

The letters 'SL' are rendered in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font with a slight 3D effect. They are centered and surrounded by several black triangles of varying sizes that radiate outwards from the letters, creating a starburst or sunburst effect.

SL

YOU'RE GONNA WANNA HEAR THIS

AM!

CHOSEN BY NIKITA GILL

MACMILLAN

*For every poet.
Your voice is valued.*



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INTRODUCTION BY NIKITA GILL

All poetry is real poetry.

Walk into a room and ask anyone for their definition of poetry. No two people will be able to give you the same answer. Poetry's become the fastest growing art form in Britain and that isn't just from traditional poets or from printed collections. It is in no small part due to the resilient and powerful work of performance poets and spoken word artists. And slams are the platform that have allowed for this growth.

A slam, for those who do not know, is a competition where poets perform their verse on stage in a set amount of time and are marked by judges from the audience, or sometimes guest judges. Judges take into account many things; audience reaction, the delivery, and the beauty of the verse: it's about connecting with an audience and letting them in on a secret.

When I write poems, I approach the mediums I place them on with equal importance – whether I put them on a blog, on Instagram or submit them to literary journals. It never occurred to me that posting my work in a certain medium would mean I would then be defined by that medium. This is why I find such a kinship with performance-based poets.

To define a poet who performs their work as a 'slam poet', and to suggest that 'slam poets' aren't 'real poets' is a myopic

misrepresentation of the work they do. There is no such thing as slam poetry – simply poetry that works in slams. There are no slam poets, only poets who, with immense craft, have the added skill of performing their work in a way that enthralls an audience. One kind of poetry is not superior to another due to the format it is produced or shared in.

For years, poetry has been misconceived as an area of elite literature which is for the privileged few to craft, learn or teach a certain way. It has been sequestered to the classroom as something that made us groan as we studied and peeled layer after layer off Milton's work in an attempt to understand just what he meant.

But what if there was a different version of poetry? What if we let it out of the classroom and put it on stage? What if poetry is remembered to be what it is: the language of fire, fury and freedom? What if, and bear with me, poetry was for everyone again?

This is exactly what performance poetry is about. It reminds us of the revolution poetry incites. People from all walks of life flock to venues or YouTube to watch their favourite poets perform on stage, using language they can relate to, incorporating humour with tragedy in an almost Shakespearean way. Slams are an inclusive, open space, giving poets from under-represented communities a supportive environment to share their truth, and presenting it in a format so easily accessible and unpretentious, that people who'd never engaged with poetry before are finally able to.

This book is a manifesto for change in many ways. It is a manifesto for performance poetry, the craft and beauty of it and the way it resonates with millions of people. It is a manifesto for poetry itself, as poets are natural truth-tellers and bring us face to face with honesty in a time where fact is being dismissed for

opinion. It is a manifesto for compassion and how important it is in a world that is ever more divided.

The poets in this book are awe-inspiring. Their work is transcendent, both on the stage and on the page. Without them, poetry would not be what it is today: empowering, immensely emotive, approachable, wise, humorous – and all of this whilst being stunningly and thoughtfully constructed.

Each of the poems in this book is a gift of truth. From the anthem that is Raymond Antrobus's 'Dear Hearing World' to the tenderness of Jinhao Xie's '你好/Hello', these voices are urgent and they deserve to be heard.

But enough from me. As it has been said by our ancestors in art, let the work speak for itself. Allow these words to wash over you and sit with you. Speak them out loud, so the truth rings loud and clear. Digest the power of this book slowly the way I did the first time I read it.

After all, poetry is not a luxury, certainly not in the world we live in today. It is a war cry – a battle song. And you're gonna wanna hear this.

I hope you find what you are looking for in these pages.

With verse, warmth and love,

Nikita.