

# **SPECTRUM**

**POETRY CELEBRATING IDENTITY**



RENARD PRESS

## RENARD PRESS LTD

124 City Road  
London EC1V 2NX  
United Kingdom  
info@renardpress.com  
020 8050 2928

[www.renardpress.com](http://www.renardpress.com)

*Spectrum: Poetry Celebrating Identity* first published in 2022

Poems and biographies © the poets and judges, 2022  
All other text © Renard Press, 2022

Cover design by Will Dady

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severn



ISBN: 978-1-913724-97-9

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The authors assert their right to be identified as the authors of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental, or is used fictitiously.

Renard Press is proud to be a climate positive publisher, removing more carbon from the air than we emit and planting a small forest.  
For more information see [renardpress.com/eco](http://renardpress.com/eco).

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior permission of the publisher.

## CONTENTS

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| About Spectrum                  | 11 |
| About the Judges                | 12 |
| <i>Spectrum</i>                 | 15 |
| GOD IS A TRINI                  | 17 |
| <i>Rayne Affonso</i>            |    |
| WHEN I BALANCED WHO I AM        |    |
| UPON THE TURNING OF A BOOK      | 19 |
| <i>Jane Burn</i>                |    |
| 12 YEARS OLD,                   |    |
| IN MY SUPERMAN DRESSING GOWN    | 21 |
| <i>Mia Jasmine Rhodes</i>       |    |
| A BICYCLE REMINISCES ABOUT 1962 | 23 |
| <i>Ivy Raff</i>                 |    |
| A GARDEN OF NEW SONG            | 25 |
| <i>Ewa Gerald Onyebuchi</i>     |    |
| A HIGHLY SENSITIVE MISSION      | 27 |
| <i>Lana Silver</i>              |    |
| ALL THAT I AM                   | 31 |
| <i>Dianne McPhelim</i>          |    |
| AUTUMN DRIVE WITH FATHER        | 33 |
| <i>Sophie Laura Waters</i>      |    |

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| BACK TO BLACK                  | 37 |
| <i>Alyson Smith</i>            |    |
| BARBER OFF THE HARROW ROAD     | 39 |
| <i>Jenny Mitchell</i>          |    |
| BBC YOUNG DANCER 2022          | 41 |
| <i>Daphne Sampson</i>          |    |
| BE CAREFUL WHO YOU INVITE HOME | 45 |
| <i>Thea Smiley</i>             |    |
| BODY                           | 47 |
| <i>Rachel Burns</i>            |    |
| BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM? | 49 |
| <i>Neshma</i>                  |    |
| CARDIOGRAM VARIATIONS          | 55 |
| <i>Oz Hardwick</i>             |    |
| CHANGING STATE                 | 57 |
| <i>Jess Skyleson</i>           |    |
| COMMUNITY PAYBACK              | 59 |
| <i>Damon Young</i>             |    |
| DANCE OF THE DRAG QUEENS       | 61 |
| <i>Cameron Rew</i>             |    |
| DISSIMILARITIES                | 63 |
| <i>Peter Hill</i>              |    |
| ELDERLY SWIMMERS AT THE POOL   | 65 |
| <i>Cathy Bryant</i>            |    |
| EMIGRANT/IMMIGRANT             | 67 |
| <i>Roisin Harkin</i>           |    |
| GROUNDED                       | 69 |
| <i>Ellie Herda-Grimwood</i>    |    |
| HALF-LIFE                      | 71 |
| <i>Jazz McCoull</i>            |    |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| HE   | 73  |
| <i>Frankie Whiting</i>   |     |
| HOME IS HERE   | 75  |
| <i>Overcomer Ibiteye</i>   |     |
| I AM NOT WHAT YOU THINK  | 77  |
| <i>Jennifer Cousins</i>  |     |
| IN SHAA ALLAH  | 79  |
| <i>Fadairo Tesleem</i>   |     |
| KEYS TO THE CITY   | 81  |
| <i>Deborah Finding</i>   |     |
| LAVENDER MENACE  | 83  |
| <i>Elle Echendu</i>  |     |
| LISTEN, STRANGER MAN   | 87  |
| <i>Arinze Chiemenam</i>  |     |
| MEMORY IS A MOTHER TO EVERY<br>LITTLE BEGINNING                      | 89  |
| <i>Nwuguru Chidiebere Sullivan</i>                                   |     |
| MOTHER TONGUE  | 91  |
| <i>Caroline Am Bergris</i>   |     |
| MUM'S HEELS  | 93  |
| <i>Sam Honeybone</i>   |     |
| MY DEAR IRAQ   | 95  |
| <i>Samah Alnuaimi</i>  |     |
| NEBULOUS STRIKE IN MINNESOTA   | 97  |
| <i>Nnadi Samuel</i>  |     |
| OLYMPUS  | 101 |
| <i>Kat Dixon</i>   |     |
| ON READING MY TRANSATLANTIC POEM,<br>SHE SENDS ME THE LAUGHING EMOJI | 103 |
| <i>Chiwenite Onyekwelu</i>   |     |

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| PENANCE                        | 105 |
| <i>Carolann North</i>          |     |
| PINK CARNATIONS OUTSIDE        |     |
| THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY            | 107 |
| <i>Tim Kiely</i>               |     |
| PRECIOUS                       | 109 |
| <i>Suman Gujral</i>            |     |
| SAPPHO'S NIGHTWALK             | 111 |
| <i>Ozzy Welch</i>              |     |
| SCREW THE PANTOMIME            | 113 |
| <i>Jessica Appleby</i>         |     |
| SOME COMMENTS ON YOUR THOUGHTS |     |
| ABOUT BEING BRITISH INDIAN     | 115 |
| <i>Anita Goveas</i>            |     |
| SUNDAY LUNCH                   | 117 |
| <i>Matt Leonard</i>            |     |
| SUNDAY VAUDEVILLE              | 119 |
| <i>Naomi Madlock</i>           |     |
| SWITCHED OUT                   | 121 |
| <i>Lucy Zhang</i>              |     |
| T4T (TRANS FOR TRANS)          | 123 |
| <i>Abhainn Connolly</i>        |     |
| THE BOY FROM THE ESTATE        | 125 |
| <i>Steve Baggs</i>             |     |
| THE COLLECTOR                  | 127 |
| <i>Jessica Oakwood</i>         |     |
| THE ODD SPACE IN BETWEEN       | 131 |
| <i>Raina Muriithi</i>          |     |
| THE WRAITH AND THE MAGPIE      | 133 |
| <i>LJ Ireton</i>               |     |

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| TO THE CAGED BIRD IN CHURCH         | 135 |
| <i>Martins Deep</i>                 |     |
| TRANSFORMATION                      | 137 |
| <i>Susan Cartwright-Smith</i>       |     |
| WHALE WATCHING IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE | 139 |
| <i>Kerry Ryan</i>                   |     |
| WHERE FOUR WORLDS MEET              | 141 |
| <i>Dave Wynne-Jones</i>             |     |
| About the Poets                     | 145 |
| Supporters                          | 163 |

## ABOUT SPECTRUM

In February 2021 Renard put out a call for submissions for the New Beginnings poetry project, a competition open to all those who ‘felt their voice was silenced in 2020’. We were absolutely overwhelmed by the response to the project, and it became clear how important such projects are in raising the voices of those who feel shut out of the mainstream.

With 2022 has come, for many, a gradual easing of restrictions and an improvement to life – but, of course, for others it has also brought war and oppression, and myriad old prejudices have yet to be banished. How important, then, to celebrate the rich tapestry of the human race, to talk about our differences, to explore others’ experiences – and that’s exactly what *Spectrum* is: a celebration of identity.

As with any project, there were several vital people working away behind the scenes. Miriam Halahmy, Tom Denbigh, Hannah Fields and Will Dady, the judges, had quite a task whittling down the vast pile of submissions to the shortlist you see here today, and it is testament to their hard work that the list is so varied and rich in talent.

The project was supported by a crowdfunding campaign – thanks in abundance go to all those kind souls who supported the project; their names can be found on p. 163. And finally, our thanks to you, reader, for picking up this book, for supporting this project and, above all, for helping us to celebrate the great spectrum of identity.

THE PUBLISHER



## ABOUT THE JUDGES

### MIRIAM HALAHMY

Miriam was a teacher for twenty-five years, and, having worked with refugees and asylum seekers in schools, her writing engages with historical and contemporary issues that affect children across time – most notably the plight of refugees. Her young-adult novel, *Hidden*, was a *Sunday Times* Children’s Book of the Week, was nominated for the Carnegie Medal and has been adapted for the stage. *Saving Hanno*, Miriam’s latest book, is about a boy who comes on the Kindertransport and reflects on the grief and loss experienced by refugee children.

### TOM DENBIGH

Tom Denbigh lives in Bristol with an obscene number of books. He is the first Bristol Pride Poet Laureate and a BBC 1Extra Emerging Artist Talent Search winner. He has performed at the Royal Albert Hall and festivals around the UK, and has brought poetry to Brighton and London Prides. He is a producer at Milk Poetry and has facilitated writing workshops for groups of students from the UK and abroad (he is particularly proud of his work with queer young people). His debut collection ...*and then she ate him* is out now with Burning Eye Books.

### HANNAH FIELDS

Hannah Fields is a writer, editor and publisher from Texas. She founded the independent publishing company,

Folkways Press, in 2020, and launched the company with an anthology, *We Are Not Shadows*, as its inaugural publication. The anthology selected writing from women of all ages and backgrounds and covers a wide range of topics – including issues of race, gender, sexuality, trauma, adversity, disability and more. She has worked on various publications, from children’s books to award-winning magazines, along with various publishers in the US and UK.

WILL DADY

Will Dady grew up in the wonderfully named Great Snoring in North Norfolk, and now lives in London. He is the Publisher at Renard Press, which he founded in 2020. A publisher of classic and contemporary fiction, non-fiction, theatre and poetry, part of Renard’s raison d’être is to empower and provide a platform to marginalised voices. The New Beginnings project was set up in 2021 as an antidote to the less pleasant aspects of the pandemic, and its huge success in attracting stirring entries has made these projects a firm fixture in Renard’s publishing programme.

# SPECTRUM

## WINNER

GOD IS A TRINI

*Rayne Affonso*

## RUNNER-UP

WHEN I BALANCED WHO I AM UPON

THE TURNING OF A BOOK

*Jane Burn*

## SPECIAL MENTIONS FROM THE JUDGES

### MIRIAM HALAHMY

WHALE WATCHING IN THE

ARCTIC CIRCLE

*Kerry Ryan*

### TOM DENBIGH

OLYMPUS

*Kat Dixon*

### HANNAH FIELDS

BARBER OFF THE HARROW ROAD

*Jenny Mitchell*

### WILL DADY

THE BOY FROM THE ESTATE

*Steve Baggs*

## GOD IS A TRINI

*Rayne Affonso*

sweating bullets in the embassy line, while the older woman in  
front of him  
sings praise for her daughter's marriage to a man in Houston  
who has one of those computer jobs, she could never remember  
the name,  
but their child is bright bright and can't get the valleys out of  
his Yankee trill and

God wishes he didn't wear black when it's so blasted hot,  
idly scrolls through Facebook, thumb brushing over the latest  
kidnapping and  
the video of that vagrant scratching his balls in the middle of  
Independence Square  
and today's Parliament dispute, and God scoffs

at the comments by the party supporters who lie and the party  
supporters  
who can stand being lied to, but God himself didn't vote,  
because no man with one foot out the door will cut the next one off  
if he plans on running and God plans on running, has planned  
on running,

has dreamt of running to a place where sugar doesn't still grow  
in the streets,  
bloodied at the root, a place where you can have a girl child

without shittin' bricks, but God still averts his eyes when  
his bredrin cuffs down his child mother so hard she has three  
chipped teeth

and God clinked beers with him that day, the dread in his belly not  
unfixable

with some hard local... besides, God is only leaving  
to take up temporary residence in his auntie's basement, not really  
his auntie

but the fat sister of his mother's seamstress, whose son he pitched  
marbles with

and God will be back in time for Carnival, to kick his feet up on  
Wednesday

with a buzz from the nostalgia of the present moment's ocean: blue,  
as yesterday's devil with her round painted breasts,  
as the barrels he will send for his children.

WHEN I BALANCED WHO I AM  
UPON THE TURNING OF A BOOK

*after Tuesday by David Wiesner,  
as used in my adult autism assessment*

*Jane Burn*

on this page there are frogs frogs frogs  
these have been the long waiting years courage have courage  
you have been learning who you are you show the person  
your string your soft blue handkerchief your small spoon  
so I had to look at all the pages from this book  
*Tuesday* the book was called *Tuesday* and I said  
clock there's a clock brightly lit up and the time says almost nine  
there are houses seen from the roof another doorway (also lit up)  
trees and on the next page (said the person doing the assessment)  
what is happening I said my head is very tired I'm not a baby  
this seems more like a book for babies I see grass  
water sky trees with no leaves on them probably winter or at least  
cold lily pads with frogs a big moon a turtle night-time  
lily pads with frogs on them and they are flying silhouettes of birds  
roosting on wires I do my best to count the frogs three frogs four  
frogs and what looks like three crows flying  
five frogs frogs upside down a tower with two bright dials  
ten frogs flying on lily pads white painted houses the frogs  
have big plain eyes man at the table eating bread milk white  
cupboards table blender toaster yellow curtains wall

clock says eleven twenty-one at the window flying on lily pads frogs  
 fourteen frogs and bedsheets windows houses trees grass clothes line  
 I'm tired let's keep going (said the person doing the assessment) frogs  
 frogs frogs (I think to myself all fucking frogs) in a fireplace old lady  
 television seen from the back wires lamp pictures wallpaper armchair  
 antimacassar glasses hair what are the frogs doing (said the person  
 doing the assessment) (heaven's sake) they are floating on (fucking)  
 lily pads same as all the other pictures open doorway cat yellow dog  
 pink tongue frogs red brick chimney frogs falling off hopping down  
 a country road going back in the water three dogs police truck ambulance  
 blue sky clouds man squatting not long now (said the person doing  
 the assessment) red barn wall the shadow of a floating pig  
 weathercock a wooden fence (I'll be thinking frogs for the rest  
 of my life) a big dark roof a heap of straw  
 well done (said the person doing the assessment) I never thought  
 that this is how

I'd be defined

I'd rather be made from all the little bits of all the things I brought  
 or read or saw I choose to be a wheel of time a wheel of moon  
 in the sky the glass wheel of a mild amphibian's eye

the silver wheel of a spoon's back

I choose to be blue

I choose to be

myself.

12 YEARS OLD, IN MY SUPERMAN  
DRESSING GOWN

*Mia Jasmine Rhodes*

12 years old, in my Superman dressing gown – the one I liked  
best,  
draped around my shoulders, skin sunburnt and swollen,  
the knot tied just below my small chest,  
resting under the cage holding my thudding heart she had just  
stolen.

Her, standing beyond the thick glass of the Panasonic  
television,  
chestnut hair flowing down her spine,  
a tool belt resting on her waist, a look of indecision,  
buckled under the cage that held both her heart and mine.

I spent that cool August night with my arms thrown around  
my pillow,  
beaming into the fabric, flashing my braced teeth, a cage  
around each tooth;  
Even my mouth knew I wasn't telling the truth.

My brother, a year younger, but two years more aware,  
passes my room on that night of crisp summer air.  
I remember the words he said,



the words he left sitting there.

‘Are you a lesbian?’

My sunburnt neck began to prickle from the unfamiliar emotion,  
as my cheeks dampened, salted like the ocean.

The veil shielding that part of me had been ripped away  
in the still darkness, by the boyish silhouette in my doorway.

That word I have since forced myself to love, but at that moment,  
at 12 years old, in my Superman dressing gown – the one I  
liked best,

the knot tied just below my small chest,  
resting under my stolen, broken heart,  
it was the most terrifying word I could have heard.

Mostly because I knew it was true.

A BICYCLE REMINISCES  
ABOUT 1962

*Far Rockaway, New York, 1981*

*Ivy Raff*

I erode unused, but once I carried the boy over Marine  
Park Bridge on sultry summer,  
soirs when Sun Chief sent rays turned whitened rods  
glinting to the surface of me.

I was lightening bolts under the boy's dungarees, and I  
was his joy. His father polished  
me, swiped me slick with chemicals to combat the rust.  
Only the best for his boy of few

pleasures and fewer mates at school. Children can be so  
cruel. At PS 102 they lilted  
he looked like an alien, plastic cords poking from the  
hearing-box affixed to his thrush-ribbed  
chest, sliding into his ear canals, transporting sound from  
speakers along his personal air  
waves. On me the boy was king. I held his birdweight,  
quickened in time with his blood,

slowed when he burned ravenous or when August roast  
coaxed the sodium from his skin.  
The boy in the cowboy hat and bolo tie. The boy with the  
gap in his gum-tab teeth.  
The boy who sopped his mother's borscht and brisket  
drippings with good Jew rye.  
The boy who didn't speak a word until his seventh birthday,  
when he tore the shining

gift-bow off my handlebars and set the tip of his tongue to  
the back of his dungeon-  
gate teeth and mouthed his first sentence, until then mere  
construct of speech therapy:

Thank You. The boy's voice, untainted by human timbre,  
feathered open. After me, the boy,  
bigger, rode other bicycles with rainbows of speeds and  
slimmer tyres, light enough to propel

him quickly through Redfern projects on his way from  
Faber Terrace to the A train. Retired  
and reduced to rust, I sighed against the unattached garage,  
and I remembered.

## A GARDEN OF NEW SONG

*Ewa Gerald Onyebuchi*

i'm not sure what it is again, but if it's what they call it,  
a body,  
then mine is a circuit,  
a complex mesh of wires carrying current, running a sketch  
through every cell and bone,  
draining desires from my soul.  
you don't know what you're saying. don't ever ask me to give  
up my demons.  
i need them. they put me to sleep, drowning the world's  
noise. they sing of a future beyond the sky,  
not the one built on maps,  
designs made to constrict us,  
the flames in our eyes,  
to put us in an eclipse of dos and don'ts.  
so, you want to know what real sorrow feels like –  
grab a knife and cut yourself,  
try to chisel out those areas where your  
body never quite fits into a home –  
a place where birdsongs are tucked behind the night's curtain.  
& see pieces moulding up as one, laughing in your face.  
this is not an experiment; it's as fickle as the human conscience  
that worships grace in a bid to wash off the stains.  
each night i wake and look up at the moon  
with bloodshot eyes & emotions locked in a cloud of cold light.  
but tonight, i will stop my heart from dancing in its electric cage,

my dreams will no longer become bloodstains pulsating in  
an azure of stolen things,  
like your milkshake flirting with the tongue of a stranger.

i'll travel through that space where time dies and distance  
becomes past tense;  
when I finally awake my body will cease to be a city of  
wreckage and dread,  
but a home, whence a garden of new song spins from the  
mouth of birds  
learning to live again.