

# All the Cancelled Parties

By Caleb Parkin  
BRISTOL CITY POET  
2020 – 2022



**Bristol**  
**ideas**

PRESENTS

**CITY POET**

This book has been published to mark the end of Caleb Parkin's term as Bristol City Poet, with the generous support of the Mayor's Office, Bristol City Council.



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## Foreword

### Caleb Parkin has brought passion, imagination and insight to the role of City Poet.

He has captured the spirit and soul of our city during his tenure, which has encompassed a significant chapter in our history. He has navigated the depiction of the city emerging from months of Covid-19 restrictions with a mixture of hope and poignancy.

'Ridgeway' marked the first anniversary of the national coronavirus lockdown. Caleb portrayed some of our city's reflections, a mixture of trepidation and anticipation in looking ahead, and a sense that we are all part of something greater than ourselves:

our gaze awash on the city's horizon,  
the dark graph of its buildings;  
its deep, unfathomable tides.

In his poem 'The Egret and the Estuary', ahead of the COP26 Climate Summit, Caleb shared an imaginative take on the ongoing ecological emergency as humanity struggles to grapple with the scale of the crisis. He summed up our complex relationship with nature with the reflection, 'the moral of this story is – is – somewhere, somewhere in the gap between / Egret and Estuary.'

Caleb's work has also celebrated Bristol's diversity. We are a multicultural city, speaking over 90 languages, practising dozens of religions, and a proud City of Sanctuary. In 'Tree of Sanctuary', written with a Bristol Refugee Rights conversation group, our city's commitment to being a safe, welcoming city for all is showcased:

she tells us on every leaf  
those we love can leave,  
have the right to safety.

The City Poet undertakes the daunting task of representing the city's conscience; their writing becomes the lens through which we view ourselves and our city. Caleb has done this commendably, celebrating and challenging in equal measure. Caleb's unique voice has lent a powerful insight into life in Bristol and his perspective has proved an invaluable tool in telling the fullness of Bristol's story.

It is my pleasure to present this anthology to you, full of Caleb's official commissions as City Poet, as well as some of the additional pieces he has produced since 2020. It provides an enduring account of his two years in post.

I am grateful to Caleb, to Bristol Ideas, and to all those who have worked with him.

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol, 2022



# Introduction

**Caleb Parkin was appointed Bristol's third City Poet by a panel of judges in May 2020. This publication is a celebration of his term of office.**

As City Poet, Caleb has written and performed poems for a wide range of organisations and occasions including the Queen's Platinum Jubilee; two State of the City Addresses; Bristol Remembers (the first anniversary of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown); the Museum of the Moon at Bristol Cathedral; and Bristol Zoo Gardens. He has run workshops at Christ the King Primary School in Knowle West and with Bristol Refugee Rights.

'Back in September 2020, I 'set out my stall' in 'Party Poem, 2020-21'. I wanted poetry to be an exchange, a collaboration, a shared collective happening, an ecology. When we were having to cancel so many parties to avoid spreading Covid-19, I wanted the poem to be its own party, populated by poems. (I didn't know at the time how significant parties would become in the wider public imagination.) I hope this pamphlet is its own little party too, with a range of guests.

To reflect these strange, unsettling years, some poems needed to be contained. 'Window Displays' needed – yes – a small window with very carefully crafted images, to look out on the big, traumatic subject of the pandemic. Likewise, 'Ridgeway' – reflecting on a year since the first lockdown – needed to be solitary and positional: looking across a city applauding through its grief and isolation.

'Peacebuilding' was written for a Covid-19 cancelled event on the *SS Great Britain*, commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Atlantic Charter, which, in 1941, 'set out American and British goals for the world after the end of World War II'. I borrowed the rhythmic form of Masefield's much-loved 'Sea Fever', substituting 'peace-' in words usually prefixed with ship-. 'What We Animals Do' is a poem for kids, but I hope it sets out questions for all readers on how we travel on spaceship Earth with our fellow creatures.

Some themes cried out for collaboration. Tom Sastry and I roved Western Harbour in fetching hardhats and clipboards; with Miranda Lynn Barnes, we created a creaturely almanac, performed under Luke Jerram's inflatable moon. I wrote poems with a whole year of primary kids in the voice of a cinema; sent a love letter to my neighbourhood in a poem-to-order at our street party; explored tree language and personified the Tree of Sanctuary with Bristol Refugee Rights.

Some poems have felt like opportunities to become *a little unruly* (like Bristol). For COP26, I created a new form – the 'Fubble' (or 'befuddled fable', as fables usually have a clear moral), where landscapes and creatures spoke to one another and tried to figure out what to do about climate change. My alphapoem for democracy invoked Bristol icon Brenda from Bishopston, famous for her vox-pop cry of 'Not *Another* One?' when interviewed about elections. In the year I lost my last grandparent, I invited people to tell me about their matriarchs for 'Bristol Queen' and hope I did them all justice.

And having started with a party, I wanted to finish with one: the Bristol Pride Dog Show. As minority rights are eroded in many places, I wanted to celebrate LGBT+ communities' right to take up public space as unapologetically embodied beings, not just a discrete category of consumers. After all, Pride started as a protest as well as a party – and poems can be both too.'

In July 2022, Kat Lyons was appointed Caleb's successor as City Poet following an open call for submissions. Kat is a writer, performer and workshop facilitator working in the field of spoken word poetry and performance storytelling. They use poetry to interrogate ideas, generate positive social change and strengthen people's connections to the world and each other. On the announcement of their appointment, they said:

'I'm amazed and delighted to be offered the opportunity to be Bristol City Poet. I've loved what all the previous poets have brought to the role and it's a huge honour to step into their shoes. When we tell the story of a city it's often only the loudest voices which are heard, but Bristol is built on a multitude of smaller struggles and triumphs. I'm looking forward to discovering these ordinary stories, the legacies left by different generations and exploring what we want the city to become. Poetry should be open to anyone to explore and enjoy, to share their experiences and see themselves reflected. I hope to use my time in this role to encourage playfulness and connection, reignite a sense of wonder in our everyday lives, and positively reimagine our world.'



Kat Lyons

## Party Poem, 2020-21

Welcome to this poem, which is  
all the cancelled parties.  
You don't need an invitation,  
other than that title: *Party Poem*,  
but feel free to imagine one in  
twirly cursive writing on fancy perfumed paper,  
or – *ping!* – arriving as a text,  
or, if you're that way inclined,  
an official calendar event (survey attached).  
You've RSVP'd with your eyes and/  
or ears, so let's head inside, away  
from this corridor – where you've hung up  
your ideas about Poems, thankfully,

because this whole party is full of poems:  
poems stood around the buffet, removing  
clingfilm from shining trays of lingo; pondering  
which delicious verbs to nibble; plunging  
a ladle into a lustrous crystal punchbowl  
full of a drink. A drink, perhaps, you'll each  
be able to describe, in HD 3-D smell  
-o-vision, as *exactly the one you desired?*

You go to find the host: whose  
party is this anyway? The music  
shuffles days, decades, centuries –  
sonata to reggae, gamelan to techno –  
mid-track, as though the DJ is wired  
into everyone's heads. Then some new  
style of music nobody's ever heard –  
but sways to, intones that  
poetry noise, *Hmmm*.  
Room after room,

full of poems, each a party, each  
a world. Some opening lines  
seem nice enough. Then, this poem  
which introduces you to all their friends.  
You'll keep in touch. Maybe there's  
a poem you'll make official, live with,  
framed on your wall? On the stairs,

poems touchscreen scroll, upload  
themselves on a digital fizz of hearts.  
As you pass, this other huddle  
of zip-lipped collar-starched poems  
hiss *Those other poems aren't even poems*  
but you smile politely, move on  
to find the bathroom. Knock, wait.  
Inside, some poem's overdone it:  
said the wrong thing again to  
that other poem they love, a second-  
hand smorgasbord of words, words,  
WORDS everywhere. Their hair  
is full of exclamation marks,  
held back by a friendly Editor:  
*Let's get you tidied up in a taxi, yeah?*

Washing re-washing your hands,  
your mind is a dancefloor  
of potential; your eyes a glitter  
of question marks. You  
are a poem in the mirror.  
As you set out from this Party Poem –

this rainbow of houses, this high-rise, this woodland,  
this high-rise-woodland-rainbow-house –  
you'll glide through rolling streets,  
where poems flit between phonelines,  
poems claw through side-alley bins  
and this poem ferries you home now,  
its engine warm and humming.



## Window Displays

For the Mayor's State of the City  
Address, during Covid-19 pandemic

In January, we went window-shopping for the year  
we imagined: peered in at February's deepening greys.  
Next door, the lights in March flickered, view obscured:

before April's rainbows flattened onto windowpanes  
and, by May, families huddled into phone screens.  
New TV channels streamed eulogies, looped bad news.  
June displayed school: a mosaic of faces, or a dream.  
Some kneaded dough: others raised fists, razed statues.

In sparse parks, high summer burned with uncertainty  
while clouds of paper masks whispered lists of names –  
blue butterflies, listless over *To Let* signs across the city.

Now, this plexiglass autumn: our smiles are contained  
behind layers of paper, or fabric, or doubt. Now our feet  
take new steps, together on this calendar's empty street.

## Great Great Grandspider, 2120

For the launch of *The Good Ancestor* by Roman Krznaric

'Love for things that are nothing like us, and which may not love us back.'  
– Rebecca Tamás, in *Stranger: Essays on the Human and Nonhuman*

*Microhexura motivaga* is my adoptive great great spruce-  
fir moss grandspider: world's smallest tarantula,  
thriving still, on rocky outcrops in South Appalachia

where she remains too busy for me, or humanity.

She'll never visit 22<sup>nd</sup>-century compostable cities:  
messy green conglomerations of enmeshed species.  
Her territory is three metres squared, and she does

not care about any sustainably developed policy;

right now, she's gracefully enveloped a springtail  
half her own mass. She doesn't realise we inhaled  
our bloated CO<sub>2</sub>, learned to view mountains as

our teachers. She doesn't give two shakes of her

thorax that once you sent a passionate email  
to your MP *Re: That Ancient Tree*, or buried seeds  
for future nonhumanity. She is sole treasurer

of her nation of moss, constructing a funnel

8mm wide to shelter from the now customary  
blizzards and rains. She jostles her spinnerets,  
tethers high-tensile time from her abdomen

to the undiscovered planet of her boulder.

She is *now*: loamy water, tasted in mouthparts;  
the brisk prickle of snowmelt, soaked through  
this understory; the scattering of prey, away from

her clustered eyes. She couldn't care less that every

single vote was counted, mattered, because – *look!*  
Here come those great great great grandspiders,  
those great great great great – add as many *greats*

as you like – grandspiders, who'll thrive too, not caring

if we were part of the reason she's here: balanced  
like (but nothing like) a world-renowned acrobat,  
on the glittering white promise of her egg-sac.

## Bring Your Ideas

To celebrate Bristol Ideas through Bristol's ideas

bring your ideas  
and let's stitch them into the city, weave them through streets chattering with trees  
and we'll sip your ideas, a little fizzy, a little bitter, with a slice of lemon or a pinch of salt

bring your ideas and serve them up  
in a meal for 91 tongues, of cardamom, jerk seasoning, garam masala and cumin  
serve them in the chalk horizons of equations, the antimatter of cosmic failure

bring your ideas and keep bringing them  
even when they laugh, when you have to switch continents for a healing Yes  
even if your ideas drop from towers into dark pools, fizzing with threat

bring your ideas and stencil them  
on the wall of the tallest tower in the city, in a chart of the body's earth  
we'll learn our edges in a quiet prayer for wellness, a hymnbook for health

your ideas might make us lightheaded or ease our pain  
or can we drink them with marshmallows and whipped cream?  
can we count them on one hand, eat them from a fruit-bowl?  
or watch them in shoals and burrows, in fights for survival?

let's purple your ideas, infuse them with vitamin C  
let them BUNGEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE  
maybe they'll smash in bright blue smithereens in the Gorge of Disappointment  
or become smash hit tracks cut-up remixed and trip-hop glitched

bring your ideas and cast them  
in bronze and pop them on a plinth and let's animate them  
or cast them differently, turn them to clay then let them dance

let your ideas stop the bus until injustice gets off  
let them magic lantern *Liberty* from Fishponds to the Docks  
let's talk ideas across borders, over trenches  
make them supersonic fledgelings

bring your ideas and let's live in them  
together – share a bright green common, but keep a backyard  
because sure, that new idea might become a regret  
or a neighbour you wish you hadn't met  
or maybe it'll be that BFF you haven't quite  
nearly but – plucked up the courage to chat to – yet

## Peacebuilding

To mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Atlantic Charter

'every ship like a casket  
of words: *bulkhead,*  
*transom, mast steps*'  
– 'The Ships of Theseus' by Steve Gehrke

To build a peace, you'll need heartwood  
timber from forests with a steady breath,  
and you'll sometimes need steel, the galvanised kind,  
shielding lights over turbulent decks;

for a peace that's strong, build a singular hull,  
but with boundaries welded within  
and a solid wisdom to endure the dark whorls,  
a knowledge that water will win.

To build a peace, you'll need a rudder  
that holds firm to a stately stern  
and a deft propellor to trouble the currents,  
a flag to welcome or warn;

for a peace that endures, choose a sturdy design  
from a peacewright's weathered hands  
and the hands of the peacewrecked, your peacemates too,  
gathered over peaceshape plans.

To build a peace, you'll need mast steps or crow's nest,  
a radar to broaden your view  
and to heed the albatrosses' gossip,  
sense the squalls that swell within crews;

for a peace that won't rot, weld two lucky coins  
beneath your peace's upright heart,  
then renew each rusted bolt –  
until peace, unfamiliar, gleams into port.

\*alternative epigraph:

'This old broom has had seventeen new heads and four-  
teen new handles in its time.'  
– Trigger, *Only Fools and Horses*



## Ridgeway

For Bristol Remembers: one year  
on from the first Covid-19 lockdown

Up here, the suburbs broadcast  
over hot air tonight: a beat, a cry,  
a siren – the evening as close  
and still as a cyclone's eye.  
We loop Ridgeway Field once  
again, where the dogs disturb  
us with their closeness. White  
flags of carrier bags are silent  
in the dead calm of branches.  
At the top of the steps, a red  
flare arcs overhead as applause  
begins to swell over rooftops.  
Here on this ridge, one man and two  
dogs become wide-eyed flotsam  
strewn on some unfamiliar coast,  
our gazes awash on the city's horizon:  
the dark graph of its buildings;  
its deep, unfathomable tides.

## Almanac of Lunar Songs

A collaborative poem to be performed  
under the moon, real and/or inflatable  
Written with Miranda Lynn Barnes

### January

Night skies are for dreaming. The sliver moon, the slight moon  
brings Kin Krill to the surface, a bloom of skittering translucence.  
*Winter moon. Ice moon.* Zooflagellates flutter, diadems of radiolaria  
glint, a lunar clock. But full moons are for hunters, light luminescing  
white the darkened landscape. The downward sink begins, migration  
to deeper waters, safer swims. *Wolf moon. Stay Home moon.*

### February

Tiny deckchair-neighbour, *Talitrus saltator*, sandhopper, sun-  
burrower, lover of the nourishing saltwater layers underfoot,  
beneath pinwheel and Mr Whippy cone. Siesta until the Hunger  
Moon. *Long Day Moon.* The intricate mechanism of your mind a moon  
-dial, your antennae bristling chopsticks. *Trapper's Moon. Storm  
Moon.* Leap to your fetid seaweed feast, the Moon a silvery gong!

### March

The *plough moon* brings on spring, softened soils. *Equinox moon.*  
Longer days, last of winter, earth's movement emerging. *Worm moon.*  
Earthworms surface, converge on winter's wastings, fertile, gleaming.  
In like a lion, out like a lamb, March brings the *wind moon, crow moon.*  
Sweetness seeps from the birch and the maple beneath the *sugar moon,*  
*sap moon.* How it glows in the half-light. How we ache towards the solstice.

### April

Sibling Squid, Brother Bobtail: while you tremble, far up in the water  
column, your body counter-illuminates, becomes nothing but undulating star  
and moonlight, seen from below. *Fish Moon. Snow Melt Moon.* Your body  
no larger than a walnut. *Egg Moon. Frog Moon.* Your belly welcomes  
a field full of bacterial glowsticks, dance party for *Vibrio Fischeri*, a living  
cloak of reciprocal light. *Sprouting Grass Moon. Awakening Moon.*

## May

The bright moon, *flower moon*, closes the bivalve mouths of *Magallana gigas*. O mother oyster, in the salt-charged sea, the new moon means the skies are dark enough for you to feed. *Mother's moon*, *milk moon*, the supermoon draws near to earth, gently tugs on our wombs, plucks the pearls of babies into the world, under the light of *grass moon*, gloss of birth.

## June

Bees put the honey in honeymoon. *Mead moon*. And the bees stop buzzing during the solar eclipse, moon looming large and shadow cast, lost light in daytime. At night, Comrade Carnica, you eschew the moon in your waggle dances, but when the moon is full, beams pull you from your hives to swarm, flight. Warm nights like this, we put the mead to our lips in a honeyed kiss. *Rose moon*.

## July

"How to create your own full moon ritual. How they can help unlock your hidden desires." *Red berries moon*. *Hot Moon*. *Summer moon*. "How to align with the four phases of the moon. How to perform moon rituals for manifestation." *Hay Moon*. *Herb moon*. "How to hold a full moon ceremony." *Buck moon*. "How to tap into the spiritual energy of full and new moons." *Claiming moon*. *Thunder moon*.

## August

O Limpet Love, hang on through the lug and shove of tides. *Dog Days Moon*. *Dispute Moon*. Your radula is a diamond spatula, a kevlar tongue on the sea rock's algae fry-up. *Black Cherries Moon*. *Red Moon*. Behold the jaunty cap of your shell, while our umbrellas invert and our waters rise. Hope, like the seasons, tilts. *Lynx Moon*. *Swan Flight Moon*.

## September

Lady Luna, you pull on our waters, our dreams. We rise to meet you. The corn moon saw our first touch of your face, a rocket prosthetic, a glancing impact. Each passing month, we strove to return. Millenia of poets, star-gazers, and singers transcribed our desire. *Song moon*. *Harpoon moon*. Our feet found your surface, the harvest of all our longing, tranquility.

## October

Under the stark searchlights of the Hunter's Moon, Uncle Gull patrols the Cut, alert to the glut and giggle of swaying gaggles of revellers, jettisoning chips. *Seed Fall Moon*. *Traveller's Moon*. Herring Gull Uncle bombdives the taxi rank, its eyes Ice Moons, the Blood Moon glistens: ketchup on beak-tips.

## November

*Ephedra foemina* weeps moonshine, globes of sweet tears ripe for pollinators. Drops diamonds for the light to catch, for night-crawling visitors to cling. *Freezing mist moon*. *Mourning moon*. Sweet seedling trees, your swelling growth times the tides, lunar gravity shrinks the stems. A violin maker pauses, considers the moon's rhythms, selects his timbre. *Tree moon*.

## December

*Cold Moon*. *Dark Night Moon*. Which invites Barrier Reef water to mingle its alluring milieu. Precious Polyps, whose skin speaks fluent moonlight: count the ways you love one another, your list which runs to trillions of gametes. Create new constellations in pink-red, red-pink, a blizzard of longing, a glitter of living probes. Beyond the *Younger Hard Time Moon*, touchdown, away from the creeping bleachescape: we bid you settle, grow.

## A Cinema's Memories

Written with Year Five of Christ the King Primary School

That Saturday night bright roses flew,  
when *The King of Kings* appeared  
in black and white days, before colour.

My seats, which snap back and trap  
people. They didn't mind, because  
visiting me was a treat, a holiday.

Once, I had a smoking side,  
a 'non-smoking' side, all of it  
foggy with cigarette fug.

People loved the Odeon too, my  
friend in town. Sometimes a cheeky  
dog was let loose in my screen,

but still human cries filled my rooms.  
My silver screen was said to be  
haunted, day and night. People queued,

an excitement building, couldn't wait  
to taste my mouth-watering popcorn,  
their feet shaking with anticipation.

Once, a young girl face-planted  
on my floors, as soon as she  
opened my doors. *The Sound*

*of Music* bounced around my halls.  
Children ran, snacks in hand,  
the rustle of popcorn bags

while I shared my movies.  
Karla and Jamie on a first date,  
sat in velvet seats with buttery

popcorn. People getting scared  
and tipping snacks on neighbours,  
cheering and dancing around me:

spirits were high, running in aisles.  
Telling chatty children behind, *Shhh!*  
loud screams and little whispers,

footsteps which come from the back.  
For a while, I became a bingo hall:  
it was fun, but not as fun as stories.  
Now, film has abandoned me. I am  
heartbroken, awaiting bulldozers.

## Flowers in the Mud

Written at the Clay Bottom street party, 11 September 2021

*Audience suggestions for 'flowers' and 'bottoms' theme; using the words 'pizza', 'macaroni' and 'rabbits'; to be written in a 'bad mood'*

Clay Bottom AKA 'Mud Bum', look at the state of you:  
you're so gorgeous, you make me furious – like a flower left  
in its vase too long. A flower which grew on a compost heap  
and flourished into an exquisite bouquet. You're so cute,

in the butt of this valley, you make me feel angry  
in a contended sort of a way. With your allotments –  
*yuck!* – chucked across the shadow of this viaduct  
like macaroni in a warming, home-made soup.

With your habitats, your 'nature', your lovely little houses  
like hutches full of cuddly rabbits waiting for a neighbourly  
carrot. Ugh! I can't stand it – your stench of freshly  
baked pizza, your bunting flickering in the late-summer

breeze as though you're a pint-sized adorable U.N.  
Just stop it, Clay Bottom – you're just showing off.  
Pack it in, Mud Bum, at 4.30pm precisely, ish, or  
maybe a little bit later, 2022ish, or whenever you like.

But in any case, here's a flower for you: I found it  
on a compost heap. I hope you've got a vase –  
or perhaps you'd like  
to borrow one?

# The Best Light

As part of the consultation for Western Harbour  
Written with Tom Sastry

*This place could be beautiful, right?  
You could make this place beautiful.*  
– 'Good Bones' by Maggie Smith

When you ask these horizons  
if people ever called them beautiful

they will point you to the archive,  
where words ring with hope

and faint sketches are green and peopled.  
These horizons would say that once, they

dreamed of drivers, who longed to see  
trees who, in turn, put down longing roots.

A route passes through, but a place  
is where you stop. And these horizons

dream of a slowness which gives time to  
look up; of being places and plazas,

safe pockets of silence. Wearing a mud mask  
of exfoliating cormorants, these horizons

are carefully hand-washing the crystals  
of history, its pistons and cogs. They are

adding detergent and softener to lawns,  
tenderly rinsing grass-bright parks.

And they want to be beautiful, loved  
for their here and now, and a half-

illuminated tomorrow. In their streetlights,  
there's a twinkle making pavements

wider than the eyes of beholders: indented  
with footsteps both ancient and new.

In their puzzles of shared-use shadows  
and slipways, there's room for bold

flyover views, while questions skitter under-  
passes. There is a dreaming pen,

poised over these horizons –  
posed at sunset for a fresh portrait,

sketched in the best light, revised  
and debated, about to blink to life.

# The Egret and The Estuary

A Fubble [befuddled fable], ahead of COP26

Would you like to hear a story? Of course you would.

This is a befuddled fable, a de-fable, a fumbled fable. It's a Fubble. That's it – a new thing and this one begins:

*Once upon a galaxy, there was a solar system –*

Though that feels overwhelming, so instead, it starts:

*Once upon a solar system, there was a planet  
called Earth and Earth was the third  
child of the Sun and they had a  
pretty special relationship –*

But maybe that's a bit big, too, so let's try:

*Once upon an Earth,  
there was an Ocean and it was  
the most gorgeous of oceans,  
sparkling as the eye of someone  
you really fancy and yes, Earth  
really fancied Ocean and said,  
"Let's get closer..."*

Hang on though, where's that headed? Not quite the vibe we're after, is it? Let's zoom in:

*Once upon a beach,  
there was a grain of sand*

– too far! Too much. Right:

*Once upon an estuary,  
there lived a little egret.*

How's that? You know egrets – a bit like herons, wading birds, spend their days dipping their beaks in mud, strutting shallows. And they're pretty, these little egrets, and pretty new in many places, too – migrating from further afield, now summers are more egret-appealing. But that's probably by-the-by.

This egret is gorgeous, pristine: envied by gulls, worshipped by moorhens, revered and feared by fishes the length of the Estuary shore.

Estuary which, interrupting Egret's narrative puff, says:

ARE YOU AWARE OF MY LATEST POLICY  
REGARDING UNDERTOWS AND SPRAT QUOTAS?  
I'M CASCADING THIS INFO ON BEHALF OF  
THE PRESIDENT OF TIDES AND CEO OF WATER  
[AKA THE MOON AND OCEAN]

But Egret ignored Estuary and jutted its claws, eyes lasered on glistening dinners:

*I'm busy, said Egret, Can't you see  
how the fishes are gleaming in my shadow?  
And I'm hungry, always hungry. I'll listen  
to your Policies when I'm full.*

So Estuary went *HMPH* with a gust of breeze and tutted by slapping some weed against a tongue of driftwood.

Egret went on feeding, warded off gulls from his patch, the fish in the shallows a shimmer in his eye and he dined and waded and dined.

\*

Next day, Estuary dressed in its most imposing power-suit grey with pinstripe waves, tapped Egret on the beak and said:

*EGRET, THE REGULATIONS HAVE CHANGED AGAIN. I'M CASCADING THIS NEW INFORMATION ON BEHALF OF THE BOSS NOW. SHE EMAILED IT VIA VOLCANIC ERUPTION, SAYS ALL EMPLOYEES NEED TO ATTEND A TRAINING FACILITATED BY THEIR LOCAL ESTUARY – AND THAT IS ME.*

And Egret, with a dismissive flick of his wing, said:

*Estuary, I'm still busy, OK? The fish are getting tricky, spreading out and staying away. I'm putting in longer shifts to keep the gulls and moorhens and my hunger at bay. I'll catch your training another day.*

So, Estuary huffed off with a bluster and a cough of spray and left Egret to stalk and snipe.

\*

Until the following week, Estuary piped up again, with a Force Four rasp like it smoked 40 a day:

*EGRET, YOU NEED TO LISTEN NOW – THIS COMES RIGHT FROM THE TOP, THE BOSS, THE FULL COMMITTEE. WE NEED TO TALK. WE HAVE TO – TO TALK.*

But Egret's dark pebble eyes flitted in his own reflection, as he snippily squawked:

*Can't you see I have no time for this, Estuary? The fish are hidden, are thinning, my claws are so tired, and my beak is open but empty. The gulls are encroaching, the moorhens emboldened and picking at my feathers. I don't have time, Estuary, for your lectures, your figures, your doom-laden conjectures. I am tired, Estuary, and I am busy.*

So Estuary showed its dismay by edging the tide out a smidge lower than usual, the mud in an arc of a frown.

In the week after this, Estuary watched as Egret squabbled and scrabbled, waded and wanted, hungry and angry.

Estuary met with Ocean and Moon and The Boss – and they looked at the stats of Egret and the others in the avian division, the marine vertebrate teams. They looked at the whole organisational diagram, creaking like a lightning-struck tree.

And if they had heads, they'd have scratched them.

\*

And the moral of this story is – is – somewhere, somewhere in the gap between Egret and Estuary; is somewhere in the meeting Estuary had with Ocean, who spoke with The Boss.

The Boss, the third child called Earth, who the Sun loved and loves still. And Earth gazes now, across the harsh face of Mercury, the cold glare of Venus.

And the Sun sighs back: a flare, piercing the dark.



## 'Not Another One?'

An alphapoem or abecedarian, celebrating voting and getting involved in local democracy

Brenda from Bishopston bawled, went viral, but in  
 Bedminster and Bishopsworth,  
 Brislingtons East and West, voting is still  
 Central: in Central, Clifton, Clifton Down and Cotham, if you care  
 where your council tax goes; if you  
 Desire change; if you're dissatisfied with droppings in  
 Eastville Park, or eager about the environment in  
 Easton. Don't  
 Forget, folks in Filwood and Frome Vale, the future can be  
 Glorious. In Hengrove and Whitchurch Park,  
 Hotwells and Harbourside, in Hillfields, Horfield, you can call the  
 helpline for local elections on 01179223400, everybody in  
 Hartcliffe and Withywood, Henbury and Brentry can then say  
*I AM READY TO VOTE!*  
*JOIN ME IN JOINING IN!* in  
 Knowle, to knock on numerous doors, let's  
 Leaflet ludicrously in Lockleaze and Lawrence Weston,  
 get lively about libraries and  
 Museums, with youth groups in Lawrence Hill. There is  
 No election without an electorate. And that's you. So let's get  
 Out there, brandishing our  
 Poll Cards! Let's protest, get planning a petition about parks.  
 QUIET! Listen to all that tapping and typing as people  
 Register to vote, while also ranting about  
 recycling in Redland.  
 St George doesn't have a sword, whether  
 Trooper's Hill, West or Central – he has a pen.  
 In Southmead, Southville, Stockwood, Stoke Bishop, let's  
 Turn. It. Out. Because if only one in five of  
 Us gets organised and  
 Votes, then 80% have not been heard.  
 Westbury-on-Trym and Henleaze, why not  
 Windmill Hill your arms, cartwheel over, make a big old  
 X in that box, that can change everything, just a little. This is  
 Your city and we can only reach that  
 Zenith, that zesty zinging moment when the  
 Air changes, in Ashley and Ashley Down, when we're all the river at  
 Avonmouth, flowing out together. Yes, even, especially, you –  
 Brenda, from Bishopston.

## What We Animals Do

Inspired by Bristol Zoo Gardens' transition to its new site

When the gates are locked  
 and the lights turned off,  
 what do the animals do?

Does the lemur remove  
 the bright rings of his tail,  
 hang each, brightest white,  
 out to dry on a rail?

Do the flamingos line up  
 and line-dance in sync,  
 in the highlighter-glow  
 of their feathery pink?

When we visitors leave  
 and the gift shop goes dark,  
 what do the animals do?

Does the chameleon select  
 her favourite shade of – what?  
 We'll never know which colour  
 she chose, with no-one there to watch.

Do the butterflies land  
 on one extra-large leaf,  
 try on different patterns  
 like it's Fashion Week?

And when they all sleep  
 at night or by day,  
 what do the animals do?

Do they dream from the earth,  
 wound round branches on trees;  
 do they sigh for bright forests  
 or the echoing seas –

and can we dream with them,  
 in fin, fur, and scale?  
 With one ant-sized action,  
 hope, big as a whale?

When the lights go back on,  
 and we all meet again –  
 just imagine, *imagine*  
 what we could do then.

# Bristol Queen

A celebration of matriarchs in the year of the Platinum Jubilee

*I know I'm a queen, but I don't need no crown.*  
– 'Soulmate' by Lizzo

By Weston-Super-Mare station, Bristol Queen  
rests Her weathered hull on stacks of bricks, floats  
in air over car park tarmac and waves of  
tufty grass. From here, She voyages  
pasts with Her motley crew of matriarchs,  
who go by *Appachi, Boms, Nan-Nan, Duchess*  
*Beryl, Grandma Tea Bags.*

Bristol Queen  
flickers, glitches between Her rust-muted  
now and Her pristine solder-fresh beginning.  
She is a hundred-tonne shipshape TARDIS,  
whose portholes blink through centuries,  
whose funnel puffs out cloudy faces,  
where it's an all-day every-day banquet.

In the galley, the crew bustle over trivets  
on open fire, cream aga, four-ring hob.  
Roast potatoes by the sack load with sprouts  
which are *nice, you know*; casserole by the gallon;  
mountains of red rice, sorru, aloo, parrapu;  
a roast dinner, cooked in California; hundreds  
of packs of Knorr soup with fresh soda bread.

If it wasn't phantasmal, the cake table might cause  
a capsiz, with its freight of fruitcakes and lemon  
drizzle and treacle tarts and Jamaican ginger  
and a hedgehog-zilla of coffee sponge, with Cadbury's quills,  
Smartie nose and eyes – which widen at this baked storm  
on the trestle table's horizon.

Then someone says,  
*I think it's time for a Campari, darling, don't you?*  
She drinks Guinness, or 'Grandma's fizzy'  
[sailor-strength gin], or mutters quiet disapproval  
in Punjabi, as She natters about the *Chiddlers*,  
the *Grandlings*, those they call *Pattar, Luv, Ducks.*  
And then She plays bingo with buttons, not money;  
or Scrabble, with a luxurious velvet bag, rummaging  
for stories: learning tennis in a white sari

on a 1900s lawn; building a palace of locked  
arms on Greenham Common; staging a parade  
of anti-Brexit leaflets by the Waitrose doors;  
bedecked for a 1930s ball solely in gold paint;  
waiting hours to see the Tour de France fly past  
in seconds, that way lives do.

Until their stories  
swell to the great shrilling pistons of song,  
in terrible music hall falsetto: 'When Irish Eyes'  
competing with 'Danny Boy', colliding with Queen,  
rhapsodic alongside 'Mairzy Doats' and *Ooooooooooh-  
klahoma* and the boat is rocking in time  
but not space, is clinking together the figurines  
of these figures I have dusted off for you  
here, on this new Bristol Queen, which is  
also their lifeboat – a holy quote snatched  
by a coastal breeze.

This Bristol Queen  
is the knitted memory of smaller crocheted  
selves on a knee, stitched with aromas of talc  
and coconut oil in a long, long plait.  
The twinkle of brooches, fading.

On Bristol Queen,  
the crew gaze out from the cracked glaze  
of Her crowded deck. She is mopping  
the crumbs from plates, each adorned  
with Her own, uncrowned face.

# Tree of Sanctuary

Written with Bristol Refugee Rights Conversation Club

She wears a brown suit with a tie  
but has sprayed her hair green  
and she does not wear shoes.

She is proud of her hair of  
mango, palm, jackfruit, bay  
*pātā*; the shelter it offers.

She provides for everyone:  
oxygen and safety; steamed رز  
(rouz/rice) ten times a week; peace and *dal*;

her *shakhah* grows homes, friendships.  
Under her branches, we relax,  
exercise, dance and rap.

Tree of Sanctuary is friendly  
with the wind, says, *You can play  
with me, but not break my limbs.*

When she invites the sun  
for dinner, they feast on  
carbon dioxide. When birds

land on her arms, she says  
*Welcome, my loves, my luverrs.*  
We cannot live on Earth

without her and the others:  
the medicines they give.  
She cares about her health,

changes colour every season.  
Destiny is written on each  
sheet of her *paper-of-tree*:

she tells us on every leaf  
those we love can leave,  
have the right to safety.

*Hello mate*, she says  
to the rain:  
*Let's have a party.*

In Bengali, *pātā* is leaf; a branch is a *dal*  
In Persian, *barg* is a single leaf; a branch is *shakah*  
*Paper-of-tree* is the literal translation of 'leaf' in Arabic;  
in Arabic; رز (rouz) is rice

# 'The Things They Get Away With in Public'

Bristol Pride Dog Show, 2022

a leather daddy in the Pride Parade once said  
when our terrier went to greet a passing lurcher,  
tilting his head up as though trying to sniff  
the sun. Today, on my way to our dog show  
I pause to buy emergency umbrellas. *Never  
thought I'd say this to a bloke*, the woman on  
the counter says, *but I like your gold nails*. The deluge  
rains off the 'most well-groomed' round –  
but we queue, bright-brollied and boofy-tailed,  
to sign up for other categories. Best Veteran.  
Best Dressed. Dog We'd Most Like to Take Home.  
Not everyone takes home home-  
made rosettes, but we all go home  
together. Because our dogs are bestowed with  
full names, like *Patsy Cline* or *Jean-Floof Picard*.  
They have catchphrases, costume changes,  
solos. They say, *Keep away, peasant*. They migrated  
on happy buses from Romania; arrived via canine  
transgressions in Slough, advertised on Gumtree.  
Our dogs stick tongues in strangers' mouths,  
then savour their slobbery chops.  
They don't care what rhymes with 'fart'.  
And they were there when we got the phone call,  
slept on our chest the days after; mirrored our  
injury, titanium plate in left leg. Our dogs are food-  
sexual, sofa-sexual, partial to a wiry senior  
Jack Russell. They say, *You want this, you can't  
have it*, then double-paw high-five you, sporting  
a wonky rainbow tie. Our dogs nibble a metre-  
long bull's pizzle, are proudly both Lady  
and Tramp. They're so flexible, they check  
the apps with the thumbs of their tongues.  
They say, *Don't touch me!* then howl on demand to  
Celine Dion. They'll wear a darling little baseball cap  
for you. Until they won't. They say, *I Yap What I Yap*  
while wolfing down an entire chocolate cake.  
They're unapologetic toy-box thieves. Our dog  
is a chihuahua, in full leather regalia, roaring  
from its pram: greeting the world with wide  
open nostrils and, when necessary, teeth.

# All the Cancelled Parties

Caleb Parkin served as Bristol's third City Poet, from 2020 to 2022, taking over the role from Vanessa Kisuule. This publication celebrates his term in office.



Caleb Parkin

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