

A beginning, and change, if you dare to look...

For our latest annual poetry competition, we received dozens of entries. We have decided to print the judges' three favourites here, with three more in the online version.

Thanks to all those who entered, and congratulations to our winners! Find previous winners via <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-32/november-2019/our-2019-poetry-competition>

'Beginning,' He Answered.

The blank look on their faces
let Sisyphus know that they didn't understand
that the hard part wasn't
the work of pushing the rock uphill.
That he almost enjoyed the heaviness
of the rock, and the honest
exhausting labor of those long days.
They couldn't know that momentum started,
even uphill,
carries its own weight.
They only saw the size of the rock,
and the angle of the hill,
and naturally assumed that
that the work they could witness
was the hard part.
No one was there
in the cool mornings
as he stared at his rock
in silence, his feet still,
his hands gently resting
on its curved sides.
No one was there
to hear the unspoken words
shouted to the Gods, pleading
for the strength to bear, not the rock,
but the desperate weight of wondering,
how to begin,
again.

Gretchen Schmelzer



'I work with individuals, organisations and communities. I received my doctorate in Counselling Psychology from Northeastern University and am the author of the book *Journey Through Trauma* (Avery 2018), a trail guide for those recovering from trauma. My mission is to change the conversation about trauma and to provide support for those who are healing from PTSD and repeated trauma. I have written poetry and read poetry as a part of my own healing.'

Judges' comment: 'This has a wry originality and for free verse is well crafted... subtle and poetically accomplished.'

Any Change?

A man is saying two words,
Repeated like a mantra.
He's frozen on cold ground
Beneath the multi-storey.

A solitary chant of two words, again and again:
Any change? Any change?
Not heard, he's walked over,
Any change?

At the heated town hall,
At the cushioned magistrates court,
they talk of moving him on.

The man has an empty bowl,
sat beneath the car park.
Any change?

Dr Chris Allen



'I am a clinical psychologist working in Windsor, Ascot and Maidenhead for the NHS. I've just had a pilot project funded to help the homeless with mental health problems...

I'll be working with the homeless tomorrow night at John West House, a hostel that was opened following the death of John West, who was homeless in the bottom level of a multi-storey car park in Maidenhead one cold winter night. I had John in mind when I wrote this poem, along with the other homeless people who still live in the bottom

of the car parks in our borough and in many others across the UK. We are also infamous as our then council leader (now standing as a Conservative candidate in the general election) suggested that the homeless should be "moved on" so that they did not interfere with the royal wedding between Harry and Meghan at Windsor Castle – another influence for this poem.

In the past few years I have also set up an integrated service with psychology working alongside community nurses for people who are housebound due to long term conditions and psychological problems, and also Maidenhead Men in Sheds (raising £3000 for a shed) to help men with practical interests to counter isolation and depression.

I am in both a reading group and a writing group, but write more short stories than poems. I do this more as a break from writing reports and letters than for publication, and for the fun of trying to write a bit more creatively.'

Judges' comment: 'I'm sure Chris would agree, this isn't the most subtle of poems, but it makes its point strongly. It's also interesting to see an entry that reflects the Society's 2020 priority of From Poverty to Flourishing.'

Ode to Emily

When you wrote that you were haunted
By your own ghosts
It made me wonder,
How did you dare to look?

'Ourself behind ourself, concealed',
This line gives me chills.
Even 150 years later,
It haunts me.

Not knowing what you would find,
And with no guide,
You left your safe house
And you dared to look.

In the ringing silence
Of that internal encounter,
You found power.
It echoes, still.

Nowadays we invent ever more ways
of keeping ourselves from ourselves.
The very last thing we dare to do
Is to look.

Eleanor Chatburn, trainee clinical psychologist,
University of Bath



'This poem is a tribute to my favourite poet, the radical 19th century American writer Emily Dickinson. One of her most brilliant poems is called "One need not be a chamber to be haunted", written in 1862. In it she riffs wittily on the gothic horror trope of the haunted house to describe the introspective experience of encountering her internal ghost – her own true self – in the "corridors" of her mind. Her work on the power of the mind, mental health, grief, and creativity were hugely influential in my decision to change career and move from publishing into clinical psychology. I was lucky to study for a masters degree in poetry studies ten years ago and whilst I love reading others' poetry, I have always felt nervous about writing my own. For this submission I channelled some of Emily's courage!'

Judges' comment: 'Any admirer of Emily Dickinson should be encouraged! I rather like one of Pete Morton's songs, "I'm In Love With Emily Dickinson". Emily had such piercing originality of diction, and Eleanor's poem makes a good point clearly.'

Read three more entries – from Rebecca Johnson, Margaret Davies and Sarah Cosgrove – see

<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-33/february-2020/beginning-and-change-if-you-dare-look>