

## POETS CELEBRATE THE CHANGES THAT REALLY MATTER ON NATIONAL POETRY DAY

**News for release: 00.01 Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018:** A secret love affair in Cornwall, a tree slung with trainers in Brighton, and the disappearance of the Geordie word “muckle”: a nationwide call-out for stories of the changes that really matter to BBC Local Radio listeners has inspired 12 new poems for National Poetry Day.

Together, the poems give a glimpse of what change can look like in different regions of England. In Gloucestershire, it's buddleia blossoming on abandoned land, in Lincolnshire, it's the seal-pups of Donna Nook, in Manchester, cranes on the skyline, and in London, the number 98 bus that reminds us: “we leave or we are left behind.”

These examples were inspired by stories of real-life changes nominated by people in communities across England and by BBC Local Radio listeners as part of the award-winning #BBCLocalPoets initiative, which takes its cue this year from National Poetry Day's 2018 theme – change.

Broadcast on the BBC today on National Poetry Day, the 12 poems by 12 local poets, including the Young Poet Laureate for London, **Momtaza Mehri**, Portsmouth's **Abigail Parry** and Cambridgeshire's **John Clegg**, offer us a poetical map of changes that touch us closely: from personal changes of heart to changes affecting entire communities over time.

Near Cambridge, a new father muses to his baby daughter of as-yet-unimaginable energy sources, while in York, radio listeners' tales of changes large and small – from the excitement of moving house to the “loudness” of modern children – inspires celebrated poet **Kate Fox** to demonstrate that no one, not even a pink-haired Yorkshire-woman, can step into the same river twice.

**“People wrote in with their stories, which were as much about the little things as about life's big turning points. I wanted to disturb the idea that Yorkshire is always the same,”** she says. **“Change is a constant, and if you can accept that then it's less of an upsetting surprise.”**

**“Poets have a special role to play in noticing change, for they catch so much that escapes the attention of pollsters and statisticians. They transform: even everyday words, when set in memorable poems, take on new resonance”** says Susannah Herbert, director of National Poetry Day.

These 12 poems, one for each of the BBC regions in England, make the most of poetry's power to change how we see our world.

Inspired by “the many changing mythologies and half-truths of North London” **BBC Radio London** poet, **Momtaza Mehri**, wrote her poem ‘Our Father, Who Art in Hendon’ (after Ian Dury)', in response to “a multitude of ever-changing London voices”.

In 'The Zig Zag Path', **BBC Radio Sussex** poet **John McCullough** uses the changes observed in Brighton, where so much is out of place (including "the beech tree in Preston Park hung with trainers"), to arrive at the recognition that the path "you never longed for" is the one you are on.

**BBC Radio York** listeners' stories of changes, big and small, helped local poet **Kate Fox** grasp that the region is not, as the tourist brochures would have it, immutable and steeped in history, but a place in constant motion, best understood through the flowing of its rivers.

The changes prompted by passion are valued most highly in the west country, where a listener's true story of a remembered love affair with a neighbouring farmer is the impetus for **Katrina Naomi's** poem 'Countrywoman', broadcast on **BBC Radio Cornwall** today. For **BBC Radio Gloucestershire**, change means no longer caring what other people think: the poem 'Second Wind' by **Angela France** celebrates late-blooming creativity, whether painting, sculpting, or - in her case - writing. Along the south coast, **Abigail Parry**, poet for **BBC Radio Solent**, gives voice to a salty tale of obsession encoded in a boat named after a nymph-turned-monster: 'Scylla'.

Several of the poems look closely at the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood; helping people to find words for the things that matter in every family - growing up, getting out, leading an independent life. **BBC West Midlands's** poet **Sebbie Mudhai** captures the shift from childhood to adulthood in 'All Grown Up'; **John Clegg's** poem, *The Sun Box*, (**BBC Radio Cambridgeshire**) dedicated to his one-year-old daughter, imagines her 40 years in the future visiting a nuclear fission plant and finding it neither miraculous or mysterious, but normal.

Others cast a poet's eye over changes to cityscapes and city culture over time. **Kirsten Irving's** joyfully insubordinate poem 'The Lincoln Imp's Birthday' (**BBC Radio Lincolnshire**) draws on Lincolnshire's wealth of folklore and natural wonder; Manchester-based performance poet **Nicole May** delves into her city's rich past through a diversity of voices in her poem for **BBC Radio Manchester**; **BBC Radio Nottingham** poet **Andrew Graves** balances a city in flux and a city that remains constant in 'This and That', while Door-to-Door poet **Rowan McCabe's** *An Ode to a Muckle* resists the loss of local dialect for **BBC Radio Newcastle**.

**James Stewart, Editor GNS Programmes for BBC English Regions, said:** "We are delighted to be partnering with National Poetry Day again this year. The hugely successful #BBCLocalPoets project has given us the opportunity to showcase emerging and established poets across BBC Local Radio, with this year's National Poetry Day theme of change inspiring a whole new set of poets to create a wonderful and accessible collection of 12 poems celebrating the people, places and language around different regions of England. We very much hope listeners will enjoy them."

For a third year running National Poetry Day is partnering with BBC Local Radio. Last year on National Poetry Day the nation's great local words were celebrated in 12 specially commissioned poems – one for each of the 12 BBC regions in England – with listeners feeding the creative process by nominating their favourite expressions, from "mardy" to

“gurt”. In 2016 the 40 stations of BBC Local Radio marked National Poetry Day by each broadcasting a poem about a local landmark commissioned from 40 #BBCLocalPoets in an unprecedented lyrical mapping of the English landscape. The partnership, which celebrates and promotes poetry as part of everyday life, has reached millions across BBC Local Radio and on BBC regional TV 6.30pm news (England) – the most watched news bulletin across the BBC.

To share a story of change on social media use #BBCLocalPoets #NationalPoetryDay

**ENDS**

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### Notes to Editors

**The 12 BBC Local Poets for  
2018 by region are:**

Rowan McCabe	BBC North East & Cumbria (BBC Radio Newcastle)
Nicole May	BBC North West (BBC Radio Manchester)
Kate Fox	BBC Yorkshire (BBC Radio York)
Kirsten Irving	BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire (BBC Radio Lincolnshire)
Andrew "Mulletproof" Graves	BBC East Midlands (BBC Radio Nottingham)
Sebbie Mudhai	BBC West Midlands (BBC Radio Coventry)
John Clegg	BBC East (BBC Radio Cambridgeshire)
Angela France	BBC West (BBC Radio Gloucestershire)
Abigail Parry	BBC South (BBC Radio Solent)
Momtaza Mehri	BBC London (BBC Radio London)
John McCullough	BBC South East (BBC Radio Sussex)
Katrina Naomi	BBC South West (BBC Radio Cornwall)

### NATIONAL POETRY DAY

National Poetry Day (4 October 2018) is a mass celebration of poetry that annually engages people across the country with reading, writing, performing and listening to poetry. It enjoys very high participation rates, especially online and in schools and libraries: supporters include the Royal Mail, the BBC, and HRH the Prince of Wales. It is co-ordinated by Forward Arts Foundation, a charity which brings together leading poetry, literacy and literary organisations around a common purpose: promoting the enjoyment, discovery and sharing of poetry.

<http://nationalpoetryday.co.uk>

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