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Development Partnership

Bristol Festival of Ideas and  
The Mayor's Office present

# This is Our City

By Miles Chambers



# **This is Our City/** **Voices of the Paradox**

By **Miles Chambers**

Bristol's City Poet Laureate 2016-2018

Published by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership 2018



This book has been published to mark the end of Miles Chambers' term as Bristol's City Poet with the generous support of the Mayor's Office.

## Mayor of Bristol

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### Cover image captions

Front, inside front and back covers: Miles Chambers performing 'Bristol Bristol' at the event Contemporary Poets and Utopia, 20 May 2016. Inside back: Miles Chambers at the Mayor's Annual State of the City Address, 6 October 2016.

The events above were part of Bristol Festival of Ideas: [www.ideasfestival.co.uk](http://www.ideasfestival.co.uk)

## Bristol Festival of Ideas/

Designed by Qube Design Associates Ltd  
Printed by The Complete Product Company Ltd on FSC certified paper  
Published by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, Bristol BS8 3RA

Bristol Cultural Development Partnership is a partnership of the following organisations:



## Foreword/

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In May 2016, at my swearing-in as Mayor of Bristol, Miles Chambers performed his poem 'Bristol Bristol'. This poem has since become an anthem for our city.

I announced then that Miles would become Bristol's first City Poet Laureate. This publication marks the completion of his term of office.

As City Poet, Miles has written and performed work for civic, charitable, social and commercial organisations. He has also inspired and given voice to many young people in our city and to some of our most marginalised communities.

It was during a discussion of the impact of Miles' work and the role of the City Poet that the phrase 'journalists write facts, but poets capture the soul of the city' was used. Miles has captured much of the spirit of our city – its challenges, its opportunities, its strengths, its contradictions – and I am confident that this publication will be valued as a lasting legacy of his two years as our City Poet.

Poetry gives people a rare opportunity to share perspectives, to occupy the experiences of others and to see the world around us with others' outlooks. It is also to be valued in its own right as a creative act.

I am delighted to be able to present to you this selection of Miles' poems. I am grateful to him for all he has achieved as our very first City Poet, and to all those who have supported him.

Marvin Rees

## Mayor of Bristol

# The Poems/

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## Bristol Bristol

*Performed at the swearing-in ceremony for Marvin Rees as Mayor of Bristol, May 2016, and rewritten with Steve Duncan*

Bristol Bristol the city that was built on the bricks of heroic hardship.  
Bristol Bristol the place of dreams and possibilities, the place of creative aspirations, culture, commerce and its own seductive music

Bristol Bristol a place still haunted by the ancestral ghost that echoes the historical hangover that yet sobered us up to what time hasn't changed.  
Bristol Bristol. Take a walk. Be inspired. Feel the magical connection, see a positive future. Come dance in this festival of ideas

See, we don't have to wait for carnival every year. The party is right now right here  
this very stage, the very atmosphere is encouraging us to lose our fear  
'cause geographically there's no no-go areas round here

Stand on the suspension bridge, see the communities within a community integrated not segregated and in the distance you can almost reach out and grab Glastonbury

Oh city of paradoxes why all this controversy?  
Oh conflicting urbanisation I love you but what are you doing to me?

Amidst the beauty I regularly see the women of the street exploiting their femininity. Being exploited by their calamity

I love you Bristol. I love the clamour of the weekend drinkers and the hustle and the bustle of the 9-5

I hate you Bristol as I watch every day the young kiddy with the old weathered face in a Tesco shop doorway clinging to his blanket of security begging to survive.

I love you because of my first kiss from Samantha, because of the smell of Pieminister.

Because of the aroma of Agnes Spencer, because of the pull of colourful air balloons floating aimlessly in a blue sky.

I love you Bristol 'cause of the first play I wrote here, 'cause of the first film we shot here, 'cause of the first poem I performed here and left my inspired listeners with one notion; Just try!

I question the graffiti that glares at you echoing the voices of imprisoned youth. Then I hear a different cheer, the screams of Rovers and City fans on a Saturday morning celebrating a different truth.

I belong here Bristol amongst the riots and the protest,  
Amongst the fighting for equality  
I belong here Bristol amongst the ranters and the ravers, the Gospel singers, the multi-cultural students studying effectively  
I belong here Bristol with the Bristol blue taxis, the 'cheers drive' shirt and jeans top. Blokes braving the winter streets to look cool  
I belong here Bristol with the scantily clad beautified stiletto brigade wearing the same skirts they used to wear to school  
I belong here Bristol with the privileged pupils parading their privileged uniforms and the under-privileged not being encouraged to perform  
I belong here Bristol. You taught me the special secrets of wild life and movie makers can see the magic in this storm  
I belong here Bristol amongst the travellers and the hippies that ask me to think about life in a different way  
I belong here Bristol amongst those that visit to work and study and exclaim 'I just gotta stay'.  
I belong here Bristol with the 'Old Money' business and the entrepreneurs wheeling, dealing, trying to own this city  
I belong here Bristol with all those food-crazed ideas and food-crazed delicious somethings emulating whatshisname; Jamie

I belong here Bristol with the Bristol sound echoing sentiments of who I am flowing through my ears  
I belong here with the faith-based streets trying to get you to come to God with all your fears

Oh city of paradoxes where you going to take me today?  
Oh conflicting urbanization are you going to show me a better way?

So what fate awaits this colourful city?  
We need to consider every beneficial possibility.  
Transport punctuality  
Drugs and social policy  
Religion ethnicity  
Multiculturalism and unity  
Economy and prosperity  
Education and opportunity  
Business and creativity  
Media and honesty  
Religion and spirituality  
Acknowledgement and generosity

I belong here with the good schools offering a good future to a bad past. The bad schools offering a bad future to a good past. It's here on these streets that the youth are spitting the lyrics of the future that will change the wrong decisions of the past. I belong here! Right now in this place we have the opportunity to be something great, something amazing together... To utilize the collective potential of us all. That will make this place unique and special... Let's answer the call. I belong right here!

## **Bijan Ebrahimi**

***Bijan Ebrahimi was murdered by a neighbour in Brislington in 2013  
having repeatedly reported his life was in danger***

Iranian son, loyal child,  
Decent, dignified peaceful and mild,  
Nursed your parents in their infirmity  
Their welfare was your willing duty  
Supported them when they were elderly  
Despite your own disability  
Had to make sure they were living comfortably  
Put on hold your own family  
Came to England for better opportunity

Placed in devil's own community  
Lone voice wasn't taken seriously.  
Easier, than dealing with mass racists' hostility  
Ignorant congruency,  
Affiliation with psychopaths and authority.  
Was this living hell really a reality?  
Pretty roses cast away  
Trampled carnations sprawled along the pathway, smashed flower pots  
where naughty kids still play

Independent, despite your stance  
Embraced education IT, carpentry  
would help you advance  
Intelligent despite your speech,  
Perhaps one day maybe you'd teach.  
(Mojgan), (Manizhah) loving sisters your dear family  
Uncle Bijan shared many happy dinners on Sunday. Didn't tell them, didn't  
want them to worry

Faith in the police, respected British rules and authority  
Bijan thought they'd take care of me.  
Officer you suppose to care for me  
Officer you were suppose to do your duty,  
'Cause I was the single quiet voice I had nobody  
You let him down disastrously,  
Rejected phone calls and frustrated sighs  
Callous indifference and cold hard lies  
Demons using a respectable uniform as a disguise  
Trailer trash at his door with anger in their eyes  
Untrustworthy housing officers, Bijan stayed dignified

Tormenters calm, assailants still  
Sorry to disturb you; I'm worried for my life.

From nowhere they started to have a go  
PC Plod didn't want to know  
Wake me up, shake me give my cheek a pinch  
Was I dreaming? Was this 1950s Mississippi  
Did we just witness a lynch?  
How did this become a possibility  
In this conscious modern forward-thinking city  
we all should take responsibility  
Should of protected you from this horrific hostility  
Should of stood by you against your murderous enemy

I should have been your buddy,  
I'm sorry, I'm really sorry  
Not in our Bristol, not in our city

Sister tears flow down a grief-stricken face  
We're gonna get to the bottom of this, this is a disgrace  
IPCC officers pushed to find proof  
Passionate siblings bravely fighting for the truth  
Such courage amidst so much pain  
Ladan says, Bijan my brother, didn't die in vain  
Let's ensure this never ever happens again

Justice prevailed  
Guilty faces hung low  
People in high places had to go  
Please let all this racial animosity cease

We all so completely different  
yet, essentially, exactly the same

Ladan, Mojgan, Manizhah, say:  
Let's find a way to live together, no more pain  
Please... let there be peace, let there be peace

## **Mrs Mary Prior, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant**

*Co-written with Edson Burton to mark the end of Mary Prior's term of office, April 2017*

Lord-Lieutenant if you please, a few words  
Before, from this honoured role,  
You take your leave  
I have no sermon on which to preach,  
But as poet will praise indeed  
The solemnity and service, which you have  
Bestowed in high service to our Brigstowe.  
How well you know this wet sweet earth,  
Born to farmers who knew its worth  
Who raised cattle upon Hambrook's pastures  
While looked upon by aristocratic masters  
Parents tutored you in the swings and arrows  
Of nature's fortunes – intemperate seasons  
Frost late-come and summers too long.  
Who with sinuous will and iron resilience  
Met the bliss and barb of every dawn  
No quarter or corner they left undone  
For neglect of duty fatal to hearth and home

Lessons you took into formal schooling,  
Where scholars honoured the Great Educator Haskins' ruling  
Who carved a route from artisan to businessman.  
Perhaps with irony your first rise in industry  
Was to captain the clothing of working men and women.

Director and advisor to commerce, on call  
To Bristol's cultural and academic institutions  
You defy the cliché that success in business  
Is brought by avarice and ill-feeling.  
Patron, administrator, champion  
To charities, sacred to secular, that give succour  
You defer your favour upon humble citizens  
The silent pillars of innumerable clubs.

First as deputy then in full capacity  
You took upon the mantle bestowed by Her Majesty,  
To serve your city.  
Your duties you discharged tirelessly  
As if powered by a divine battery  
The colour and variety of each adventure  
Are beyond the allotted time of this recitation  
But I must mention this – the hallmark of a true civic ambassador  
How you convinced the Queen to forgo the comfort of her limo  
To travel up-hill in a mobile home, that's aptly Bristol, have a go

An outsider in circles once reserved for  
The less inclusive of the species  
You have seen what will and nurture may yield,  
And have flung open the doors, in quiet revolution,  
To people the system with men and women  
Drawn from every corner of our great city.

Blessed with a mind to conquer crosswords  
Armed with an eye to unpick puzzles  
That same gaze fixed firmly upon  
whom you engage, as they tell their  
life stories you ardently digest each page  
And without error remember tale and face for ever

With hardly a grimace, except for those  
Who weren't with time keeping quite up to mark  
with sincere protest we recall you say:  
'Do I LOOK all right' When you look fantastic.  
'Did I DO all right?' When you were brilliant.  
A perfectionist in every way, for this job  
such qualities the applicant must display.

A great passion, for the arts, perhaps borne  
from musical flare, Mary, which street,  
which accolade, which part of Bristol has not  
been touched by your care.

Positions grand, stations vast and plenty  
Family is a special gift, your children are  
an inspiration, you're their children's  
favourite granny

A far cry from Hambrook's gentle charm  
The best of Bristol in you flows  
Our Bristolian, Commander of the Royal Order,  
Our humble Lily of the Valley  
Our favourite English Rose... Thank you

## Christian Soldiers

*Written for a homecoming service at a Seventh-Day Adventist Church  
in Bristol*

Christian soldiers in becoming attire  
Sophisticated sartorials worn to impress  
Warm embraces pressing against a  
recently ironed, now creased dress

Endless handshakes welcoming  
You into the father's house  
Polished wives clutching babies  
while walking proudly with their spouse.

Dry-cleaned suits and neatly plaited locks  
Young innocent laughter, infants  
Pulling up their little brothers' socks

Tired worn sighs, happy for a weekly rest.  
Fashion conscious giggling teenagers in their 'Sabbath' best

Everlasting smiles on familiar friendly faces  
Stable reassuring promises of connection in the usual places

Praise team singing in unison 'Thank you Jesus for blessing me!'  
Happy mouths of adoration 'His endless love has set us free!'

Passionate gospel hymns casting away your cares  
Closed eyes and genuine heartfelt prayers

Radiators pumping the room  
With heat hot, like a Jamaican sun  
Worn bible pages, highlighted verses  
Telling us the battle is already won.

Life-changing testimonies  
From reluctant lips  
Transformational comebacks  
From lives that were in bits

Spicy aromas with the promise  
That vegetarian is better for you.  
Wafting smells of warm patties  
and a reassuring vegan brew.

Messages of mercy, reassurances of an inner peace  
Honest passionate words that would even arrest the police

Words of unity, we're one family one faith, with one God  
Message of peace, we're different but we're all in the same squad

Switched-off Internet, small thumbs  
no longer playing on the phone.  
Heart-felt aura the spirit of the  
Comforter welcoming you home

Back seats kept warm waiting for the prodigal's return  
Relaxed happy faces none of them looking stern

Roast the fatted calf. Put your coat  
on the shoulders of the returned

Come together and fellowship  
Share with them all the lessons that you've learnt

The Messiah has always been with you  
Just like footprints in the sand  
You been sitting on the Saviour's shoulders  
With everything you've planned

Come on in! Close the door behind you! Outside is very cold!  
Come in, Come rejoice, you're a part of the greatest story ever told.

## Lord Mayor Poem

*Co-written with Edson Burton to mark Lesley Alexander's inauguration as Lord Mayor, May 2017*

The bloody contest done, England parcelled  
Among kings, barons, lords, the people divided  
Their Celtic, Saxon tongues silenced  
In the borough of Barton, where sits watered Brigstowe  
The reeve acts as fist and hammer over  
The merchant, artisan, the shepherd, the weaver?  
Counted too low to raise a voice in matters of local or national state.

In scarlet robes, conferred by royal largesse, gloved, ruffed, plumed the  
Lord Mayor  
Leads the procession of civic estate, before the meat, the bones, of  
government can commence.  
With impartial order you oversee the councillors as they their passions and  
concerns vent,  
your sword bearer goes before you our first citizen, at each noble civic  
intent  
A special gift to those of extraordinary stature chosen with noble committee  
Flags raised high, generals perched in salutes, you bestow favour with keys  
to the city

Ranked in the highest order, Brigstowe's Mayor rides in two coaches  
intricately adorned  
And for a year to have Mansion built of bold bright stone as a splendid office.  
Caressingly hugged by ample fur of kingly authority, armed with your  
swords of noble distinction  
Ardent university students witnessed you adorned in hanging chains at  
fruitful graduations

In mud and heat, and deathly blast Bristol sons run from cleaved earth to  
Godless slaughter  
The deathly harrowing cries and hollow eyes of survivors move a frozen  
nation to new order  
Hunger march and General Strike, strike the heart of Bristol's iron centre  
A just call to arms suspends civil war; fresh blood is spilled to end the threat  
of Fascism.  
The common man demands a voice, a party of labourers bring a British  
socialism  
From female lips on pain of persecution a campaign for political equality  
secures suffrage.  
A growth in commerce, affluence and splendour stimulated by ill and  
virtuous endeavour  
Upon their twice-sacrificed a new city is built, the yoked become citizens  
Citizens now of tongues, creeds and colours drawn from imperial quarters.

Through flow and flux, rage and peace the Lord Mayor's role has kept the  
city steady.

No longer the servant of the few the Mayor becomes friend to the newly  
embraced many.

Lesley, successor to the state, has an eye digesting variance beyond party ties  
You have carried out your civic duty, such is her love of the city.

Etch Lesley's name on the wall, let every member of every civic order heed  
the call,

We proudly accept you as our First Citizen at City Hall

The consistent voice of the people cries

You've debated, you've inspired, you've summarised

To use this role of high office to champion a causes close to your hearts

Raise awareness, support for our older, loner counterparts

Still you greet, venture out and meet, today the shepherds, artisans and  
weavers are the noble men

The Mayor's office conjures a city ancient and renewed, impartial to politics  
now as you were then

The mantle worn to embrace all, from whichever quarter of Bristol that  
requires the call

Bless you the rock of Brigstowe still, firm foundation of our institution, go  
out! spread goodwill!



## Our City 3

**Co-written with Edson Burton and performed at the State of the City  
Address delivered by Mayor Marvin Rees, October 2017**

The chocking mill, the boiling liquid  
The brew house the ladle and anvil  
What hope have they to change their state,  
For has not God ordained their fate?  
And paradise awaits through heaven's gate  
If they bow and scrape to masters who  
Sit on high estate on Clifton and Redcliffe Hill.

Christian disciples show God's kindlier face,  
Armed with warrior bibles and red banners they lift up their heads. In  
hunger march, strike and riot they fight a civil war.  
In mud-soaked trench and blood-red beach  
A costly victory secured. Slums cleared, education and health for all a new  
caring state is born.

### **This is their story; this is their city; this was their right!**

Across oceans came the children of Empire  
Searching for succour from the Imperial Mother  
With bared teeth she snarls rejection  
These are not her children  
The legitimate siblings spurn their sisters and brothers.  
Content of character, skills or income, hold no currency  
Despite what grandness you accomplish  
In face of repeated proclamation: no dogs, no blacks, no Irish  
Like ancestors enslaved they are condemned to the lowest rung free in  
mind yet wage slaves. Chains of subjugation firmly placed

Through protest and honest boycott  
Flames of passion and burning police cars  
Emerged our civil rights stars  
Through frustrated tears and collective cries they exclaimed

### **This is our story; this is our city; this is our right!**

From these humble origins emerged our Mayor  
A golden son of humble mixed birth  
One, which many cursed for being  
born into streets that others dammed  
Resignation to crime he gave wide birth.  
Your teacher should have believed your worth  
Challenged by the black-white divide  
He carved a new line, he was from each side

With charm and vigour and righteous might  
He placed his aspirations in plain site  
The military would have adorned their first black officer  
The BBC opened its doors to a charismatic presenter  
Yale world leaders found a new scholar  
Demons of fear and diffident, evoke a negative appetite  
Empowered a bigger story and justice he exclaimed

### **This my story; this is my city; this is my right!**

Is he a paragon of change available to everybody?  
A statement of the redefined... We  
A rendition of self belief, that brings into fruition... possibility

Is he an accident?  
A freak of aspiration that now has full access to City Hall  
Or an apt illustration of the potential change available to all  
Or an exception of super-human will that will never again be seen?

### **Is this our story? Is this our city? Is this our right?**

Migrants from inside England and overseas  
All searching for new hope come to Bristol city  
They meet the bark of Brexit and the brutal hand of austerity  
The promise of a caring city fades, food banks and tents line streets where  
once was industry, and commerce cascades  
Upon our streets...  
The lustre for improved housing opportunities pervades  
A generation of displaced disillusioned adolescence remains  
Moral soldiers dispelling youth despondence with a passionate desire  
Armies of angels trying to motivate young faces and inspire

### **This is our story; this is our right; this is our city.**

What demon of fear stands before your positive fate?  
What actions does change demand you make?  
Imagine a conclusion of a solution of a different kind  
Perhaps the change starts with resifting of our mind.  
Let's embrace the bigger picture let's open your eyes  
I am you and you are me. We may be on different pages  
but we all share the same story.

### **This is our story this is our right this is our city.**

*As for me Inspired by Marvin's possibility...*

*As bright as we may be there are still more ways you can shine  
Let's paint a future of how things should be, a future  
where we are helping others to realise every possibility*

*I don't wanna be the singer but to be the song that weaves into our minds  
and heart, inspires us to move things along*

*I don't wanna be the scribe but to be the words on the page words that  
motivate and inspire, words that positively enrage*

*I don't wanna be laughter but for us to be the joy and happiness that  
resonates with our values to simply be our best.*

*I don't wanna be the doctor but for us to be a part  
of the cure, for us to ask questions and keep demanding more*

***This is my story; this is my right; this is my city.***

## **The Blessed Twinning**

***Co-written with Edson Burton to mark the 70th anniversary of Bristol's  
twinning with Hannover and Bordeaux after the Second World War***

Three gateways to ebb and flow ingest and egests of commerce.  
Long storied sites of strife, intrigue and pride. Grown rich  
Through industry, their hand reaches inland and out far and wide.  
Cousins, speaking different tongues moved by music of gulls  
Basting in the opulence the Merlot and Claret bestowed  
Castles and chateaus of history and desire  
Place des Quincunxes vast and sprawling,  
The great garden of Herrenhausen is part of your cities' decadent calling  
Bridgetown bloated with ambitious trade  
Royal docks devouring a gluttonous mouthful  
All this spoiled by covetous greed  
Centuries of demolished antiquity from a single air raid

Misted rising from water, scent of water, earth salt.  
Through empire envy and block alliance demented Europe tears  
Earth and guts, unsettled truce sees dictators rise and unleash evil  
Unlike any in the annals of humankind.

Vine Street ghosts of thatch and timber, hover over streets no longer there  
Hannover's antiquated architecture lay flattened and bare  
Bristol burns under Luftwaffe assault, aeons of delicate history  
Smashed to smithereens revenging British fleet pour out a payload  
Of heat – Hannover brought to heel – its loss thrice Bristol's,  
While occupied Bordeaux becomes unhappy home to snake like U-Boat.

The war ends, justice and death the only true victors, each wounded  
City broken unto devastation after the first sigh and kiss of release,  
The numbness of what has gone before and the grimly rationed  
Comforts to come. How likely the hate that might descend, to blame  
The ravage upon the other? Yet this was not the outcome

The intimacy of suffering, that which only the other will know,  
Bends the will to kindness. Sentiment a sharp arrow, weighted by suffering,  
Hannover's innocent face an end to winter. Threadbare, without shoes  
They can find no way to school, in despairing hibernation Bristol's hungry  
citizens though with cupboards bare, answer the citywide appeal and send  
clothing, food, shoes. By this act Hannover begins to get back onto its feet.  
Bless Alderman Reade, Professor Closs, Edward Seath, Gane and Hughes  
Bristol the first British city twinned with Hannover, with music for old shoes

Reade's insightful inspiration, altruistic bravery that ignored our many fears  
A true visionary who saw the potential of unity a testimony of which is the  
Past 70 years

An evolution from desperate relief and school exchanges, whatever  
aspects of our societies choose to partake  
Unities in business, sports, culture, education, art and all this built on a  
simple handshake  
Sprawling growth, commerce, civic arms and dignity carried far and wide.  
Set against each other's cultures and urbanity, full of Bristolian,  
Hannoverian, Bordeaux pride.

Bordeaux students writing on white boards,  
Ashton Park children earlier reciting every line  
French business students, sailing, raising  
Money for cancer, carrying boxes of red wine  
Hannover insights into Green Capital activity  
Teas and luncheon with our Mayor  
UWE media students showing  
Bordeaux dignitaries our digital flare

Dual lineage booklets, Georgian choirs singing in harmony  
Roller Derbys, urban paint festivals sprawled across our city  
A few of the many things we've chosen to share

Growth and support in our commerce and technology  
We shared and enlightened every area of our lives.  
Even seen Bristolians after many years  
Caressing German and French wives  
Ohhh ces français romantiques complètement de la passion.  
Ohhhh jene schönen Deutschen

Put on a Trenker hat, pour yourself some merlot  
In a Bristol blue glass. Feel our magical  
connection. See another 70 years of a positive future  
'Keep dancing in our festival of ideas!'  
In this moment in this place we have the  
potential to do great things together  
To involve the collective potential of us all  
The potential to dispel all our fears  
In the past we set our cities on fire... now...  
Now let's feel the flames of our burning desire  
Blaze our cities with prospects  
Harness the heat of opportunity  
Lest we quench the quest of prosperity  
Let's not water down our morals or our values  
Or smoulder the smoke of our faith  
Nor extinguish our hope.  
Let's connect with our common goals  
The future's bright.

## The Magnificent City

*Co-written with James Breese as the script for an animation created for  
the Lord Mayor's Christmas Children's Appeal*

There was a wise magician who travelled the land  
Spreading peace and happiness  
Doing works of great magic, acts that were grand

The magician comes to a magnificent city  
with a dazzling bridge a tall elegant tower  
and grandiose castle of outstanding beauty

He rides over the bridge, enters this peaceful place  
A graceful river flows through the city  
Everyone's contented, there's a smile on each face

This was a place where artists did gather and make things  
It was known all over the land for being a place of  
great scholars who debated like kings

The school bells were ringing in their towers  
children were skipping and running to play  
in fields full of bright pretty flowers

He saw beauty and splendour and great finery  
This was a place where everyone wanted to live  
The townsfolk all seemed genuinely happy

There was sunshine everyday and nothing to lament  
Professors' heads were in their books deep in their studies  
He thought; 'Could this really be, everyone seems so content?'

As he looked around he saw something of a great mystery  
There's a part of this city that was dark and gloomy

In this place it's cold and dreary and it always snows  
It's permanently winter and the wind always blows

He turns to a man, asked him about the miserable scene  
He shook his head and said; 'I don't know what you mean!'

He asked a woman: 'Over there, why is it so dark and dreary?'  
She said; 'Sir, I have no idea what you're saying, please don't ask me!'

('Who are you to come and tell me what I can and cannot see?')

He found a young child; 'Pray tell me, this gloom what is the meaning of this?'  
She replied; 'Kind Master, I don't understand, I only see bliss.'

A voice from the shadows appeared and called him to one side  
He saw an old woman with a weathered face full with compassion and pride

'Sssh... keep your voice down. We don't welcome change here, things are fine  
I'll tell you... Once, the whole city was all enshrouded in permanent sunshine

One day a great curse was place on that area of the city  
The people who lived there had great suffering and much misery

It was constantly frosty and icy and it always snows  
where it's permanently winter and the wind always blows

We called great magicians from far and wide to break the spell  
But none could deliver that part of the town from their living hell

Over time the townsfolk in their wisdom choose not to see  
They ignored it, in their minds, the sufferings in that part of the town  
ceased to be.'

'What of you, dear woman, you see it, how do you cope with this plight?'  
'Sir... Look into my eyes? I am a blind woman I no longer have sight!'

The magician said; 'One part of the city is in constant winter how can this be?  
With so much great suffering, with the other so happy, so sunny?'

The great magician stroked his chin, tapped his foot began to search his brain,  
He went into the town square stood on a cart and became to exclaim  
He said; 'Gather round for my greatest trick, we are going to solve this  
awful pain

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will need audience participation for this special trick  
Bring me The Tailor, The Grocer and most important of all, The Toy Maker.'

The townsfolk gathered, he spoke louder and louder, he engaged them in  
rhyme.  
'Take these three, fill this cart with goods from your shops this one time

You have had in your hands the power you just didn't know  
Take it to the place with great suffering and there's always snow  
where it's permanently winter and the winds always blow.'

The wise magician continued... 'All you need to lift this awful curse  
is to believe the magic starts with you first

Open your eyes and hearts and then you will see  
It will stop being winter and everywhere will be sunny.'

Dawn breaks our great magician rides over the beautiful bridge out of  
the city

He looks over his shoulder, to see if evil has been defeated and goodness  
has won

The snow has stopped falling a rainbow breaks over the whole town  
Everywhere is permanently sunny, the magician exclaims;  
'My work here is done!'



## To Perplex You

*Written for The HOPE virtual school's annual conference as part of a motivational talk encouraging and inspiring excellence*

I came here to upset, to perplex you  
make trouble with who you think we are

I came here to challenge you  
to remind you to know you are a star

I came here to tell you bright as you may be  
there are still more ways you can shine

I came here to say doing all right isn't good enough  
I came here to say things have to more be than just fine

I came here to challenge you  
to be the best you can possibly be

I stop by to you to show you more of you  
And for you to show you more of me

I came here not to be the flame but  
for us to be the fire

I came here not to be the intent but  
for us to be the burning desire

I came here not to be a breeze which flows around but  
for us to be a storm that blows everything down

I came here not for us to be the doctor  
but for us to be the cure, for us to ask questions  
and keep demanding more

I came here to see a future of how things should be  
a future where we are helping others to realise every possibility

I came to be not the singer but to be the song that  
weaves into our minds and hearts, inspires us to move things along

I came here not to be the scribe but to be the words on the page  
words that motivate and inspire, words that positively enrage

I came here not for us to be laughter but for us to be the joy and happiness  
that resonates with our values, encourages us to simply be our best.

I came here for when we're tired and there's really nothing there  
I came here for you to remind me, why we do this, simply why we care.

When the impressionable minds reach out to you  
And those vulnerable stories come your way

How will you cradle their passions, help shape a better day?

I came here not for us to be the answer, but the question  
constantly asking for us to do better than before  
Tell me... what did you come here for?

## **I Wanna Be Treated Normal**

I wanna be treated normal whatever normal means  
Have an ordinary life and an ok time

When friends say how's work, the family  
And the house, I wanna say just fine

I don't wanna keep beating you up about our history  
I want everything to be safe and cool man I love to see genuine unity.

There are many injustices which have been  
Done in the present and the past  
All this anger and resentment cannot last

I'm tired of you thinking I've  
Got an attitude, chip on my shoulder,  
I'm tired of talking to you like I'm rude

I don't wanna keep shouting  
At you and speaking to you  
With no manners like I'm a crude

I like to chill out with you  
Have a laugh eat all kinds  
Of funny grub

I like to go clubbing bust some moves  
share a drink in a pub

I said I just wanna be normal whatever normal means  
I don't wanna keep seeing black and white

I wanna relax not worry about getting  
Stopped by the police late at night

I don't wanna walk past an elderly lady  
And watch her hold tight to her purse

I don't wanna walk into a job interview  
Have them look at me as if I've been cursed

I don't wanna read their thoughts when  
They think he's just like the ones on TV

Is he gonna sell me a ten bag  
Or get really violent with me?

I wanna love a woman; maybe we'd have sex  
Maybe we'd be celibate like monks in a monastery

Maybe we'd go at it like rabbits  
Or maybe just a kiss once a day at half past three

Maybe she'd be black or maybe she'd be white  
Maybe she'd be slack or maybe she'd  
Be a strict Christian and pray every night

I don't wanna take her to her house  
Meet her Dad and hear him shout

I don't want that sort in here  
now get that black bastard out

I'll have my kids go to some posh school  
In Clifton and take 12 GCSEs

I want them to pass with flying colours  
And have their pick of the best universities

Not get in 'cause they're black; white,  
Bluey or pink and they used that to get through

But be given an entry  
'Cause of what they can do

I wanna grow old next to an old  
English log fire with pipe and slippers  
from Marks & Spencer  
And a white fluffy cat

I like to listen to Beethoven and Bob Marley  
And R7B and gospel music and have the Lion of Judah  
embroidered on my living room mat

I don't wanna debate on Proportional Representation,  
Positive Action and all that old hat

I don't wanna define my identity by ticking some box  
Like some misguided prat

I'm tired of being a number, a statistic of  
Belonging to this and that ethnic group

I wanna be recognised as normal,  
Play football on Sundays  
Eat boiled-down chicken and oxtail soup

I like vending machines which sell  
Rubicon Mango Juice and Jamaican fruit punch  
I love Sainbury's to have jerk chicken sandwiches  
Curry goat flavour Pot Noodle for my lunch

I like to know that all my bredren, Spa's, my Idrin, my bonafide,  
My mates, my friends if they wished could get a degree  
And get high-powered jobs in the financial centre of London City  
Or become decision-making executives on network TV

Am I being realistic or is it not that kind of place  
Do we have to make a big deal of appearances and our race?  
Is my colour the first thing you will always see?  
Tell me what is it that you notice when you first look at me

## **Smash!**

***Written for Babbasa, a social enterprise supporting the professional aspirations of young people, based on the life story of one of the organisation's clients and performed for a fundraiser event***

That's what the two twins did with glass, they stabbed in my face  
I was fighting them both they were aggressive and cold

My Bro came out and 'battered' the two of them  
see... I was a little boy; I was just six years old

I had to fight... I grew up in Hartcliffe, what else could you do?  
I still speak to them now, don't hold grudges, hatred will kill you!

I felt scared from that age, loads of chores to do to keep my Mum sweet  
Clean both rooms, wash my own clothes, help cook the food, else I get beat

I admit I was angry I smashed things up, I'd steal things, all right I was a  
little wild  
I had to Hoover the whole house as well. 'I ask you would you do that to  
your own child?'

If you ask my Mom she'd swear blind it didn't happen that way  
I was there, Mom, It happened, I remember as if it was yesterday!

Racist abuse was in my area, one time I had a fight I put someone in  
hospital... I was fine  
Just before I turned seven my mum and dad got a divorce, they were  
arguing all the time

On that day Mum walked out, after Mum beat Dad up with the morning  
post.  
I mean vicious paper cuts like a bread knife cutting toast

I used to blame myself for them breaking up, that's how twisted it became  
my brother would spend 24 hours in his room playing his video game.

My sister left to live with her boyfriend, I thought everyone was leaving me  
some of the stuff Mum did I still can't sleep at night, my brother reacted  
differently...

I used to hear screams in my dreams, visualise being trapped  
wake with blood coming out of my nose

I used to hear creaks on the landing, voices in my head,  
but I could have been high, who knows?

I'm not gonna lie, I couldn't communicate with Mum, I was scared of her many mornings she sent me to school after she beat me black and blue

I looked so bad I'd tell my mates I was jumped by loads of kids  
One morning she followed me down and said to the teachers:  
'YES I beat my son, what's it to do with you?'

Social services were called, told them everything how home was such a hostile climate.

'Your Mum's crazy, just say the word we'll section her,' but... I just couldn't do it

'Come here, Joker. Face the corner, Boy. Stand there, watch the other kids play  
I don't care if your fingers in a cast, finish your work, Boy! WHAT DID I SAY?'

I was angry, I was scared, I was lost, I was unloved, you could see it in my eyes  
I'd come into school and say; 'This day's a write-off. I'm just coming in to terrorise!'

I got kicked outta a school for beating up a supply teacher who rugby tackled me to the floor

I got kicked outta a school for shouting and swearing at teachers and a little more

I got kicked outta a school for smashing windows and doing anything I thought was wrong

I got arrested outside of school, for singing NWA 'F\*\*k Tha Police', a reasonably innocent song

I used to carry a knife to school; 'Don't touch me or you're gonna get wet believe me  
I might take crap from family, I ain't taking it from anyone else, I ain't no pussy!'  
When I went to the referral unit the teacher talk me out of bringing it into the vicinity

My Bro handled it differently, he kept his feelings in, took some of his anger out on me, quashed my passion, destroyed my affinity, my love felt dead even though we're family

Were we in a cartoon, like Tom and Jerry?  
Playing cat and mouse with my body  
You put on different voices confusing my reality  
beating me up when no one could see,

cruelly tormenting me,  
Dad didn't stop you, he was apprehensive about the possibility  
but you couldn't break me mentally!  
Sat there while your mate beat up on me  
I know we were going through the same hell reality  
Got kicked out for standing up to Mum's brutality  
You were s'pose to look out for me  
We're family  
Bruv, you were s'pose to love me!

Neatly pressed shirts and dry-cleaned suits, holding hands and walking in a line  
Gospel songs and Bible stories and the promise that Jesus will make you feel fine

I remember Dad took us to church when we were little, that's the stuff he liked to do  
Dad only ever smacked me once, when I was rude to his girlfriend,  
and it wasn't till I was black and blue

Dad worked at the council, he was in charge of parking for the whole city  
He was the boss when parking was good and you could get a space quite easily

Dad is a clever man, intelligent, a leader, creative and full of ideas  
but... I couldn't tell you how he would act when confronted with his fears

I couldn't tell you when his birthday is or what present he would really like  
I couldn't tell you his favourite colour, if as a child he rode a bike.

I couldn't tell you what guidance I was taught to discern between good and bad

I couldn't even tell how many hours we spent together,  
Why the hell weren't you there, Dad?

Beaten by my Mother,  
Tormented by my brother  
Racially abused by my mates

I used to write 'I hate my life' on my arm  
I used to punch and head-butt concrete walls  
I used to smash dinner plates

When the coarse rope bruised my neck and burned my crimson skin  
When I closed my eyes, took my last breath, I should of asked my Dad's Jesus; 'If there's a heaven and will he let me in?'



Perhaps if I had listened carefully I'd have heard my Dad's God say;  
'I got a plan, I love you, I'll be your friend'

Perhaps as I hung there thinking of nothing, He'd of said  
'Hold onto your pain, be strong,  
this is not how I want your life to end'

Twice I tried to end it all, that's it, I just couldn't cope  
but my purple face was still alive hanging from the rope

I guess death was not an option,  
this is my life and I must drink from this cup  
I guess I've reached rock bottom, now the only way is up

Martial Arts was where the seed was planted for my life to take a positive  
turn immediately my Sensei said; 'Stop smoking weed'

Develop myself in a positive manner, have self discipline, help others, never  
abuse or offend, this was our creed

His words of wisdom affected my life like he was waving a magic wand

You can't control what happened to you in life but you can control how you  
respond

When I met my girlfriend we fell in love in a few days; I realised I was  
lovable for the very first time. I told her everything, she listened and she  
accepted me. She was positive and she was mine. I liked that she was at  
Uni studying law

We were together for one year, I got into 222, got an A-star in Chinese  
Mandarin, completed an apprenticeship in carpentry. I plan to go to Uni, I  
just want to do more

It's also the freaky similarities of my sister's fiancé that gave me a positive  
influence which I never noticed before

I'm Cam, he's Cam. We're both carpenters, we both like motorbikes  
we like doing the same stuff, he was my guardian angel mentor

The day I had my interview for apprenticeship I sat there and told the guy  
the truth; I told him if he gave me a chance my results would go through  
the roof

I did get top marks in the class, I started working, earning shed-loads of  
money.  
It's not about f\*\*\*ing about. It's not about the streets. It's not about getting  
in trouble. It's about making yourself the best you can be.

Bless you, Nan, full of charm and speeches, you were the joy in all the strife  
I miss you, Nan, you were the only resemblance of unconditional love in my  
life

When my gran was ill and my Mum and I nursed till she passed away  
I realised that my parents would need me to do the same one day

Let's get this straight: I don't regret one thing that happened to me  
I would change one act, one event, no way.

It's because of all the negative experiences I'm the positive person I am  
today

If you don't let go, it will consume you, the past will never go away

The rain drops falling heavily on our face  
Carrying shopping in the Morrison's car park  
Mates giving chase.  
Elderly couple struggling to get in the car  
The man's helping the woman but he's  
shaking, bizarre, go over to help them get in  
I realise the old man trying to help his mother  
I make him grin  
No hesitation didn't ask me twice  
My mates puzzled why I would be so nice  
It's little things like that that I live for...

Motor cyclist crashed I thought he was dead  
I go over and rest his head  
On the phone, ambulance tells me what to do  
I know first aid so I pursue  
Has a fit while he's in my grip  
The man's heavy, holding him I daren't slip  
I know I made the right decision  
Saved his life put him in the recovery position  
It's little things like that that I live for...

Tell them I like what you are wearing, looks good on you  
I like your smile when your teeth shine through  
say things with a wink, take time to dance  
see a positive future help someone to advance  
Notice someone make them laugh have a natter  
Bring them out of their shell, let them know they matter

It's little things like that that I live for...  
It's little things like that that I live for...  
It's little things like that that I live for...

## Afterword/

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Miles Chambers was appointed Bristol's first City Poet by the newly elected Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, in May 2016. This publication is a celebration of his term of office.

As City Poet Miles has written and performed poems for a wide range of clients including Avon Constabulary, BBC Points West, Bristol Energy, the Bristol International Balloon Fiesta and Triodos Bank.

Among the organisations he has worked with are Ablaze and the social enterprise Babbasa, both of which aim to raise the aspirations of young people. He has also been involved with The HOPE – Bristol's virtual school for children in care. He performed and spoke at the annual sleep-over event for the homeless teenagers charity 1625 Independent People and at marches and meetings for the refugee support organisation Bristol Refugee Rights. He led workshops to help residents from Lockleaze and Hartcliffe develop the voice of their community.

Feedback comments he has received include: 'It was a great poem, declaimed with passion. Thank you.'; 'Thanks for this, Miles, you were great!'; 'Thanks so much for being so brilliant...'; and 'I wanted to say a huge thank you to you... your input made such a difference'.

He is currently co-writing an opera on the theme of migration with the Welsh National Opera and is the presenter of the BBC documentary *Civilisations Stories: The Remains of Slavery*. For further details of his work visit: [www.mileshiltonchambers.com](http://www.mileshiltonchambers.com)

Vanessa Kisuule has been appointed to succeed Miles as Bristol's City Poet in May 2018. She has drawn up an exciting programme that will include writing poems based on suggestions received from members of the public. Her work will be posted on her website ([www.vanessakisuule.com](http://www.vanessakisuule.com)) and in the City Poet section of the blog on the Festival of Ideas website ([www.ideasfestival.co.uk/blog](http://www.ideasfestival.co.uk/blog)).

We have enjoyed working with Miles over the last two years in his role as City Poet and look forward to working with Vanessa in the future.

### Bristol Cultural Development Partnership



From May 2016 to May 2018 Miles Chambers served as Bristol's first City Poet Laureate. This publication celebrates his term of office.



An initiative of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



RRP £5