

About the editor

Tom Chivers is a writer, editor and promoter of poetry. Born 1983 in South London and educated at St Anne's College, Oxford, he is the author of *The Terrors* (Nine Arches Press, 2009) and *How To Build A City* (Salt Publishing, 2009). He previously edited and published *Generation Txt* (Penned in the Margins, 2006). He is associate editor of *Tears in the Fence* and was the first ever Poet in Residence at The Bishopsgate Institute.

City State

New London Poetry

Penned in the Margins

LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

For some time in the development of *City State*, my working subtitle was *The New London Poetry*. Anthologists make a habit of using that looming, numinous definite article, engineering provocative statements of fact. This is *it*. *The Poetry*. The rest is window-dressing.

But this anthology makes no such grand claim. There is no manifesto, no flag to raise, no team to join. The *The* was axed.

But *City State: New London Poetry* is not without shape, intent or agenda. The editor's role is always to inject his or her subjective taste into the book, not just sit back and wait for the work to roll in. What lies within represents my best subjective snap-shot of poetry as it is being practised in 2009 in London by a new generation of writers. I define this snap-shot as characteristic rather than representative; impressionistic rather than photographic. Crucially, *City State* aims to capture a diverse range of approaches to writing.

In the last five years I have perceived a real increase in poetry-related activity in London: new publishers and promoters are springing up everywhere (including online); there is greater ranager of work being written; poetry is engaging and reacting with other artforms and in performance. London is often described as a city of villages - a nostalgic notion propagated by estate agents and romantics, but one with some validity. In poetry terms, I would characterise the capital as a collection, not of villages, but

of cultural hubs and hotspots. There is no single London poetry scene, and it's all the better for it. A scan through the biographies of the contributors to *City State* will reveal a matrix of familiar and unfamiliar names: independent publishers Salt, Tall Lighthouse, Flipped Eye and Veer; small magazines such as *The Wolf*, *Fuselit*, *Mimesis* and the gloriously photocopied *Rising*; important and dynamic creative writing courses at Queen Mary and those run by the influential poet Roddy Lumsden.

The numerous events and venues that host live poetry also play a crucial role in bringing writers together and providing platforms for performance and experimentation. Opened at The Foundry in Old Street has given London audiences the chance to witness appearances by a number of major UK and international avant-garde poets as well as nurturing a new generation of innovative writers. The Betsey Trotwood pub in Farringdon has become the unlikely home for a number of small, interconnected poetry communities (Broadcast, Tongue-Fu, The Shuffle and more). Promoters such as Poet in the City, Utter! and my own Penned in the Margins continue to work tirelessly to bring top-quality poetry to new audiences, alongside more established organisations such as Apples & Snakes.

It's no wonder so many young poets are drawn to the capital; of the contributors to this anthology fewer than half were born and raised in the city. London sucks in cultures and influences from elsewhere - from Wigan to Bombay - and then spits them back out in the form of poetry, music and art. For some the city plays a crucial role in their writing. The de facto poet laureate of the capital Iain Sinclair

lurks ominously in the background of the work of many emerging London poets, myself included. For others, London is merely the place they've ended up, providing no more than urban backdrop to other personal or artistic concerns.

The poets featured in *City State* range in age from late teens to mid-thirties, in aesthetic from formalist to performance to post-avant and back again. Accordingly you will find what I hope to be an engaging and challenging mixture of potential and accomplishment that entertains, provokes debate and offers no easy answers.

Tom Chivers
East London, April 2009

City State

New London Poetry

We all live in the universe – this we should not forget, but aside from that, we each have a simpler and more definite address: a country, a city, a street, a building, an apartment. The presence of so precise an address is the criterion by which original poetry is distinguished from the pretentious and the artificial.

Samuil Marshak

JAY BERNARD

A Milken Bud

Of all the things that were inside me
she is the part I miss the most. I remember:
through the black flashes and the sun-lit green,
I saw my flesh come away with the sand.
A surge unfastened my stomach,
the skin gently over-turned and the child
went away with wave. The last tissue
of my breast stuttered and I saw what I thought
was a strange white fish; only a milken bud
curdled in the nipple.

No, I was never a mother; I never brought to term
a lit cluster of dividing eggs, thriving like bulbs
and streaming behind me, like the proud amphibious
matriarchs hatching their young in my hip bone.

I would have taken her for night walks.
I would have shown her the wonder of streetlights
pouring forth cascades of orange water.
Or the blue that bleeds brown that is the London sky

at dusk. Chips and vinegar. I still imagine her
making an O with her lips, blowing at the hot
and pungent chip that burns her tongue,
and her warm breath escaping.

You who'd put a hammer in my head:
I'd have suckled that child headless.
Put a boot in my face: I'd have held her faceless.
I'd have walked her home with my
gashed eye weeping.

F12

I have pared around your wrists with light.
I will always have the deep crease in your thumb
your cupped & faceless hands around
my limbless waist. My green skin against
your blue skin

transposed & re-hung. You with your eyes closed on the Circle
Line into you with the deep crease around your mouth into you
with the shadow of St. Paul's obscuring you into a woman sipping
into a woman stepping from a bus into the wine-chalk street.

Twice; I am behind a lens, behind an eye; again, behind a skull,
behind a brain, behind a mind; my view is ragged. The frame is
torn. All those people who made the world magic are gone.
Grown. I'm not ready for the flesh to double

& double. I end the alphabet at U. I point, I click, I catch
the second when your head was turned, or when a dog leapt from
a puddle at a bird. I shutter the world in two; your two hands
separate from you.

Between this world and the next hour I will gaze at you &
you & you. I am behind the eye that froze you feeling a dasheen.
I am behind the gloss, behind the print, behind the page.
Behind the blunt lens that cut you out and kept you.

I am cracked soap
melting in the bath.
Scum on the taps.

I undress and put one foot in.
Swole ankle changes in the water.
Gets slim. Toes get bubbles.

Then lower myself in.

Pray for powercut.

THEN it will be just me
And sound of water, and it
running in my eyes.

(HEAR two boy cursing as they pass)

Just scrub the skin,
Armpit, neck, ear.

Clean everything.

The mirror steams.

I lift my hand to it —

Just some colour on glass.

