

**WOW**  
WRITING ON THE WALL



WHAT'S YOUR WORLD  
**PRIDE**  
STORY?



**What's Your World Pride Story?**

Writing on the Wall  
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# Introduction

Sometimes there are moments in our lives that seem inevitable, so important that they simply must happen and mark a moment of clarity in our minds. *What's Your World Pride Story* has been just that for myself as a Project Manager, a creative and an activist. Writing on the Wall (WoW) in partnership with Liverpool Pride have been working for the second year running with writers from the LGBT+ community to create an anthology of work that marks the injustices people face here in the UK and internationally. The news has been littered with snapshots from Orlando, harrowing news from Chechnya, the UK's messy break-up with the EU and our current government's affair with a political party which denies basic rights to homosexuals. All this coming not long after Uganda's very public battle to make homosexuality punishable by death, yet somehow we appear to forget all too quickly the legacies of activists such as David Kato and the rights they often sacrificed their lives for. At a time when heated debates about bathrooms are turning entire communities against one another, it seems language has never been so important.

Pride's theme this year is International Love, and at WoW we jumped at the opportunity to work on a project that allowed unheard stories to be told. Over eight weeks the group worked together, led by course leader Helen Sandler, to create a supportive and collaborative space that empowered writers from Liverpool and the world to share stories of fear, determination, laughter, resilience and love. A special thanks to Helen Sandler for facilitating such an inspiring programme and to Liverpool Pride, in particular Joan Burnett and Michael Carey, without whom the whole project would not have been possible. A huge thanks to Liverpool based group Many Hands One Heart who work to support LGBT+ asylum seekers, and Lyndsay Price, our wonderfully talented volunteer. Our biggest thanks are reserved for our wonderful writers who have come together to bare their souls so that we do not forget that for some people the world is still not equal. This book is a piece of art and a form of activism that needs to be read and shared. I hope it resonates with you as much as it has with me. Enjoy.

**Emma Hulme**

*Project Manager*



# A Note from Liverpool Pride

This book captures a moment in time when people resident in the UK are thinking about their identity with more intensity than for a generation.

In 2016, the referendum on the UK's continued presence or otherwise in the EU opened up fault lines in our society that shocked some but felt all too inevitable to others. There has been a marked rise in all kinds of hate crime, including homo, bi and Trans\* phobia since the vote last July that has to be faced down. Liverpool Pride's response was to have our own vote, asking people to choose a theme for our 2017 festival. The theme they chose by a huge margin – International Love – was an overwhelming affirmation of the city's pride in its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic history and present reality.

International Love looks out across the world, celebrating the nations that have embraced LGBT+ rights, but remembering the more than seventy countries where it is still extremely dangerous and/or illegal to be out. In eleven countries around the world, the death penalty exists for those found guilty of homosexuality. We mark the fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 here in mainland UK by reminding people we've come a long way and need to help others to make the same journey.

*What's Your World Pride Story* is part of this active attempt to make sure that all kinds of LGBT+ voices are heard. This year, the writers group is comprised of people from very differing cultural backgrounds and experiences all of whom have one thing in common – the urge and ability to tell their tales with power and clarity. Some of the group are new to the UK, some seeking asylum here, looking to live positive lives as LGBT+ people without constant threat; others were born here but have cultural histories that make their work essential to the understanding of our communities.

Hold this book in your hands and feel the strength and resilience of our writers well up from the pages. I can affirm that you'll be moved, you'll laugh, and that most definitely, you'll never forget some of things you'll read. Heartfelt thanks to all the writers involved and to Emma Hulme and Helen Sandler for supporting them to make something very special happen. It is an uncommon gift to create a place where everyone is welcome and has a chance to speak and be heard and it has never been more important to do so.

**Joan Burnett**  
*Pride Trustee*



# Bold Street

*Binta Ochola*

Having just returned from Tanzania, all hyped up about Swahili and the food, plus of course the people, Anna could not stop talking to me. I, on the other hand, was very intrigued and excited, seeing this beautiful *Muzungu* girl who could not only speak one of my languages, but also knew about the food and how she had tried a sugar cane one time and chewed to swallow. That cracked my rib, I kept that picture in my head. Remember, sugar canes: you chew and suck until the fibres are left, then *spit it out*. Can you imagine?

I could have sworn she had a crush on me. No wonder she became my tight in the blink of an eye.

‘Today is a beautiful Saturday afternoon. How about we go out, Dada?’ Anna asked.

‘Out as in out, or just girl out?’ Don’t ask what I meant by that question because I do not remember. But Anna had gotten used to our East African way of using English, and it was always nice to see how she got it.

Bold Street: a place that is as bold as its name, the very first street I knew off by heart in Liverpool. It changes depending on the day and the time, just like Wandegeya in Kampala. If you don’t know Bold Street, you have never been to Liverpool.

It can be full of funny smells, noises and different types of music at night, with some beautiful girls becoming a nuisance and some vomiting due to the intoxicating cocktails; not forgetting the rough sleepers. It has a very corporate style in the morning, with fresh smells of perfumes, people in office wear, walking through to their places of work, cafes, business meetings, charity shops, bookshops, etc. Bold Street is magical indeed; no wonder my new best friend wanted us to go through there that day. It puts one in a partying mood.

I shared my first funny observation with her. ‘Anna,’ I called, and before she could answer I asked anyway. ‘Why is it that people on the street in this city always wear a smile and close it up as they get close to you? If one goes ahead to say hello, they won’t respond, just like a plastic smile.’ Being me, I even demonstrated to her what I meant.

‘Really?’ she asked. And then along came someone who did just what I had been explaining. ‘Oh my, Dada, you’re so right. Why though?’

Then Anna suggested, ‘Let’s play an eye-candy check game, please? You show me the beautiful black boys and I show you the white ones.’

‘I like that, Anna, it’s going to be funny.’

I immediately thought, ‘How I wish I could just tell you that as you look at the boys, please show me the girls too!’ But there it stopped – in my thoughts – since I had lost a good friend back in the day just because I told her about being tempted to kiss girls sometimes. She had taken off like she was being chased by a ghost. I was not ready to lose my only friend in a foreign land now, because of my twisted mind.

‘Let us use Swahili, so that way no one will understand our stupid game and it will be more fun,’ Anna was saying.

‘*Wacha*, Anna, that is taken to be rude, according to the British.’

‘*Ninakuja kutoka Austria kukumbuka*,’ she was quick to remind me. (‘I come from Austria, remember that!’)

‘*Sawa basi*.’

Trust me, we were full of laughs like teenagers on heat, hahaha, how embarrassing, but we couldn’t care less. That was the best outing so far. We walked Bold Street a number of times without even noticing it until I mistakenly said out loud to a girl coming towards us, ‘Ohhh wooww, that’s an eye candy, Anna.’ Please don’t ask me why I never said it in Swahili, I guess my brains were frozen for a moment.

She had passed us but she stopped and turned back. Meanwhile, I was busy pretending to be drunk, wishing the earth would open and swallow me. Before I could say a word, she planted her lips on mine in the middle of the street. I froze.

Before she walked away she said to me, ‘You’re an eye candy too and I could kiss those big black lips again if you would let me!’

Anna was laughing, unstoppable. How annoying, but funny too.

I was embarrassed at what had just happened. Remember, we do not kiss in public back home, let alone a girl. Quick to pretend, I became very assertive towards Anna. ‘In Africa, we have no such thing as gay!’ The most stupid denial one can possibly give.

‘*Ilikuwa tu mchezo*,’ I was shouting and laughing again.

‘*Mchezo mchezo*,’ Anna agreed. It is just a game.

# I Ain't the Problem

*Binta Ochola*

A typical day back home usually started with sunrise and ended with the sun setting, birds singing in the trees, cars and *boda-bodas* passing by from a distance, since their family house was a bit far off the main road, going downhill, enclosed in a gate. To her, the main memory was being forced to take an evening nap right after school with her brothers. She hated it with all her being.

One girl and four boys, including her twin brother, racing in just their shorts (no tops) towards a big mango tree which was right in front of their house. The grass felt cool even though the sun was still up. This tree was very wide, providing beautiful shade. However, to Zipporah, the main attraction was its fruits whenever it was in season, fresh ripe mangoes and tasty too.

Enid, their maid who had worked for the family for some years, would yell, 'Go to bed, children, or I will report you to your mother.' Her threats never stopped them.

I do not know how her tiny legs did it, but Zipporah would always get there before her brothers – this afternoon, like so many others. I choose to tell you about this one because this evil bastard little thing called Zipporah did something funny. She did the unthinkable, and up to today I wonder how that plan came into her little head. Greedy girl... or cheeky!

Action: She quickly did *susu* (urinated) on the tree trunk to make it slippery... remember, the boys were on it, climbing up, so this means they got a share of it too. Eeeeeeeesh, this girl will kill me, hahaha. 'Well, mission accomplished,' she said to herself. 'The boys can't come up now.'

'Evil sister,' her twin brother Zane cried out. Zipporah didn't care. It was not long after that they started begging her for mangoes, as she had hoped. 'Please, Bibicher,' (as she was commonly nicknamed) they kept asking, and she gave them the fruit according to her own wishes.

By the way, there was no one at home or close to Zipporah who didn't

get a nickname, including their Mama and Tata. The children had fun chatting about their parents, who didn't know their own nicknames, in their presence. Mama would often say, 'I know that's me you're talking about, you kids.' Then they would just giggle, saying, '*Neda neda, Mama.*' Because if she knew, it would mean *kiboko* (lashes).

'Goblin, Goblin,' the boys were shouting out to Zipporah as they ran. That was her nickname at the time.

'Oh my,' her Mama cried out, 'If I had not given birth to you, God knows a tumour would have grown in my tummy because you're too much.' She went on, 'When will you ever be a girl? Instead of taking a nap you are in a tree like a monkey, fooling around as if there is no food at home? Zipporah, my child, you will send me to my early grave.' She said all that as she walked away. Zipporah stayed up in the tree for some time.

Such was their everyday life. There was always drama somewhere, somehow, either in Zipporah's room, the boys' room, at school, or better still, on the way back home from school.

Father, commonly known as Tata in the Lutooro language, was an engineer and a politician, which meant being very busy and having visitors almost all the time. Zipporah had her routines with him as a must, which were almost the only duties she did, since there were helpers in their home.

Her duties included making juice – not using the blender, because they didn't have one, just a strainer, which made it hard to do. She would have all the different fruits squished in her little hands, hence Tata saying, 'God knows how much of my girl's fingers and dirt I drink everyday with love.'

The other one was making him tea (please note, when I talk about tea, don't think of the Liverpool tea but rather tea in a cup that is known to the rest of the world, hahaha), plus soaking his feet and massaging them in warm water in a basin in the living room – visitors or not. Tata lived like a king for sure. As the saying goes in Luganda, '*Okuzaala kujangaanya.*' Meaning: 'giving birth is a blessing that makes one live big!'

One evening, with Zipporah doing her chores as usual, her father noticed the small breasts at the stage of coming and going back; very painful at this stage. The guy shouted and cried out very loud:

‘Woooooweeee, I am dead! My little girl is getting breasts, as young as she is. She is only nine years old but the monsters out there will start to think she is old enough now. I am finished.’ As poor Zipporah tried to understand what all this was about.

Her childhood episodes won’t end, but let’s go to when life changed.

Mama had married in a different country from her home. She and her children always got picked on by her husband’s people over small, stupid things. Statements like, ‘*Abana bomunyamahanga*,’ meaning ‘The children of a foreigner’. Especially if one made a mistake. The problem was never the children or their mother but the narrow-minded bastards. Zipporah was a bit tired, but whenever she went to her mother’s home in school holidays, it was different. ‘I wish I could change and stay there for good,’ she always thought.

Mama was aunt to Mungai, one of the most evil men, for whom she paid school fees. He used to help the kids with homework and that night that’s how he ended up in Zipporah’s room. She was only nine years old; can you imagine? The monster raped her. Late in the night the little girl is dozing off, only to be woken up by the horror of sexual assault. She is so confused at what just happened to her, done by a person she calls cousin. He never said a word to her, but Zipporah was so scared of him that she never told anyone.

But then it happened again. ‘No no no no no, I have got to do something.’ Those were her thoughts as she cried herself to sleep, refused to get out of her room for two days. Poor Zipporah, her mama brought out *kiboko* instead. As she caned her Zipporah kept saying, ‘*Hapana hapana, Mama. Hapana, no no no no.*’ After a week Zipporah was found unconscious by Enid, their house helper, having taken a bottle of rat poison. Thanks to Enid she made it, after two weeks of hospitalisation.

Coming back home, Zipporah was told Mungai had gone back to Kenya. ‘Bastard, why couldn’t my poor mother figure it out?’ she wondered. She never talked about it and tried not to think about it either.

‘*Inatembea katika familia yako*,’ literally meaning, ‘It runs in your family,’ in Swahili. Because her two paternal aunties and an uncle had committed suicide, her mother’s coping mechanism was to once in a while talk about it like it meant nothing. And sometimes she would tell

Zipporah to go ahead and do it, since she was such an attention seeker. Poor girl, very damaged.

Zipporah joined nursing school on government entry, far away from home. She failed to get the government entry score for medicine. Her father avowed that all his children were aware of the fact there would be no paying privately for university. His duties stopped after high school, so he always said.

‘Why not government entry?’ he asked. ‘What do other kids have that you don’t, for you not to get in on government?’ The same reason that made Zane, her twin brother, apply for a green card, luckily enough getting one and becoming a USA Marine later on. Everyone had to carry their own load henceforth.

Far away from home, life was good again. Oh man, Zipporah was in love, but with a girl called Justine. What’s wrong with this girl? She seems to see life from a different angle from the rest of us. How did that happen? I guess she was always a test tube girl anyway. That is what they called girls who loved girls – meaning that they used the chemistry lab test tubes. Hahahaha.

Boys used to make fun of it, saying that those girls were too ugly for boys to love them. It was all a bit of fun as long as it was just a rumour. If the girls were caught and it was proved true, then the story would change to something ugly. That’s why people had to hide.

Zipporah knew this since she had had something similar, but not violent, back in secondary school days. She had been in the volleyball team and also a rugby co-captain for both teams. Her best friend Pamela was the captain and they had shared everything from a cubicle to food, commonly known as grub, and sometimes the uniforms. She trusted Pam, as she called her.

This girl with a twisted mind had worked on her lines and told Pam, ‘I’m feeling very confused, I swear to God I love boys and that means I’m not a test tube girl. *Naye mwana*, every time I see *demo eyo* Madam Olivia I feel so in love with her. I wish I could kiss her. Can you imagine, I even fantasise about her? It seems I’m very twisted in my head otherwise why would I be daydreaming?’ Zipporah was into the moment.

Pam shouted, ‘Stop stop, you fool, you even sounded like a boy for a minute! Ohhh nooo, not you! How can you be this nice a friend and



still be a test tube girl? You disgust me. Jeeez, what type of stupidity is this now?’

That’s how she had lost her best friend. Zipporah made a promise never to tell anyone again.

Anyhow, being close to Justine was never an issue, until one day a Catholic nun saw them make out behind the school social hall. There was a house ball and everyone was in the hall partying – or at least they thought so. Outed and made fun of by a local radio station, Zipporah and Justine were both fired. They went separate ways. Back to square one, Zipporah tried to take her life once again, thinking that must be the only solution. As I write, I can’t even begin to imagine how she must have felt! She was not only a test tube girl but also a failure at many things including taking her own life. Hahaha, she failed again after taking a full tin of drugs. She was in the hospital for I don’t even remember how long, but this time all by herself. Poor Zipporah, so so sorry.

After surviving that attempt, she was so determined to fight and be somebody. She was done feeling sorry for herself. Zipporah needed to show her enemies, but also herself, that she could win and prove a point to all those who called her a mistake.

She stopped lamenting and started writing letters to different organisations and churches, looking for any help or scholarship. As luck would have it, a Catholic priest, who was her late Tata’s drinking buddy, came to their home after reading a letter from her and offered to help find a sponsor. Zipporah was not only back to school but to medical school. Time to read and be serious.

Little did she know that her misfortunes were not yet done with her. In school holidays, out on a bicycle ride, this girl was always wishing she were a boy. I don’t know why, though. Some of the things Zipporah had done that were good memories were bike rides and river swimming. Their Tata, when they were still young, had stopped them from swimming in the river, but they would never listen. One time he came and carried away their clothes and bicycles in his pick-up, so after their swim they could not go back to school for the afternoon classes, nor go home, as it was too far and they were naked. They waited until it was dark to go home and had it all planned on how they were going to lie to their Tata and Mama. Hahaha. That day *kiboko* was dancing on

their bums. Sorry guys, for taking you back, but this girl is some piece of work. No wonder she is a lesbian.

Back to the present. Zipporah loved going for those evening rides. That evening, out onto the wild paths on a dusty road, her bike broke – and she had no clue how to fix a bicycle. It was getting dark, she was desperate and asked some boys on the way for help. They asked if they could take it off the road so that they could work on it. They were four in number. One covered her face with a cloth and then she must have passed out. In the dark, with a compound fracture of the right leg. Allow me not to write the scene as it unfolded for Zipporah. Determined to fight, she made it – and even managed, now that she had medical knowledge, to get on PEP to prevent HIV. She went back to school and blocked her brain from remembering... until story-telling time. Wow, what a strong girl she is. She has even told the story to me because she hopes it might help another person out there.

She finished school, became somebody, someone's colleague, boss, political representative, girlfriend/wife, best friend and mother. All by choice. She was angry so she had to prove to the world that she could get past this stuff, which was a good coping mechanism. She became unstoppable and so there is the saying, 'What won't kill you makes you stronger.' Plus a Luganda saying, '*Kijakugwa*,' meaning *it will end or pass*.

Liverpool: a beautiful city. Zipporah was lucky when Liverpool chose her. I mean, she knew no one in this city and never had plans to live in it, but of all the cities in the UK, they had to ask her to go to Liverpool? It was just meant to be. Very nervous, scared and alone; yes, she knew English, but their English is different and yes, some are friendly, but there are those who show and say their hate right into her face. 'Try and make friends with those who are kind to you,' Zipporah keeps telling herself. Her twin, Zane, loves Liverpool Football Club and all he can say is he will visit when he is back from deployment. There's some hope there. Try to learn the things that make Liverpool, Liverpool.

She tried to keep busy, to keep sane; volunteering made that possible. The more she got involved, the more Zipporah was surprised at how some things could be just the same as back home. She had been totally naive. When would this hell on earth end? How did she end up here?

Oh yes, this is how she ended up here: by being a voice for the voiceless in a government which was totally bonkers.

Since Zipporah had become well established in youth politics and campaigning in her country, it was not long before she became a target – as a rebel in the very government that employed her. Remember, this government had been in power for 31 years. That is a long time for one president to still have a ‘fresh mind to make things better’, but one could not speak up – and if you were bold enough to do so, you had better make sure there were no skeletons in your closet. This is how Zipporah found herself on the run for her dear life, before she could be thrown into jail for life based on fabricated stories plus her test tube life.

In those volunteering places in Liverpool she heard a conversation between two mature ladies who had become colleagues, discussing how they disliked lesbians. Well, she listened. ‘I don’t mind gays, but lesbians, ohhhhhh they give me goosebumps,’ one of them was saying. And the other of course seconded her. Zipporah was thinking: ‘Do they think lesbians have no taste? For fucksake, these ladies must think lesbians are rapists. Nobody is grabbing anyone here! Oh pleeeeeease. How pathetic!’ Another statement: ‘Yes, it may be legal here, but not acceptable. There are people with real issues, not this LGBT stuff.’ Just some of the statements she heard used now and again. Hands down, Zipporah gave up on the fantasy of ever being free and happy.

Yes, someone who cared enough once advised Zipporah: ‘You have got to be careful, please. Just don’t say it, since it makes many people uncomfortable. And the same thing when someone picks on you because of your colour, accent or sexuality. Just walk away and let it pass.’ But this girl is a fighter; she will speak up.

Dear rainbow family, please always remember, when scared and very lonely, we are not the problem. We are just different, so deal with it!

WORD: If you are hated or picked on for something you have no control over, or being different, take it as a compliment, because if you were not better, they would not be bothered. *I ain’t the problem.*

# Racism

*Chaldrine Ekobe*

Every human being is created by God  
No matter the colour of our skin  
No matter the language we speak  
We are all created by the same God  
Everyone created by God is special  
Love is the ultimate solution to racism  
Where there is love, there is peace  
Where there is peace, there is joy and happiness  
Joy, peace and happiness is what everyone needs  
SO LET LOVE LEAD!

# The Lisbon Bar

*Chaldrine Ekobe*

It's a very beautiful and amazing gay bar  
Situating along Stanley Street in Liverpool.  
They got a great restaurant and a lovely bar.  
The restaurant sells good food like pizza, burgers, tea, coffee etc.  
The bar sells top brands of beers, whisky, etc.  
Got lots of entertainment like snooker, poker, etc.  
All these are spiced with western music  
With quizzes from Lady Sian, which are very interesting.  
People drinking and chatting, enjoying themselves.  
This is really an amazing bar.  
The Lisbon Bar –  
I LOVE IT.

# A New Life

*Chaldrine Ekobe*

Where I came from I lived in fear always,  
Today I am in a place where I can live freely.

Where I came from I was discriminated against by everyone, even my  
family,  
Today I am in a place where I am welcomed and loved.

Where I came from I was mistreated,  
Today I am in a place where I am cared for like someone special.

Where I came from I was hated and it was okay,  
Today I am in a place where I am loved and hate is a crime.

All this hate, discrimination and mistreatment was because of my  
sexuality,  
Today this gay man is in a place where he is welcomed, treated with love  
and shown respect.

How I love my new life in the special place called the *United* Kingdom.

# The Boy in the Mirror

*Imogen Christie*

‘Get your ass out of bed... get your ass out of bed... get your ass out of bed...’ The voice goes off in my head like the klaxon in *QI*. I pull my head off the pillow, last night’s foundation left on the pillowcase like the Turin Shroud, only in Max Factor panstick foundation no. 60 (well, I caught the recent summer sun so needed a darker one). I force down an unwanted half litre of water as I find a bobble, shorts and Reeboks, with a self-narrative of, ‘Just don’t look in the mirror luv, it’s half six in the morning.’

I trot out the front door with a target of running for 45 minutes, building up my distance and stamina for the forthcoming half-marathon skating event I’ve entered. Despite the struggles with motivation, I enjoy the time on my own and the freedom to practise my mindfulness and self-reflection. The soundtrack to my run is broken by the occasional bus, always revving in too low a gear for the speed it’s going, and a dawn chorus of gulls screaming at each other in some kind of ‘volume-off’, saying, ‘My screech is louder than your screech.’ I pass the back of the Foresight Building and then Paddy’s Wigwam, the stained-glass windows resplendent in the early morning sunshine, to be confronted by a gull. A gull so big it makes me break stride, a gull so big it is waist high to me, a gull so big it is wellying a polystyrene food container all round the pavement – and none of your titchy single burger variety either. It kinda looks up at me to say, ‘The kebab run is the kebab run, mate... an’ what of it?’

So I consciously alter my stride pattern to take a wide arc around it. I glance back at it as it says, ‘Would well take you, mate,’ but as I do, my mind’s eye takes me back to a time and place where gulls were seagulls on the Upper Clyde Peninsula – to fishing trips and all-nighters on the beach. It makes me think of the familiarly familiar and the newly familiar. A time and place where it was the boy who looked back at me in the mirror... or one where gulls inhabit an urban environment that is the very epicentre of financial, cultural, social and leisure activities in

Liverpool. It all makes me think of the more recently familiar in relative terms, if not the newly familiar girl in the mirror rather than the boy.

I round the corner and drop onto Hope Street just as my self-reflection process is reaching Zen-like heights. I think to myself of the hope I had in my youth; it was so virile, the strength of it made it almost palpable, a force that could be touched rather than felt. In my mind's eye I see myself in that time and place – not reliving it in the here and now but being there at that moment, in that time, in that space. I am back to a time and a place where it was the boy who looked back at me in the mirror.

The Anglican Cathedral comes into view as I have pressed fast forward to a time of New Romantics and bands like Visage, Duran Duran, A Flock of Seagulls (no pun intended). A time where boys could wear make-up to be part of a cutting-edge pop and cultural movement. I am there in that moment once again in a pub in Glasgow, blonde streaked hair and eyeliner on, with a guy drunkenly and loudly saying:

*'Well know me pal ahhhhve nutting against it, ye know, guys wi' make-up and all that shite... course it disney make ye gay... just look at aww ra burds that Rod Stewart's shagging.'*

I pass the Chinese Arch, and think of what it represents: the importance of the individual and collective sense of self; an expression of individuality and, simultaneously, of belonging and inclusion. My mind flicks back to the encounter in the Glasgow pub and I think, 'Maybe if Rod Stewart had included an existentialist perspective to his song-writing, pointing out that human existence and the way humans *exist in the world* co-relate, just maybe, he might have produced a different conversation. A conversation where make-up and expression were devoid of sexual preference, and social difference was not based on sexual choices or freedom of expression.'

But then, 'If You Want To Be Baby Jane and by the Experience of Being Baby Jane You Will Maybe Be a Better or Different Baby Jane,' was never really going to be a catchy song title.

I head up the hill past Hannah's Bar, homeward bound, memories turned off, focused on the effort required to finish my run. Two more sets of traffic lights across Orange Peel Common and home.

Forcing down the next half litre of water, I really don't want Chris



Evans in the background introducing Rod Stewart's 'Do Ya Think I'm Sexy?' I wander into the bedroom and catch myself in the mirror. You know that reflection when you have not a scrap of make-up on and your sweat tash has sideburns to match, as big as mutton chops? When your hair cannot really decide if it wants to be matted or frizzy? It is the girl though who looks back at me, it is the girl who could only be the girl she is through the experience of being the boy she once was.

So, as Rod sings in the background about someone wanting his body, I shout to my partner, 'Pass me a sheet for the mirror and my leopard leggings, luv.'

# Zzub Bee the Pride Bee

## *Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle*

Rapidly and in an uncontrolled manner, Zzub Bee sparkled her colourful pollen all over Liverpool city.

Turning dark streets into a scene of love, an indication that something has been present. Something existing in perception only may appear small by comparison, but the sound of the Zzub Bee filled everyone with love.

Children smiled and pointed in amazement, older people ran for cover for they did not understand Zzub Bee. Parents rushed their children for their LGBT antihistamine jab. 'That time of year again when that lot remind us lot they are here.'

The other so-called yellow and black bees tried to chase the Zzub Bee from the centre of the city. But this did not stop her from sharing her rainbow pollen of love with all the diverse people of Liverpool City.

Even though the Bee had setbacks, this never stopped her from continuing to sprinkle her rainbow pollen over the dark areas of Liverpool City. Every building from St Johns Tower to Liverpool Catholic Cathedral started to burst with kaleidoscopic flowers of Zzub Bee swinging sixties love, hug a bug love.

Over in Anfield and Everton the red and white and blue and white bees were breaking the norm and having baby bees that were blue and red striped.

Slowly, Liverpool was changing its colours in a true scouse gritty way. One day the whole world will be tolerant of mixed-breed bees, just as humans like mongrel dogs.

The rainbow unicorn in her own unique world, looking across her field with her multiset coloured pop socks, stood in her dirty field. The so-called normal horses did not notice her, but she noticed two male stallions making love behind a gooseberry bush.

The rain brushed against her rainbow mane. She smiled and she knew she could not exist as a plain Jane. She smiled again as Zzub Bee flew past her lonely muddy field and sparkled pollen drops into every corner.

# Damn Seagulls

## *Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle*

Damn Seagulls said the two ostriches  
As the little scally dumped on both their heads  
He laughed and ate his stolen chips and swigged his stolen lager  
So both the ostriches climbed to the top of the Liver Building  
And pushed their bottommost out the window and laughed  
As they both unloaded on those damn seagulls' heads  
'Revenge is sweet, or is that smelly' said one ostrich to another  
As they skipped and held each other's wings and feathers  
Heading back to Breck Road Liverpool and St Helens

# Cinquains

## *Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle*

1.

Snowflake

Flurry, ice, sleet

Two dogs sit cold outside looking at each other

2.

Endure

Holding their leads

Kitten in their beds

Tandems gradually proceed, end and onward

Pausing

# Name in the Corner of a Painting

## *Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle*

Designation description cataloguing  
Painters drawers cartoonists of life on planet earth  
All god's creatures creation of our biosphere

Creepy-crawlies that crawl in your undies at night  
Like security men in galleries who give you a fright as they  
Tell you to stay behind the red rope in front of this painting

The name in the corner of a painting, is it real or not?  
I wonder if this painter was a ladies' man or a man's man  
This security man is not called Scott the snotty is he?

I may one day have my painting of me riding my ostrich  
Riding across the sun which is very hot  
But I don't want it in the wrong sun if you get what I mean

The name of the artist who wants to shine like the sun  
To be remembered as the son of Liverpool perceptions  
A name passageway corridor footpath

To the soul of soul work of art to our hearts  
Genius ability flair aptitude – a name gives a picture  
of perspective of the soul of a human being

# Steps to Freedom

*Steven Benson*

Paul, in memory, re-entered and reclaimed his first flat (since coming out as gay). In his act of remembrance, he walked around the land of yesteryear, but also (in vertical time) the demesne of today, as his memory joined the past and present. By that very act of the flaneurie of the past, he recalled how he had broken free and remained free. The year in Princes Gate East had probably been the most significant and character-forming (especially in regard to his unapologetically gay identity) in his whole life.

He entered the big decaying house, into the ramshackle, slightly uncanny hallway. It was dark, and there were spectral dead letters to unknown denizens of the past piled up on a table. The flat was at the back of the ground floor; there was no bulb in the light above the door, he remembered, adding to the penumbrous feeling of the whole house. The upstairs was like some shut off area of dark dreams.

This was a big moment for Paul. He had forced himself out from the strangling carapace of middle class, repressive suburbia, ejected himself up Ryedale Road, like a cannon ball seeking its target.

This is how it was and is (Paul is viewing the flat for the first time, walking around it, in memory, as he did when he lived there, thirty-three years ago, and reliving it as if it were now).

Through the door... a dark (again!) bathroom straight ahead of the entrance; to the left, into the main room, which, on closer perusal, turned out to be the only room; a vast, semi-desuetudinous space, with the vestiges of a decorated ceiling (a very high one). Was it just a bedsit, then? 'I suppose,' he thought, 'nowadays you would call it a "studio".' As he gradually realised/remembered that the bedroom was poised above the main living area, somehow on top of the tiny (no window) kitchen and the glimpsed bathroom, he circumvented an exploration of the main area and headed towards the kitchen. 'That's nice,' he said, 'wooden kitchen shelves,' realising, next, that they were in fact a ladder to the bedroom, which was a slightly uncomfortable six foot below the ceiling, all in the

one vast, cavernous room. Climbing up the ladder/shelves, he found a double bed, perched above the main space, somewhat precariously, and again, disconcertingly, filled with shadowy, unknown spaces (which he decided to ignore!). The light bulb hung down, perilously, into the main room, at the side of the bed. Back to the kitchen, and there was an archaic small gas cooker (probably unsafe, looking back), and no fridge.

Yet it was enough. Physical space refracted psychological and emotional space. This was Paul's gay space, and Paul's gay base. From here he would go inward (into reclaiming his occluded gay self) and outwards to the Gay Centre, and Sadie's and other dens of... pleasure... and dancing... and... friendship. Still full of angst, there was, yet, now, a strong ray of hope. No matter the 10p in the slot gas meter and the Health and Safety nightmare that was this pied-a-terre. It was HOME, his gay home; he had come home to HIMSELF, that is all that mattered. It had been, and still was, then (easier, now, but still not quite a finished work!) like hewing out a life from the arid stone of heteronormative hegemony; he had carved a new sculpture, but a living one. Corny, but he was reborn and remade. This flat was the psycho-geographical manifestation of that.

Paul used to lie on his dais (bed) reading Gay Men's Press novels from the second earliest incarnation of News from Nowhere (another gay-friendly haven) and then fall asleep, to the sound of rats clawing and scraping above and below. He remembered in visual images, like shots of lightning in the dark sky of time and memory.

Paul wanted to recall as fully and clearly as possible, given the hazy curtain of time that hid his clear vision of the past – like that eerie curtain he had seen in the old deserted ABC a few months ago – he wanted to recall Mark, the raven-haired Irishman from County Longford, who, one evening, had come to his flat (having met him in the decrepit Gay Centre of the time) and who had sat with him on the sofa and whom, after two tantalising hours and a bit of grappling, he had taken to his pedestal bed in the sky, and who had shouted, when Paul had said, amidst the throes, that he was hurting him, 'I can't help it if I love you to bits,' in a lilting Celtic accent. Mark with skin like alabaster, threaded like veined marble; exquisitely handsome Mark, who also conformed to

Paul's ideal of the dark-haired, slim man he had always desired. Mark who loved Abba, so that Paul could not listen to a track by this band but think yearningly of him. He remembered how, the second time Mark was meant to appear, he did not turn up, with Paul, periodically and anxiously, walking the tiny distance to the 80 bus-stop on the corner of Granby St to see if he was getting off the bus. It had been/is (recalling it) excruciating. Gone was the ecstatic feeling following their first (and only once repeated, four years later) night of passion, when he had walked to work through Greenbank Park and all the birds of Liverpoolshire sang, as everything became three-dimensional and joyously bright-hued, like some variegated Hopkins poem (he had the tendency to experience life through the transfiguring lens of literature.) Now everything was dreary and dark, like the Matthew Arnold poem; it was no longer the radiant beach of another former home, Aberystwyth, but the night-time with the tide receding, leaving him embattled, alone and confused: not for the last time!

Despite the traumas of this, the most intense of his post coming out love-passions, and one of the {rarely} actualised ones, he survived and, somehow, amidst and athwart the desolate sense of loss, it affirmed his newly found gay self and identity, he had met and made love to an exquisitely beautiful man. He still, occasionally, bumped into this man, now, like himself, in his fifties. He was still not bad-looking. He had, in fact, told him, a few years back, about the huge effect he had had on him. Again, time was somersaulting in many directions at once.

Paul did not know if he wanted to finish his story. {Neither did Steve.} When you are back in 'another country' that is the past, do you want to return to the present, especially if, in some significant ways, it is troubled? Steve found writing third-person narrative hard; ok, he had made a stab at it. He found it interesting how people felt the need (privacy?/self-protective distancing?) to re-write (parts/all) of their lives as if written by/about someone else, which persona was merely a flimsy mask.

That said, I quite liked writing MY short story, Steve said.



# Lodge Lane: 'The Hood'

*Agatha Sibanda*

As I walk through this long boulevard with not enough trees to earn its  
title

But because of its diversity

The cultures

The languages

The gangsters

The addicts

The different restaurants and bars as I look from left to right.

LODGE LANE: a place I call home

Home away from home

It's not too different from home.

The graffiti on the walls

The kids playing outside

The sound of traffic

The cougars standing outside the bar

And the teenagers smoking weed

A couple of blocks up, seniors shout 'BINGO!' at the Bingo Club.

LODGE LANE: a place I call home.

# When We Are Born

*Agatha Sibanda*

We are born with survival instincts  
We learn how to walk  
We learn how to talk  
We learn how to love and we learn how to hate.

As we grow  
We learn to judge  
We learn to class  
We learn to fight  
We learn to adapt, all to society's beliefs, and we learn to be fake.

Where is the LOVE?  
Where has humanity gone  
Who have we become  
Can we go back to when we were born  
So alive  
So much feeling  
So much emotion  
Where have we gone to?

#BRING BACK THE LOVE

# Acceptance – Moving On

*Agatha Sibanda*

I'm just going to hold this pen and paper  
And allow it to flow as it engraves these  
Pages with what's from the heart.  
I am confused  
My mind and heart can't come to an agreement  
A conclusion  
A mutual understanding.  
Letting go of you has already happened in my mind  
But my heart still holds on and has done so more than it has for anyone.  
Why Why Why? I ask myself that all the time.

Why, little girl?!

You're not appreciated anymore  
You're always blamed for everything  
She is tired of you, can't you see  
You don't bring happiness in her life anymore  
You're a burden now  
Thoughts of you depress her.

Baby girl!

Anyone who does not see the happiness you bring to life does not  
deserve you.  
You're amazing  
You're beautiful  
You're smart  
Be proud  
Stand firm and do what's right for you.

# 2016 Turning Point

*Agatha Sibanda*

You came and you gave me hope just like every New Year

You revealed yourself

I showed you who I was and my capabilities

2016, you came with ego and pride

You wanted to be the boss

You hated me

I tried working with you

Showing you some old tricks

Yearning to learn new tricks from you

2016, you never wanted to be tamed

You took my world

You took my life

You shook me hard

You left me dizzy

Stripped me of my independence

My human rights

My beliefs

And you made me forget who I was

You made me lose myself

You had me feeding off your hands like a baby who depends on breast  
milk

2016, you destroyed me

I hated you, for all the challenges you gave me

For leaving me in a deep dark hole to fend for myself

How could you?

How did you?

Why did you?

You made me flee  
Flee for protection  
Flee for freedom  
You stripped me naked and dumped me in a foreign place  
What did I ever do to you?

Like a baby I started crawling, I had to learn to walk again  
I stumbled and fell a few times but I got up  
My pace increased  
I started running and man did it feel so good

2016

You were never at fault  
You came  
You saw a weak girl that needed to be a strong woman  
You taught me life's lessons  
You left me at the deep end not because you wanted to kill me but  
Because you were creating this woman (the woman I am today)

Here's to you, 2016  
I see you, Namaste!  
You conquered  
This bold, strong, black woman right here has been tamed.

# Cheers

*Letitia Wallace*

Me and my friend Matt always dread when our friend Amy invites us out, and we debate about it for a while together reminiscing about how she's been in the past.

'Well, she will be drunk because she always is,' Matt says.

'Yeah, but we always end up having a laugh,' I say. It's around 5.30pm now and we're headed out of Matt's bedroom where we always hang out, no matter what the conversation.

'Come on then, I'll text her to let her know we're leaving,' Matt rants. We continue to talk about the adventures that await us as we're nearly at the bus stop. Amy has the capability of turning most normal days into something interesting; we call her *the livewire* as she's so unpredictable. 'Here's the bus so I'll message her that we're on it now,' Matt says. 'She just texted me saying she's just leaving now. Ahh I'm dreading this, there's always drama but I just don't want to be stuck in the house all day.'

We've been sat on the bus for about five minutes now, and I can see the look of sheer 'can't be arsed' on Matt's face. 'Whatever happens it'll be funny,' I say, in an attempt to lighten the mood.

'Yeah I suppose,' Matt huffs. We're in town now and it's just the waiting game; many buses pass by but Amy doesn't seem to be on them. Fifteen minutes later, Amy appears off of a bus.

'Hellooo,' in that familiar tone she has that I think is just for us. She has a bag big enough to fit a bottle or two.

'So, what's on the menu?' I ask.

'Well, I have prosecco, and Red Bull and vodka,' Amy says. 'I've been drinking since about 2pm.' Amy laughs while Matt gives me a look of disappointment and 'I told you so'.

'So what are we doing then?' Matt asks.

'I dunno, we could just sit in some place?' I suggest.

'Nah let's just sit out here and drink,' Amy says.

'Eugh,' Matt huffs, 'Let the fun begin.'

Amy has cups in her bag so she pours us a drink. We put our cups together and toast to the night ahead.

'Cheers.'

# Letters n Pigeons

*Claire Hornby*

Pass, blend, hide  
Kiss ass, pretend, self-deny  
Shirk it n work it  
But never catch the eye

No  
This straightjacket racket  
Kills me inside  
Cuz in here I'm queer  
A rollercoaster ride

So  
Disable the labels  
Drop the disguise  
Don't whore me or bore me  
Don't make me a lie

No  
See me n free me  
From being girl or guy  
No refinery of the binary  
Just blow it sky high!

# Return Fire

*Claire Hornby*

'Oi! Tranny!'  
Ain't words I've heard  
Applied to me

By contrast  
My friend has

Some clowns in town  
Thought it'd be a gas  
To give her a blast  
Of that slur

Neither shaken nor stirred  
She stood up n returned  
'Oi! Wankers!'

N those wankers burned!



# Photo

*Claire Hornby*

Last Christmas together  
Hubby and I  
Nostalgia for love  
Greying blue eyes

Haste of a photo  
Hubby by my side  
We stand against time  
Mortal not divine

Pumped oxygen gasps  
Tuts and sighs  
Keeps on until mourning  
Then silence cries.

Now four-year photo  
No use I find  
Picture got distorted  
The clarity's in my mind

# Pride After the Fall

*Claire Hornby*

It may have two cathedrals on a street called Hope, but I never expected to find God in Liverpool!

It happened at Pride, of all places, and I don't mean the placards proclaiming 'God Hates Fags' (*He should give up smoking then!*). I mean the real deal: a religious revelation on the flyover as we marched back to St George's Hall. Maybe that's the danger of marching behind St Brides, but who knew Christianity was so infectious! All I knew was I suddenly had an itch I needed to scratch.

I could've ignored it, told myself I was mad but, no, off to St Brides I went. It is a forbidding giant of a building, all Roman columns and marble. Not being able to see inside, I almost lost my nerve. But inside I found reassurance in the wooden pews and the smell of damp. This was Church as nostalgic childhood memories. Even so, my head was filled with questions: Would they try to convert me? Tell me I was a sinner? Lay on hands? If they did, I'd be out of there like a rocket!

But, no, this is Scouseland, and so I got a traditional, open-hearted Scouse welcome (even though one of them, Warren, is Australian). Then we broke bread and shared a meal. I may've only half meant it at the time but I followed the ritual all the same:

1. Pass the tasteless bit of bread around
2. Try to digest it without gagging for water
3. Drink the wine that, disappointingly, is actually Shloer
4. Take care to wipe the cup with the holy napkin so you don't pass your germs around
5. Be all polite and genteel (Some call it 'reverence')
6. Say a prayer or two
7. Remember you do this in remembrance of Jesus

I found out later this is called The Eucharist. It was all very solemn but the conversation before and after wasn't and the proper grub was proper good too!

I've had many memorable times around that table now. Like the time

one of us bemoaned the lack of a decent chippy (apparently, it's to do with the fat the Chinese use) and we all chipped in with our faves. Mine's Yanni's, opposite Debenham's – they do a mean veggie burger and chips. Maybe it's the fat the Greeks use?

Then there was the time Kieran toasted the 'saltiness' of folk, only for me to then say 'fuck' – in the house of God, for fuck sake! But that's what I really like about St Brides: I don't need to mind my Ps and Qs. Their motto's 'Come as you are' (*cue Nirvana song*) and I do. I go exactly as I am. As Warren jokes, they're so tolerant, they even welcome Tories!

Almost a year's passed by now. I've even been to Christianity classes and lately bought a Bible. God knows what my hubby, John, would think of that! (*Probably!*) We always used to chuck the Bible on top of the wardrobe when we stayed in hotels. Now I have it beside me on the sofa. But if John's death proved anything to me, it's that I can't predict the future.

Who knew I would find God at Pride? Come to that, who knew I would find pride in God?

# 1 + 1 = ?

*Claire Hornby*

'I'm sorry, Mrs Littlejohn,' said Mrs Lane, 'but, after what Roxy told us, we just don't think you're suitable.'

I tried to protest my innocence over the phone but she wasn't having any of it. Instead, she kept on about how I'd crossed boundaries.

She was from the RSPCA and Roxy was my cat. In court, people were so amazed a cat could talk, they never even stopped to think she might be lying. I've had to move because of her. I'm a social pariah! I've even had my golf club membership cancelled.

Meanwhile, she's become somewhat of a celebrity – in fact, she's even been on *I'm a Celebrity* and all the talkshows. She makes it sound like some kind of trauma she's been through. But going on *Ellen* was taking the biscuit. She knows full well how I feel about her. I think she did it just to spite me. Ellen was where it all started...

I'd just sat down on the sofa in the front room, turned on the TV and there she was.

'Oh God, not Ellen!' I exclaimed. 'The last thing I want is that creature on my screen. Isn't that right, Roxy?' I said as she wandered in and hopped up on the footstool.

'If there's a sure sign this country's lost its way, it's having lesbians on our screens,' I continued. 'Isn't that right, darling?' But Roxy rested her head between her paws and pretended not to hear.

She's a beautiful cat. I got her from the RSPCA almost three years ago now. She's a black and white Norwegian Forest Cat (or 'Wegie' as we cat lovers call them) with such a beautiful face. The cameras love it. It's no wonder her shampoo sells like hot cakes, either, with her luscious long hair. I used to love running my fingers through it. It was a nuisance, though, when she was moulting, no sooner had I hoovered it up than there it was again.

I'm surprised her perfume sells so well, though. Who wants to smell like a cat? You might as well be a fishwife! But how I adore her. She was such a blessing after my husband, Dicky, died. Anyway, I'm digressing...

Finding nothing on the TV, I turned it off. 'Honestly, Roxy, what do I pay a TV licence for if they're gonna put degenerates like that on it?'

Roxy rounded on me. 'Honestly, just what is your problem?' she asked angrily.

I was dumbstruck. She'd never spoken before, but now I come to think of it, she's got quite a sexy voice – not unlike Joanna Lumley's in the way it purrs.

'Seriously, I get it. You don't like lesbians,' she continued. 'But you really ought to take a look at yourself. I've never seen such a case of internalised homophobia.'

I was taken aback by this and asked her to explain herself.

'Well, I'm a girl and you're a girl. So you do the maths,' she replied.

'But I'm not having sex with you,' I protested. 'Besides, it's perfectly normal for humans to love cats, no matter what their gender.'

'Oh, come on now,' she replied. 'Do you seriously think it's wrong for two girls to love each other if they're the same species, but not if they're different?'

'Well, um... er... I don't know,' I stuttered.

'Exactly. You're warped!'

'I'm warped? I'm not the one suggesting I'm some kind of queer! I'm not even having sex with you!' I exclaimed.

'Maybe not,' she replied, 'but you do almost everything but! You share your bed with me. You kiss me. You cuddle me. You pet me and call me all the sweet nothings under the sun. I know lesbians who've been in relationships for twenty years who do less than that.'

I protested again that I was not a lesbian, that I'd been married to Dicky for forty years, but that didn't seem to cut any ice with her.

'So you got turned by a cat? Wait till I go to the *Mail* with that one,' she said. 'I can see it now: "Cat Turns Woman Rug Muncher!" I'll earn a fortune.'

'I think, "Cat Can Talk!" will earn you far more,' I replied sarcastically.

At that she shook her head despairingly at me. So I challenged her as to why she had never protested before, since she clearly had a problem with me.

You know how she replied? 'Because I never felt someone like you was worth speaking to.'

It was so hurtful of her. I threatened to take her back to the RSPCA. She screeched, 'Do it! I dare you!'

So I did dare... and then she made up her ridiculous story about me molesting her. As a result, I was charged with bestiality and taken to court. The case was mercifully short. But I lost it. Now I have to sign the sex offenders register – even though we never had sex.

So now what do I have to look forward to? I've lost the light of my life and, even if I wanted to, Mrs Lane won't let me replace her.

Oh, of all the things we could've talked about, why did it have to be an argument about lesbians?

# My Journey

## *Namayesa*

'Hey! Matthews, wake up, it's time to get ready for school.' This was the song my mum used to sing to wake me and my little brother up. Those were chilly, foggy mornings. I hated mornings so much all my childhood.

I remember pretending to snore heavily whenever my ears caught the sound of footsteps coming towards my bedroom. 'Oh! It's another fucking going to school day,' I whispered to myself each and every weekday morning. My mum was horrible to me anytime I asked her if she had seen my school uniform. She was like, 'Did you put your school uniform in my nose?'

Good old days! Those days I used to cry so hard if my Mum didn't give me some coins for lunch at school. Me and my friends walked ten kilometres every morning to school, barefoot. Some days the sun was so harsh on us and the soil was getting too hot to walk on barefoot. So we used to improvise sandals from jackfruit tree leaves.

After school, we played football on a dust covered ground with bare feet as well. Regardless of all these things, I was always happy. I had nothing to worry about. All I knew was that after playing I'd go home and find Mam had cooked *nsima* and *masamba a mtedza*, without even thinking where that food comes from and what it takes to get that food on the table.

Going to school in those days brought prestige, and I remember speaking boastfully in broken, memorised and incorrectly pronounced English to my friends, to whom school was alien.

In my life I have had a huge number of friends, but there was one lad my memory will never get rid of. This tall, dark and hulk-bodied guy was bad company for me. He was so bullying and his ways of treating those who disagreed with him were similar to Adolf Hitler's. Ganizani was so dark and we used to call him Idi Amin Dada. He always forced me to join him in absconding from classes. Then we would go swimming to a nearby river, covered in mosses and sewage from a community tank.

One day my mam realised that I was not attending classes as normal. She started checking my exercise books every day after school. When I told Ganizani about it, he came up with an idea that any day I missed classes I would just copy exercises from a book and Gani would mark it as a teacher.

After a while I finished my primary school and was selected to attend a secondary boarding school. The first time I stepped onto the school campus, I knew that life was hugely different from primary school. New students were being bullied and teased by older students. I remember one night I was sitting on a lower bunk of one of the Colonial-era beds reading a novel, when a fierce looking older student peered through the window, which had broken glass.

He shouted, 'Hey! You *yarro*, stop whatever you're doing and start sleeping.'

I started shivering and my whole body was attacked by fear. I abruptly engulfed myself in my itchy, prickly and prison-designed blankets. I was given this blanket as a present from my uncle, who was a prison officer, when I got selected.

After a few minutes the same student came back again and shouted, 'Hey! Are you asleep?'

With fear, I replied, 'Yes, I am sleeping.' Honestly, if I knew what was going to happen I would not have answered.

He said, 'Who the hell on earth talks when he is asleep?' He came into my room and started beating me with heavy fists.

In secondary school I learnt enormous things about life. I got to know so many people and I knew myself very well. In my last year I knew a shy, slim guy with an oval-shaped face. This little creature was very handsome. I was sharing a room with Jere and wondered about him being so girly. Sometimes he wore makeup.

One day Jere asked me, 'Matthews, are we going to have a shower together?'

I was like, 'That's total insanity. Men can't shower together.'

With the beautiful tone of his voice he managed to bombard me with verbs that enticed me to go and shower with him. It was a very awkward moment and I was abashed to take my pants down.

Little by little it became our habit to shower together – and the best



thing ever to do on Earth. Eventually I discovered the truth about myself. I realised that I don't get interested in *akazi* (women). I tried everything I could to deny this reality, since being homosexual is seen to be taboo and worthy to be killed for in my country.

I vowed to myself to keep my sexuality secret. I was afraid of rejection by parents, friends. I was afraid of losing friends, being mocked, being arrested and even losing my life. This time of concealing my sexuality was self-imprisonment. I was in a prison without bars. Two years later, after I realised my sexuality, two men were arrested and sentenced to 14 years in prison for getting engaged. My mind was poisoned with fear and I couldn't think of anything positive. I thought I would be the next one, so I managed to hide the real Matthews in a closet for quite some solid years.

Teacher training college was a milestone for my homosexual life. I became so confident, strong and courageous enough to accept my sexuality. When my parents got the news that I am gay, they disowned me. I lost many friends and there was a time I nearly got expelled from college. A fat-bellied, bald-headed lecturer found me kissing my boyfriend Gideon. He then reported it to the college principal.

Being in a relationship for the first time was an interesting experience. For the first time in my life I had someone who loved me the most. Gideon and I were just like love birds. We used to do assignments together, eat together. Life was so sweet at this time. Gideon was so humble and loving and I loved the softness of his skin. All these things were happening in a dark, hidden world. We were afraid of being arrested, attacked and expelled from college.

Life is so unfair. My relationship with Gideon didn't last long. After college I was posted to work in the southern region of the country and Gideon was posted to the far north. This was the main destroyer of our relationship.

When I broke up with Gideon I got another boyfriend. His name was Sobuza. Sobuza was a foreigner in my country. He was from a country where homosexuality is legal. Because of that he found it hard to hide his sexuality and he was arrested. A week passed while he was in police custody, then he was bailed out. He then fled back to his country. This time I felt my freedom and happiness were very far away, just like a

distant star.

I had lots of dreams growing up in my country, but I am gay, I've got one strike against me. I wasn't allowed to love a person that my heart loved. Imagine love on this Earth where there is no hatred... and imagine hatred on this Earth where there is no love.

So many times I thought of having a break from all this hatred and from these heart-breaking situations and fears. I thought of fleeing my own motherland. But my heart wouldn't let me leave behind everything I'd known since childhood, because of selfish humans who justify their evil doings and criminalise love.

It reached a point that one evening a group of young men came and started stoning my house and shouting that their village is not Sodom and Gomorrah and I must leave. If I didn't they would slit my throat with a sharp, two-edged knife.

Finally, I got an opportunity to leave my country. I started having hopes that I would gain the freedom to love who my heart loves. But the day I left my country was the beginning of another chapter of struggle in my life. Upon arriving in the UK I met people who deceived me, saying they would get me the papers to stay in this country in exchange for looking after their baby. I was out of my country for the first time and ignorant about anything in the UK. These people took advantage of me and did whatever they could to me, then dumped me in limbo.

I stayed for a year inside their house without outside contact, because they told me that black people were not allowed outside. I became their babysitter and household worker without being paid a single penny. Instead of getting me the papers they promised, they started telling me that if I wanted to live in the UK I must start sleeping with older women. Being a young gay man this was very disturbing to hear and I realised these people were just taking advantage of me. When I told them that I couldn't do what they wanted, they got furious and kicked me out of the house.

I became homeless with no food, no money, and at this time I didn't know anything about the asylum-seeking process. But one day I met a certain man who, after hearing my story, advised me to go to the Home Office and explained what it is all about. I went there on two different occasions. The first time, they wouldn't see me without an

appointment because I had no address. On the second occasion I was denied a screening interview again. I explained that I was homeless but they insisted I must have an address because I had been in the UK for almost a year.

This time I lost hope. I would never have thought this could happen to me when I fled my country. I was sleeping on the stinking, dirty floor of a car park full of drug addicts and violent people. All I wanted now was to be arrested or dead. So many times I went to the top floor of the car park to throw myself down, or thought of committing a crime, but my conscience wouldn't let me.

One night a group of police officers came in and raided the car park, looking for petty criminals. When they found me, covered with a small blue sleeping bag, they started questioning me. After I told them my story one police officer wrote a note and gave it to me to take to the Home Office. This time, I was taken in and given accommodation. It was the happiest day of my life in the UK. I remember meeting lots of people with different languages and different stories from different parts of the world.

The asylum process can be the most depressing and stressful to go through. But for me it has been different, I felt like I got my freedom. I was able to meet people, have friends, join groups that don't judge me.

Life is really full of ups and downs. I remember when I was homeless, one guy told me that there is no progress without struggle. I am a believer in that shit. I struggled a lot and am struggling still in my life.

# Could It Be Magic?

*Paul Amann*

The plan had to work; Jamie nearly called the whole thing off with his reluctance to go back, not wanting, in his words, to have 'that homophobic witch touch my food'. The weather helped to persuade him, without forcing me to tell him of our scheming, with a downpour that left Mount Pleasant flowing.

As Jamie and I enter the Reilly Bar in the basement of the Students Union Guild building, I spot Hassan and Rodriguez first, then Sofia and Prisha together with Chad and Ivan. Only on joining the queue do I realise that the last of the conspiracy, Sum and Wei Wei, are being served.

'Cheese and ham toastie, and a tea please,' I ask the bored middle-aged woman at the till as Sum and Wei Wei go to find seats. Jamie pushes at me.

'Can you get mine? I'm a bit short.'

'Yeah,' I say, 'Make that two, Short-arse has forgotten his purse.'

Bored woman tuts, saying, 'That'll be £4.60 and some manners.'

'Sorry,' I drawl, pushing a fiver into her pudgy hand.

We grab a booth near the back, the old varnish on the wooden bench seats scratching our jeans as we slide in. Our mugs of steaming tea compete with a smouldering ashtray to thicken the Reilly Bar's atmosphere. Stereo MC's 'Pressure' punctuates the background chatter. I notice Jamie glaring at me whilst taking languid pulls on a Silk Cut.

'What?' I ask archly.

'You're the vertically challenged one,' he cuts back, missing my quip.

'And you're permanently *short* of cash,' I say with emphasis and a smug look. 'But seriously, I'm forever forking out for you.'

'Diddums,' he replies equally smugly, 'you know I'm worth it,' with a leer that would have made Sid James jealous.

'Were worth it,' I remind him. 'That ship sailed a long time ago. Mike's taking me places you never managed.'

'Too much information,' he giggles. 'I really don't need to think of your cum face when we're about to eat!'

We both collapse into helpless mirth, comfortable with each other as friends that know each other quite literally inside and out.

‘You’re too much, you know,’ I tell him.

‘Why thank you,’ he sings out, ‘that must be the first time I’ve ever been complimented on my endowment!’

‘That I can believe, I think “chode” was invented to describe yours.’ I giggle as he glares at me again, before failing to hold in yet another round of laughter.

‘Well it works, and Dave and Steve aren’t complaining,’ he says, leaning forward conspiratorially, his Morrissey-esque quiff seeming to reach halfway across the table, finally revealing that he hadn’t just had a lift home when he left me in Reflections on Saturday night.

‘I knew it, you complete slut!’ I say as his eyes twinkle with the remembered pleasures of the weekend.

‘Thought you’d be pleased that I was getting some,’ he smiles, tapping his nearly finished Silk Cut.

‘Oh I am,’ I say with feeling, ‘At least now I don’t have to keep explaining to Mike’s mates that I’m not messing him around.’

Radio City’s DJ announces Take That’s ‘Could It Be Magic’, just as the bored woman brings over the toasties.

Jamie squeals with delight, ‘I love Robbie!’ jumping to his feet, nearly sending scalding tea and the bored woman over.

‘Sorry,’ I’m saying before I think, ‘He gets like this over him.’

She tuts again, ‘It’s disgusting.’ Hands on hips, apron taut across her ample chest, she glares at us both.

I am fuming, but this time I think first. Take That had provided the pretext ahead of schedule. ‘Really?’ I said. ‘Glad you warned us because there’s no way I’m eating your vile food.’

We push past her, as Sum and Wei Wei stand up, then Hassan and Rodriguez followed by Chad and Ivan, and finally Sofia and Prisha. I turn and face her.

‘We’ve had enough of your disapproval, your constant tutting at us all, your frowns and sneers. Yes we’re queers but we have rights,’ I declare right in her face.

Her face aghast, she is finally speechless, with the ten of us together right in front of her.

'No more slights, we have rights!' Rodriguez sings out, smiling.

'It's 1992, not 1952,' says Chad, his massive afro awobble.

'Gays bash back!' shouts Ivan, with some menace.

She blanches, as the handful of other customers look on.

'¡No pasarán!' says Rodriguez, no longer smiling.

'Our families have values too,' explains Hassan, 'you can't carry on treating us like shit.'

Together we chant: 'One, Two, Three, Four! Open up the closet door!'

Jamie finally clicks in, joining us as we continue: 'Five, Six, Seven, Eight! Don't assume your kids are straight!'

We chant this solidly for a couple of minutes. She seems near to tears as she retreats behind the counter. Our point seems to be made.

'Just because Jamie's camp and sweet, doesn't give you the right to behave like that. Treat us *all* with dignity, or we'll be back with *all* of our friends,' says Prisha with elegant menace, her salwar kameez swirling as she turns to leave. Take That segues into U2's 'Pride' as we walk out, heads held high.

We head out to Otty's Cafe where at least the woman serving won't give a damn about our peccadilloes. Not least as we regularly see her serving burgers and chips at the hatch in Jodie's. As we head out of The Guild bright sunlight creates a rainbow and we skip and sashay in Doc Martens and trainers over puddles towards Myrtle Parade.

'I don't know what to say.' Jamie speaks quietly. 'You guys planned this all out?'

'It was the least that we could do,' Wei Wei explains. 'You always listen to our tales of woe and heartbreak.'

'You always welcome new people,' smiles Chad. 'It was time for the world you welcome in, to stand by your side.'

'Stop it, you'll have me ruin my concealer,' protests Jamie, 'and that just won't do!'

# Queer Fear

*Paul Amann*

Homophobia: a complex word, an excuse  
To vent your strange abuse.  
A word of academics  
That cuts through to harsh effects.

What drives your need to fear?  
Can you not bear to be so near?  
Another man, holding hands,  
Dreaming of, distant lands.

To shout, to punch, to kick, to scream  
At difference that dares to dream.  
Is all your anger at love expressed?  
Yet it's you that's now oppressed.

# Nobody Seems to Understand Me

*Rodrick Kazembe*

Darkness comes beneath the dying stars  
With all blood and scars,  
My mouth hunts you.  
With fear I appear,  
Nothing will stop me.  
You, crave creature inside me  
Shattered, I will capture you,  
So run.

People around me refuse to understand  
What I go through.  
Underdiagnosed for ages  
It never broke through.

I've never been able to do  
The shit I'm supposed to do.  
I wouldn't wish it on anyone I'm close to.  
I wouldn't wish it on anybody I'm opposed to.  
There is no accurate diagnosis to show you  
Basic neurobiology isn't close to it.

I'm watching life as a spectator,  
I can't help myself though I'm a grown-ass man.  
They think they know what I'm feeling

I'm having problems in retaining new information.  
Familiar scenes begin to look foreign – derealisation.  
I'm tired of being patient.  
My Mama wondering why I'm always crying in the basement,



Constant rumination just exacerbates it  
To the extent that I can barely narrate it.  
I've had doctors telling that my mind is fascinating  
But they can't tell me why the sickness is constantly worsening.

My head hardly works.  
My meds hardly work,  
But I don't want to be dead.  
Probably I would rather be dead  
Perhaps dead don't get hurt

Realisation of an inherent emptiness  
Maybe that's another sin of the pessimist,  
Possibly I am a jinn with an exorcist.  
Maybe it's my Mama's possible regret  
Or it's neurological neglect,  
Maybe it's a reason why water is wet.

Maybe I'm being too complicated for you.  
Maybe I should just be calm and explain to you.

The psychiatrists think they can fool me,  
Quetiapine, Paxil is just wasteful to me.  
I've tried meditation, tried to sit in silence  
But how the fuck will that help neurochemical imbalance?

Why would you tell me I'm childish,  
Without understanding the pain I'm surrounded in?  
I always feel foggy, somatic detachment.  
It's like my body is not connected to actions.  
I don't have nothing but a sense of sadness.

# Lost Ones

*Shelique Braithwaite*

We're livin' in a lost generation,  
a place where segregation and deprivation  
is ruling the population...

Controlled by the media,  
*listen to what they're feedin ya...*  
Hatred has become so normalised,  
when did we lose the ability  
to see with our own eyes?

Innocent Muslims labelled as terrorists,  
personally I'm sick of hearing this!

A young boy is shot down in front of you  
and what do you do?  
You pull out your phone, take a pic  
and upload it to the Internet –  
morals, respect, is there any of that left?

A kid comes out with something daft,  
what do you say?  
*'Ahhhh lad that's SO GAY'*  
PLEASE, please do not use the word in that way...

**Lost ones I hope one day you find your way.**

# You

## *Shelique Braithwaite*

Our immediate connection  
Disguised your poisonous intentions

The constant jealousy  
And your countless enemies

Tears and laughter  
Talks of our 'happily ever after'

Verbal fights  
The cause of many sleepless nights

Occasional threats  
The smell of menthol cigarettes

Plans that never did take place  
That doubtful look on your face

Compliments and romantic gestures  
A possible weekend away in Manchester

The opposite to the Midas touch  
Everything good you managed to crush

You said I was your soulmate  
The two of us meeting must have been fate

Continuously telling me that I was 'the one'  
One month later and you've already moved on

They say that opposites attract – I guess they do  
Never again will I fall for a person like you.

# Symbolic Logic

*Trisha McKeon*

Concentric circles  
seeking intersection

Overlapping happens  
by chance or by design

Will I know you when I meet you?

Longing for acceptance  
We spin out and we spin in

Longing to belong  
We find our place, our space

Will I know you when I meet you?

In this Venn diagram of life

# Brides of Christ

*Trisha McKeon*

As I push the door the bell pings above my head. I'm assaulted by sensations unearthed from childhood. The sour undertone of fruit, just on the right side of rotting, competes with the comforting aroma of freshly baked bread – crusty, brown soda bread. But the overwhelming smell is of boiling bacon and cabbage drifting from the kitchen, which hides behind a drape of multi-coloured plastic strips. They have seen better days and several strips are missing, like absent teeth. I feel a familiar rush of anxiety, but I know I have nowhere to go. To ping my way back out the door would draw too much attention, so I drift down the aisle, basket purposefully hanging from my arm, choosing items I neither need nor want. Picking them up, I examine them as though seeking the meaning of life and, shaking a disappointed head, I put them back on the shelf.

I know Tom's shop as well as I know my own home. Nothing has changed. There is still the array of penny sweets in plastic bottles on the shelves behind the counter. Blackjacks to blacken your tongue; stripy, aniseed Bulls-eyes that had once made me cry to my mother, fretting about all the poor eyeless bulls in Ireland. And my favourites, the delicately coloured satin cushions and succulent coconut mushrooms. My mouth waters and I wonder whether I could ask him to fill a little brown paper bag and weigh it, just for my inner child!

A tiny elderly woman is standing at the counter. I feel I should lift her up so that she can see over the wooden barrier. I am reminded of a nun, Sister Pious, who had to stand on her special foot-high *ardán* to enable her to write on the blackboard.

No! Could that be her? Could it be Sister Pious without her nun's habit? It's difficult to tell because the nuns had never seemed human enough to do something as common as shopping. But it is her, in a little grey skirt and cardigan, with sensible shoes and a neat head of white hair. To see a nun's hair was a sin. They had it shaved off when taking vows and getting their veil; and to see their hair would be to see them as real women. We should see them as 'Brides of Christ'! I can taste the chalk dust and the fountain

pen ink as I remember a game we played called 'Bless me Father for I have sinned', which would be followed by something daring like 'I have wondered if Christ knows his bride is shaggin' another nun 'cos they're all lezzers up at the convent.' We thought we were hilarious. It was my first exposure to the idea that lesbians existed and to the attitude towards them.

Oh, dear Jesus, please don't let them recognise me.

'Isn't a great day altogether, Tom?' says Sister Pious.

'Oh 'tis that, Pious, 'tis a great country when the sun is shining! Will it last, do you think?'

'According to the forecast it's supposed to break at the weekend. We'll have enough of it by then. Please God the lads will have the hay saved anyway. Even if we're back to the rain, sure 'tis better than a drought. But you can never rely on the weather forecast anyway, can you, Tom? That one that gives it after the evening news is only half dressed. What would she know about it with her skirt more like a belt?'

'True for you, Pious, true for you. But, I'll tell you now: keep an eye on the sheep.'

'The sheep, Tom?'

'When they're up the hill it'll stay fine and when they come down 'twill rain.'

'Well now, I never heard that one before. I heard about the swallows flying low all right. It's supposed to be a sign of rain, because the midges fly low and the swallows follow them. Sister Anne heard on the radio that if you get three days over 25 degrees then that's a heatwave. But sure, who'd wish that on us? The heat would kill us.'

'Be Jesus – oh sorry Sister, be jeepers – but I'd say we have that already. Great for the Vitamin D, Pious, they say it does wonders for man, beast and country!'

Hiding behind the magazine stand, I pretend to be interested in the vacuous lives of celebrities, while listening to a conversation in the language of my childhood. Meanwhile Tom is ringing up Sister Pious's items and packing them into her much-recycled Tesco bag.

1 white sliced pan

Package of ham

1 block of cheddar cheese

2 tomatoes

‘Is that Nellie’s soda bread?’ Pious interrupts proceedings.

‘‘Tis of course, I’d be in trouble if I sold anyone else’s.’

‘I’ll put back the sliced pan so, Tom, and take the soda bread instead. You know what,’ she continues, ‘I’ll take one of the rhubarb tarts as well. No one makes a rhubarb tart like Nellie. Wait a minute now and I’ll go down and get a block of ice-cream to go with it.’

Hiding in the magazine, I’m only missing a long raincoat and trilby to complete my private eye ensemble. But Sister Pious barely glances at me as she purposefully forages in the freezer for the block of vanilla ice-cream. She needs to stand on her tiny tippy-toes as she reaches in and for one moment I have an urge to topple the little nun into the freezer in reparation for the years of anxiety she had caused me.

‘Will you be able to manage carrying all that back to the convent, Pious?’ asks Tom.

‘I’ll manage all right,’ she says, ‘though that heat might be the death of me. I’ll get one of those young bucks on their bikes to help me. I see Johnny Sheehan out there, he’ll bring it for me. *Slán* now Tom and God bless you.’ Sister Pious takes her leave, safe in the knowledge that she still commands the obedience of the young and the respect of the old.

‘*Slán* Pious and God bless you too.’ He rushes to open the door for her.

‘Eighty-two she is,’ he says to me, inclining his head toward the door, ‘and as sharp as a pin. Wait a minute, will you, ’til I run in and turn down that pot or the spuds will be in smithereens.’

‘Now. Isn’t it a grand day,’ he starts as he reappears, stooping as he pulls the coloured plastic strips aside. He returns to his kingdom behind the counter; the wooden high stool, his throne, shiny from years of his arse holding court.

‘Beautiful,’ I reply, wondering if the entire weather-based conversation will begin again. ‘Just this magazine and two 99s,’ I say, having ditched the empty basket.

‘Are you here on holiday? By God, you got the weather for it,’ he says.

I hesitate, not sure how to answer this question. ‘No Tom,’ I say looking up at him, ‘I’m Roisín Kenny, from out Lios Aird.’

‘*Wisha*, is it yourself? Sure, you were only a girleen when I saw you last. God bless us, I heard your mammy isn’t well. Is that what has you

home?’

‘Yes, Tom, she’s not well at all. We’re hoping this round of treatment will help.’ I use the pronoun ‘we’ quite loosely, because I have very little information about my mother’s condition.

‘Oh ’tis a terrible disease all right. Poor Maura O’Flaherty was buried last month. I’d say she would have been your go, though she was Maura Dempsey then, but married Dara O’Flaherty from out Glengoose. You’d know her if you saw her. It was a huge funeral. Poor Dara is heartbroken and she left those lovely little girls. Sure, we know not the day nor the hour.’

‘Sorry now Tom,’ I butt in before I get a litany of all the deaths in the parish over the past year. ‘I don’t want to rush you, but I have to get home. Just the magazine and the two 99s.’ I know that this will be considered rude and that what he wants is some bit of a story to relate to his customers.

(He’d live off: ‘Roisín Kenny home for the Mother. I don’t know how that’ll go. I heard they haven’t talked in years. They fell out over Roisín and that girl. I don’t know what truth there was in it but there was an awful furore at the time and the Mother wasn’t one bit happy. Sure, she’s a lovely girl though she has a few of those tattoos on her arms. I don’t know at all what makes them do that to themselves.’)

‘Be sure to tell your Mammy I was asking for her.’

‘I will thanks, Tom,’ I say, making my way out of the shop.

I know that as soon as I leave the shop Tom will be peering through the dirty, flyblown window with its faded packets of custard and cornflakes and ancient tins of USA assorted biscuits. His eyes will peer between the sun-bleached buckets and spades, beach balls and the occasional, unexpected piece of farm machinery.

I know that he’ll be watching as I bring the ice-cream cone and hand it to Emer and he’ll be watching as we lick our ice-cream with indulgent, teasing tongues and as we push the flake down the cone, biting off the point so we can suck the ice-cream out the end. And he will watch as we play like children sitting on the wall, swinging our legs. He will keep watching as we walk hand in hand towards the beach.

Then he’ll have his story.

Emer and I sit with the scutch-grassed, shifting sandhills at our backs.



We inhale salty Atlantic air and watch as the thrashing waves toss rubber-clad surfers onto the beach. We curl our toes into luxurious soft sand, and are lulled into a quietness, created by the warm breeze, breaking waves and children's laughter.

'I've lost the language of this country. It's been ten years since I've been here and all that's changed is me. I had forgotten. Emer, I don't know if I can do this.'

When Daddy called me, I had been stunned into inactivity. 'What should I do?' I asked him.

'I don't know, a *leanbh*, you'll have to decide that for yourself. But you know, we'll be lucky to have her until the end of the month.'

And I had returned and here I am, still not knowing what to do, looking out to sea for answers.

But what the frothy blue-green waves and the white foam bring is memories of Mammy, when she was Mammy, a kind woman full of hugs and laughter. This beach was our own special country, just the two of us, building castles, carrying buckets of water, splashing up from the ocean to make our moat. We'd collect shells and stones and feathers as though we were the bower birds of the beach. We'd bury our legs and then running into the freezing ocean, we'd throw ourselves backwards into the frothing breakers. I was her little girl then.

But the softness of those memories is tainted by the cruel words that were spoken, years later.

Daddy had continued paying for me to go to university and we spoke occasionally but as he said, 'I've no power over her. She's a stubborn woman.' I don't know if he tried to talk her round or if she ever talks about me. I gave up asking.

'Emer, what if she dies and I haven't seen her. Would I ever forgive myself? Would I ever forgive her?'

Emer fishes my phone out of my bag and hands it to me. I take a deep breath of the strong Atlantic air. 'Daddy, can you come and get me please? We'll be outside Tom's.'



# About the Writers

**Binta Ochola** is a feminist and political activist who was born in Uganda to a Kenyan mother and a Ugandan father, both now deceased. She went to Mbarara University of Science & Technology (MUST) and did a postgraduate diploma in epidemiology. She started writing and poetry performance for her first time with Writing on the Wall in 2016, as a way of coping with the stress and depression that she was going through. She says: 'Writing is therapeutic, it is a relationship, it is a salvation and it is also life – otherwise I would be insane. My passion is loving and helping people, no matter who you are. It makes me feel alive to relate with fellow humans.'

**Chaldrine Ekobe** was born in Cameroon and due to discrimination and abuse regarding his sexuality he fled to the UK to escape imprisonment. He has a passion for educating people about the discrimination the international LGBT+ community faces in differing parts of the world.

**Imogen Christie** was born in the early 1960s in Glasgow. After having completed their schooling in pre-Thatcher Britain they became a bricklayer's apprentice at the age of 15. After many years of working in construction at home and abroad they returned to higher education later in life. This was the catalyst for a journey of emancipation and transition to finally become the girl who wrote this story. They would like to thank Writing on the Wall for giving them the vehicle to express this and their support in enabling them to do so.

**Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle aka Alison Stokes** is the one and only Liverpool Bernie Clifton tribute act, painting Liverpool with rainbow hearts and love. She is for Transgender woman power. A creative writer/poet, Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle rules the world riding an ostrich and has a friend who is a unicorn. Facebook: 'Liverpool Rainbow Sparkle' to book her for your events.

**Steven Benson** is an LGBT political and literary activist. He has lived in Aberystwyth, Swansea and Liverpool. He was involved with fighting Clause 28, and more recently co-founded and runs five local LGBTQ+ groups, including social, creative writing and book groups, which are still thriving. He writes LGBT studies/Queer Theory and hybrid material, bridging the gap between academic and creative writing. He has been published by the 2016 Liverpool Biennial and here is his blog: <https://towardsutopia.wordpress.com>

**Agatha Sibanda** is an aspiring poet/writer, musician and part time IT student. Born in Zimbabwe and raised in South Africa, she is currently living in Liverpool. Her life has turned around for the best since arriving here and she is hoping that this won't be the last time you see her name. She would define herself as a very ambitious young lesbian and believes she is redefining herself.

**Letitia Wallace** is a creative vagitarian who's powered by bacon, fluent in sarcasm and movie quotes. She has taken part in the Writing on the Wall project and is a people person but not a stupid people person.

**Claire Hornby** was born in a hospital. She grew up in a house and was educated in a school. Afterwards, she went to work in a big, brightly lit building with slidey doors. After twelve years of paid-for boredom, she decided to give it all up to learn expensive stuff. She currently shares her home with a cat, flies, art materials and damp. Her future ambition is to win at least one game of Russian Roulette.

**Namayesa** is a LGBT+ writer who was born on the African Continent.

**Paul Amann** is a long standing LGBT activist. From his time at NUS at the University of Liverpool in the early 90s, then on into the trade union UNISON, Paul has long campaigned for LGBT rights. In Liverpool he was instrumental in the establishment of Liverpool Pride and the Stanley Street Quarter. A keen football supporter, he played with and chaired Mersey Marauders FC from 2007 to 2012. From 2011 to date he has worked with Liverpool FC, getting them to march at Liverpool Pride, and setting up the LGBT supporters' group, Kop Outs. Paul married his husband in March this year, having met at the first Liverpool Pride. This book's theme of International Love is of particular relevance to Paul as both he and his husband are half-Trinidadian.

**Rodrick Kazembe** is a proudly gay man who was born and grew up in one of the smallest countries of South East Africa but currently lives in Liverpool. This is his first piece of work to be published.

**Shelique Braithwaite** is new to writing and feels it is important that voices from diverse backgrounds are heard. Shelique is a community activist and trustee at WoW. She also has a strong love for avocados and olives.

**Trisha McKeon** is an Irish woman who came to Liverpool three years ago and wouldn't leave. Her writing draws on her experiences growing up in Ireland, on life as a lesbian feminist and the wonders of being a woman, mother and grandmother. She lives in Liverpool with her partner (no cats!). Trisha writes short fiction and an occasional, often obscure poem. She is a member of the Merseyside LGBT Creative Writing group, which has become a hugely positive part of her life. This is her first piece of published writing, but hopefully not her last. She is, of course, working on her novel. This is Trisha's blog, which she'd love you to visit: <https://smileintherainblog.wordpress.com>



# Writing on the Wall

Special thanks to Liverpool Pride for choosing Writing on the Wall to help run this project and to produce this book of wonderful writing. Congratulations to all those who participated for producing such quality writing and being generous enough to share their stories with us.

Writing on the Wall is a dynamic, Liverpool-based community organisation that celebrates writing in all its forms. We hold an annual festival and a series of year-round projects. We work with a broad and inclusive definition of writing that embraces literature, creative writing, journalism and nonfiction, poetry, song-writing, and storytelling. We work with local, national and international writers whose work provokes controversy and debate, and with all of Liverpool's communities to promote and celebrate individual and collective creativity. WoW creative writing projects support health, wellbeing and personal development.

If you have a story to tell, or would like to take part in, or work with WoW to develop a writing project, please get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

**Mike Morris and Madeline Heneghan, Co-Directors**

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**WOW** WRITING  
ON THE WALL





# Liverpool Pride

Liverpool Pride is an entirely volunteer-led charity aiming to combat homophobia and transphobia across the Liverpool City Region and beyond. Our core values are that we are FREE, INCLUSIVE, VISIBLE and all about LIVERPOOL.

Formed in 2010 in response to the LGBT+ communities' outcry in the wake of the murder of young gay man Michael Causer, we have since produced an annual festival and a large number of smaller events to raise awareness of LGBT+ lives.

New volunteers are always welcome from board level to our invaluable community fundraisers to help us continue to develop our vision of a fully active, diverse and inclusive Pride.

To find out more information or get involved please get in touch.

*[www.liverpoolpride.co.uk](http://www.liverpoolpride.co.uk)*

*@LiverpoolPride*





