

The Manchester Writing School at Manchester Metropolitan University presents:

The Manchester Writing Competition
2023 Manchester Poetry Prize
Short List

2023 Poetry Prize Finalists

D A Angelo

D A Angelo (they/them) is a disabled, working-class UK-based poet with work currently featured in *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Flights of the Dragonfly*, *Impspired*, *The Amazine* and *Petrichor Mag*. They are currently interested in prose poetry, surrealism and alternative perspectives in nature writing.

Elena Croitoru

Elena Croitoru is a British-Romanian writer. She won the Charles Causley Poetry Prize, the South Bank Poetry Prize, the Retreat West First Chapter Prize and was commended in the National Poetry Competition. She was also a finalist for prizes such as the Montreal Poetry Prize, Bridport Prize & other awards. Her first poetry pamphlet, *The Country With No Playgrounds*, won the Live Canon Pamphlet Prize and was published in '21.

Shakeema Edwards

Shakeema Edwards is an Antiguan American writer living in Belfast. She studied poetry at the Seamus Heaney Centre as the recipient of its International Poetry Scholarship and has received an Ireland Chair of Poetry Student Award. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *New Isles Press*, *Channel*, *Propel Magazine*, and *The Apiary*.

Debra Marquart

Debra Marquart is an American poet, memoirist, and musician living in Ames, Iowa. She teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing and Environment at Iowa State University and the Stonecoast Low-Residency MFA Program at University of Southern Maine. Currently serving as Iowa's Poet Laureate and the Senior Editor of *Flyway: Journal of Writing & Environment*, Marquart is the author of eight books, including *The Horizontal World: Growing Up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere* and *Gratitude with Dogs Under Stars: New & Collected Poems*. She has released two CD projects—*Orange Parade* and *A Regular Dervish*—with her jazz poetry, rhythm and blues band, The Bone People.

Katie O'Pray

Katie O'Pray is a creative facilitator, living in Bedford. They have been the winner of The Ruth Weiss Foundation's Emerging Poet's Prize and the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition, and are currently a Barbican Young Poet. Their work has been featured in publications such as *bath magg* and *berlin lit*, as well as mental health campaigns for East London NHS Foundation Trust, among others. The poetry workshops they deliver focus on writing as a therapeutic tool. Their debut full-length collection 'APRICOT' was published by Out-Spoken Press in October 2022.

Tracey Slaughter

Tracey Slaughter is a writer of poetry, fiction and personal essays from Aotearoa New Zealand. Her latest works are the short story collection *Devil's Trumpet* (Te Herenga Waka Press, 2021) and the poetry collection *Conventional Weapons* (Te Herenga Waka Press, 2019). Her work has received numerous awards, including the Fish Short Story Prize 2020 and the Bridport Prize 2014, and she has twice been shortlisted for the Manchester Prize, once in Poetry, once in Fiction. She teaches Creative

Writing at the University of Waikato, where she edits the literary journals *Mayhem* and *Poetry Aotearoa*.

D A Angelo

Timothée Chalamet

Your cheekbones could demolish
half of Manhattan. Pavements
sigh into sonnets with your every step.
Silver birches cosplay as you,
weeping willows bow whenever
you're close. Frank O'Hara
might say something like "OMG
Timothée Chalamet! Look how the sky
is lowering itself to meet you".
Andy Warhol might paintball you
with emojis. Don't ask. Convince DC
to let you play Robin. Every fan
would turn turquoise like robin eggs
if announced. Graham Norton
once pronounced Timothée like *Timotei*,
the shampoo. How golden you could make us;
how you could make us pure, almost worthy.

Content Warning: implied horror imagery

Jason In The Woods

After Dave Pollot's "TGIF" series of paintings

Now that he's retired from mass murdering,
Jason Voorhees is living a quieter life in the woods:
Wakes to birdsong as calm as the watercolour sky
painted every morning. Gathers a catalogue
of mushrooms, wild garlic, blackberries
slipping into suits of night, thimble-fat hazelnuts,
raspberries pink like skinned rabbits, and lace dresses
of elderflowers for cordials and syrups. Fly fishes
for trout and salmon in a nearby river, a glimmer
of the hunter in his hands with every delicate movement
of the line. He never shoots deer, letting them
graze near his property. Sometimes, very rarely,
he strokes his hockey mask like a penitent
touching a saint's relic for strength. The machete
in the corner of the cabin always weeps tears
of blood when he does, like a prayer returning
to its sender, a broken bone trying to snap back into place.

Content warning: themes and descriptions of slavery, which some readers may find uncomfortable.

The Oral History Of Mangoes

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes with phrases like 'postcolonial survivor' or 'brighter than a skylight' because I have always seen the sun.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes with descriptions like 'sashaying across supermarket shelves' because I am a temperate fruit struggling to shed its ancient coat.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes by asking if the fruits were present during incidents like the Berbice Slave Uprising of 1763 in Guyana.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes by asking if their descendants witnessed 6,000 slaves being sold in Charlestown, Nevis, between the years of 1674 and 1688.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes by thinking of their cello-round bellies carrying a solitary seed while countless children were born under an iron sky.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes by daring to ask if several million souls were carried in their light, and whether the grief of an entire continent paled the moon.

I am unqualified to retell the oral history of mangoes because I am a white man with no history running deep like the mangoes.

Discussing climate change with my mother

The digestive biscuit
recedes like a glacier
in the warm tea.
Mum doesn't want
to know about wildfires
reducing woods to matchsticks,
or the numbers of birds
declining like the hairs
on her ex-husband's head.
The recycling bag's oversized body
waits by the front door. Days
overdue. *EastEnders* or the weather
opening like cuckoo chick mouths
are better choices, her looks say.
"There are *no* cuckoos", I want to retort.
The tea bag sinks a little lower in the mug.
Something starts to puddle inside of me.

Content warning: imagery of mental illness and distress

How To Destroy The Moon

Investigate family history for curses; mental illness mistaken for witchcraft. Ancestors locked away in Janus-faced asylums.

In moonlight, conspiring eagle owls carry plans for superweapons in their soft, downy necks.

A rarely observed effect of grief and/or childhood trauma. Eminent psychologists believe the victim witnesses the lunar body 'fading' into the background of the night sky, reinforcing a belief that the moon is 'dead'.

Albatrosses harbour pearls in secret compartments. A definite sign of hatred towards the moon.

Astronomers have observed rabbits making burrows in lunar craters. Of particular interest, Tycho and Copernicus.

Moonfish are fallen lunar satellites intent on revenge.

The exit wounds of break-ups may not be seen for years.

Elena Croitoru

While Reading *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

I'm reminded of another novel set in the afterlife, except the dead are deadly this time and limbs that used to belong to them float in the Kelani River like poisonous fish and somehow I laugh through the grief this brings back, the type of grief that one can try to get rid of by leaving little pieces of it with each outing (like the convicts that drop tunnel soil in the exercise yard). But my laughter is more madness than anything else because it reminds me of a child beggar who was missing a leg from the knee down and was laughing while sitting on a plastic seat in the tram and by the time he got off at his stop, I thought I knew how he ended up like that, and two months later, I was on a plane and I left my country for good. And because I grew up having to listen to a dictator who filled the Danube with the bodies of those who tried to leave, I still won't get too close to a river and perhaps I don't appreciate the way it glimmers, insinuating a purity it just doesn't have. But that is still nothing compared to the violence in the novel and though it's meant to be fiction, it probably isn't, the bodies are different, the river is different but the reasons to kill are the same. But what stayed with me the most is that even the dead have deadlines and that some dead live inside the living, taking up more and more room, until they kill you. But back to the novel now, I realise that death is just moving to a different country with its own customs—it's just a country you can't leave.

Daughter

Sometimes I must seem like
a tired, selfish mother
for not wanting to speak

& lying next to you on the bed,
thinking that you'll never get to play
in the dirt of the country that

made me—your fingernails will
always be clean & you'll never get
to see how I buried my dead.

Maybe you will set fire
to my bones before
you get to know what

I want for my afterlife.
You'll never get to live in that
small, tenebrous flat where

I learnt to speak in a language
that sometimes comes first
in my head & where I watched

my parents work too hard for
scraps of love & a life that turned
them against each other.

I try not to think about
all the strangers that will
hurt you the way they have

been hurt & I wonder if
your life will soften you so much that
you'll have to return to me

as I always returned to you
if only to make sense of yourself
before you leave again.

Separation Anxiety

The year with no summer, Mount Tombara
erupted & the planet was covered in ash
so nothing grew & children fed
off their mother's flesh—well
some will say they ate the last
of the bread but if I think about it
that's what really happened. When I still
couldn't sleep, I read about the plague of the Justinian
& how people waited their entire lives
for it to end & I wondered what
it must have been like to see the first lesion
on your thigh while your baby still wants you.
My own baby has been feeding for an hour,
her rhythm doesn't slow down, she
needs it to sleep. Earlier we were
at the pool & her arms flailed faster &
faster in that chlorinated blue & I kept thinking
that a blue whale's aorta is so big that
a child could swim through it & I imagined
my baby inside this
fleshy heart trying to find me.
In 1969, a man had a pigeon living
on his head & I think that's
not too different to caring for a baby.
She screams & follows me
every time I leave her side & I've never
experienced being wanted this much though
I'm trying to get used to this
constant need to stay alive.

Cleave

I point to the dying lime,
to the way its trunk is drying
under the sun & say that it's
a mother tree & that it's sending
the last of its nutrients to its saplings.
Its bracts have rotted so
it can no longer spread its seeds.
You laugh at the word sapling
& stroke the ground
with your small, gentle fingers,
picking up fossilized leaves
that look like dead hearts.
Each of our cells has a tiny clock
inside it, I explain, & when
daylight enters us, it sets the hands
of these clocks. You ask if we can
stop time by staying in our rooms
with the curtains drawn.
I consider this & wish I could
stay with you for longer.
I say that the lime tree flowers make
a golden tea that can settle a heart
& that reminds me of my own
mother, whom you've never met,
& of the fact that the one thing
that must never happen
is for a parent to outlive their child.
I say that grief is the type of monster
that cleaves you open & enters you.
You don't understand
any of this, maybe you won't until
you have children of your own.
& as we sit on a picnic mat
by the ragged shadow of the lime,
my love settles on you like dust
& I wonder if there is
so much of it that it might bury you.

Shakeema Edwards

Delicatessen

When my body dies, I'll miss the taste
of guava jelly smeared on Crix crackers,
crushed bananas folded into batter,
soursop leaves boiled into bush tea
and sweetened with brown sugar.

I'll miss rolls of avocado and crab roe
from the sushi place on Botanic Avenue,
where I ate often with that boyfriend,
holding chopsticks at awkward angles
to lift slivers of pickled ginger into our mouths.

After, we slept with our shoulders touching
under a scented duvet's Anjou and vanilla blossom,
and nocturnal creatures in my follicles woke
to feed on sebum, multiplying unnoticed in my pores.

It is enough to live and be wanted
by microbiota, to hold ecosystems in my eyelashes
and be assured the mourning of one million mites
when the kitchen of my body closes.

Pattern Making

It began, always, with the pressing of fabric
in the dark morning. The overhead lamp,
burning yellow, gestured toward more light
than it delivered to my granny's dimming eyes.

Still, her hands, muscled with memory, traced designs,
cut along the grainline, wound the bobbin,
and threaded her Singer's suspended needle,
whose jabber woke or soothed her children.

I've inherited none of the patience or skill
required to outline hip and bust, to knit sleeves
and neck holes, to measure with precision,
hoping each shirt would be worn-out or outgrown.

She buried five: two stillborns, one toddler,
two adult daughters who spent their girlhoods
wearing homemade dresses with her stitched-in label,
Made Especially for You by Joan Browne.

Solar Doom

Salt in my sandals from beach days at Fort James or Dickenson Bay,
Third World looping in the cassette deck on coastal drives
under a seagulled sky. Impromptu mango-picking in Swetes Village
and buying bunches of guineps from the lone vendor in the valley.
These are the summers I remember. Still, her voice lowers
as she slows her sentence with pauses wide enough to touch me
on the other side of the North Atlantic—*Was I a good mother?*

Every conversation ends with her peeking out the grave
to read her eulogy. I soothe her like an infant and assure her
that she is, and was, a mother whose passing would resemble the sun
buckling under its gravity, bloating until it swallows Mercury and Venus
and bursts over a billion years into a nebula that repaints the galaxy neon.

I do not say a bad mother's dying likewise disorients and devours
her children with her collapsing star, that the loss is indistinguishable,
that only the heat death of the universe is certain.

Nietzsche's Sandcastles

Sunning on sugar-white sand,
three sisters circle an upturned bucket.

The oldest knows the tide will turn within the hour
so refuses to build even a turret.

The youngest eyes the shoreline, paralyzed
by the water's prow behind the tidemark,

its craving for the moon's pull to lather into spume
and, frothing wild, ravage any castles on the shore.

She manages to dig only a moat.
The middle girl molds forts, sculpts towers,

decorates each with banners of sargassum
and the broken shells of cockles and whelks.

When the water devours her hour's labor,
she rests blue-gray stones on the remnants,

which two horned pelicans disturb on their descent
to lay eggs in the castle's damp ruins.

Job's Latter Days

Waking again to the soft breath of his youngest daughter,
Job moths to one room, then another, glancing from the doorway
at the rising chests of his nine other children. He listens
to their somnolent coughs, their sighs, mostly for silence.

They never understood this watchfulness, the hunger in his eyes,
his refusal to let even the eldest boys shepherd alone. For years,
when the house shook against a gale, he'd lift them from their beds
and lay them to rest among the sheep as he searched the clouds.

He's suffered so much, the neighbors muttered, but never said what.
They whispered, *At least God restored his fortune*, and gazed
at the oxen and jennies grazing in his fields by the thousands.
All their mother would say: *He was a man of integrity*.

This did not explain the foreign names he called to in his sleep or his habit,
after prayer, of cupping each child's face as though expecting someone else's.

Debra Marquart

LEAVE IT IN THE GROUND

i.

In the dojo, Master Yun taught us that to break the board you must level your fist, your foot, your knifed palm not at the board itself but beyond the board, through the board, trained on the torso of the one who grasps the board. Only then the broken board becomes a certainty.

In this spirit, I will state the obvious forgone conclusion of our time, we must leave it in the ground. Leave it in the ground, for the two young derrick workers who died in a Bakken rig explosion in 2011. *Beyond burned, a witness testified, nothing but char, and the smell*

of flesh burning. And for the third worker, who yelled from where he was thrown, “the rig man is on fire,” who survived with grave wounds but committed suicide a month later, let us leave it in the ground. And the same for Dustin B who was 21 years old and six weeks

a father the night he climbed on the catwalk to pop the hatch of a storage tank of Bakken crude to check levels, found slumped on the catwalk the next morning, his death determined to be “hydrocarbon poisoning due to inhalation of petroleum vapors.”

And for the six-week-old son he left behind, and his girlfriend who spoke of his love of riding rodeo and declared “he was just the sweetest boy.” Let us leave it in the ground for the three other workers who have since died in the Bakken

in a similar manner, inhaling hydrocarbon vapors checking storage tanks, and for my friend Sven, who is still alive, I hope, and still tall as a Viking, wearing a gold broadaxe on a chain heavy around his neck. Sven, who works on the crew that arrives

within 24 hours after the wellbore is drilled down to 4000 feet, the crew that installs the concentric vertical rings of metal and concrete casings intended as a sleeve running down from the surface to the shale, designed to protect groundwater

from contamination, down through the geologic layers, the sleeves that fail, according to a University of Pennsylvania engineering professor, at a rate of “1 out of every 4.” Let us leave it in the ground for Sven who opines

about looking down into that prehistoric chasm,
that newly-drilled hole into the core of earth
that no human eye has ever seen, Sven who raves
about obsidian black North Dakota nights and

northern lights that strobe electric waves of pink
and green across the dark sky, Sven, who once said,
“the oil has been down there for millions of years,
and we are all suddenly in such a hurry.”

ii.

And for Deja, whom I discovered a little tipsy in a hotel lobby because she'd enjoyed too many complementary bourbons on the plane back from Wyoming, where she'd been visiting her boyfriend and son, before returning to the Bakken, to Williston, to resume co-habitation on the top floor penthouse of the hotel with the widowed oil executive who paid her for sex (but who had temporarily barred her from entry because of her drunken state), which is how we met in the lobby by the giant fireplace, and why somewhere in her phone contacts I hope I am still listed as "beautiful Deb."

Can we leave it in the ground for her, and for Drey, who works the hotel bar in Williston, who pours beer and wine during happy hour, who was largely silent beyond, *how you doing?* and *what can I get you?* until an oil worker from South Dakota began to tell me about his work in other oil plays—Wyoming, Texas, Prudhoe Bay—who compared the Bakken to the Wild West, who confessed, *We can do things here we could never get away with in Alaska*, and this is when Drey reels around and exclaims, *That is why I stopped working in the oil fields!*

And he lifts up his right hand to show us the missing index finger, a clean pink cauterized scar from his middle finger to his thumb, a cut clear down to the metacarpal, and he explains how the boom of the rig came loose and swung across the platform, knocking him over and severing his finger in one sleek motion. Let us

leave it in the ground for Drey. And for his wife, who worked the front desk of the hotel, whom I asked the next morning about Drey, and who said, "Oh yeah, he's so accident prone. I don't let him work on the rigs no more."

iii.

And leave it in the ground for my student in Watford City
who wrote about going to yet another funeral of yet another
young friend who had gotten too impatient on the two-lane
highway in the Bakken, stuck behind oil and water tankers

in his Ford F-150 or Chevy Silverado or whatever half-ton truck
he felt so momentarily safe in, that he was emboldened
to pull into the passing lane and collide with an oncoming oil
or water tanker. For that friend and all the other lost friends,

and for my student, who refused to allow me to publish the story
when I asked, fearing that someone from his town would read it,
and for all the EMTs and paramedics and firefighters, all of them
civilian volunteers from small nearby towns, not accustomed

to industrial grade accidents and toxic spills,
forced now to come out and peel bodies off blacktops,
subject themselves to chemicals and carnage to clean up
this mess. Let us leave it in the ground.

iv.

And for Rhonda, who lives in White Earth with a pump jack in her front yard and a six-foot flare outside her kitchen window, burning off excess gas from oil extraction, whose yard smells

of ammonia (*like someone's getting a permanent*, she says, *but no one is getting a perm*) and rotten eggs, whose grandkids wake in the middle of the night from the vibrations

and cry, "it feels like a truck in my bed," a small detail that Rhonda reported to the state legislators when she testified at a public hearing, these legislators who swiveled in their chairs

behind microphones and looked down at their papers because maybe they agreed with her and were ashamed or maybe they had mineral rights themselves or had political campaigns funded

by oil companies, and either way they knew no matter what she or they or anyone said that day, no one was going to stop oil, because in the Bakken people like to say, *oil makes things happen*.

v.

I return to the state of my birth in haste as one rushes to the scene
of an accident or the bedside of a dying lover or mother, no matter

how estranged by absence, years and grievance, no matter how tangled
and fraught the ties. Filial bonds pull me back, attachment stitched

into fibers by long ago kisses, fingertip touches, ancient strokes of hair
and the long-gone gold of my grandparents' laughter. Threads bind me

unbreakable to this place where first faces of kindness taught me survival
in this strange world where I landed (where we all land): naked, pink,

and hungry. Marked by this earth in my skin, tattooed, just like the story
told to me by a woman who survived a childhood fire: she was a girl

with long curls and a cotton dress who backed up too close to the cook
stove's open flame. And when the fire scaled her backside, thrilled up

her dress and into her hair, her mother threw the girl to the ground
and batted out the flames with her hands, burned her own skin,

cauterized the daughter's flames with her fingertips. *Ever since then*
all my life, the woman says, as she lifts her shirt to show me,

my mother's fingerprints are on me. And so it is with me and this
homeground that reared me. The water I drank from

this ground source, a sympathetic ocean, every
molecule and pore, every ripple, every fire

and explosion felt even across great time
and distance, even across the silences.

Katie O'Pray

Leftovers

I have memories I don't want to have.
They seem to be happening tonight in
my kitchen. Something guttural screams
of dis-safety. Ragged burning things
in my stomach. I wonder where this
sensation stems from & I don't like
it. I think ANYWAY ANWAY
ANYWAY several times loudly
& pop the doctor's newest treat
out of its packaging, onto my tongue.
He'd acknowledged I'm often interrupted
by pain. I sit down with the leftovers
I have been thinking about eating all day.
I allow myself light from the hallway
& the tv set. A fork but no knife,
no plate. I prove I am as grotesque
as I know – crumbs on my t shirt
& no trousers at all. Fleshly as
an animal. Shame-sick & glazed over
with sweet, congealing sauce.

Neighbour

Some breakfasts, before sunrise, I wondered
what Dave made of my microwave, its shrill
& predictable noise thru our walls – twice
at dawn & once at dusk. What I didn't know
was Dave had been dead on his side
of the top floor, for at least a month; that he
had been ill around Christmas, short of
luck in the one room he heated. What I didn't
know was his aunt, who would decide
on a closed casket, Guns n Roses, no prayers;
that my mum wouldn't know what to say
to his, wasn't going to mention the smell. I hadn't
been compelled to know that after five weeks,
on sight, it is hard to tell the sex of a body, let
alone who it is. What I'd known was Dave
liked to take a book to the garden in summer,
to tie a hammock between the trees

I am asked if we share INTIMACY

I can say NO but only with the cadence
of a lie. The truth is fanciful. I haven't
jumped your bones yet & I've been feeling
deficient for it. It's embarrassing how much
I want to know where you smoked your cigarettes
today, how many pans you scrubbed clean
of gravy & what happened to you last night
in your dreams. I've been childish
over you, nightly, watching your favourite
cartoons, fantasising about your shoulders,
hungering for your neck. I imagine your opinion
of things I hear – a 70s guitar riff, a baby's laugh,
the thrush trilling by my window. I daydream us
hosting dinner parties. Your glasses steaming up.

Self-portrait, as of now

I am no conversationalist today. I speak
to the glum face in my mirror in muted shame,
imagine I am working. My health has been improving
but there is still a tumour inside me, the size
of a secret. I smoke & smoke but anyway,
the nightmares. There are so many mornings
yet to come & go. It's exhausting to consider
so I don't. I indulge in eggs & hot water & refuse
to imagine decades more of this slog,
its twinges & embraces, the ailments
I'm yet to acquire & all I haven't learned
but will. On a train, the dark of a tunnel, my warped
face reflected back at me in the window, vacant
& morose. This is all so fragile & it costs so much.
I see myself smashing this life like glassware. I don't
want to. Everything is dirty or running out. It is awful
to have anything, knowing you inevitably won't.
I am not whoever my nephew thinks I am,
teaching him the word Jupiter.

Left early

My mourning is so noisy tonight. So obvious,
even in my gait, as I carry all the bits of me
home where they can tumble. A pile of rocks
is how I've been feeling. If you'd had a birthday
this year, I mightn't have even gone
to the party. Or I'd have left early, chewing over
your latest hijinks – whatever you'd have been
chasing. Smiling & shaking my head in the rearview
mirror. Thinking this doesn't get any easier.
Knowing it wouldn't have been a miracle, or not
noted as one; the cluster of candles on
the cake, lit then not. The force of your breathing.

Tracey Slaughter

opioid sonatas

#

[allegro]

I crashed. It was choral. The glass formatted the light. She was driving a scream into distance. The gravel doubled over. Halt this. It was illustrated. Let the scalpel tell you what happened. That was a trickle of mercy from her ear. Many revolutions. Steer with the thorax. Sunlight belts you to the ambulance. She bleeds on the blue nurse. Asleep in needles. The car is a seven pointed flower. She was singing in the blindspot. The red line holds a nocturne. It was metal. It was god. It was weightless. I misspelt collision with my wrists. Please radio. He stood on the right, observing the passenger tendons. Swung a corona through the windshield. She was dropping. It was filigreed. He smashed the screen like a recital. I was just out of town. It was quartz. I needed. Sparkles on the gurney. Conjoined. I bruised the rearview. An eyeful. It was dressage. She was singing from the glovebox. Tell the doctor what didn't. Aluminium can swim. The lid. The back of your thoughts are sticky. Staunch this. Four door. Intravenous. Admitted. Singing deuteronomy. Reversible in her red jacket. Her laughter tied at the back. Inserted. Facedown floating to the next prescription. Sunlight welds you to errata. That was the cathedral. Tell the doctor you're an article. His crowbar smashed the scheme of things. Regain a mouthful of memory in water. The white believes in minimalism. It was solitude. The fenceline blessed us. It shattered. Erasure scrapes chairs. Open all sides. Her angels birthed against disposable plastic. Solve this. She was singing to the haemorrhage in waiting. The nurse made a red head or tail of it.

#

[da chiesa]

The pills have a beautiful infrastructure. She bleeds out
in an off-road church. Two hundred & fifty milligrams of south
facing blue. The doctor, half-in, locks the clutch.
Drips invite you to a silver wedding. It was veering.
It was votive. Stop watching
what happened with your spine. Took linoleum
diamonds to arrive. Saliva is everything. Rosette of an acrid
towel. Let the scalpel circle anti-clockwise. Into the neighbour's linen
& wiring. I sloped. The nurses scroll her lineage. The car does
all this to us. I shed it. It was violet. Side effects illuminate
corridors. I was severed. I was only just out of town. Describe
the spirals of the loaded
nude. People are bringing devices
of pollen. Bedstand trimmed with O negative
tassels. Cartilage in the dashboard. Come apart. Fresh.

#

[da camera]

He opens the car's right
eye. Known to science. The clouds come down like pesticide. Inland
there is regular death-grey tea. It's a write-off. It's an urn. She is auctioning
a scream from a ward. She submitted. Detangle your hair
from the wheels. The nurse is singing with tweezers. Caught
between the axle & the subcutaneous
blue. All the tubes would call out if they could. Scalp a constellation
of tarmac. These are the stations of a shower. Too much hair
& blood for one cubicle. Off-road, into the metal
botanicals. Wearing the car like a flash in the marrow.
Aluminium can genuflect. The cut-throat
god loves you. Old ladies visit your open wound
to leave his card. She's under the dome
of what happened, stoned. Aluminium can swim. In the iris. On re-entry
you're wearing pearl vertebrae. The fenceline executed us. Inland
there is tea. There is singing on a trolley. Ladies have
crocheted the flannel edges. It was calligraphy. The morphine tells her
so. The stitches sip. On the third day, they roll
away the heart.

#

[largo]

Use strictly

as bleeding. It was procedural. I crashed. It's an atrium. The nurses photocopied the wreck. A whiteness had received the ceiling.

The car originated anywhere lightspeed. Magnificent cracks in her liver polished her ribs. The asphalt finished yesterday.

The dish ran away with the red, singing. Each blink a blackening bon voyage. It was ionic. I was an antonym. People delivered

statues of pollen. The pills had a beautiful depersonalisation. Does

she look like her pain can be rated? The road sucks crisscrossed air right out of us. The car has left us a necklace of decibels. The full

force of tea. The full force of cotton. She's cabled, breathing

in the fallow blue. The gradient of each day in slippers. Headfirst, hitching your tank through the corridors. Plastic thermos of your bladder.

Pre-inspection. Keep out. Keep weeping. Keep opening

nine bone lives on the hydraulic bed. Until

keys to the wreck

get lighter.

The Manchester Writing Competition was established in 2008 and for 15 years has celebrated Manchester as an international city of writers, finding diverse new voices and creating opportunities for writer development. The Competition offers the UK's biggest literary awards for unpublished work, has attracted more than 25,000 submissions from over 80 countries and has awarded more than £220,000 to writers. Designed to encourage and celebrate new writing across the globe, the competition is open internationally to new and established writers.

The Manchester Writing Competition was devised by Carol Ann Duffy (UK Poet Laureate 2009-2019) and is run the Manchester Writing School at Manchester Metropolitan University:
<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/writingschool>

The 2023 Manchester Poetry Prize was judged by Malika Booker, Momtazi Mehri and Clare Shaw. The Manchester Fiction Prize was judged by Lara Williams, Laura Barnett and Oliver Harris. The winners of this year's £10,000 Fiction and Poetry Prizes will be announced on 8 December.

The copyright in each piece of writing submitted remains with its author. Views represented are those of the individual writers and not Manchester Metropolitan University.

If you have any queries, or would like any further information, about the Manchester Writing Competition, please contact: writingschool@mmu.ac.uk.

Press enquiries: Laura Deveney: l.deveney@mmu.ac.uk. The judges and finalists are all available for interview.