

and wove a tale out of the sensation
about how someday we could fall in love
until they whispered a slur under their breath
and I had to decide what I could live with.
If magnetism was taught, perhaps I could unlearn it.

I don't know if I can keep feeling this addiction to you.

All of you.

Congratulations/Condolences

by **Anya Hunt-Byer**

Con grat u lations

You've been a con artist in your own skin
For two and a half decades.

It grates against u:

Your whole frame peeling unbearable lations
morpheme's transporting grievances,
to the thousands of us
who experienced a girlhood that was scorned
for emotional volatility
mocked for flapping hands
belittled for your breakdowns at the end of play dates
When it felt like the end of your world.

Con dolences

Contradictory to belief
you feel lighter than ever.

This griefkeeper of a secret
flinches from your hands
and exhale.

Doléances no longer fight your body
or treat your tears as a crime.

congratulations/condolences,

You're autistic.

Key Chains

by Erwin Arroyo

It is quintessential of any Mexican family
to buy souvenirs anywhere we go—
a magnet, a t-shirt, a keychain—
as if love could be bottled and carried home
like sunlight in plastic.

Late February—Oslo.
The sky a long exhale of gray breath.
I told my friend I must stop at a souvenir shop,
my tone officious, like a family business
I had to attend to.

My fingers counted—Mom, sister, granny,
my boyfriend, aunt, uncle... Dad.

Choosing for him was delicate work:
Not too gaudy, not too plain.
Not too girly, not too macho.
And by all means, not larger
than the body of an adult beetle.

Each keychain a tiny planet:
Oslo, London, Paris, Rome, Prague.
I collect them the way sailors gather shells.

And, as all fortunate foreigners do,
I returned to my homeland for the holidays,
with a bag of world cities—in case I should see him.

Then, I received a stranger's call,
a dark-hooded voice—
'Those are pearls that were his eyes.'

It told me to take a bus to see my father,
whom I haven't seen in more than three years.
I know, I'm a bad son, right?

Late at night, I arrive.
My aunt's house leans heavily into silence,
as if trying not to be noticed by God.

Inside—my aunt greets me with
the smell of antiseptic sheets.
My cousin was there, she took me to his room.

His bed empty,
a small stain of blood, blankets collapsed,
as if the body had just stood and walked away.

something about hospitals,
something about the body,
 about an ambulance
 about him taking his last breath—

And there I stood, in his doorway,
palming five keychains,
the metal clinking like coins for a ferryman.
thinking he must be coming back soon,
through that exact same door.

Only my cousin's words returning,
clear now, cruel in their gentleness:
'you just missed him.'

And so I kept his keychains.
I hear them jingle, jingle still;
into something rich and strange—
souvenirs for a man
who no longer carries keys.

Girl Dinner

London, 2025

by Alison Clara Tan

for EL

Sorry I'm late. This restaurant is so
cute. I started a venture fund for migraines.
Wait, let's get food before we eat a horse.
A whole stable of stallions. Out of my budget.
Fine. Let's order the hispi cabbage. I could
if I weren't in this job. Where are your
jeans from? A factored equation. Just like
the old days. That makeup style
really suits you. I wanted the pain
to go away. All the way to Japan?
Yes. A walking tour. Put a non-disclosure
on your feet. Actually, we're going
through a rough patch. That's brilliant.
No freaking way you could hear
Amy pee. Let me pay you back. My heart
is an arrow fletched for the sea. When do you
fly out? In twelve minutes. Meet me
at the cafe I found on Zoom. How
did I spend my whole life talking about Amy?
We never take pictures together. Yes. I really
do intend to be at your wedding. Do you
want a whole stable of kids? I'll trade
you their futures. Just go take advantage
of the sun. When we were ten, I said
I wanted to be prime minister. I remember that. I
remember. Shall we get this to go?
Yes, quick, sure. Your presence is
very much welcome.

My body is a housewarming party

by **Ellie Spirrett**

Except my uterus is barging into other rooms unannounced. Except the other rooms are organs with their own conversations. Except the rooms are a labyrinth, my uterus is trying to escape. Except every corridor looks the same, the same wallpaper peeling like it's mimicking desperation, except my uterus is angry, not desperate. It would tear doors off their hinges, except it has found a chainsaw and the walls are being hacked off in clumps that gather in my body's crevices like rats around garbage. Except the garbage is dumped on top of them and the rats are eating their way out, except this is a trap. Who would leave a chainsaw in a labyrinth? Except a uterus is supposed to find its way into this world. Except the thing about this world is anything that can hurt, will.

Poem Interrupted by Louise Glück

by Olive Franklin

Winter has lasted one hundred afternoons.
I loved every one of them, apart from Sundays
or any time I saw you in nothing but those stupid
frilly socks. *But nakedness in women is always a pose.*
The best morning: we threw ourselves fully-dressed
in the river and struck out together for its mouth.

unravelling at the seams

by **Shermya Modupe**

stuck outside four walls;

lie down until the bed revolves

lick all tears

taste myself

fall in love with blurred vision

leave no time to be real / do the same thing

the same way /

morning

night

morning

night

when does the wanting stop?

burn my thoughts

then my throat / respond to all messages one week too late / marry

my memories / get stood up at the altar /

i should know better than this

/ try to write

the way i used to / eat plain toast / cry

whilst thirsty / a drought

in my soul / make slippery new year's resolutions /

aphotic

cavernous

ignitable

desire brutal cleansing

mum can see through my bones / couldn't hug myself if i tried / the messages

have become self fertilising / there are not enough words in the world / change

my sheets / rewear old pyjamas / reminisce /

drown in water

at 3am

reminisce

reminisce

once i had everything

turn life into an alternate reality / imagine a small bird
leaving your chest as you lay like a carcass / spew vitriol and remorse in every
word / nostalgia will be my final nail in the coffin / what are the loves of my life
achieving without me? / do they grow sideways as i do? / think of how innocence
mourns us all / us paupers
who stammer under too much love /

like an instagram story / like 10 stories / let it be known you still exist
dream of turning it all into beautiful words, words that make parched eyes bleed

hug your little brother / apologetically / close every door you own / pick up your
guard and place it behind tightly shut eyes / hold your own hand / call the space
between everything you've ever owned / finally /
sleep / three days
too late

 this feeling is the closest i will ever get to decoiling myself



About the Poets



Ahana Banerji is a former Foyle Young Poet and a Poetry Society Young Critic. Her debut pamphlet, *Piecemeal*, was published last year with Nine Pens Press. Her poetry and short fiction have been published by Oxford Poetry, The White Review, and The Short Story. She currently studies at Pembroke College, Cambridge.



Bhumika Billa (she/her) is a poet, creative facilitator, kathak dancer, filmmaker & legal academic. A Button Poetry Grand Champion (2023), Out-Spoken Prize Finalist (2023), and BBC Words First finalist (2021), her poems on page, on stage, and on screen have travelled to the US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Greece & India. She has been commissioned by Amnesty International, Harvard University, University of Cambridge, and Apples and Snakes among others to creatively and critically explore themes of heritage, justice & identity to bring together languages, art forms & people.



Photo by Ray Roberts

Taylor Beidler (they/them). A byproduct of the American Midwest, Taylor Beidler is a London-based writer. They are a recent alum of Barbican Young Poets 2025. They were the inaugural recipient of the UEA New Forms Award through the National Centre for Writing. Their collaborative poetry with composer Aliayta Foon-Dancoes was a part of Plastic Language x Tenement Press, available to listen on NTS Radio. They are currently finishing their first novel. They will embark on a Creative-Critical PhD at the University of Essex/University of East Anglia in the fall.



Gaz (she/her), an unpublished dreamer who started writing poetry as a girl to help bring about world peace, but has since settled for less lofty goals - mainly criticising misogyny and making others feel seen. Big fan of the small things such as pocket-sized notebooks. Proud owner of five library cards.



Photo by Antony Mo

Jay Mitra (they/he/she) is a punk poet, non-fiction writer, and educator currently based in London. Born in India but raised in Yorkshire, they have spent their life merging two cultures into one 5ft body. They were selected as one of Apples & Snakes' 40 Future Voices in poetry and are an alum of the Roundhouse Poetry Collective. Jay likes to write about desire, grief and memory; their poetry has been broadcast by the BBC and published in print and online. Currently, they work as an English teacher and freelance as a writer and facilitator. @punkofcolour



Annabelle Sami (she/her or they/them) is a writer working across prose, poetry and television. She has written 12 books for children, which have been shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, longlisted for the Blue Peter Book Award and Diverse Book Award, and won the Spark! Book Award and Stockport Children's Book Award. Her writing for adults has been featured in Writer's Mosaic, Peaks of Colour Nature Writing Journal and Fearlessly Magazine. Annabelle also works in the arts with several prominent theatre companies and artists, producing participatory and experimental work.



Lauren Hurrell, originally from Bristol and now living in Lewisham, is a content writer and journalist (previously at New Statesman Media Group) and has been contributing to the queer digital magazine Nonchalant Mag since 2020. She mostly loves to read and write about the weird and beautiful eccentricities of human beings, queer identity, grief and sometimes, pop stars.



Eliezer Gore (he/him) is a Zimbabwean-born artist who was raised in Lewisham. He is Poet, Theatre maker and Facilitator. His work makes use surrealism to transform concrete reality and deliver joyous affirming narratives. He is currently a Roundhouse Resident artist, 2024 Roundhouse Poetry slam runner up, and Soho Writers Lab alum. This year he was commissioned to write “Last Orders”, a narrative poetry sequence for Deptford Literature Festival



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Simone Eligon (she/her) is a South London Creative with a degree in Film and Media Studies with a concentration in Screenwriting from Yale University. Her work focuses on the body, Blackness, and womanhood. When she’s not busy writing, Simone can be found in goal on the football pitch for Chatham Town FC.



Photo by Kashif Haque

Julia “JULZ” Motcho (she/her) is a poet and songwriter who writes on topics surrounding loss, love and issues of intersectionality which manifest through Blackness and neurodivergence. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Law and has transferred those writing skills to more creative endeavours. Her work has appeared in the Tate Modern, representing artists of South London. She is mainly a written artist, although is expanding into spoken word as seen in her participation in Mind Over Slammer.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Lily Steve (they/them) is a writer and poet with a background in visual art. They write in an attempt to get unstuck, poke at the roots of things, unmask autism and embrace fluidity. Lily’s work has been published by Buoy Press, Raid.R and Warepeople. They co-run One Word workshops, a poetry and art project, with the artist Karl Murphy. Lily’s been writing alongside working in SEN education for the last few years.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Izzy Radford (she/her) is a poet, playwright and screenwriter. She was part of the Southbank Centre New Poets Collective, has several television projects in development and her romcom, 'Seating Plan', is currently debuting at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to rave reviews. She has been shortlisted for the BAFTA Roccliffe Comedy Award, Hat Trick New Writers competition and the BBC Writers Room. She feels deeply passionate about Michelle Pfeiffer's on-screen range. @ @izzyradford.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Mamour Touray is a Gambian musician and poet whose work concerns abstract stories led by fleeting emotions. He celebrates people and moments and questions what it means to be free. Roundhouse Poetry Collective Alumnus and founder of Art Society Records. He is currently working on his debut poetry pamphlet.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Dianne Danquah (she/her) is a South-East London writer, visual artist, activist and budding social researcher, who believes in the power of storytelling through a range of mediums and hopes to dedicate her life to amplifying the voices of marginalised people through multiple art forms. Writing is her first love and she aims to continue pursuing it through this programme.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Yuwei 魚尾 (she/they) is a queer Chinese poet based in London, working across poetry, fiction, and multidisciplinary art. As a multilingual writer moving between languages, nature, and the more-than-human world, their practice explores gendered trauma, queer becoming, and diasporic migration, with a growing focus on decolonial and ecological awareness, as well as ritual-based writing. Their poetry and art writing have been featured in festivals, venues, and literary magazines such as Rehearsal Art Book Fair, The Feminist Library, ANARKISS. They love talking to trees.

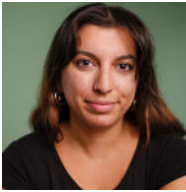


Magdalen Simões-Brown (she/her) is an English-Portuguese writer from South East London, who studied English and Creative Writing at UEA. She mainly writes poetry and short fiction.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Pallas Yiu (she/they) is a writer based in London with sporadic artistic endeavours. Their current interest angles towards multi-modal poetry, polyphonic poetry, and poetry as a conduit for resurfacing histories. Otherwise, they enjoy haptic poems from a snail's eye view. Last year, they wrote and performed a solo piece on memory & grief with The Storyteller Residency.



Alice Foxall (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist based in London with work spanning theatre, poetry and podcasts. She focuses on interlacing these art forms to make new, innovative forms of media and is currently releasing season 2 of her dystopian podcast THE PROJECT. Her poetry features themes of womanhood, queerness and fantasy.



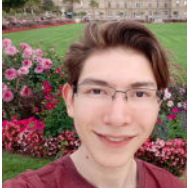
Photo by Kashif Haque

Anya Hunt-Byer is a Queer, disabled writer, actor and artist based in South London. She's previously been published in 'Within the Binding' with Spread the Word, and her made her stage debut at theatre Peckham with Portic Unity's spoken word theatre company. She is currently training in writing for stage screen, radio and television at the Royal Central School of speech and Drama.



Photo by Deepthi Muralibabu

Leon Ray-Fernandes (he/him) is a poet from London whose work often explores history, myth, and place. He is an alumnus of the Barbican Young Poets programme.



Erwin Arroyo Pérez (he/him/his) is the founder and EIC of The Poetry Lighthouse. He also teaches literature and works as a translator. He holds a Master's degree in English Literature and Linguistics from Université Paris Nanterre and King's College London, specialising in Victorian literature and poetry. He studied under poet Sarah Howe and novelist Benjamin Wood, shaping his approach to creative writing. Erwin's poetry has been published in Paloma Press, Ink Sweat and Tears, Magma Poetry (forthcoming), Angrygables Press, The Winged Moon, Wildscape, TGLR Prize, Cosmic Daffodil, Nanterre University Press, among other American and British literary magazines and anthologies.



Alison Clara Tan (she/her) is a Southeast Asian writer based in London. Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in fourteen poems, SUSPECT, The Comstock Review, Oyster River Pages, and is highly commended in The Passionfruit Review 2025 Here and Now Contest.'



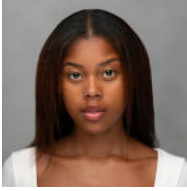
Photo by Kashif Haque

Ellie Spirrett is a poet and member of Spread the Word's Young Writers Collective. She writes about disability, ableism, friendship and the loneliness epidemic. Ellie is the self advocacy coordinator at Lewisham Speaking Up, an organisation that supports people with learning disabilities to campaign for their rights.



Photo by Blythe DeBeer

Olive Franklin work appears in Banshee, The London Magazine and The Poetry Review.



Shermya (she/her) is a London-based poet and actor whose work explores memory, loss, and the echo of girlhood. In 2025, she was runner-up in the Roundhouse Poetry Slam and shortlisted for the BBC Words First competition. She was interviewed on BBC Radio London, where she spoke about poetry, creativity, and the stories behind her work. She has performed widely across London's poetry scene, sharing her work at both intimate spaces and established stages. Poetry began as therapy and has now evolved into a way for her to hold the ache of being human. Her writing blends nostalgia, softness, and wordplay, offering shimmering moments where melancholy turns beautiful.

Acknowledgements

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About London Writers Centre

London Writers Centre opens doors to great storytelling.

We are a charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Our vision is for literature to be accessible to everyone because stories shape who we are, spark new conversations, and expand how we think. Our work is focused on engaging and supporting Black, Asian, Global Majority, deaf and disabled, LGBTQ+, working class and low-income writers, and young people.

We run writer development programmes, connect writers with communities, and campaign for a more equitable literary landscape. We do not just develop individual writers – we are working to change who gets to be a writer in the first place. By removing barriers and creating new pathways, we are helping build a literary world where talent matters more than your background or connections.



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About Poetics Lab

Poetics Lab is an artist development initiative and community for poets and creatives aged 18 – 30, looking to expand their artistic possibilities. Throughout this weekly program, the cohort creates new poetry pieces while gaining insights and experience in publishing, performing, collaboration, facilitation, and experimental writing.

Contact Us

If you would like to find out more about the Poetics Lab project and contributors, please email:

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[@londonwriterscentre](https://www.instagram.com/londonwriterscentre)

Poetics Lab is an artist development initiative and community for poets and creatives aged 18 – 30 from South East London, looking to expand their artistic possibilities. Throughout this weekly program, the cohort creates new poetry pieces while gaining insights and experience in publishing, performing, collaboration, facilitation, and experimental writing.

The London Writers Centre would like to thank our generous anonymous donor for assisting us to create this opportunity for young people in South East London.