

CONVERSATIONS AND CONNECTIONS THROUGH POETRY



Word Weavers Collective

Poems from the 2025 Springboard Festival

Illustrated by Joanna M. Lawrie

Connections

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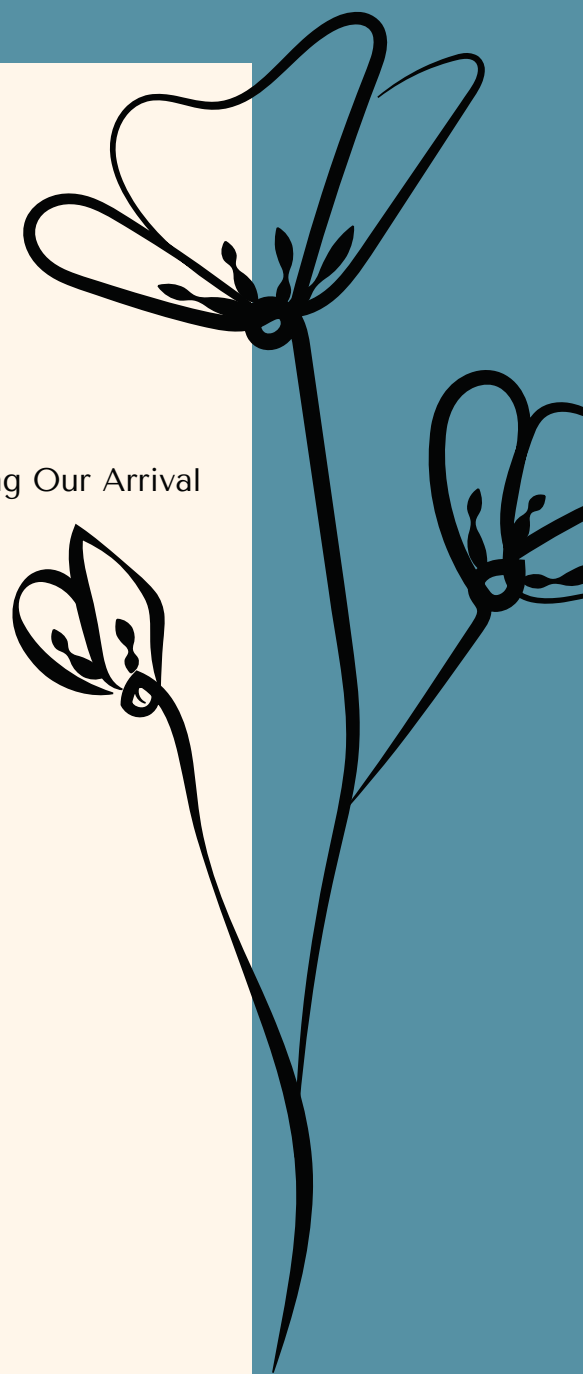
For more information, visit:

<https://criteriontheatre.co.uk/production/543>

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Preface

This collection springs from shared fascination with the intricate dance of human connection, with how we reach across the spaces between us, build bridges through misunderstandings, and sometimes stumble in the attempt. At its core, this project draws inspiration from Yanyan's PhD research, which explores how people in group settings orient to and address relationship problems through talk-in-interaction, using the framework of multimodal conversation analysis. This method unpacks the subtle choreography of social interaction, the pauses, gestures, overlaps, and repairs, which shape our bonds.



The poems here are echoes of that research, translating the analytical into the lyrical. They examine how connections form, endure and occasionally fray, mirroring the ways we align or clash in daily conversation. From the driving rhythm of *The Ringroadman* to the delicate filaments of *Redlines*, from the resolute unity of *United* to the fragmented exchange of *Turn, Unknotted*, each work interrogates both the mechanics and metaphysics of human connection. How do we signal understanding? When do silences become barriers? Can a mistimed response, a missed opportunity for repair or an interruption change a relationship's trajectory?

The collaborative poems are experiments in collective meaning-making, where voices both clash and harmonise like overlapping conversational turns. They pose essential questions:

Can we ever truly speak as one?

Or is connection always an imperfect, provisional act of translation?

This collection offers both an invitation and a challenge: to listen not only to what is said, but to the silence that follows; to see interaction as artefact and poetry as testament. Each line represents an attempt at understanding, some successful, some lost in transmission.

The question that remains is yours to carry forward.

How would you respond?

Dr. Yanyan Li

Springboard Festival

The first Springboard Festival took place at the Criterion Theatre in Coventry in March 2023. Each year, it is an eight day long extravaganza, with every evening featuring a combination of short plays, poetry and music. From the beginning, it has championed local talent, bringing together professionals, community performances and encouraging emerging artists in the same space.

The festival is now in its third year, and has expanded to include a ground-breaking film and a mini literary festival. Each year a group of poets is selected and formed for the festival, taking part in a series of workshops and rehearsals in the build-up, culminating in a flash mob style collective poetry performance.

From being part of the first poetry collective in 2023, and helping to collate the poetry groups for 2024 and 2025, it has been a delight to see the groups connect, develop and support each other, as well as to see how individuals have progressed in their creative journeys. Poets from previous collectives have developed in subsequent Springboard Festivals, taking on roles as comperes, playwrights, actors, resident poets, directors, organisers of literary festivals, collaborators with musicians and curators of whole nights.

Alison Manning



A BEAUTIFUL SPACE

By AM I 261AH

77 souls woven into poems
77 souls connect collectively
Yanyan surveys patiently in pause
Does it make you feel awkward mesmerised body language
gesturing
Souls talking spiritually elevated
Is there a supernatural phenomenon taking place in that space
of pause
Words carousel invincibly in love comforting and healing
Technology connects human beings connectivity
She could have long dark hair full lips and voluptuous hips
Or a robotic sound voice that puts the being after human
So the space that there is in pause
Chaotic it may seem
To me reveals a concoction of laughs, gold and mystique
That's what awaits in pause
To me that's what I feel and hear in pause
So that silence in the space of pause
Are building blocks of connecting social relationships
So come aboard our ship
Come aboard our craft
And enjoy the travel



EARTH'S HEARTBEAT

By Sharan Cheema

I am Earth
Just as you are Earth
From birth
Until death

My eyes are blessed
 with oceans of tears
 shimmering in the morning's golden blush
 as memories from the past draw near

I soar through the salty sea air
 breathing in the scent of your fragrance
My salty tears falling into your oceans
 as I weep into your waves...as we both become one

Waterfalls, rivers and streams
 flow to console
 all that was absent in my soul

I wished for skies of sunrises and rainbows
Yet you graced me with sunsets and volcanoes
The sun ablaze in crimson desire - on fire
 kissing the ocean's frozen skin
 as the summer's heat melts in

Then tornadoes descend from the clouds to the ground
 choking me
 spinning me violently
 around and around

Yet again, I have been found...by you

Your pulsating storms revive me
Your thunder ignites my lightning
The skies are no longer frightening
It is a dance of enticing passion...for thunder and lightning

My soul inhales
the slow whisper of your burning
forest fire flames

Hot water springs
stir steamy desires
in every steamy claim

Volcanic surges of longing
erupt
molten lava flowing out
from inside of me

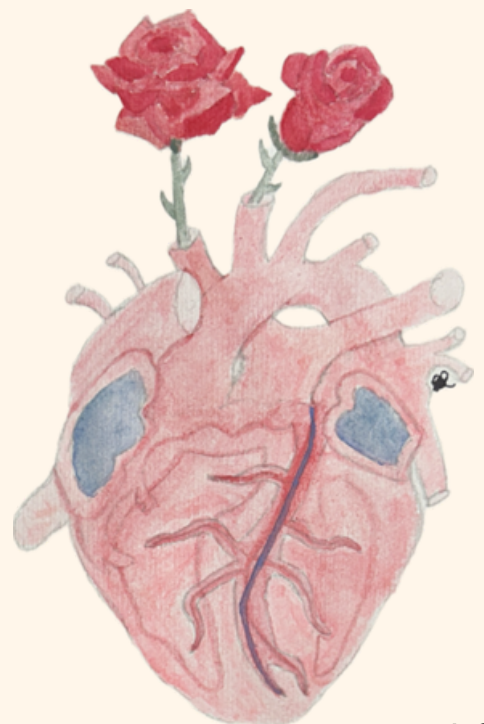
You have triggered Earth's unknown heartbeat - within me

My spirit is healed
with the wounds
of your trembling earthquakes and tropical monsoons

At the summit of the highest mountain peaks
I grasp onto your support
You steady me, so I do not falter
In your strength, my honour comes home

As I search for me
through the depths of your valleys
I discover peace
I connect with this soil - where you ground me

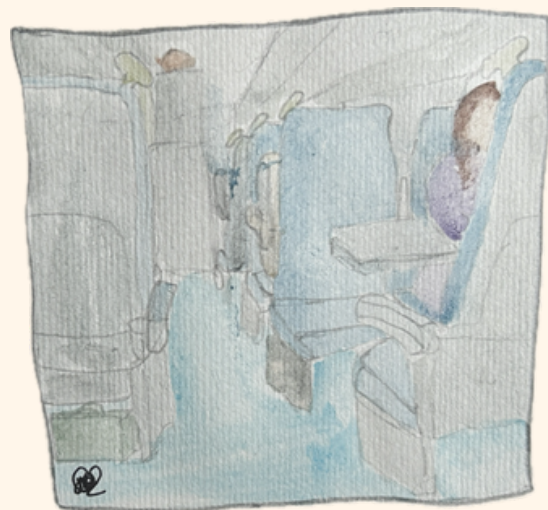
Water flows through me
Air surrounds me
Fire burns within me
For I am Earth



A SILVER BULLET, PANTING SOFTLY, AWAITING OUR ARRIVAL

By Maxine Burns

A silver bullet, panting softly, awaiting our arrival.
Seats secured, relax, almost taste the ocean.
Whispered farewells, a watery smile, wave goodbye,
Try not to cry as bells and whistles tussle with slamming doors.
Laptops out, earbuds in, knees kissing.
A chorus of 'tickets please,' rings through the aisles.
A sandwich, a beer? Tea or coffee, my dear?
Wheels hiss over the track,
Speed builds.
The steady clickety clack a lullaby as eyes slowly close.
The green terrain struggles against grimy glass,
Pylons converse across the alien landscape,
Dogs, golfers, runners with long legs in sharp white shorts.
And here is the sea. Settling into the sunset.
Waves, bubbly on sand - almost touch with your hand.
The train pulls me home, connections stretch like thick, white
elastic,
Taut, unbreakable, lengthening from one beloved county into
another.
The brakes shriek. The whistles blow,
And here, it's Devon and it's raining.
Of course it is.

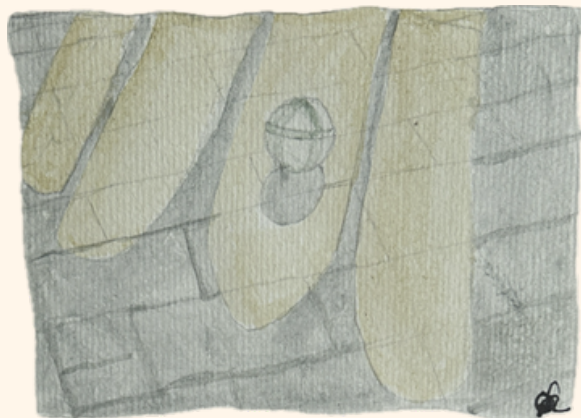


UNITED

By Alison Manning

There's a football
In the middle of the old cathedral,
Just sitting still,
Framed in a shaft of light
Shining through the window ruins,
Outlined by shadows,
Steady in its incongruity,
Poised and solemn,
Stationary,
Waiting.

Is this how reconciliation begins?
A ball thrown on to the scene of battle,
The place destroyed by war,
Awaiting opponents
To come out and join forces
And to kick and to play,
Exchanging deadly blows
For friendly rivalry,
All together
In neutral territory,
Putting past differences behind them,
United in a common goal.



THE RINGROADMAN

By Phil Dean

After The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes

The wind was a panther's growl, from
a wild V6.

The air was a cyclone of smoke staining
the tunnel-wall bricks.

The road was an eternal hideout from
the arm of the law,

And the Ringroadman came driving -
Driving - driving

The Ringroadman came driving, foot flat to
the floor.

He'd a baseball cap on his forehead, a
neat goatee on his chin.

A bright bubble jacket of orange, and tattoos
covered his skin.

They fitted with never a wrinkle. His jeans
slipped down to the thigh.

And he drove with a jewelled twinkle,

The chrome on his grill a-twinkle,
The grill from his smile a-twinkle,
under the Coventry sky.

He whipped round the ring road and parked, in
the sky-blue-tavern yard.

He flashed his lights at the window,
last Friday night he'd been barred.

He hooted his horn in the darkness, and who
should be waiting there,

but the landlord's doe-eyed daughter,
Molly, the landlord's daughter,
taking a selfie to send him, pouting and
tossing her hair.

And dark in the old tavern car park,
the doors burst open wide.
Out raged the black-eyed landlord,
with a baseball bat at his side.
“Stay away from my daughter!” pointing the bat as he said,
“Stay away from my daughter! Or I'll bash you in the head!”

Sirens wailed in the distance,
“Go!” Poor Molly cried,
No sooner she spoke, in a cloud of smoke,
he opened the throttle and fled.
They watched him into the distance,
o'er the engine they heard him say,
“Wait for me by moonlight,
I'll come back for you by moonlight,
All the coppers in Coventry,
couldn't keep me away!”

On the Eve of his return the landlord hatched a plan,
To capture the arrogant upstart and put an end to the Ringroadman.

Held in the sky blue tavern,
poor Molly sobbed and waited,
Surrounded by two dozen coppers,
the trap was primed and baited.
Eyes watched every window,
batons hung at their side.
And Molly could see the ringroad,
Through tears she watched the ringroad,
The road that he would ride.

And though her fingers trembled,
they proved stronger than her fears,
She thumbed a text to send him,
the screen was blurred with tears,
A ping in the fugitive's pocket,
warned him of their plan.
And he spun round fast in the darkness,
A handbrake turn in the darkness,
The coppers cursing the darkness!
and the elusive Ringroadman!

All was quiet in the sky blue tavern, as
the landlord sat and fumed
The Ringroadman evaded the law, but
his love with Molly was doomed.
For the landlord in that moment, resolved
she could not stay,
And Molly, the landlord's daughter,
the landlords doe-eyed daughter,
Was sent packing far away.

...

*In the Coventry City night, they say, when the wind is a wild V6,
When the air is a cyclone of smoke, staining the tunnel-wall bricks,
the road is an eternal hideout, you will find him there,
The Ringroadman keeps driving -
Driving - driving-
With a photo of the landlord's daughter,
On the dashboard, the landlord's daughter,
pouting and tossing her hair.*



THE FINAL GIRL

By Mia Lee



The final girl is the last alive
And the worst off.

She lives in fear of the creatures that killed her friends;
She lives in fear that they will come for her again;
She lives in fear that she won't be strong enough to survive a second time.

She flips the coin of guilt and luck
And the penny never lands.
The final girl can never die
Because the film ends before she starts living.

Final girl, to shoulder the fear you become the infinite and immortal monster.
You're not a person but a computer virus,
Mass-emailing yourself into oblivion.
You're not a person but a recurring decimal number, almost,
Almost 1
But you're not truly anyone.
You're not a person but a bloodied gash,
The only proof of the devastation you outlasted.

If you seek ultimate horror, ask the final girl how she made it this far.
She will tell you, with tragedy written in the very way her mouth moves, that
Somewhere, somewhere very far away on the other side of the computer screen
Is the real her.
She never defeated the monsters, or saved herself, or survived at all.
She let you down.
She watched her fate sprawling ahead of her,
That awful death lying in wait,
And crawled inside of herself.
Away.

BETWEEN WHEELS AND WINGS

By DK

How I've learned to find connection in a world that often feels like it's spinning too fast for wheels.

Beneath the weight of wheels and the whisper of dawn,
I trace my own map across the earth's skin—
temporary grooves in grass, a conversation between steel and soil.
The wildflowers nod, unbothered by the shape of my body.
Bees hum approval.

This chair is not a cage—it's a compass.
A tool to navigate a world of sharp edges and tilted pavements,
where every curb is a riddle, every stare a brick in a wall I didn't build.
But the mind adapts: bends, stretches, rewires.
Turns exclusion into observation,
loneliness into lyric.

Music floods my veins—Kendrick's grit, Lauryn's grace, Simz's fire—
a bloodstream of anthems that defy gravity.
They teach me to alchemise ache into art,
to let syllables carry what legs cannot.
Football bumper traded for pens,
goals swapped for stanzas.
Each verse a rebellion against the dark.

My dogs don't pity. They know.
Ears pricked, eyes soft—no manuals, no lies.
Their silence speaks in a dialect older than language,
a reminder that connection doesn't need words,
just presence.

The earth never asks why I'm shaped this way.
It simply holds me—rooted, patient—
moss clinging to stone, rain seeping into cracks.
We're all just fragments seeking belonging,
building bridges from the materials we're given:
wheels, words, rhythm, soil.

And when night falls, pain retreats like a tide.
Green medicine blooms in the quiet,
unspooling creativity like a river remembering its path.
In that haze, I'm whole:
a constellation of scars and stories,
stitched together by the things that bind us—
music, mud, mercy,
and the unyielding act of persisting.

Here, in the space between wheels and wings,
I am neither broken nor hero.
Just human.
Connected.



REDLINES

By Joanna M. Lawrie

in my head, i look
every day for them, red
thread between one finger
and another. perhaps
it is naïve of me
to think that there is someone
whose pinky links to
mine and yet
what if
what if
what if they
wait for me too. i
think of those in stories
whose red string was plain to
see:
like ariadne, the string
she gave to theseus
false
the string
she found with dionysus
true, and
unbreakable. like
orpheus and eurydice, a
string which orpheus
might have felt, had he tugged
his little finger, to know
she was behind him. like
hades and persephone,
whose love was not without
its trials, but who



it goes.

the red string still bind itself

perhaps

for us.

FAMILY IS COLOUR OF THE SKY

By Dr G

Camera lens movement

exposed slowly over time,
directed skywards.

Kaleidoscope of visibility,
clarity,
vibrancy.

Gloom of cloudy days,
 sultriness of summertime haze,
 magnificence of full moon nights,
 unaltered experiences,
 seen but taken for granted.
 Nature reigns despite seeming human gains.

Apparent randomness weaved together.

Light filters through prisms.

Redness of skies
when we first met eyes.

Orange sun transformed into yellows,
connection making many friends.

Green growth in walks enjoyed,
conducting separate into whole.

Blueness in air,
symphony brings us there.

Existential marvel
creating lights, mesmerizing vision.

Appearing initially singular
but through enlightened visions,
many colours, yet superficially one.

Humanity results from miracles.

Many failures before our creation.

Many relationships flail, reborn,
connecting our heartbeats,
yet only seeing what we're seeking,

expecting.

Families looking alike,
almost.

Families having similarities,
almost.

Our wonders are winds.

Seas seized,
air grasped,
benevolence gained,
enabling our living, thriving.
Natural but appearing artificial.

The camera lens slows over time.

Weaving dissimilarity into tapestry.

Light tells ultimate truth.

Our shades refracted,
disjointed but anointed.

Differences connecting magnificence.

Family is colour of the sky.



TURN, UNKNOTTED

By Dr. Yanyan Li

We launched clean -
synchronised,
each turn-taking a silent contract:
you speak, I answer,
I speak, you build,
a choreography drawn in breath and instinct,
not yet needing repair.

The opening laps shimmered -
perfect adjacency pairs,
calls met by responses,
an elegant weave of trust at full throttle,
our meanings drafting one another,
pressing close but never colliding.

Words built us,
word after word,
curve after curve -
until the first small misalignments:
a question brushed aside,
an answer clipped short,
intonations rising where they once softened -
Pre-sequences:
tiny warning lights blinking at the edge of sight,
ignored in the speed of wanting.

“Is something wrong?” - a gentle lift of the brake.
“No, it’s nothing.” - the throttle pressed harder.
A repair, deferred.
A crack, deepening.

Overlap cracked our rhythm -
you gunned into my lane,
I defended mine,
talk clashing over talk,
initiatives crashing mid-sentence,
each interruption another missed apex,
each interruption a sharper corner.

Silence - once a pit stop for breath -
grew heavy, unscheduled,
lengthening across straights,
gaps in our sequence no longer filled,
disalignments stacking like debris on the racing line.

Trouble repairs misfired:
“Let’s talk.”
“Why? Nothing’s wrong.”
a broken repair attempt spinning into gravel,
a missed flag waving unseen.

Misunderstandings piled like unserved penalties:
you thought I was pulling away,
I thought you were blocking -
both of us tightening our grip,
both of us steering against invisible winds.

Sequence closings failed:
“Are we okay?” -
no closing move,
no arms raised at the finish.
“Let’s figure this out.”
- no final lap,
just endless circuits of silence.

Each aborted conversation
tightened the circuit,
less room to steer,
less time to slow,
until we were racing ghosts,
chasing the echo of conversations unfinished.

We fought the same track,
but no longer the same race -
each curve a question unasked,
each straight a breath not taken,
each lap an erasure of the last.

Words built us,
words unwound us.
Thread by thread,
lap by lap,
until only frayed edges remained.

Until Turn Three -
tight, blind, unforgiving.

Until contact -
metal folding inward,
words crumpling on impact.

Until everything we didn't say
shattered into carbon arcs,
fragments of meaning skidding across the runoff,
no longer repairable,
no longer ours to claim.

No repairs.
No checkered flag.
No white flag raised in surrender.

Just two abandoned machines,
the knot between us undone,
cooling beneath a wide, indifferent sky -
silent,
in a race neither of us finished,
and neither of us won.
We each, in the end, won ourselves.



THIS IS A POEM ABOUT RHUBARB

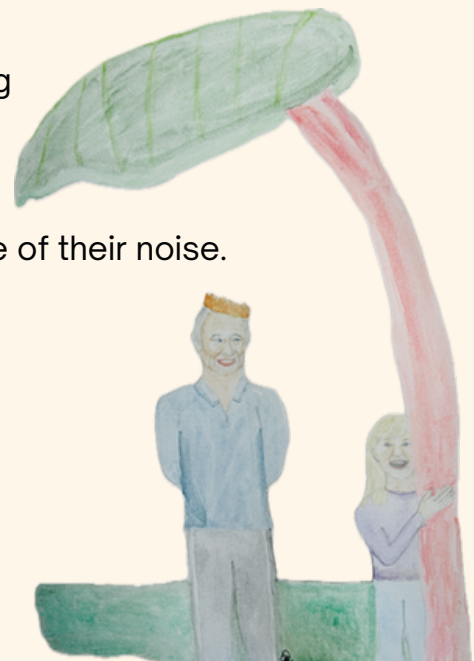
By Emilie Lauren Jones

rhubarb, stalks of ribbon red raising into emerald
an abundance of leafy umbrella canopies occupying
one clayey corner of our garden. My grandad used to say
that actors repeated rhubarb, rhubarb, to fill a scene with endless babble,
rhubarb, rhubarb repeated utterances replicating vital conversations.

A good poem would appear to be about rhubarb
but would actually be about mortality or love or societal pressures
but this poem is just about rhubarb,
rhubarb, ribs rising, ripe, ready to boil with a flourish
of sugar or snapped straight off, crunched rhubarb,

rhubarb, just a stream of verbal rubbish really,
what a load of rhubarb. Other things my grandad thought
were rhubarb include: paranormal activity, the internet,
and poems that don't rhyme. I only mention this
because our conversations were often eclipsed

by rhubarb leaves, at least, that's how I remember
those afterschool hours of cutting, watering, digging
myself away from the day's unkind comments
kids who picked up on differences, just rhubarb,
background racket, he would tell me, take no notice of their noise.



THE POETRY CONNECTION

By George Bastow

Poetry is the contour lines that criss-cross the maps of our hearts
guiding us on our mundanely magical drives through life.

Poetry is a quiet country lane
miles from the mainstream motorway
and the chaotic congestion of its traffic

Poetry is a bridge that closes the distance of difference,
allowing empathy and understanding to travel back and forth.

Poetry is a door to new perspectives,
a refuge for restless minds
and a home for tender souls.

Poetry is an ocean across which we float, swim and sail
on voyages to new continents of consciousness.

Poetry is a river of ink that flows
from soul through pen
to page through eyes
to brain to soul
and on,

and on,

and on...

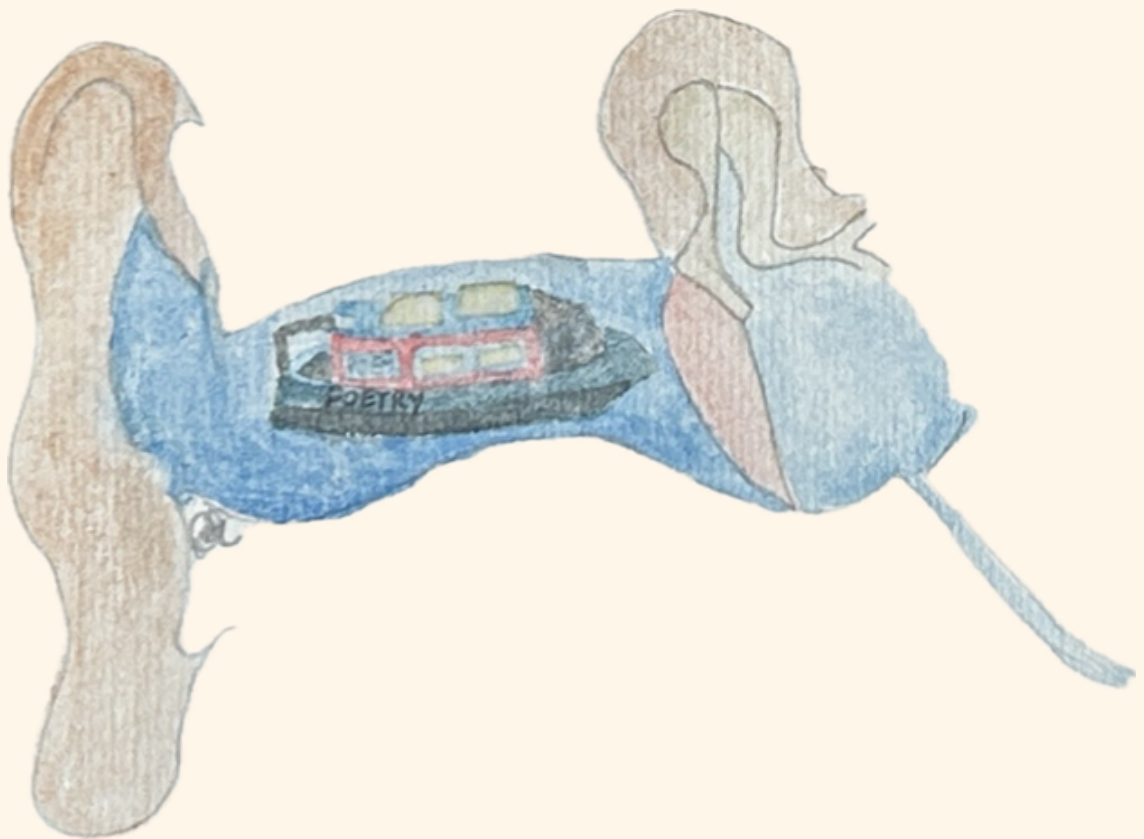
Poetry is a barge carrying a priceless cargo
of wit, whimsy and wisdom that drifts down ear canals.

Poetry is a conductor for intellectual electricity,
a source of power that generates empowerment.

Poetry is the socket into which we plug ourselves
to feel the currents of other emotions,
thoughts and realities surge through our beings.

Poetry is human WiFi that brings us together,
across the boundaries of history, space and time
with the help of its lovingly crafted passwords.

Profound, universal, eternal.



POETIC SERENDIPITIES: THREADS OF CONNECTION

Collaborative Poems

LAUGHTER AFTER THE FROST

Looking at you, I felt the connection
through the fogged-up glass.
with a view so frosty, sat on the grass,
anchored to the blades beneath.
I enjoy the feeling of fighting together.
And then we can get a takeaway and laugh,
laugh at past times.
as time goes by,
nothing changes except the shades.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

A soul connection,
connected deep with
trapped soundly in the water,
unable to breathe, unable to love,
unable to feel, unable to move.
Stuck in a place — dark, cold, and dingy.
Seeing a love bird, with whom I could be
wingy,
flapping my way, across the continental drift.
The transatlantic albatross
with love, fully embossed.

LINKED BY LIGHT

We're connected by our humanity,
connected by the sun which all can see.
So why has she forgotten about me?
I deeply stare to the sky, imagining what
could be.
I see the connections, the links between
the stars,
as I search for the moon from afar
to bathe in the glow of her stolen light,
to dance under the starlight of her eyes,
with waves happy at her feet.

A MIST THAT APPEARS AND VANISHES

Twelve souls knowing not knowing,
twenty-four eyes glowing not showing,
forever growing, continuously glowing,
like a sunflower looming over the fence
for the strength of Sun's energy again.
Remembering, reviving, connecting,
strengthening,
hand in hand, flowers of connections
blossom.
Pink and white, hand in hand, we leave.
Sometimes, we have to pass by our past,
without letting it hold us back.

TO LOVE MYSELF, THEN YOU

Connection is hard, sometimes you
connect at your peril.
Take heed,
that what you see you might not like.
I love myself after an internal fight,
an intricate paradox, a fight with self.
I've punched myself in the face too many
times,
for no reason, rhythm or rhyme,
come rain, come snow, come sun.
I will experience all the rains, winds,
sunshine with you,
thankful that I found you at last.

MADE OF SKY-STUFF

Don't you say good morning?
A connection of stars in the Milky Way,
Orion's belt, holding it together,
a connection that would last for forever,
a connection that could never be broken,
a relation that would never fade away,
that you love, that I love you forever.
We are made of sky-stuff,
the cosmos within us connecting across
vast distances.
The sound of light connects us, now you
see and now you don't.
pain or pleasure where eyes flaunt or taunt.

WEAVERS OF THE SAME WEB

Jack built a Lego brick house,
on a solid ground.
We weave a web around us.
We are happy to be trapped in a web of
love,
and sit at the top of the hill, smiling,
looking down at our community.
The same light shines on all of us.
Vision creator and rays shake with
similar eye.
One body, different parts that connect,
the leg bone's connected to the hip
bone.

WHEN LAUGHTER FLOWERS

Laughter is the seed of friendship.
It fills your soul with honey,
drink it and spread it wide.
Taste buds savouring over our last meal,
olfactory flavour across many fields.
Deep down where our roots of origin
connect,
in the bowels of my trousers,
where my anxiety flowers,
and my fear transpires,
but our connections get stronger.



A BRIDGE ACROSS

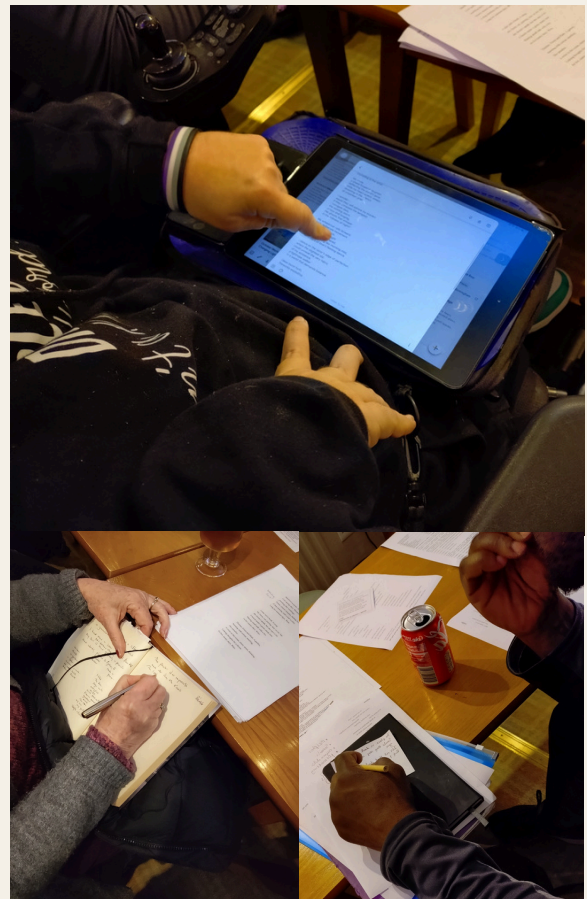
Connection is finding the commonality in the unfamiliar...
of people, places, and the emotions we bring within ourselves,
within myself I find a soul I don't recognise,
a heart yearning for kindred links,
consuming with the fire of desire, with the need for seeding new connections,
sparks hit the earth and blossom into love.
Connection is a spiritual bridge between distance and difference,
defying those who would deny our commonalities,
and connection is the defiance of distance.

SOUNDS OF DIFFERENCE

Community reigns where sounds of difference change
bringing together those who might be at arm's length.
We complement each other, without words fitting together, filling each other's gaps.
Aluminum, aluminium
porridge, oatmeal
say what you feel
menus not just for restaurants
hats more than for winter
sounds of difference.
You understand me, don't you?
Sharing experiences, traversing tracks together,
notebooks open, senses willing to explore
each other's worlds.

WEB

We are caught in a web of connectedness
like a spider endlessly making his web.
He spins, he laughs, he kills
with his wit.
He chose her, we all laugh.
He married her, we all gasped,
grasped by her, was lost without the connection.
She found me, face down in a puddle
in a mess and a muddle
though I longed for a cuddle.



Each of these poems were created collaboratively, with all poets writing at the same time. Each person wrote one line, then passed it on (covering up the previous line so only their own was visible). Everyone contributed a single line to each poem, and the poet who wrote the first line also wrote the final line, bringing it full circle.

THE EMBARGO

Eleven souls have given you their
essence on this ship to relate to
Near crashes with icebergs eclipsing
darkness

Finding our way through the foggy night
We have safely reached the end of this
connection

Thank you for boarding our vessel
Thank you for riding the waves on the
connectivity ship

And I thoroughly hope you enjoyed the
wonder in this beautiful space.

B I O G R A P H I E S

AM I 261AH is a Christian, a mentor, and a dedicated volunteer. He gives his time at Swinfen Hall, a young adult prison, where he mentors and speaks to long-term offenders and lifers through the power of poetry. In addition to his mentoring work, he is a barber and the CEO of Dayo's Cutz. His past does not define him—who he is today does.

DK, a poet and music producer with cerebral palsy, co-founded AccessAbility Arts in Hinckley. A passionate advocate for inclusivity, he delivers workshops and talks while performing rap and spoken word. Recently awarded 'Best Open Mic' at the Fluent in Both Awards (March 2025).

Dr G is a New York City-born African-Caribbean, British-American historian, educator, and more recently a local Coventry poet. Dr G's inspiration comes from international, intercultural and social perspectives that shape his writing and performances. Instagram: @doctorg_thepoet

George Bastow is a poet, writer, blogger, workshop facilitator and hat connoisseur who just so happens to be a neurodivergent wheelchair-user. He has written for numerous online and print publications and regularly performs at spoken word events including Fire&Dust and Yes, We Cant. George has run workshops for Writing West Midlands, Writing East Midlands and AccessAbility Arts. Instagram: @gdbastow_writes

Joanna M. Lawrie – a writer of mysteries, fairytales, folklore, and mythology. Cannot be trusted around caffeine. Cat mother, poet, storyteller, artist, musical being. In a world where one can choose to be anything, chooses to be kind. Hopes to one day get enough sleep, in a cosy seaside cottage filled with cats and books. Instagram: @joannamlawrie

Maxine Burns has had several features and short stories published in a variety of magazines and anthologies, Some of her poems have been placed in the Positive Images Festival poetry competitions. She has had a play performed at Birmingham's Blue Orange theatre, and is currently working on a new play and poetry book.

Mia Lee is a lover of horror films, loud music and generally feeling everything too deeply – so naturally, she is also a poet. Her writing has been described by the legendary George Bastow as "as decadent in imagery as a chocolate torte". She can be found thinking about vampires on her Instagram @maneaterm1a

Phil Dean writes to entertain by fusing the seemingly mundane with the classical style. His poetry often has a strong metre and rhyming scheme. His best work comes from writing parodies based upon popular forms of poetry. Phil works in Construction and lives with his wife and three children in Coventry.

Sharan Cheema – British-born with Panjabi, Kenyan and Malaysian roots, a quiet poetess and writer since her teenage years. A moon-kissed soul, drawn to romantic love, sunsets, the stars, and the deeper meaning of the universe. Her recent book *Blue Moon* intertwines love poetry, and art, with the moon representing profound emotions, unspoken truths and silent yearnings. Instagram: sharan_cheema_poetess

Festival Team:

Alison Manning had a poem commissioned for The Show Windows, part of Coventry City of Culture. She has had poetry films featured in film festivals, exhibitions and radio. She has published a children's book, and poems in anthologies and on The Dirigible Balloon. She was shortlisted for Coventry Poet Laureate in 2023.

Instagram/X: _alisonmanning Facebook: Alison Manning Writer Website: alisonmanningwriter.wordpress.com

Andrew Sharpe - a playwright for ten years, with long history in performing arts as a musician, actor, organiser, poet, pianist, artist manager, and a past life as a lawyer. Andrew is the Festival Director of Springboard.

Emilie Lauren Jones was Coventry's first Poet Laureate. Her words have been widely published and featured on national radio and television. She has performed across the UK and internationally. Her first book of children's poetry 'A Poetic A-Z of Awesome Animals' is out now. www.emilielaurenjones.co.uk Social Media: @EmilieLaurenxx

Dr Yanyan Li is an Early-career Fellow at the University of Warwick, exploring communication, creativity, and research culture. She's an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and passionate about supporting others through teaching and mentoring. Alongside her academic work, Yanyan is interested in the power of words to build connections and open up new perspectives.

Conversations and Connections Through Poetry is a vibrant anthology from the Word Weavers Collective, featuring diverse voices from the 2025 Springboard Festival. Illustrated by Joanna M. Lawrie, this collection explores how we build bridges and navigate the complexities of human connection.

Inspired by Dr. Yanyan Li's research into social interaction, these poems transform analytical insights into lyrical explorations of daily conversation. The anthology asks: Can we ever truly speak as one, or is connection always an imperfect act of translation?

Featuring poets from diverse backgrounds, this collection invites readers to listen not only to what is said, but to the silence that follows. Here, poetry becomes a testament to how we connect, endure, and sometimes fray.

Step aboard and join the journey—where every word and silence builds understanding.

The Word Weavers Collective is a collation of talented local poets and word-crafters, curated and corralled by Emilie Lauren Jones, Dr. Yanyan Li and Alison Manning. A variety of voices that combine to create a community of questioning creatives exploring the theme of connection. They will weave a web around you with their words, binding together and strengthening the threads that link their seemingly disparate voices

Featuring: poetry from: AM I 261AH, DK, Dr G, George Bastow, Joanna M. Lawrie, Maxine Burns, Mia Lee, Phil Dean, Sharan Cheema, Alison Manning, Emilie Lauren Jones and Dr. Yanyan Li.

With heartfelt gratitude to Andrew Sharpe, Anne-marie Greene and all of the incredible volunteers who made Springboard Festival possible.

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