



PUTNEY
HIGH SCHOOL

Poetry Festival

WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2024



Poetry Festival 2024

Welcome by Jo Sharrock
Head

Year 7

Year 8

Year 9

Year 10

Year 11

Sixth Form

Please applaud only at the end of the delivery from each year group

The interval is a 15 minute break

We ask that you do not leave the Performing Arts Centre during this time

Adjudication

Vote of thanks



Ella Frears

Ella Frears' collection *Shine, Darling* (Offord Road Books, 2020) was shortlisted for both the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry. Ella has taught Creative Writing for Goldsmiths University, as well as poetry masterclasses for *The Guardian*, the Arvon Foundation, and The Poetry Society. In 2022, Ella was named the first ever Poet in Residence for the Dartington Trust's grade II listed gardens, selected by Alice Oswald. She is currently the Royal Literary Fund Fellow for the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Photo: Etienne Gilfillan

YEAR 7

The Coral Reef
Haunted Graveyard
You and I
Left Behind
For So Long
Hope
Cycling in May
Lord Percy of Penguinshire

Hannah Lam
Lizzy Mathai
Elena Rayman
Amelie Hondris
Rosie Longstaff
Penelope Convey
Evie Lowther
Matilde Buskell

YEAR 8

The Lights of London
Leader in Red
Anti-Social
Trophies
The Bystander
The English Lesson
Frozen
Phone Generations

Anya Roberts
Sofia Rocha
Bella Thompson
Isabelle Conway
Mila Botnar
Libby Hudson
Minnie Jarvis
Sophie Day

YEAR 9

Seasonal Metamorphosis
Flawed
Family Tree
Innocent as a Daisy
Life
I Dream of the Day
Old Father Time

Katie Crickmore
Francesca Kelleher
Phoebe Pilbrow
Freya Patterson
Hannah Khan
Lottie Middleton
Sophia Ullathorne

YEAR 10

A Painting by Frida Kahlo

Screen after Screen

Memories

Man, Monster, Man

In the Heart of Bisol

Blanchette and Her New Riding Cloak

Growing Up Isn't So Kind

In My Street

Hannah Nott

Emily Mecrate-Butcher

Jessica Gilligan

Austin Zwain

Isabella Double

Lilly Myskovets

Tallulah Hunter

Zoe Thomas

YEAR 11

Sunday

The Berlin Wall

Shadows of the Past

The Woman at the Window

An Ode to Regression

My Personal Hell

Rebecca

A Rock and a Window Pane

The Fig Tree

Clemmie Peerless

Evie Joseph

Juliana Lawe

Lucy Wright

Mimi Bowden

Olivia Lockhart

Poppy Lawrie

Sophie Walshe

Mabel White

AI Category

AI Poem

Leah Digby-Thomas

SIXTH FORM

Even Eager Hands

Jenga & the Literary Canon

Daydream

Wings

Best of Both Worlds

I Wish I Were a Teenage Girl

Dust to Dust

Twilight

The Siddal

Fragment of the Head of Caligula

Charlotte Walker

Diya Sharma

Frankie Zage

Katie Say

Janani Nagendran

Anna Bayfield

Christina Song

Jaya Kumar Das

Phoebe Hall

Madeleine Percy

YOU AND I

When I am with you all there is is you and I and when I look at you the whole world stops right there and I enjoy every moment the wind brushing through my hair my heart beating loudly or the pungent smell of all the roses but most of all you you captivate me most of all that fresh white smile of yours but your blue eyes might even be more beautiful I get lost in a sea when I look in them all the depth of your emotions and I get lost in your eyes they can look like a storm like a tsunami but normally they look placid and serene but with depth like the ocean complexity behind those eyes just like you I love the way your fingers tangle through my hair the way your low comforting voice fills my

ears the euphoric feeling I get when I just make you giggle I take in the moment no matter what you do or say it stays with me but I will never feel that euphoric emotion that fills me up to the brim I am alone now, alone with a tub of ice cream and no one to hug no one to be with no one to talk to no one to brush my hair or look at me with those eyes I know so well alone and thinking of you all the colours drain from everything just me and my thoughts alone without you to laugh with and talk with I am just alone. You said you would never look at anyone like you do brown but now you look at blue like you looked at brown.

Elena Rayman

LEFT BEHIND

We gathered in the church hall,
we were lucky after all,
to still be standing here on this ground,
protected by these walls.

We knew we could be watched,
but felt safe protected by God.
We wanted to remember the ones we lost.

For they left far too young;
innocent victims of a pointless war.
They did not have a choice.
They did not have a future;
stolen from them in the blink of an eye.

Amelie Hondris

FOR SO LONG

When I came to the edge of the world,
I had come to complete a task.
For so long I have tried,
but for so long I have not.

Isn't it odd?
A task so easy, but yet so hard.
Nothing untrue: the legends and myths they are all true.
The boulder has always been there,
not yet moved.

What surprised me?
Anger, anger was the key!
Anger, oh yes! Without a touch the boulder rolled over
the edge!
The task is done!

For so long I have said what I have.
But now I would say:
For so long I have longed,
For so long I have tried.
For so long I have not.
Until now.

Rosie Longstaff

HOPE

Hope is a balloon,
vivid and joyful against a dull, muted background.
It rises up, up, up into the bright heavens above.
It supports me as I grip the string tightly.
I never want this to be over:
this beautiful thing,
this bright, cheery balloon filled with hope.
Hope keeps me floating,
hope fills me with a warm sensation as I gaze
Up, up, up.

But this balloon of hope is precious,
because it might not be around for long.
One day it will
pop.
So savour the hope,
the radiant, heartwarming hope.
Because hope is a balloon that lifts me into a whole
new light.

Penelope Convey

LORD PERCY OF PENGUINSHIRE

Percy is a ceo and a part-time nurse
He earns a lot of money which he keeps in his purse

He runs a global empire from his cosy bed
Employing all his little friends to do the work instead

He loves to eat at restaurants who pay him for reviews
Which make him super-famous always appearing in the news

He loves to eat all types of food but nothing that is green
The doctor says that will explain why he sometimes can be mean!

He likes to go to bed at 8 every single day
To get his precious beauty sleep to keep his feathers grey

He wakes up thrice throughout the night, to have his snack buffet

And help him grow up big and strong to get his crest one day!

Matilde Buskell

CYCLING IN MAY

Beginning of May,
The sun smiled broadly
down on us.
I'd waited weeks for
this day, and now it came.

We cycled up and down
the hills happily,
with the cool breeze
running through our
hair.

The village was in sight,
I cycled with all my might.

I skidded to a halt
and drew out a few coins.
My eyes glinted with
delight as I squinted
at the various treasures
stacked on the shelf.

I finally chose the
scrumptious Skittles.
I laid them on
the polished counter
and handed the coins over.

After, I sat on the wall
and munched greedily.
Five minutes later I reached
in and the bag was empty.

Evie Lowther

YEAR 8

THE LIGHTS OF LONDON

When the sky turns black
And lights fill the night.
The city begins its metamorphosis.
From cold spires and polished brick
To a bustling metropolis of light.

The moon hangs in the sky from its silver thread,
Cowering away from the glow
Stars humble themselves,
Hiding from the city's splendour
As its true colours are able to show.

From the neon lights in Piccadilly
To the soft lamp-lit streets
The city comes to life,
With car and trucks, people and parties
Stations and shops filled with treats.

The shadowed Thames snakes through the night
Reflecting the blaze in its obsidian mirror,
Bridges shine with an ethereal lustre
Shining beacons in the darkness
Boats getting nearer and nearer.

Anya Roberts

LEADER IN RED

A land ruled by tyranny,
A land filled with poverty.
The people are dying,
The people beg for mere crumbs.
But he does not care,
He does not care for his people.

In the darkest night,
A glimpse of hope.
Filled with anger,
The leader in red rises.
Filled with determination,
His people rise.
They rise against Him.

Fists raised, they march against Him.
Full of hope, full of power,
They wave their flags with pride.
As they build their barricades of freedom.
Men, women, children,
They sing the song of their liberation.
Their voices loud as thunder.

The night falls.
The glimpse of hope flickers.
The leader in red is afraid.
His people are afraid.
Guns drawn,
They point at the leader in red.
Head held high,
He raises his flag to the night that ends at last.

Sofia Rocha

ANTI-SOCIAL

100%

Hi how are you,
Yeah, how've you been?
Gotta keep my head up,
Plaster on that grin.

72%

Talking and smiling,
That seems to be the norm.
Feel like I'm the only one,
Who's going through a storm.

49%

Life seems so easy for them,
Always having fun.
Constantly socialising,
I am just so done.

24%

Is it wrong to just enjoy,
Being on my own?
I just want to lie here,
So I can be alone.

3%

Yeah of course I am okay.

2%

Is it always this cliché?

1%

I'll be back in a minute once my eyes are dried.

0%

Social battery has died.

Bella Thompson

TROPHIES

I have left my family, my home, my country,
and yet I do not shed one tear,
These men I kill their bodies – my trophies,
I do for them,
I hear the bullet before it hits,
I am now just another trophy.

I am displaced,
Lost, alone, vulnerable,
It was not my choice to hold this gun,
It was not me who decided my fate,
I pull the trigger before I comprehend it,
I have collected yet another trophy.

Our lifeless bodies,
Our stories,
Our life,
Taken for the benefit of others,
Our blood runs gold,
We are just another trophy.

Isabelle Conway

THE BYSTANDER

Amidst the bustling rhythm of the street,
An unseen spirit, discreet.
In the margins where shadows play
A silent presence, woven in the fray.

A figure in the crowd, not seeking fame,
Yet, in their quiet, a mysterious flame,
They navigate the currents of the crowd,
A phantom dance, no voice too loud.

Observing life through a subtle lens,
A witness to every sight.
Not just a bystander, but a spectral art.
Moving through life, a beating heart.

Amidst the chaos, they find their part,
Unnoticed, like a whisper in the breeze,
A silent witness to life's melodies.
No stage, no spotlight, no screen.

Mila Botnar

THE ENGLISH LESSON

Outside of my classroom the storm suddenly rages
The rain and the wind and the noise a distraction.
I want to go home, but that won't be for ages.
Meanwhile my teacher is seeking reaction.

He points and asks, "What is onomatopoeia?"
Oh no, figurative language just fills me with fear!
As the thunder rumbles and the hail stones clatter,
And the lightning zaps and the raindrops pitter patter.

What's that he just said? A hyperbole?
I wish someone would set me free!
The gale is morphing into a tornado outside.
While the rain is pooling into lakes deep and wide.

Next he's asking for a sample metaphor.
I look around frantically and stare at the floor.
It's pouring cats and dogs as the wind picks up.
The storm is a cauldron bubbling over the top.

Now we're to explain personification –
Who came up with this extraordinary creation!
The dark clouds are swallowing the sun's dimming glow,
As gnarly oak branches knock at the window.

The torture of descriptive speech won't end.
The gale accelerates, screeches, like a race car on a bend.
This tremendously, terrifying tempest. This squealing, spinning, squall.
He's demanding similes and alliterations as if I know them all!

I smirk as he requests an oxymoron next –
Everyone knows it's written 'oxy-moron' in text!
The blinding glare from the lightning fades away
We're plunged into blinding darkness (that's an oxygenius by the way!)

Next, we're being asked to provide anaphora!
I wish to go, wish to leave, wish to get out of this area.
We must be nearing the end – he wants an idiom now.
I'm going to throw caution to the wind and take my bow.

Libby Hudson

FROZEN

They judge me on my beauty, status,
They trap me in their world,
They freeze me in my tracks,
My petals are frozen in the winter,
Coated with frost I cannot move,
They say frost makes me all the more beautiful.

They judge me on my size, shape,
They shoot me with their words,
They froze me, altered me,
My petals are frozen in the winter,
Coated with frost I cannot move,
They say frost makes me look better,

They judge me on my colour,
They paint me pink, but I am orange,
They froze me, hid me behind a makeup mask,
My petals are frozen in the in the winter,
Coated with frost I cannot move,
They say frost makes my petals look prettier.

I do not Listen.

Minnie Jarvis

PHONE GENERATIONS

A baby watching Peppa Pig
Wishing that she could grow big

A toddler on a crowded bus
Given a phone so he'll stop making a fuss

An 8 year old on his older sister's Snapchat
Trying out all the filters – one gives him a hat

A teenager on the way to school
Practising her Duolingo as to not look like a fool

A 23 year old on Bumble
Trying to find somebody who's actually humble

A 39 year old on Photos
Reminiscing the years – wishing time froze

A 54 year old and her friend on FaceTime
While she makes a margarita – and chucks in a lime

A 67 year old on Spotify
Reliving his youth, thinking how the time flies

A 74 year old on Words With Friends
Chuffed with how he just got 'transcends'

A 99 year old's eulogy posted on Facebook
She lived life to the fullest - now we can all look.

Sophie Day

YEAR 9

SEASONAL METAMORPHOSIS

With Spring's beckoning birdsong, I rise from my slumber,
Bringing forth a wistful air, a fresh world of wonder.
While emerald leaves and fragile buds sway,
I decorate the earth in life's bountiful bouquet.

Until Summer dominates, vibrant and intense is my aim,
With scorching sun and passion's fervent flame.
Beneath my watchful eye, the world remains ablaze,
As I weave my golden threads into sparks and dazzling rays.

At last Autumn, in soft whispers, I let go,
Of the leaves which descend in a gentle, effortless flow.
They blanket the earth, warm colours release,
Nature's artwork, an abstract yet familiar piece.

With Winter's silence, my breath runs cold and deep,
Snowflakes falling, a tranquil promise I vow to keep.
With fingers of frost, I seize the earth in my hold,
Coating a shimmering gloss as I paint the land in white gold.

Katie Crickmore

FLAWED

Stepping over a menacing crevice,
Metal slamming behind me,
Each face blank and plain lost in their own thought,
High-heeled woman, eyes glazed over,
Staring at a piercing blue screen,
What is she thinking?
Where is she going?
One battered cuboid holding so many lives,
So many hopes and dreams,
So many fears.

Silver haired man propped up on the wall of the carriage,
Eyebrows knitted together in concentration,
Face morphed by age and worry,
Eyes glistening with saline liquid,
He mutters in a foreign tongue,
Speech interrupted by a fit of raw coughs,
I wonder what he ponders,
Which such depth and engrossment,
That he collides with a spindly youth,
The boy spits obscenities in his face,
Then slouches off the train.

No one makes a scene,
No one utters a word,
The high-heeled woman stays put,
Glued to her device,
Life continues on as normal,
The insulted man hunches dismally,
His heart stinging like a thorn has been torn through it.

We are flawed.

Francesca Kelleher

FAMILY TREE

The tree of my life is heavy with branches,
Each one giving life to the next.
For without the elder,
The newer could never be.

I can only see the branches near me,
The greater ones lie behind,
Their traces visible in my shape.
In my form.
Yet I can only hear tell
Of their existence.

The family is like a tree,
For it is the structure that grounds me,
That nurtures me.
It is part of me,
And I of it.

And when wild winds blow,
My tree holds on to me.
When cruel fate
Would have torn me apart
And lost to the world,
My tree holds true.

One day there will be more branches
That I will never know,
But I will ever more
Be the roots
Holding on to them
In their time of need.

From the few to the many,
The tree of my life is high with branches.

Phoebe Pilbrow

INNOCENT AS A DAISY

5TH APRIL, BRUMLEY, 1912

(Eva)

What was I to you?

The last scrap of your dignity, lost and drained

At the end of a bottle,

Riches wasted on a hopeless case,

To be glossed over in a golden sheen.

All I can thank this for is that at least he cared for me,

Even if in hindsight it was just a gallant guise,

I was just a pawn in their chess game,

Forced to rely on golden blood,

Draining me dry, just getting by

On scraps of pity, but really, I pity you,

Your life wasting away beneath the chrome gold pressure

Of finding a precious, perfect wife,

She won't be broken and battered like I was.

(Eric)

Beneath the gold, I am tarnishing,
rotting from the inside,
Eris' apple cast down to smite us
and now I can't feel the flames of resentment I kept like an oath,
only embers of hollow, aching regret that cut me to my withered core.
and it is just so easy to give in, easier than breathing,
the desire so much more enticing
as the blood red river flows into my garden of Babylon.
But now I am awake; the incessant cacophony of thoughts
drowning me, they are the ones pushing me in (I am sure of it)
not the temptation, the angelic wine of the forbidden fruits of hellish Eden.
You mock my words, so is it any wonder you can only hear my screams
when my body is hanging from the rope of justice you tied me to?
When it is blue and blemished in the casket you put me in?
that I put her in.

Freya Patterson

LIFE

The souls drift onwards
Singing their sweet tale of sorrow
Of hurt, of love and pain
And fear of places long forgotten

Stand still
The grass plains
Drifting away from the faded memories
The souls entangle ever on
Blurs of a journey lost to time

Gaze onwards
The mist-stricken river
Sickly grey hollows of life
Twisting silhouettes of abandoned vitality
Following you past their grave
As they contort into winds

Gaze down
The piercing water
Memories wade away from consciousness
The winds cry for longing
An empty hollow lies in their midsts

Stare deeper
My crystalline skull stares back

And my bones fragment in the winds

Hannah Khan

I DREAM OF THE DAY

I dream of the day,
I return to the place from childhood days,
A cherished haven in memory's daze,
A landscape of wonder, where innocence could thrive,
A world of adventure, where dreams were obtained.

I dream of the day,
I return to the place from childhood days,
A home of memories, so vivid and vast,
Rekindling the spirit, that once set us so free,
Reminiscent of old times, a child again.

I dream of the day,
I return to the place from childhood days,
Though time has passed, and we as people have changed,
This place from my childhood, it always stays the same.

Lottie Middleton

OLD FATHER TIME

From the depths of slumber Old Father Time stirs,
His clothes spangled with stars,
And his hair splattered with moonlight,
He gazes upon the world.

Memories etched into his weathered face,
Untold stories, dreams, futures,
Complexities of nature
Carved out of his skin.

He walks through corridors of eternity,
Weaving tapestries
That tell tales of adventure,
Of times long past.
He witnessed every ebb and flow of movement,
Birth, death, love, despair,
From the first light of dawn
To dusk's gentle farewell.

He watched through wars, peace, joy and strife,
As seasons blossomed, wilted and regrew,
He could only ever watch
As we changed.

In his hand he grasps the sands of time,
Spilling through his weathered fingers,
The bridge between what was
And what will be.
Yet the weight of time lay heavy on his shoulders,
As he grew ever wearier,
He will lie for a while,
Slow
Down.

And let the sand

Fall.

Sophia Ullathorne

YEAR 10

A PAINTING BY FRIDA KAHLO

If all great paintings are actually self-portraits, what, if anything,
is she saying about herself?

They say the canvas is a mirror of her soul, a testament to inner strife.
So let her paintings speak, even in silence they say...

The bird is watchful, resigned
His beak is restrained, his cries of emancipation are silenced.
But when words elude, presence can still be found.
A double abyss between painter and imprisoned bird.

The canvas is wide.
The roots encroach upon her, furtively, their tenacious fingers piercing
her bare throat. The acrylic paint drips from her wounds, a cover up
for the crimson that pours out from her heart.
A double abyss between paint and observer.

The monkey on her shoulder, its fur.
The cat, its gaze.

Everything makes sense, all is joined.

By Hannah Nott

SCREEN AFTER SCREEN

Trapped, timeless
Cornered off from a sense of reality
Let me out, let me go
My words forgotten dissolved
(Pew pew you won forty coins)

Behind the screen
Behind the fake facade were tears
Tear stained cheeks
Fear in our vulnerable eyes
(Congratulations spin this lucky wheel)

They were taking over
They were taking control over
They were taking control over what
They were taking control over what used to be ours
(Move your character to the left)

Reality was shrinking
Or my sense of
There's nothing left to say
I'm done
I can't do this anymore
I'm going to break free
Past that virtual screen
(Closing down)

To my home
The real world
Where I belong
Out of virtual reality
(Game over)

Emily Mecrate-Butcher

MEMORIES

Her memories were not moments;
Not seconds in the sun,
Not running in the rain,
Nor walks in the winter.

Her memories were not moments.
They were not like that.
"Tangible," she would tell people.
"I can hold the past in my hand."

Her memories were not moments.
Instead, they were newspaper clippings,
Glued into a brown book
So small she could take anywhere.

Her memories were not moments.
That's the thing:
She could take them anywhere
To town, to school, to the hospital.

Her memories were not moments.
They were photos and Polaroids
Scrawled words an explanation
To the mess of her mind

Her memories were not moments,
They were someone else's stories,
Another person's life, another past
But why were their faces the same?

Her memories were moments,
Her book helped remind her of that.
She was expecting to forget, expected to;
So she wrote to remember.

Jessica Gilligan

MAN, MONSTER, MAN

To be a man is to be a monster.

The broad shoulders that embolden me have been used to block her way
out

The large hands that empower me

Are what her eyes flicker to when he corners her and demands her number.

To be a monster is to be a man.

The large hoodie that makes my torso look more boxy and my chest flatter
Have plenty of room for the items he uses as threats every day,

The comforting pitch I can now make my voice

Starts to sound like the voice of the men

Who bellowed obscenities at my childhood self's tensed and shaking body

And the voice used to threaten her into obedience.

To be a man is to be a monster.

The wide stance we've always held while we sit

Has always forced her into a tight corner

The height that uplifts us

Has made her feel helpless too many times.

As I watch my manhood come at the expense of all women,

I wonder if the symbols of masculinity could ever be separable

From symbols of oppression

Or if being a man will mean to be a monster forever.

Austin Zwain

IN THE HEART OF BISOL

Mount Mayon is a volcano located in the Philippines, known for its near-perfect shape. It is one of the most active volcanoes in the Philippines, erupting over 52 times in the past 500 years. The myth associated with the volcano is a local legend that explains its formation.

On top of Mount Mayon and its ancient crest,
A myth unfolds, true love is confessed.
Magayon, her beauty and elegance,
With Pangaronon, a story of eloquence.

In Mayon's shadow, by the river's swaying grasp,
Magayon stumbled, tripping with a gasp,
Falling into the waters, swift and wide,
Yet Pangaronon dived for her, with love as his guide.

Their lives, a flame dancing with grace,
A war melody, an enchanting embrace,
An attachment of heart, the secrets they share,
Yet will always have their moments in despair.

A tragic end to a love untold,
A competitor's jealousy starting to unfold,
The arrow of fate flew towards Magayon,
A tragedy witnessed by the ancient Mayon.

Pangaronon held her in his arms,
Her limp figure resting on him, lacking charms,
She was gone, and he must follow,
His heart feeling heavy and hollow

Though the myth of Mount Mayon may be old,
Its story of love, now forever told,
Magayon and Pangaronon, in eternal grace,
They lie there together, in that sacred place.

Isabella Double

BLANCHETTE AND HER NEW RIDING CLOAK

I am just a little girl,
Leave me be
So I can dance through fields of snowdrops
And pick up my easel,
Squint my eyes to hide the grim ivy
And paint my pretty picture.

Leave me be
And I will skip down past the pristine stream.
I'll mind my limbs,
Mind my body,
And hopefully,
The rosebush will not snag my legs this time.

Grandmother gave me a new cloak today
And taught me how to wear it.
Leave me be,
For I hope to keep it clean.

Even though it hangs too low,
Drags through the gravel and bugs,
When I lift the fur-lined hood,
My skin looks fair and dainty,
And my eyes turn large and soft.

So I'll lift the blood red skirt
Above murky puddles
And try to keep it clean,
At least for a little while...

So when you see the snowy nymphette
Rippling through a glassy stream
In her red riding cloak,
Baggy on her unwary figure, please,
Leave her be,
She is just a little girl,
Unblemished.

Lilly Myskovets

GROWING UP ISN'T SO KIND

I used to look forward to being a teenage girl.

Well,

Today I am a teenage girl.

Today I will complain about
something totally unimportant.

Today I will lose yet another hair tie.

Today things won't go my way.

Today I will find things I don't need
and spend money I don't have.

Today I will change my mind a number of times.

Tomorrow I might do the same,

Or tomorrow will be completely obscure.

Today things will trouble me,

Tomorrow they may be completely irrelevant.

That's the thing.

Today I am a teenage girl

who knows tomorrow may be different.

Tallulah Hunter

IN MY STREET

In my street, mid evening she left.
Tilted her head at John the neighbour,
My neighbour,
In my street.
Greeted the gatepost cat,
Avoiding the yellow haze from smokers on their evening breaks,
Outside the Bluebird café,
In my street.
But watched.
Watched by the wild fox hunting for its next meal,
In my street.

Arrested,
Handcuffed into the car she proceeded,
Oblivious that her life had ended.
Her eyes darted for familiarity,
Five minutes turned into twenty,
The south circular sign she passed,
Then she wished she'd been arrested,
Maybe back in my street,
Or better, alive.

In my street, mid evening I left.
To the new world,
The world at the raging protest,
Crowds not silenced by the stifling masks.
Police, oppressive, enforcing the laws,
The covid laws that is,
Not the ones which keep people safe.
Shouting about Sarah with placards and chants,
Thinking about Sarah as women were dragged away,
Into the backs of cars.

I returned to my now darkened street.
I greeted the gatepost cat,
Tilted my head at John the neighbour,
My neighbour,
In my street.
Then the noise of Sarah's protest faded,
Though fear didn't,
It never will,
Even if I'm in my street.

Zoe Thomas

YEAR 11

SUNDAY

Time trudging by
thickly lugging itself through the present
forcing its way through the future.

Discarding yesterday's
remains
a shelter of procrastination
crumbles,
moulding the meanders
of tomorrow's terrain.

An irritability
nags beneath your skin
as the dull
bounce
of time
echoes within.

A slow Sunday's serenity,
laced with anticipation.

Clemmie Peerless

THE BERLIN WALL

A wall erected:
A land once great ripped in two;
A scar on the map.

The wall falls at last...
Broken fragments – now mended;
Lost memories healed.

Seeming united,
The skeleton still haunting;
History remains.

Evie Joseph

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Would you talk to me if I said we
didn't have to talk?
Keep everything from the past buried
in the dark
Nothing we could say could fix it now
So let's not try, let's not make a sound
We'll just walk the distance of our
memories drawn across the ground

There's not enough time or patience
in both of us combined
To try to unravel the shadowed parts
of your mind by talking,
so I'm content with staying quiet and
walking
Side by side, to anywhere, I don't care
As long as I could see how you tie
your hair
If you still use pins like the ones I
found and kept, when I realised you'd
really left

I want to see your face, and how
in these years you've aged
Would you smile
Or would your eyelids frame
blank space
If you don't want me to see then
you can just look straight ahead
and I'll take the hint and just look
straight ahead
And be grateful that you're here
at all

Please come and meet me, I
promise we won't talk
Keep everything from the past
buried in the dark
Nothing we could say could fix
it now
So let's not try, let's not make a
sound
We'll just walk the distance of
our memories drawn across the
ground

Juliana Lawe

THE WOMAN AT THE WINDOW

There was an old lady that lived opposite to me.
She would sit at the window with the days passing by,
Looking longingly up to the sky.

After school I would be doing my work
I would look up, seeing her usual smile.
And she would give me her regular cordial nod.

I wondered what she thought of:
Somewhere far away, a beach perhaps?
Covered with white sand and a bright blue sea.

I got too used to it, I suppose.
I never really thought of what would happen,
If one day I looked around
And the blush pink armchair lay empty.

Until one day I sat down,
And looked around,
To see she wasn't there.

For days on end
I wondered if she would ever return.
Why she had left me,

So alone in this world.

Lucy Wright

AN ODE TO REGRESSION

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Or shall I compare thee to a tempest?
Raging in the storm-tossed tumult that is our lives.

Shall I compare thee to the moon, and I to the sun?
You glow using my light.
I never ask for anything in return.
Only that I will see you again the next eclipse.

Shall I compare thee to rain?
Drenching me in your relentless sorrow,
Frightening with your cold attentive detachment.

Or shall I compare thee to a knife?
Sharp spoken and angular,
carving the knowledge of you into my mind in your relentless absence,
Hoping one day that the pain will cease.

Mimi Bowden

MY PERSONAL HELL

It's day eight of this punishment
And the cry count's currently nine.
My bag now weighs ten kilos
And I'm eleven feet behind.

I now dream of airports
And stinking city smells.
I wait for the day that I can say
Goodbye to this hiking hell.

Chest heaving, heavy breathing,
Clothes forever damp.
I call this my biggest regret;
But others call it Summer Camp.

Olivia Lockhart

REBECCA

In shadows cast, where moonlight gleams,
A name embraced in whispered dreams.
Rebecca, a gem of night's embrace
in verses spun with elegance and grace.

She walks in silence, her steps unknown,
A puzzle unsolved
in a world overgrown.
Her past a riddle, her future concealed,
In the realm of mysteries she is perfectly revealed.

with every
glance
a question arises,
A puzzle piece that tantalises.
A mystery woman, a living paradox,
In the crypt of death, eternally locked.

With each calculated move, she plots and schemes,
Invisible strings controlling other's dreams.
A puppeteer of hearts, emotions she'd thread.
In the web of deception, where trust is
shed.

With each step, she treads the line between
the realms, a ghostly sign.

Poppy Lawrie

A ROCK AND A WINDOW PANE

She paints her world on canvas. A crescendo in the overture – a harking melody that leaks from her beating heart and hums in watery droplets of paint; her life's art splattered across the plain white. Plain white no longer.

Arms arc in a balletic blur –

Fingers, graceful, glide with the brush against the fabric –

Stained now, she knows there is no going back –

–

Girl watches the strange dance. Woman at the easel.

They serve. Two subjects of a higher monarch; a reign of silence...

Elusive.

Inexorable.

Is this all? she wonders. But only to herself.

Only ever to herself.

Crack!

The rock collides with the window pane; like a missile it breaks through the façade – a vain fulmination – an outcry from within, sending bullets of glass ricocheting from the small (too small) room – an aperture of reality appears amongst pretenders; girl's eyes widen

as the air is sucked from her lungs and wrenched from her lips, lurching beyond the glass –

[rewind]

Silence.

Girl feels the weight of the future in her hands. Its sharp edges
and rough, chalky sides.

Woman lays down her brushes – her canvas full; paint now dry
and flaking in sordid divorce from the bristles that once danced across the
paper: paper saturated and dripping with the liquid of the past.

Their eyes meet.

[skip forward]

An empty chair.

Whistling wind.

Shattered glass.

Sophie Walshe

THE FIG TREE

Each branch holds opportunities
I want all and none of them.
But the longer I take to decide,
The faster the figs begin to rot
So I watch them crumble and break off the tree
When each branch leads to a series of new branches
I am torn.
My indecision starves me.
Slowly, the tree wastes away
And I have nothing.

Mabel White

AI CATEGORY

AI POEM

Poem prompt: 'Write a short poem to an A level standard.'

In twilight's gentle, fading hue,
Where dreams take flight and skies are true,
A poet's heart begins to soar,
To craft a verse forevermore.

With pen in hand, the ink may flow,
In sonnets sweet or verses low,
Each word a universe untold,
In syllables of silver, bold.

Through metaphors that dance and sing,
A world of wonders they bring,
An A-level poem, fine and grand,
Is born upon this poet's hand.

In rhythm's pulse and rhyme's embrace,
A masterpiece takes its place,
An ode to life, love, joy, and pain,
In verses, A-levels proudly gain.

Leah Digby-Thomas

COMMENTARY ON AI POEM

The poem above is generated by AI, and it raises a lot of ethical and moral questions. It challenges what we think about poetry, and begs a question about this new era of technology, and whether poetry and technology will slowly merge together.

The imagery of 'twilight's gentle hue, where dreams take flight and skies are true' paints a dream-like picture and evokes a serene feeling. The presentation of 'twilight' highlights the calm atmosphere the AI has generated. 'Dreams take flight' is a commonly used metaphor to tell people to follow their aspirations and goals in life, and is perhaps a bit corny. Another metaphor is employed where it suggests that a heart is able to craft a verse; this makes it seem like only one who has a heart is able to craft poetry. Perhaps unconsciously, this is ironic; words like 'heart' and 'hand' are used, despite this being an AI-generated poem and AI doesn't have either. It causes the reader to ask how the AI is able to evoke emotions when it neither has emotions nor has any past experiences with emotion; yet it successfully manages to capture the feeling of escaping into a fantasy world.

Irony is used yet again with 'ink may flow'; ink is a traditional way of writing poems and has been used throughout history and even nowadays, but this wasn't made with pen and ink: it was typed. This proves that the AI draws the information from a database rather than creating something authentic to itself.

The personification in the line 'metaphors that dance and sing' shows that poetry echoes music as well; since poetry historically was oral, this underlines the creative process behind poetry and the difficulty of this craft throughout time. This is especially emphasised in 'the world of wonder they bring'. 'An A level poem' is an odd line. A levels are challenging and suggest a mastery of a skill which is further

indicated with the 'poet's hand' becoming the instrument for this challenge. But this also makes reference to the prompt I gave it, since the AI has taken the words I gave literally, and used the words 'A level' as a topic for the poem, when I asked it to write to the standard of A level. It has misunderstood the connotations of my prompt.

The fourth stanza emphasises the musical aspect of the poem again. 'A masterpiece takes its place' implies that poetry has a rightful place in the world and gives a sense of achievement; this proves the importance of poetry and the impact it has in our world, which is reflected in the last line as well. 'An ode to life' implies that writing poetry is a high achievement and an honour; it represents the human species and experience (i.e. 'love, joy and pain'). Again, this is ironic since it is written by an AI which hasn't experienced these sensations.

In full honesty, I wouldn't be able to tell this was generated by AI if I hadn't been the one to issue the prompt. The only moment where I could tell an AI has written it, is when it directly states the words 'A level' in a way that sounds very odd. In retrospect, this is both fascinating and concerning, since it shows how advanced AI is. This begs the question of originality and the ethics around authorship; I can't tell where it drew its inspiration from. It seems like an original piece, yet I know it can't be, since AI doesn't have the ability to have original thoughts, feelings or past experiences. The first half of the poem truly feels as if a student could have written it. It is, for lack of a better word, creepy. If AI can draw inspiration from a database to create an apparently original piece, this once more asks the question: does one need to be human to write poetry?

Leah Digby-Thomas

SIXTH FORM

EVEN EAGER HANDS

I did not expect to drop it.
It was given to me blindly.
In my sore hands, it promptly split,
Even though I touched it kindly.
Why not hand it over with care
On velvet, satin, with some hope?
At least give me time to prepare
For outcomes I cannot cope.

But I could see it in your eyes,
Even eager hands could not catch.
Was it meant to demoralise?
My cowardly hands were no match.
Don't mock, pretend to reminisce,
I did not make it fall apart.
No one is supposed to catch this.
Not an already broken heart.

Charlotte Walker

JENGA & THE LITERARY CANON

I wasn't here when they built the tower.
When they placed layer upon layer of the seemingly same
Finely cut, chiselled, alder tree blocks.
Chalky, brown hardwood. Pale and faded.

Shaking, trembling hands reach out to the block my eyes have fixated on
All else around has simply become a blind spot.
This is just a game. One of benign nature, at that.
Such emotion is unwarranted, wrong.
Dismissing rationale, I tingle with anticipation

For the structure isn't stable. Nor the blocks the same.
"Minuscule, precisely-crafted differences" they say,
To further instability, the challenge of the game.

Yet just as the alder trees were once considered weeds,
I ask myself about the building blocks, tantamount to one another
Students forced to latch onto a parade of dead, white, privileged men.
Are they weeds waiting to be yanked, pulled from their origins as
Edward Coulston toppled into the city harbour and
Produced a dozen roaring ripples?

Or are they roots deeply ingrained in the soil?
The history of "our language". The pillars of our education.

I want to reform. I want to incite change.
I want to be ruthless, bloody, a revolutionist.
But I fear if I remove one block from the tower, free one book from
the canon
The whole structure may come crumbling down.

Diya Sharma

DAYDREAM

I lie alone in the garden
The last dappled waves of sunlight swell
Slowly, like the tide.
From my bed of sweet-smelling grass,
Dizzy yellow daisies,
And the first crisp leaves of autumn,
I can see through the front door.
Sometimes it sways open
Lazily, in the cool breeze.
The radio drones
Drifting from the kitchen window.
The nodding flowers cast shadows,
The wind whispers in the grass
And I close my eyes
And listen.

Frankie Zage

WINGS

Love is not an easy subject for a poem
Like a word repeated over and over again –
Until it loses all meaning,
Love is so easily heard but not listened to,
Obscured behind cliches and tropes,
So that in describing love,
One's lines are left hollow and leaning –
On the hum of a thudding heart,
Tapping beneath lyrical slopes,
Buzzing between the footfalls of each patterning beat,
Barely heard,
Offering up a vague sense of the word,
But never quite rearing from the poetic white noise;

In writing poetry, I find myself another tiny voice,
Amongst the mass semantic satiation,
Speaking in antiquated paradigms,
Of a 'stomach filled with butterflies' sensation,
Knowing that you have heard the phrase too many times
To bother truly picturing
The kaleidoscope of fluttering wings,
Churning vibrantly against their fleshy prison,
Shredding one's insides into crimson ribbon,
The corporeal cataclysm of it all made still in words,
Simply because they have been spoken too many times before.

I ran into my neighbour the other day,
She asked my mother how old I was,
Then laughed: 'You'll be flying the nest soon'.
And I found it funny too,
The way she conjured the image so casually,
Of my mother like a songbird,
Singing tenderly as songbirds do,
Laying twig after twig on the branch of a tree,
So that I might one day nestle amongst her labour,
And grow large enough to fly from her somehow,
Once insulated from the harsh winter,

And leave the home she built,
An empty crown on a loosened bough.

In primary school,
I asked my friend what soulmates were,
She said I must be hers,
We both loved tea cakes and twilight,
And I wondered if souls mate for life,
Picturing them as great beasts within us both,
Wretchedly clawing their way out
Through ribbed cavities, made airtight,
Escaping to the tenderness of one another,
Throwing up the butterflies into trepidatious flight.

In Year 7 she used to nudge my arm
And whisper 'Love is in the air,'
When the boy I liked walked by.
He heard her once, but I did not care,
Busy watching streams of love pulse through the sky,
Sipping breaths from their rocky pools,
As though my thirst unquenched would make me fall,
And never want to pick myself from the ground again.

In Year 9 she said a boy 'took her breath away';
He had twinkling deep-set eyes.
I wanted to rip them out and crush them
into lobes of soggy gore –
So that he would be made blind
As I was with rage and love,
And my friend might breathe steadily in once more,
Breathe in my love-filled air,
And fill her lungs with my blood-battered butterflies,
And the creature that thrashed inside of me for her.

But while my friend spoke often of love,
She never thought deeply of it,
Or of me,
And I was made alone.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

I'll tell you my name
And watch your face turn quizzical
So I'll give you an alternative
And your face unleashes relief
To give you convenience, I'll freely change my name
Only to see the cost is distancing from my identity

I'll immerse in the motherland
And feel a sense of home
And for them it is funny
When I pronounce the easiest words wrong

I can tell you I'm fluent in my mother tongue
And you'll ask me to teach you a word
I give you something simple so you'll see yourself as cultured
Only to tell myself "It's too late, you'll never get another chance to learn"

Conflict invades me, when I'm asked where I'm from
Should I say "England" and wait for the "where are your parents from"
question?
Or should I say the motherland
And see them stare at my voice?

I've simplified many equations
I've expanded many brackets
But the bracket I'll never simplify
Is the "what am I" equation.

From the birthplace to the nationality,
The mother tongue and the culture level,
There are too many variables
That I always consider.

So I'll stand proudly,
With one hand here and the other with the motherland.

Perhaps I'll have the best of both worlds.

I WISH I WERE A TEENAGE GIRL

I wish I were a teenage girl.
A Lisbon girl, a Gibson girl,
Swathed in diaphanous curtains
and desires in a gauzy room,
Stolen red lipstick lying open on the vanity.

I'd spend my summers in heart-shaped sunglasses,
Riding shotgun in strange boys' cars,
Painting my nails white by the pool
in the queer, sultry heat.

My friends and I captured in film,
Slightly blurred but oozing joy,
Crosses tightening about the necks,
The marks permanent on unsullied skin.

I'd pass the winters an angel in the snow,
Wrapped in the words of my Madonna,
Saved from the ice by my sister's lover.

*I'm a Gemini,
What day were you born? At what time? Where?*

And then I'll reinvent myself in the jewel flames of spring,
In the pangs of eternal hunger.
And finally, fruit-crowned and wide-eyed,
I'll realise my yearning to be younger.

Anna Bayfield

DUST TO DUST

In the beginning there was death
Stiff legs and body fawning just beneath the grass,
Hidden in wait for something to claim,
A full flush of blood halted in the veins, blossoming.
The rush had already begun.

Bacteria began budding, blooming from within,
Decomposers flooding to their new compost;
Flies laying eggs nestled in bloated flesh,
Flesh which resisted no longer, subdued by death, released by life.
It turned a blind eye, gave an empty response, and saw that it was good.

Then came the vibrant wave of maggots through liquified flank, the
swimming dance of the living in the vessel of the dead
Fruitful and multiplying, squirming
through a translucent white pelt.
It peeled away like petals of a lily, and was consumed.

Then came stench of death, the thick odour of matter which no
longer breathes,
Fragments of a face looked up to the sky, pondering
The stifling rot which drew in lazy insects circling,
Larvae slithering, reaching the weakened brain with empty greed.
The body became overripe, beginning to wilt away.

The rutting competition came for scraps of fertile remains,
The final remnants of meat straying away.
The fruits of a mother's labour
Utterly devoured, left in ruins,
Yet the crown of bones upon its head stood proud above all.

Soon everything was still.
The pupae hatched, now, and flown away,
The remaining maggots left crawling in dirt, eating dust.
A transition as smooth as velvet left only bones and teeth,
Unyielding as untamed earth.

The branched antlers suddenly knew themselves bare
And its remains withered in shame, longed
For its body, exposed without.
Lifeless and fruitless, it lay pressed against the ground, a skeletal husk;
A fall from grace, too aware of its nakedness.

The stag wasn't there for a very long stay,
Abandoned now after seven days, what's left were
Some lifeless maggots, antlers blanched by the flaming sun,
bulbed molars.
Now was the time to rest.
The dead bones retreated into the earth, hidden by leaves.

Christina Song

TWILIGHT

The deepening, restless velvet
holds its breath

before exhaling molten gold,
piercing the morning chill,
and tickling the groggy raindrops
that race to the finish line of the bedroom's windowsill

through the rugged blinds,
the buttery crimson casts silhouettes
that pirouette about the freckled nose
of the giggling girl on the left

floating particles of dust
fidget impatiently in the dappled, waking light,
illuminating the sage eyes and flaxen hair
of the whispering girl on the right

fleeing from the clutches of the night,
the sun had burst into her amber flames,
to which the girls pay no attention, continuing the night's conversation
about dog names, their deepest fears, and some boy called James

the awakening sun bathes them in her aureate lustre
and their glistening eyes grow heavy,
for they have not yet been shut
since the sun last plunged into the dark, icy sea

painting them with pigments of smoky scarlet,
their faces blush in the glow
and the sun beams too on the face of a woman,
sleeping just one floor below

burnt orange rays kiss her head,
disclosing the delicate crevices time has carved into her face,
revealing the stains upon her once blank canvas of youth,
inked by fifty years' worth of the sun's embrace

her usually taut face appears peaceful,
for she had slept through the night,
her exhaustion having drowned out
the girls' ceaseless squeals of delight

emerging from the night's cocooning veil,
their naive laughter reminds her
of when she and her best friend, too, giggled into dawn
about raw, girlish matters

but now they meet rarely
over brunches at cafés
that take weeks to plan,
and culminate in superficial 'you haven't aged a day!'s

and as she rises to scramble eggs
for the girls who fake a good night's sleep,
she tightens her lips and suppresses the news
of this same inevitable fate they are sure to meet.

Jaya Kumar Das

THE SIDDAL

Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862) was a Victorian poet and artist. She was the wife of the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti and frequently served as model to her husband and other painters in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. She died of a laudanum overdose and was buried with a selection of her husband's poems.

A fair maiden in crimson glow
Waits breathless in the light.
Clinging drops on her hollow form
Sculpt her figure so slight.

My maiden is like a willow,
A nymph of echoes past.
Though she may tremble in her pose,
Her rosy hue will last.

My love and I range thro' the hills
She stumbles like a doe
And lo we find a sprawling tree
Grown old some time ago.

Upon its bank we knife and scratch
A likeness of us each
She carves my poor heart, beating still,
Onto the golden beech.

Swift airs upon an auburn mist
Sway her to and fro.
My bride is cold and paler now
As winds do rage and blow.

An ashen love and waxen heart
Stand gently on the wing
Of singing cardinal dove
That whistles of the spring.

I weep and wail for my sweet bride
Yet now I feel her chill.
Alone I walk the journey home
With shaky nerve and will.

At home she waits stock-still in frame
My sea of passion stirs
Too quick the day was red and blind
My vision bleeds and blurs

I dash my love from her high seat,
The flame I douse and snuff.
The splinters then I turn to ash
To meet her in the rough.

O, love, when I do bury you
With tresses tightly bound,
My work shall lie there by your side,
Two treasures in the ground.

Phoebe Hall

FRAGMENT OF THE HEAD OF CALIGULA

I.

The moon and I have conversations,
Pale-cheeked and rosy-fingered, glittering-minded, deathless,
Dry, hard, cold, with wicked, naked beauty
Rising from just beyond the hills which have been given
Unto me.

Life's pulse, light's pulse, immortal, through the windows
streams, on the Palatine Hill.
Perhaps in death's undying embrace,
The light will shine favourably on me,
And the gods will accept me as one of their own.

II.

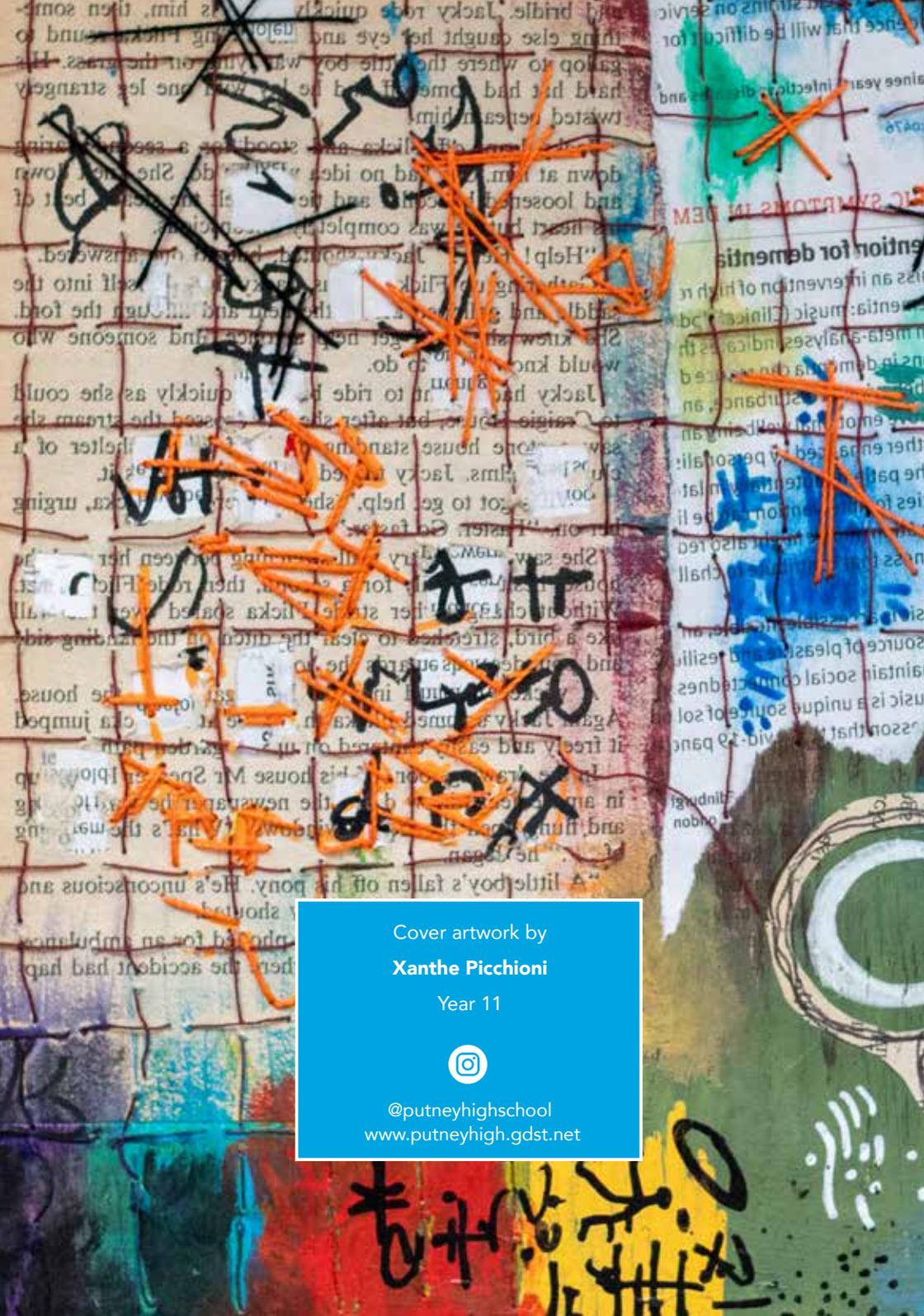
The camera captures elusive scenes, a blurry chase,
grainy impressions of something
Of something so distant, unattainable, alluring,
That I can only attempt once more to grasp, to hold,
To love her as I yearn to do.

We're in a constant state of reinvention,
Becoming more beautiful with each transformation.

III.

The waning moonlight slanted across the walls,
Its immaculate coldness feels warm like blood,
and slivers of moonglow cloaked
his neck, lineations so thin,
like a slit throat.

Madeleine Percy



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