

SL

YOU'RE GONNA WANNA HEAR THIS

AM!

CHOSEN BY NIKITA GILL

MACMILLAN



First published 2020 by Macmillan Children's Books
a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
The Smithson, 6 Briset Street, London EC1M 5NR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

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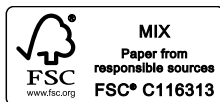
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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



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INTRODUCTION BY NIKITA GILL

‘Poetry is not a luxury. It is the vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.’

wrote Audre Lorde in her 1985 essay, *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*.

There is an urgency in Lorde’s words that simply cannot be overstated. In the time I have been writing poetry, I have come to understand it as a cataclysm of emotions made elegant. It is trauma made hopeful. It is searching for answers through carefully crafted words that often lead to deeper questions. But most of all, a poem is meant to confront you with a truth that rings loud and clear from the very soul of a poet. A truth that will never leave you.

For years, poetry has been misconceived as an area of elite literature which is for the privileged few to craft, learn or teach a certain way. It has been sequestered to the classroom and remembered as an anathema, something that made us groan as we studied and peeled layer after layer off Milton’s work to understand just what he meant.

But what if there was a different version of poetry? What if we took it out of the classroom and put it on stage? What if poetry is remembered to be what it is: the language of fire, fury and freedom? What if, and bear with me, *poetry was for everyone again?*

This is exactly what performance poetry is about. It reminds us of the revolution poetry incites. People from all walks of life flock to venues or Youtube to watch their favourite poets perform on stage, using language they can relate to, incorporating humour with tragedy in an almost Shakespearean way. Diverse voices, experiences that are wholly new to us are presented to us in a format so easily accessible and unpretentious, all one has to do is find it on social media or walk into an open mic night.

Sadly, not everyone is a fan. There is an argument to keep this kind of poetry separate from 'real poetry'. That only 'book poetry' written in that specific format is valid, whilst 'performance poetry' cannot be considered 'real poetry'. This, of course, is nonsense. All poetry is real poetry. No one kind of poetry is superior to another due to the format it is produced in. And this is the fundamental premise for this book.

This book is a manifesto of change in many ways. It is a manifesto for performance poetry, the craft and beauty of it and the way it resonates with millions of people. It is a manifesto for truth, a word that is quickly losing its meaning where facts are ignored for opinion. It is a manifesto for empathy and how important it is in a world that is ever more divided. There has never been a time in recent history where a book like this is more needed.

Each of the poems in this book is a gift of truth, experience, love selected because they brought tears and hope, anger and wonder, joy and grief. From the anthem that is Dean Atta's 'How to Come Out as Gay' to the tenderness of Jinhao Xie's 'Hello', the words are fresh, ferocious and fiery along with being heartening, hopeful and heroic bringing forth a wonderful set of voices that are as urgent and necessary as Audre Lorde has stated.

So when you read this book, let it set a fire to your heart as it did mine. Allow these words to wash over you and sit with you. Speak them out loud, so the truth rings loud and clear. Digest the power of this book slowly the way I did the first time I read it.

After all, poetry is not a luxury, certainly not in the world we live in today. It is a war cry, a battle song. And this anthology is where hope lives.

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DEAR HEARING WORLD

by Raymond Antrobus

This is a poem I wrote after coming across a statistic that estimated 70 per cent of people born profoundly deaf in the UK grow up illiterate. I was teaching in a Hackney school at the time and quickly switched to working in deaf education. My first residency at a deaf school was in the same school I'd attended as a student in London. I recognised some of the struggles that young deaf people are still facing today and this poem is a response.

I have left Earth in search of sounder orbits, a solar system where the space between a star and a planet isn't empty. I have left a white beard of noise in my place and many of you won't know the difference. We are indeed the same volume, all of us eventually fade. I have left Earth in search of an audible God. I do not trust the sound of yours. You would not recognise my grandmother's Hallelujah if she had to sign it, you would have made her sit on her hands and put a ruler in her mouth as if measuring her distance from holy. Take your God back, though his songs are beautiful, they are not loud enough. I want the fate of Lazarus for every deaf school you've closed, every deaf child whose confidence has gone to a silent grave, every BSL user who has seen the annihilation of their language, I want these ghosts to haunt your tongue-

tied hands. I have left Earth, I am equal parts sick of your 'oh, I'm hard of hearing too' just because you've been on an airplane or suffered head colds. Your voice has always been the loudest sound in a room. I call you out for refusing to acknowledge sign language in classrooms, for assessing deaf students on what they can't say instead of what they can, we did not ask to be a part of the hearing world, I can't hear my joints crack but I can feel them. I am sick of sounding out your rules – you tell me I breathe too loud, and it's rude to make noise when I eat. Sent me to speech therapists, said I was speaking a language of holes, I was pronouncing what I heard but your judgment made my syllables disappear, your magic master trick hearing world – drowning out the quiet, bursting all speech bubbles in my graphic childhood, you are glad to benefit from audio supremacy, I tried, hearing people, I tried to love you, but you laughed at my deaf grammar, I used commas not full stops because everything I said kept running away, I mulled over long paragraphs because I didn't know what a 'natural break' sounded like, you erased what could have always been poetry (strike that out). You erased what could have always been poetry. You taught me I was inferior to standard English expression, I was a broken speaker, you were never a broken interpreter, taught me my speech was dry for someone who should sound like they're under water. It took years to talk with a straight spine and mute red marks on the coursework you assigned.

Deaf voices go missing like sound in space and I have left earth to find them.

Raymond Antrobus was born in London, Hackney to an English mother and Jamaican father, he is the author of *To Sweeten Bitter* and *The Perseverance*. In 2019 he became the first ever poet to be awarded the Rathbone Folio Prize for best work of literature in any genre. Other accolades include the Ted Hughes award, PBS Winter Choice, A *Sunday Times* & *The Guardian* Poetry Book Of The Year 2018, as well as a shortlist for the Griffin Prize and Forward Prize. In 2018 he was awarded 'The Geoffrey Dearmer Prize', (Judged by Ocean Vuong), for his poem 'Sound Machine'. Also in 2019, his poem 'Jamaican British' was added to the GCSE syllabus.

TOP TIP: You don't want to bring too much nervous energy to your performance. Don't begin your poem until you feel ready and you can feel your audience are too. I think it's important to remember not to perform at them but speak to them.

INHERITANCE AND NEW WAYS OF LEARNING

by Zainab Dawood

I wrote this poem for SLAM, the brief for which was to write a poem about Asia or the diaspora. In this piece I explore my three most-visited themes: family, culture and religion. I wanted to incorporate aspects of personal family history and relate it to the wider immigrant diaspora experience.

Note: Surah Falaq is the name of one of the shortest chapters in the Quran.

You inherited the ability to be insulted.
When the drunk woman on the tube christened you
paki
you didn't react you flushed red and thought of your mother
as a child
her bully a big white girl
who named her the same in the school playground
and all your mother could think was
'but I'm not Pakistani'

at home you placed a finger on the map and traced the
journey from here

to religion and further east to where you're finally just
another brown face in the crowd
another face in the crowd
and no-one looks at you funny when you eat with your
hands

on the final night you made a grieving tribute to the waves
between the Indian Ocean and
Arabian Sea and you don't know but that might be the last of
you that remains there because
you're the result of another person's success story
(success as defined by the criteria of a passport that is red)
and if that's what you were not then
let's be honest
you would never have picked up a pen to write poetry
nor raised your head high enough to fall in love with the
land you were in

instead you cherish a history related through twitter
and swallow the longing in your mouth blue as Surah Falaq
but nowhere near as sweet

Zainab Dawood is a British-Indian writer from Hackney. She began writing at 18 years-old, trying her hand at short- and long-form fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction during her time at university and beyond. She enjoys attempting new artistic projects such as sketching, painting and crafting, though she doesn't spend as much time on these as she does

on Netflix. Zainab spends her free time learning languages and wishing she had a pet cat.

TOP TIP: My top tip for performing is a basic one: practise, practise, practise! Unless you are a seasoned performer, I would always advise reciting your poem to yourself a few times in the mirror before you go on stage.

MY DUA IS LOVE

by Sanah Ahsan

‘My Dua Is Love’ translates as my prayer is love. It explores my continually evolving and growing understanding of prayer. I am learning that love in all its forms, including sex and intimacy, can be prayer in itself. This offering of my truth may give some insight into the journey I continue to travel in seeking nearness to God. It has been a brave, liberating and tender movement away from externally imposed societal narratives of shame, towards rewriting the inner script of my life with love and radical self-acceptance. This piece is both a celebration and remembrance of God’s unconditional love and presence, interweaved with the love shared between two queer South Asian Womxn.

i am learning that the desire is not dirty. that i need not pray
myself clean.

that shame need not shove me to my knees
forehead to zameen
to bring me closer to my deen

my dua is love.
my dua is love.

it pours pure
 like zamzam
 through my body
 through her body
 through my body
 through her body

we are holy.
 we are holy in liquid sighs and sweat soaked skin.
 i cannot tell where she ends and i begin
 as love interweaves through estuaries of limb
 in this tapestry of brown

it is not a sin.
 it is not a sin
 instead
 a call to prayer.

it is a call to prayer
 whenever my name leaves her lips with devotion
 i know that god is here

whenever i am with her
 i know that god is here.

Sanah Ahsan is a Queer Pakistani Muslim Womxn, Trainee Clinical Psychologist, Reporter, Spoken Word Artist and Published Poet. She is also active in social justice and

community spaces.

Sanah recently presented ‘Young, British and Depressed,’ a *Channel 4 Dispatches* documentary on mental health, as well as giving a TED Talk on how we can use poetry to develop self-compassion.

Her poetry performance journey began with *BBC Words First*, and has taken her to the stage of *Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre*. She recently won the *Outspoken Prize 2019* in the Performance Poetry category for this piece ‘My Dua is Love.’

Sanah works closely with grassroots organisation Jawaab in tackling Islamophobia, and her activism has involved collaborating with organisations such as *Human Appeal* and *Childline*. She is currently conducting research to deconstruct whiteness within clinical psychology, whilst developing community projects promoting further dialogue around QTIPOC, young people’s mental health, and spaces for queer muslim womxn.

TOP TIP: Labour with love and brave vulnerability to offer the exact utterance of your truth – a truth that needs to be heard. Each expression you offer creates a world in itself! Come as you are.

A SPICE

by ChefAdoniz

ACCEPTANCE

I'm known as Mr Master of sauce. I specialise in English and French fine dining as a chef, but words and poetry are the ingredients and the recipes of my journey. What I bring is flavour and seasoning to topics not typically covered. We all need a bit of salt and pepper for the palate of poetry, just like we do in the kitchen.

This poetry is soul food . . . let me feed you some ideas. You never know what will be taken away for digestion when you're with ChefAdoniz . . .

When a man calls you hot
He doesn't even know
What kind of spice you are.
You got flavour flowers ain't gonna cut this when your a herb
I got thyme for.

I'm feeling your spirit
Smoking with out needing the sage.
Can see the heritage all in your age.
Let me tell you what lies in your ingredients
I got on this page.

Missing a Anise Angelica Allspice.
 The coriander seeds gets carry'ed a way
 Bare tings in this rice.
 I Put a spoon in as this is more then nice.
 All my Baes leaf.

Lots come at you salty
 Hence why your a black pepper.
 Hard to stop the black Cumin.
 Some of us need to taste mace.
 When I see you more then a hole
 And something I want to nutmeg.

Have most choking on the thought of . . .
 Swallowing you miss cinnamon
 See the brightest and shine in complexion
 Feeling a hint of Turmeric.
 Some be on porsha get it from you like cayenne.

Tongue dipped in paprika
 Miami had ball games as if heat
 Behind those words.
 Your a different kind of stock.
 No Oxo cube

Times I bought Rose for a Mary . . .
 Your looking alot of different from hair to ankle you must be
 a 5 spice.
 Like most herbs you come at a price.

Most can't keep you have them on a sprint.
 Well I find you refreshing
 Like Moroccan mint.
 Maybe we should chill sleep on this one
 Chamomile.
 Not one to act first have me thirsty for your
 sorrel

Like from the garden of Eden you was picked.
 The kind of herb or spice
 Natural and fragrant
 Most wanted try
 Have you bagged
 on the freshness.

Next time he calls you hot see if he can handle the chilli
 before he flakes.
 Still ask myself where has Tara Gone . . .
 See you as saffron
 Your for more then a season.

Sweet aromatic flavour Rich without Reason.
 Natives don't get our language or customs as If asian.
 Add spice to a dish cusines as if Cajun.
 From ginger to vanilla
 Lavender the scent of your perfume
 Without medicine is a kill a.
 Your a Spice special flavour as if Food.

Question what Spice are U

Duban C Sinclair is a capricorn hailing from South London Caribbean parents and is the oldest of 6. Creating is his saviour and food his muse; he is an extroverted introvert who performs and writes under his alter ego ChefAdoniz.

He specialises in English and French fine dining in an array of environments working with celebrity chefs and masters of their craft and has been a chef for 13 years. It is this intensely creative, constantly shifting setting that fuels his expression. That and the support of his best friends, including #1, his mum. ChefAdoniz has been writing since he was a young teenager.

LITTLE MAN OF THE HOUSE

by Shagufta Iqbal

This poem is dedicated to my son, and anyone who is trying to raise a young man in this patriarchal society in which we live. It tries to re-balance the relationship we have with the environment, as we try to navigate our way back to ourselves. Essentially, it is never too late for a new beginning.

Little man of the house.
I worry about you.

Even though I know
there are many 'little man's of the house'.
Your father before you was,
my brother is,
and I'm sure my father was once too.

I worry what love looks like to you.
Quite possibly it is all hurt,
and partings,
and the grasping
at strands of what once was.

Little man of the house,
does my love suffocate you?

Your chores have doubled up,
the Hoover is your job,
the recycling too.
instead, I am trying to sit you in gardens,
push our hands into the earth,
sow seeds,
wait for sun and rain
wait for tomorrow.

We are re-learning that love is
a beautiful responsibility,
and it is patience,
and all our dreams,
in that small first sprouting
all green and fragile
against the morning light.

Founder of The Yoniverse and Kiota Bristol, **Shagufta K Iqbal** was longlisted for the 2017/2018 Jerwood Compton poetry fellowship. She is an award-winning writer, filmmaker, workshop facilitator and Tedx Speaker. Described by *gal-dem* as a poet whose work ‘leaves you validated but aching – her narratives are important, heart-wrenching and relatable.’ Her poetry collection *Jam Is For Girls, Girls Get Jam* has been recommended by Nikesh Shukla as ‘a social political masterclass.’ Her poetry film *Borders* has won several awards, and has been screened across international film festivals. She currently works in the publishing industry with Burning Eye

Books, and is working on her second poetry collection and a debut novel.

TOP TIP: Speak with your audience. Performance poetry is more about honesty and authenticity and vulnerability than performance and over exaggeration. It is about starting a conversation and speaking with your community.

你好 / HELLO

by Jinhao Xie

Hello and *How are you?* are two of the most common phrases used in English in greetings. *Ni Hao* and *Chi Le Ma?* are two of the most common phrases used in Chinese greeting phrases. However, something is lost in translation. The poem uses my first encountering with people as an international living in the UK. The questions asked and the subtle prejudices are also explored. However, the poem aims to bridge and tell a story behind the facade of one's physique. It is about assimilation, misunderstandings, and the search for empathy.

Hello

When I say *Hello*

I mean *Ni Hao*, simply meaning *You good*

My acknowledgement that this is a benign encounter

And no one is getting hurt

It's me handing out an olive branch

I mean *cherry blossoms*

No, that's Japanese

I mean *lotus flowers*

No, I mean I come here in peace

When you say *Ni Hao*

You mean

*Look, I have made a couple of Chinese friends at university
funny thing though, I find them everywhere in universities*

*I thought of learning a new language,
but my Ni Hao is as good as my Bonjour*

I don't wish to be *exotic* you know

So, you can begin to tell me your far east adventure

How you 'Eat, Pray, and Love'-ed your way in Asia

How you found yourself under a Bodhi Tree

It puzzles me even

How you can find yourself in my motherland

and I am lost in yours

*

So, we just carry on talking

in English

like it was nothing, but a mere Greeting

How are you?

When I say *How are you?*

I mean *Chi Le Ma?* (Have you eaten?)

Did you have your Chicken Chow Mein?

Or Your Slice Beef in Black Bean Sauce

With a bag of Prawn Crackers?

What I want to say is

Am I the acquired taste that you find oriental initially?

*Am I your friend with different coloured skin so you can say that
you are cultured?*

What I really want to say is

I don't like sweet and sour

The taste is as foreign to you as it is to me

But I am still waiting

for those crucial lines

You: *So . . . how long have you been here?*

Me: *Six years*

You: *Oh, really? But your English is so good!*

Me: *Thank You?!*

*

Every *Thank You* translates

Dui Bu Qi (I am sorry)

I am sorry that I have forgotten the beauty of Chinese
characters

How each stroke flows like the Yangzi River

Water runs in the veins of Chinese sons and daughters

The long history of my culture

Legends narrated in scriptures

carved in the ancient bone factures

How each stroke interlinks into strong and bold structures

And reminds me of those withered brick walls

protecting my ancestors

over millennia from intruders

*

I was sent away with my mother's prayers
 She often told me that the moon shines far brighter
 and is far rounder on the other side of the sea
 How she has to let go of this bird
 to fly for a better opportunity

Every sleepless night,
 Every *A-B-C* that I have learnt is me
 ripping off timbers and logs of my own language
 piece by piece
 I break down the monasteries of my own history
 I set them on fire to keep me warm

The fire cries like a dragon that flies
 and reunites with the moon: *home*

The flame burns like feathers
Feng Huang turns to ashes
 and up rises a *Phoenix*

I pour my tears on the fire
 ashes to mud
 I morph it into letters and spit out words
 that taste like
 your Sunday roasts
 your Fish-n-Chips
 or your English breakfast

Now, when I say *Hello*,
 I sound like you

when I say *Ni Hao*
I sound like
you

Jinhao Xie is a lover of poetry, languages; is curious about the quiet voices; believes that poems carry the non-weight of hearts. Their poetry journey began in 2017. They have been telling stories through forms of poetry: on the page or spoken words. They are interested in the possibilities of existence, exploring themes on culture, gender and personhood. In early 2018, Jinhao performed at Tedx Talk in searching various meanings of Truth. Later that year, they had won the inaugural champion of Asia House Poetry slam 2018.

TOP TIP: The top tip I'd like to share with everyone is to perform in your own voice. Imagine how you would talk in an everyday setting and explore the variation of emotions you have. Let them be anger, confusion, or ambivalence. The most important thing is to enjoy yourself because the courage you have by sharing your stories is invaluable.

SARGAM

by Fathima Zahra

Sargam was the name of the biggest expat community events when I was growing up in Jeddah. It is also a letter away from meaning heaven in Malayalam.

I mishear my friend say she went to heaven for the weekend/
how there were string lights everywhere/ how they danced
all night/ how her parents lost their frowns in the crowd/
I asked her why she left/ I was six/ God knows I don't still
picture Jannah the way I did/ when the class prefect tries
her best sermon pitch/ 'you know Al-Baik?/ you get those in
heaven/ anything you love/ comes flying to you'/there's never
been a version of heaven that didn't hold my old life/ of
datepalms and corniche picnics/ where the sun squeezed our
headaches alive/ ordered shawarma from the Lebanese diner/
of all the things I said goodbye to/ loss slept in the house
coated by sand/ where we watched the world from a peri-
scope/ our days punctuated by the Adhan/ I've downsized
my dues since/ they exchange outfits at the gates of heaven/
asks to be let in/ asks about a boy/ a dead grandfather/ of all
the heavens I've hoarded/ I like the one with the flying boxes
of fried chicken best/ the one where the bouncer speaks ara-
bic/ where I don't need the right passport to stay

Fathima Zahra is an Indian poet currently based in Essex. She is a Barbican Young poet and a Roundhouse Poetry Collective alumna. Her work has been featured across BBC World News, The New Indian Express and Young Poets Network. She has won the Bridport Prize, Wells Festival of Literature Young Poets Award and Asia House Poetry Slam 2019. In her work, she tends to explore the lives of the diaspora and what belonging means to her. She is currently studying towards a Biomedical Sciences degree at Queen Mary University of London.

TOP TIP: I learnt this from my mentor Shantanu Anand, and it has transformed the way I prepare for a slam. Bring the audience into the room when you practice, picture faces of your loved ones, poets you look up to, strangers; each time you step in to the space, picture invoking a different reaction in the audience and get on with your poem. That way, when you go on stage, no matter what happens, you can tell yourself, I've done this before!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PUBLISHING 16 APRIL 2020

ISBN 9781529028300

For more information, go to:

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