

THE KEATS-SHELLEY

Joung Romantics Prize 2015

'Poetry is the great adventure of the young'
Carol Ann Duffy, Poet Laureate



2015 KEATS-SHELLEY'S YOUNG ROMANTICS

"Poetry is the great adventure of the young"

In 2015, the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association ran its first ever Young Romantics Prize aimed at poets, essayists and short story writers aged between 16 and 18. This new competition ran parallel to our long-established Keats-Shelley Prize for Poetry and Essays.

Our Prize Judge was the Poet Laureate Dame Carol Ann Duffy, who followed in the footsteps of Sir Andrew Motion, Stephen Fry, Penelope Lively, Kathleen Raine, Tom Paulin and James Fenton. Helping her make the difficult choice of selecting winners from an impressive shortlist was the poet Matthew Sweeney and the poet and novelist Kate Clanchy.

Three categories were open to our pioneering Young Romantics. Poems and short stories, both composed on the theme of Lost Angels. The Young Romantic Essay Prize could explore any aspect of the life or work of the Romantic poets and their circles.

First Prize in Poetry went to Presence by Daniella Cugini, 17, an A-level student at King's High in Warwick. In Second Place was Esme Partridge, 18, who attends Oxford Spires Academy, for her poem, For My Future Lover.

The Short Story Prize was won by Parth Vaghani for Leaving Home. Parth is 16 and a student at Wembley High Technology College.

Winning the inaugural Young Romantics Essay Prize was Stephen Horvarth for 'How Did Revolutions in Politics affect the Poetic Revolution in Lyrical Ballads?' Stephen, who is 17, is a sixth form student at Westminster.

All the judges highlighted how hard it was to choose from a formidable short-list. 2015's Young Romantic Poets were: Carolina Earle, Michael Egbe, Henry Gee, Magnus Jeffery, Amanda Louise Minkkinen, Jennifer Stevens and Rhiannon Williams. The Story Writers were: Tilly Alexander, Joseph Boorman, Rohan Gupta, Louis Scott, Eleanor Smith-Hahn and Madeleine Joung.

The winners won book tokens and a week-long Creative Writing Course with the Arvon Foundation.

ENTERTAINING ANGELS

THE KEATS-SHELLEY AWARDS CEREMONY 2015

2015's Keats-Shelley Awards Ceremony was particularly exciting this year. In addition to the well-established adult poetry and essay competition, the KSMA introduced prizes for 'Young Romantics' for the first time.

For some years now, the Keats-Shelley Museum has hosted a very successful poetry prize for school children in Rome, and it could well be argued that a British equivalent was overdue: as our prize judge, the poet laureate Carol Anne Duffy said: 'I don't know what took you so long!'

While the theme of the main poetry prize was the Keatsian, 'Watchers of the Skies', the 'Young Romantics were asked for a poem or short story on the theme of 'Lost Angels', recalling Shelley's haunting description of Keats after his death – 'Lost Angel of a ruin'd Paradise'. For the Essays in both categories there was no set subject, but 'Angels' got in there too, with a splendid riff on 'Satan and Romantics'. The results, for all the prize categories, were better than we could have hoped.

The atmosphere on the night of the ceremony crackled with anticipation, the lecture hall was packed, and it was wonderful to see so many short-listed young poets, story-tellers and essayists, there with their families and friends.

Carol Ann Duffy said that it had been a wonderful competition to judge. 'Poetry is the great adventure of the young.' The Young Romantics' poems showed 'a welcome freedom and humour, even sassiness... It would have been so easy to have approached the subject in a clichéd or solemn and predictable manner – yet what stood out in several of the poems on the shortlist, as well as their technical control, was an astonishing maturity.'

Many of the short stories inspired a truly Gothic response, but what caught the judges' fancy was a quiet, deceptively simple tale of leaving home - beautifully conceived and written.

Before the winners were announced, Carol Ann Duffy read from The Bees, her most recent volume of poetry. Poignant, humorous and engaging, she put the audience in the perfect mood to hear the prize poems, and for the actual presentations it was a pleasure to welcome to the stage the judges of the overall competition: Matthew Sweeney, Jo Shapcott, Sharon Ruston and Kate Clanchy. This was another departure and one which we look forward to repeating.

Sue Bradbury



Daniella Cugini

Poetry Prize Winner

Daniella is 17, and a student at King's High in Warwick, studying English Lit, Maths, Psychology and Religious Studies. She hopes to begin a degree in English at Cambridge in the autumn, grades permitting. Daniella has already won Foyle Young Poets prize.

Daniella's advice for next year's Young Romantics. Remember you're taking influence from the Romantics, but you can incorporate that into your style. Research the Romantics, play with the common characteristics of a Romantic poem, use them in unusual ways and apply them to unusual contexts. Write an Ode, but instead of a Nightingale, write it to an artificial tree or a toaster oven. Have fun with it!

Daniella on the Romantic poets. For me, they just contain this vibrancy, this strength of feeling. It seems like their poems all originated from themselves; they imprinted their philosophies and thoughts and loves onto the natural and literary world and then reeled that back into their poetry. Their poetry always contains aspects of themselves.

presence

darker, I say. night knits the moon's eye shut. quiet, I say. the birds swallow their songs.

apples fall at my touch. the moths unfurl and soar into the flame. it's good, I say.

it's healthy. stop it now. a child poised at the edge of the lake. each star collapsed

into evening. go back, I say. go back to the beginning. the trees rewreathe themselves

in amber. amber succumbs to green, as calm to fever. returning is a slow affair.

each berry regathered, back to before the birth of Christ. bring her here, I say.

the earth draws back, and there she is. petal cleaves to bone. bring her back, I say, louder.

she blinks twice. her hands open to accept the rain. I turn away, for now she can hear

me breathing. they seal her in. back home I wear flowers in my hair, faintly slick

with oil. die for me, I say, and they listen.

Esme Partridge

Poetry Prize Winner

Esme is 18 and attends Oxford Spires Academy. She is studying English Literature, History, Drama and Creative Writing at A-Level and hopes to continue studying English and Creative Writing at Nottingham University in September. Esme credits the charity First Story as helping her develop her writing. Esme was the runner-up in the Poetry Prize.



Esme's advice for next year's Young Romantics. Try and work the theme to fit things you know. Poetry is always better when it comes from the poet's true feelings and experiences. And don't think twice about entering – you never know what might happen!

I was introduced to the Romantic poets through watching an Inspector Lewis episode with my Mum when I was about twelve. The episode was called 'And the Moonbeams Kiss the Sea' – named after a line in Shelley's poem Love's Philosophy. To this day it remains my favourite Romantic poem. I enjoy the Romantics amongst a whole host of other poets, many contemporary. I think that's a great way to read.

For my Future Lover

Sometimes it feels like indigestion, sometimes like gut wrenching cramp. Sometimes I want to call you and say *Here's my pain. Understand me.* It takes everything in me to wait for you. Sometimes I want to know what it is about me that you love, so I can admire it on your behalf. Do you think about my hair, my hips,

my heart? Sometimes the pillow swallows my tears. I want to know the pearl of your ear, the slope of your nose, the habits of your shoulder blades. A piece of you, to keep me going. In my dreams you are clear as my bed sheets, solid and hot. Then I wake and sit up, listening to the rain in the pipes

and missing you. Sometime I will write- I've fallen for you, hard as the bottom of a well. You scare the elbows off my arms; It takes a lot of boy to scare me. Sometime I will say- Just drop by when you're in town, I'll be waiting. Lover, I am sitting on my bed, at 00.57, the lamp light glints off my pen and

I'm planning our beginnings. I do all these things, on my own, missing you.



Partha Vaghani Short Story Prize Winner

16 year-old Parth Vaghani is a Year 11 student at Wembley High Technology College. He is also on the youth editorial board for the Brent housing partnership which discusses current issues in the Borough.

Parth on composing Leaving Home. Writing the story was more instinctive than anything; one sentence led to another.

Leaving Home

'A man's house is like his baby,' my father would exclaim, whenever I talked about moving out. 'If you don't take care of it, it will die. You can't even take care of yourself, son. How are you going to manage a house?'

He would always present this question in a condescending tone, as though he were trying to delay my growing up. Not once had he asked me to get a job, or what I wanted to do with my life. All he had ever asked of me was not to throw away my life like he had. He wanted me to do something worthwhile: become a doctor; take the teaching route or discover a new element. He had a good sense of humour; he knew I wasn't into science or anything academic. I was only taking a course on sociology at university because, well, my best friend was. To be honest, I didn't know where my life was going. I had nothing planned. I travelled with senseless optimism.

For a week now I had been packing and unpacking, and then packing again. I didn't know what I needed for my new life. Should I take a spare towel? Or another pair of shoes? There was only a finite amount of space in my two large suitcases. I would usually ask my dad to decide for me; he always knew best. But this time he didn't help.

'I don't know. What do you think?' He answered all my questions with more questions.

He'd being doing that more frequently the past weeks. I couldn't tell if he was questioning what I was doing, or trying to teach me something.

I took the shoes.

It was finally the Friday, the day of departure. There were dirty plates on the kitchen counter from the previous night. We had ordered Chinese from our local restaurant; it was the last hoora with my dad. At ten in the morning the cab arrived and honked so we would acknowledge its existence. As I dragged my suitcases behind me, sliding my way to the cab, the driver looked at me, emotionless and cold. This was Esteban, his usual look. In a month it will be fourteen years since we met Esteban. He's been married for ten years, and witnessed the miracle of birth in his cab, twice. But I have never seen him smile.

I loaded my suitcases into the trunk of the black cab.

Dad stood next to me, offering words of encouragement as I struggled to lift the suitcases. After a little pushing the trunk door finally closed and I saw him. Tears in his eyes like a reservoir in monsoon, water filled to its banks. I hugged him until his eyes flooded.

The ride gave me time to contemplate. To reflect on what had just happened. A man with the heart of a lion, a poster boy for what I understood manliness to mean... crying. This was something I had not seen for fifteen years.

The last time he cried was when I was four, in our house. Mum wanted to spend her last remaining days with Dad, Gavin and me. Holding the hand of my mother, my father wept. Gavin was at school and I was sitting next to him as tears rolled down his cheeks, and spit forced its way volcanically out of his mouth. The ECG wasn't making a beeping sound; the line was motionless. I was too young to understand what that meant. I didn't understand what anything meant then: why he was crying, or why she was sleeping so still. Nothing at all.

In 1999, two years after she passed away, my older brother was gunned down by a local policeman. He shot him point blank as Gavin tried pulling out his wallet. Gavin had gone out to get beer for Dad and his friends from work.

We lost a lot living here. There were a lot of memories in that house, the one he calls his home. I was ready to let go, but Dad wasn't. He wanted Mum to come back, to call Gavin home from the shops. He didn't want to lose the dog in the park, or over-feed the goldfish. He didn't want to let go of me. But I did.

It was ten thirty-five; if I were to get there on time I had to leave. He let go and I looked away immediately. I couldn't continue with anymore eye contact or I would begin to regret my decision.

The suitcases were loaded and Esteban and I were in the cab. Last looks between dad and Esteban were exchanged, and then he turned to me. 'Come say hi sometimes.' I nodded without thinking and hated myself for it. I could have at least said goodbye, or given him another smile. But I didn't.

And then we were off. I could feel his stare burrowing holes in the back of my head. Yet I chose to ignore them. I didn't say goodbye. I didn't even smile.

Stephen Horvarth Essay Prize Winner

Stephen is 17 and a Sixth Form student at Westminster School studying for A' Levels in English Literature, History, Ancient Greek, and Maths. When not studying, he is a successful competitive debater and a Karate black belt.



Stephen's essay:

How did Revolutions in Politics affect the Poetic Revolution in Lyrical Ballads?

"Low and rustic life was generally chosen... because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil."

- William Wordsworth in Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1800

Wordsworth emerged on the poetic scene at a time when poetry was dominated by highly educated authors primarily concerned with imitations of the great Classical poets. Poets themselves used what Wordsworth called "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" (Preface to Lyrical Ballads 1800) to meet the requirements of form and metre, and the language of the poet was very formal. In juxtaposition, Romanticism's emphasis on imagination and creative freedom dramatically shifted the artistic subject to the outcast. The Poetic Revolution debuted by Wordsworth took place not only in the setting of the wider artistic revolution of Romanticism, but also in a political climate of upheaval and the intellectual atmosphere of the Enlightenment, where the rights of the individual against the state were asserted.

The first section of the essay shall primarily make use of Wordsworth's commentaries in order to understand the nature of his Poetic Revolution in Lyrical Ballads' before considering how the Poetic Revolution fits into Wordsworth's politics and the wider political milieu of the time.

Lyrical Ballads heralds two poetic revolutions: a remarkable shift in both substance, in terms of the characters of the poems, and form, in terms of the use of language and metre. First, the authors consciously and dramatically change the poetic subject and focus. For Wordsworth, the ordinary men and women of the countryside were ideal characters. Wordsworth proclaims in his Preface: "in that condition of life our

elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity." The attraction to "low and rustic life" must therefore be understood in the context of trying to go back to a simple essence of man in which man's "elementary feelings" can be distilled more clearly. Wordsworth thought that poetry needed a clear and significant purposein order to be effective, and that exploring the character of man was the highest possible calling. The Advertisement says that poetry succeeds "if it contains a natural delineation of human passion, human characters, and human incidents." The tricolon of human' as an adjective highlights how Wordsworth was concerned with ordinary people and a genuine portrayal of their feelings; 'human' here can almost be seen to mean 'real.'

Wordsworth takes a unique approach to the poor. Poetry about the poor and destitute had begun to emerge to a significant degree at Wordsworth's time. Other contemporary poets can be seen to patronise the poor in a moralising sense: the poor are always fringe subjects perceived through a lens of privilege. Wordsworth's approach is far more about the story and character of the individual rather than a general moralising attitude. Wordsworth's role here is best described by his own declaration that a poet "is a man speaking to men." This egalitarian posturing of the nature of a poet is one where the poet lies on the same level as the subject, be they a beggar or an abandoned mother, and the subject is thus accorded full human dignity.

The transition to a rustic and ordinary background necessitated certain changes in language that led to the second revolution in poetry, as Wordsworth rebelled against the "poetic diction" he detested, and adopted the vernacular. Wordsworth wanted to convey the experience of reality as nakedly as possible, and the use of simple language was a key method of achieving this objective. Wordsworth goes so far as to argue that the formal language and diction of other poets "separates themselves from the sympathies of men" (Preface to Lyrical Ballads 1800). Wordsworth's initial 'Advertisement' from 1798 is immensely conscious of the linguistic cleft, and it says these poems are exploring "how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to poetic

pleasure." The Advertisement is comically understated when it comments "readers of superior judgement may disapprove of the style... of these pieces." In Wordsworth, we see a figure advocating that reality is mirrored very closely in plain language, as it is "arising out of repeated experience." The "habits of expression" that other poets supply artificially corrupt the character of these moments and their purpose in reflecting the true nature of man is thus lost. The Poetic Revolution was not a 'dumbing down' of poetry for the masses, but an attempt to harness expression unadulterated by "social vanity" in order to explore more accurately the nature of the character of man. Such a mission is Romanticism at its highest as it is concerned with the character of mankind in a pure form, uncorrupted by modern society.

Wordsworth's Advertisement and Preface indeed recognise these changes as revolutionary. The third sentence of the Advertisement declares that "the majority of these poems are to be considered as experiments" and thus explicitly denotes the break with the past - an "experiment" to see if such a change in poetry is possible. Wordsworth describes the Poems in Lyrical Ballads as "so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed." Moreover, the extensive justification of this poetic approach to readers and critics (even going as far as to suggest what readers "should ask themselves") illustrates how Wordsworth deemed his theory to be so different that it would require a lengthy defence.

The Poetic Revolution must be seen itself as a political act, and a revolutionary one. We must first then understand some of Wordsworth's own politics. He travelled through France during 1790 at the height of revolutionary debate and keenly supported the Revolution, believing it would transform the living conditions of the poorest members of society.5 Wordsworth remarks in Book IX of the Prelude that his "heart was given to the people, and my love was theirs." Wordsworth strikes up a close connection with Michael Beaupuis, an aristocrat fighting for the Revolution, and they discuss at length the goals of the Revolution. Wordsworth devotes a spot of time to witnessing a starving girl, describing her in an honourable yet saddening tricolon as "the meek, the lowly, patient child of toil." In this powerful moment, Wordsworth and Beaupuis declare "Tis against 'that' / That we are fighting," and in this way align their political efforts with an emotional moment, and one meaningful enough for Wordsworth to make it one of his spots of time. Shifting the subject to ordinary life allows Wordsworth to demonstrate to the poetic readership, a generally

upper-class group, the conditions of what he considers to be the unfairly violated and marginalised poor. Wordsworth is using his poetry as a political weapon: he gives dignity and voice to the poor, and aggressively defends (what were at the time) extremely controversial political principles.

Last of all, the general political and intellectual currents of the time had a remarkable impact on Wordsworth's poetry. Lyrical Ballads falls at a key juncture in the broad epoch of history: after the American and French Revolutions, but before the Industrial Revolution. The shift of the 'poetic subject' was enabled by the political shift of the 'emancipatory subject.' The French and American Revolutions marked a seminal point in history whereby politics escaped the exclusive domain of feudal lords asserting themselves against an autocratic monarch to encompass ordinary men and women challenging the political system. The emergence of early capitalism gave voice to men who earned their own money outside of the land system but were held back by it. This necessitated the battle cry of liberalism to enable a system of free trade. A system of politics not tied solely to land ownership was vital in allowing them to grow their businesses and secure their rights against the government. Notably, the publication of Lyrical Ballads was before the rise of the Industrial Revolution. In this historical vacuum after the emergence of liberalism and capitalism but prior to the establishment of the industrial labourer as the figurehead of radical politics, the poverty-stricken rural environment was a key revolutionary field. England at this time faced restrictive property laws that made it very hard for fanners to have adequate land and forced many people into homelessness. The Old Cumberland Beggar is an excellent example of this: Wordsworth details the suffering of a beggar under age and poverty, but also depicts this as a broader human crisis, describing the beggar as "solitary" or in "solitude" seven times. Marginalised homeless people had a key impact on Wordsworth who travelled amongst them on his walking tours. Unable to organise in the parliamentary framework due to restrictive suffrage laws, these people agitated for an overhaul of the political system.

In conclusion, the interplay between poetry and politics goes beyond the confines of Wordsworth's own life and stretches to a much larger set of historical revolutions. Politics shaped Wordsworth's Poetic Revolutions, which can be seen as a revolutionary act against the literary establishment, but also a broader act against the political system. Wordsworth's achievements in his seminal Lyrical Ballads fulfils Leon Trotsky's old adage: "Revolutions are always verbose."



Poetry Shortlist (L to R): Carolina Earle, Esme Partridge, Jennifer Stevens, Henry Gee, Carol Ann Duffy, Magnus Jeffery, Amanda Minkinen, Rhiannon Williams, Danielle Cugini



Poetry Shortlist (L to R): Parth Vaghani, Joseph Boorman, Carol Ann Duffy, Louis Scott, Rohan Gupta

MEET THE SHORTLISTED YOUNG ROMANTICS

Jennifer Stevens: Poet

I am 17, and a pupil at St. Olaves Grammar School where I study Biology, Chemistry, Maths and English. I'm grade 7 flute and also play the violin and piano. I love sport and I'm a huge reader of books, particularly sci-fi/fantasy genre. I was told of the Romantics at school and was encouraged to enter by my English teacher Ms Wilkie.

Rhiannon Williams: Poet

I'm 16 and have loved poetry ever since winning a carton of apple juice at age 10 after writing a poem about apple trees! Recently I have found myself becoming more and more fascinated by the Romantic poets with their reverence for the natural world. The poem I loved most when I was younger was Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud'. I would say that most of my favourite poets were not discovered through school however, but from books read at home: Keats, Mary Robinson, Longfellow and John Clare, all of whom are incredibly powerful poets who have influenced the way I think about the world in some shape or form.

I started writing poetry as a way to express myself and try to reach the same command over turning emotion into language that the Romantics had.

Magnus Jeffrey: Poet

I am 16 and am a pupil at Oundle School, where I am studying for AS levels. In my free time I take pleasure in beekeeping, swimming, and drinking hibiscus tea. I entered the competition through the school, where I am studying for Pre-U English. I've been analysing and really enjoying Wordsworth, but studying the context in which he wrote is certainly the most interesting part for me. I'm considering doing Biochemistry or Genetics at University, and mainly read and write poetry as a hobby for quieter moments.

Tilly Alexander: Short story writer

I am 18, a student at Marlborough College in my final year. I'm studying English, Philosophy, History and

Creative Writing. The latter is a subject that has only very recently been introduced to my school and so is one that I took up this year but nonetheless absolutely adore. My teacher suggested that I look at the Young Romantics competition. I am not sure yet what I want be or do, but I do know that I want to write. Poetry in particular is close to my heart, and I like to both read and write it – although I am quite shy at sharing my

Rohan Gupta: Short story

Three words to describe me: Need a haircut. I'm 17, studying History, French, Spanish and Maths for A-level. As well as following of Chelsea FC, I enjoy reading foreign literature, finding translation of Spanish and French texts particularly rewarding. My preferred medium is plays, as dialogue and seeing that dialogue being lifted off the page is fun to experience.

Joseph Boorman: Short story writer

I'm 18. Before gaining entrance to Eton on academic and music scholarships, I was a chorister at King's College Cambridge. I have had poems published a few times, two in two different charity anthologies and four or five in school publications. Favourite books are Midnight's Children, Narcopolis, Ulysses and especially Heart of Darkness. My non-literary interests include Jazz, cooking Indian and Middle Eastern Food, and Maths, for which I have an offer to study at Trinity Cambridge. I maintain an active passion for creative writing and reading, as well as Spaghetti Westerns.

William Baker: Essay writer

I am 16, living in Oxford and London. At school I am in the lower-sixth, studying English, History, French, and Maths. Outside of school, my interests are centred around cooking and gastronomy, tennis and cricket, writing and journalism, and philosophy; and, finally, I came to the Romantics primarily through looking at Wordsworth as part of Pre-U English, although I had already encountered Romantic poetry in previous reading.

YOUNG ROMANTICS A JUDGE'S VIEW



Angels in California, angels in high rises, angels in gothic lunatic asylums, angels on bikes, angels, more conventionally, in graveyards: the theme of this year's inaugural short story competition for young people certainly appealed to the teenage temperament. Some of the best ideas flamed and burnt too early; other stories seemed cut down from what surely wanted to be a fat fantasy novel – but the best few announced themselves early and were excellent examples of the form. Matthew Sweeney and I, shortlisting, were glad that we did not have to pick a single winner when there were so many different sorts of excellence on offer.

I was delighted, though, when Carol Ann Duffy picked out one my personal favourites for first place: an understated, sparse story about a young man and his father, where the theme of falling happened only in the mind of the child. And even more pleased when we realised – judging is strictly anonymous – that the story was by Parth Vaghani, a First Story student from Wembley High in London. First Story is a charity which places writers in disadvantaged schools in England and Parth's victory showed the impact of workshops by distinguished short story writer Peter Hobbs.

Both Peter Hobbs and Parth attended the prizegiving, and so did several runners up. The prize-giving, where the young people mixed with 'real writers' and heard a superb reading by Carol Ann, was very much part of the prize, and it was wonderful to see and hear how affirmed the all the young winners were by the occasion and their success. We are hoping for even more wild entries next year.

Kate Clanchy



KEATSSHELLEY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

The Young Romantics Prize is run by the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, which supports the Keats-Shelley House in Rome, where Keats died, and which since 1909 has been a museum of the younger Romantic poets.

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THE KEATS-SHELLEY



The second Keats-Shelley Young Romantics Prize will launch this autumn. The theme, for the poets and short story writers, of 'After Frankenstein' - inspired by the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley composing her famous novel. Essayists can once again write on any aspect of the life and works of the Romantic poets.

We are thrilled to announce that this year's Prize Judge is Professor Richard Holmes, the respected biographer of Shelley and Coleridge, and author of *The Age of Wonder, Sidetracks and How We Took to the Air*. He will be aided once more by the poet Matthew Sweeney and the poet and novelist Kate Clanchy.

details at keats-shelley.co.uk



ASSOCIATION

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Young Romantics Prize

