

## My Town, My Future

## Meet a Local Poet



**Natalie Scott** is a poet and educator local to the North East, who has been running creative writing workshops in Middlesbrough, as part of the **My Town, My Future Project**.

I asked her if she would tell us a bit more about herself and her own work.

I hope you will enjoy reading her story and perhaps it will give you some ideas too!

**Francis Annett**

**Q When did you start writing and what do you think attracted you to poetry?**

**Natalie** I enjoyed poetry through school, but my first proper 'try' at writing poems was at university. I like making the shapes of poems as well as the sounds of words. One of my poems, called 'Dredging the River Chain' is shaped like a river decreasing in size. It was one of the first I ever wrote about 15 years ago, when I was doing my MA. There's no link because it only exists as a 'published form' on acetate - the lecturer printed it and projected it to show the whole year group!

**Q What motivated you to focus on a career in writing?**

**Natalie** You just can't earn a decent living from poetry by itself. By working freelance, I make a living doing lots of linked activities. I run workshops, then there's therapeutic writing, tutoring, editing, examining for AQA\*, writing educational resources ...and the list could go on!

So I think it is possible to have a career as a poet, but you must be prepared for it to have many strands. And be prepared for competition, especially when it comes to getting commissioned work.

This suits me, and my way of working, perfectly but I can see how it wouldn't suit everyone.

*\* AQA: An independent education charity and the largest provider of academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges. They set and mark the papers for around half of all GCSEs and A-levels taken every year.*

**Q Can you tell me about how you got your work published?**

**Natalie** For a start it's certainly difficult! The top magazines can receive thousands of entries for their competitions, of which they'll only publish maybe twenty.

I started with the magazines for new writers and worked my way up from there. After getting a few poems published like this, I had some success with larger publishers. Eventually I produced two pamphlets and a full collection. When you are featured on several publishers' websites, word then spreads.

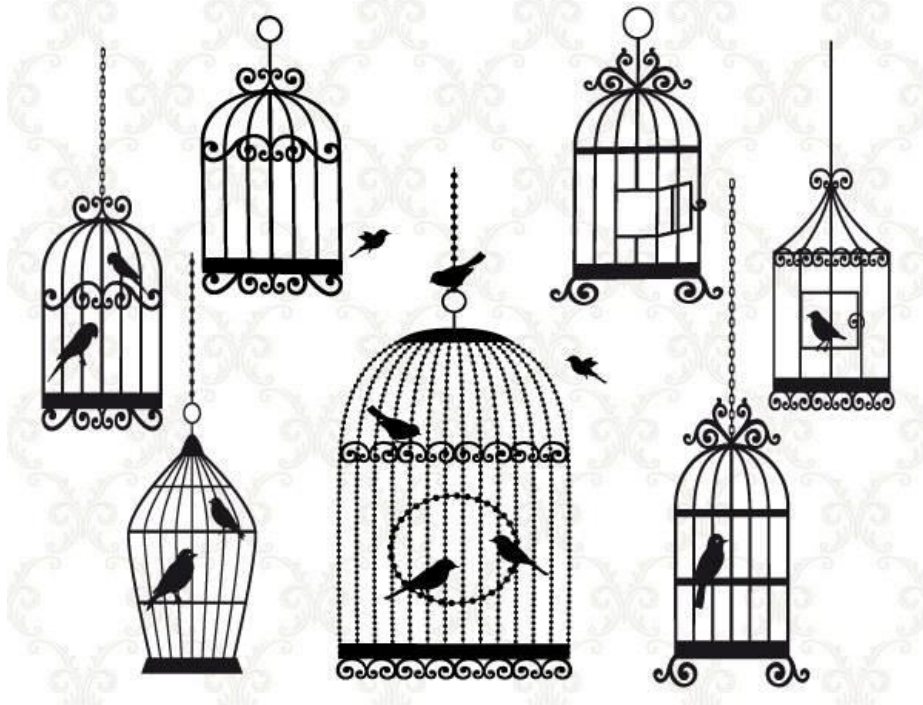
I love writing dramatic monologues. It enables me to step outside myself for a moment and experience the world from someone else's point of view – a bit like an actor playing a role. You have to pour yourself into their life to imagine what they see, hear, feel, taste and smell.

**Q Could you give us an example?**

**Natalie** My first full collection 'Berth – Voices of the Titanic' (Bradshaw Books, 2012) retells the story of the tragedy through a range of voices and perspectives.

I've also used the form in my most recent pamphlet 'Frayed' (Indigo Dreams, 2016) and of course it will take centre stage in my latest project 'Rare Birds – Voices of Holloway Prison'. If you're interested in more, please visit my Facebook Page.

See this on Facebook: Rare Birds - Voices of Holloway Prison



In my first pamphlet 'Brushed' (Mudfog, 2009) I created dramatic monologues from the point of view of figures in famous works of art.

That gave me the stimulus to create dramatic monologues from the point of view of figures in such paintings. 'Victorine', quite a provocative poem, is based on a naked woman in one of Manet's most famous and controversial paintings 'Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe.'

I want to show the scene as she experiences it: naked while the male figures are fully clothed. As you might imagine, she has a lot to say!



For this poem I was named as one of the finalists in the first Aesthetica Creative Works Competition, whose Annual showcases the best in new artistic and writing talent. The competition received over 5,000 entries, with some from as far away as South Africa, Japan, Brazil and Bulgaria.

## **Victorine or Naked Woman in Manet's *Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe***

It was cool in the shade  
but he wanted me naked  
as the day I was born, slap  
bang in the centre, like a white  
beacon warning off all those afraid  
of new ideas.

I'll admit I was a little uncomfortable  
at first – a breeze blowing goose pimples  
over my bare limbs and pins  
and needles to boot.

Did I mention I was starving?  
So much for a picnic - the food had to be left  
where it was, abandoned on the grass; I could smell  
the cherries over ripening and the bread going stale.

The men sweated and talked politics.  
I felt their guilty eyes burning my skin.  
I laughed inside, as their serious gossip  
wavered like candlelight drowning in its own wax  
and tried to guess which one of them would be first  
to awkwardly adjust his trousers.

After the painting was finished  
I made them dress me, then  
I made them buy me dinner.

**From Natalie's pamphlet *Brushed* published by Mudfog.**

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**Buy a copy of *Brushed* here: <http://www.mudfog.co.uk/portfolio-item/brushed-by-natalie-scott/>**

There have been many writers that have inspired me but the most prominent poet is **Edwin Morgan**. I find his poetry both poignant and accessible.

His voices are convincing, even for inanimate objects and animals. His poem 'The Loch Ness Monster's Song' changed the way I viewed poetry as an art form when I first read it (and heard him perform it).

To me it is a work of genius because of the way he uses patterns of language to create meaning. Many would dismiss it as nonsense verse but it makes so much sense to me. It's just like I imagine the monster would sound if s/he had been disturbed from slumber by an irritating tourist with a camera!

I've been inspired by **Carol Ann Duffy's** dramatic monologues. As shown by her poems like 'Stealing' or 'Psychopath' the dramatic monologue form is perfect for delving into the inner psyche of a character.

**Q You can see the poems Natalie mentions via the links below.**

### **Stealing**

<https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-stealing-annotated>

### **Psychopath**

<http://www.eyemouthhigh.org.uk/learning-zone/english-literacy/h-psychopath>

Both by Carole Anne Duffy

### **The Loch Ness Monster's Song** by Edwin Morgan

[http://edwinmorgan.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poems/loch\\_ness\\_monsters\\_song.html](http://edwinmorgan.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poems/loch_ness_monsters_song.html)

**Q What's the best experience you've gained through your writing?**

**Natalie** It's difficult to choose just one experience, but I would have to say being awarded the Arts Council grant for my latest project means a lot to me.

As it was funding to write the collection, **Rare Birds – Voices of Holloway Prison**. It was a real confidence boost for me and my faith in

my writing ability. There can be many dark moments as a writer, when you don't believe in yourself, so this was very uplifting for me.

I've also had fantastic experiences of reading and performing my poems to an audience. I'm never happier than when I have shared a poem like this, especially if someone tells me they have enjoyed my work. It's an incredibly uplifting feeling.

**Q Do you have a particular place where you like to write, and does a poem start life in longhand, notes, or straight to the computer?**

I always start writing a poem by hand and take it through a series of drafts in the notebook before typing it up. Once typed, I check my structure and line lengths to see how it sits on the page.

I always read it aloud when I'm doing this part. I also try poems out at my local 'open mic' events to gauge audience response – this is particularly important for the dramatic monologues, because they're written to be performed.

**Thanks to Natalie for spending the time to share her thoughts with us. You can see more about her work at the web site below.**

<http://www.nataliescott.co.uk/>

Natalie Scott is a poet and educator with a PhD in Creative Writing, specialising in multimodal poetry. She has published two poetry pamphlets and one full collection: *Berth – Voices of the Titanic* (Bradshaw Books, 2012), which won runner-up in the Cork Literary Review Manuscript Competition 2011 and received an Arts Council award to produce a theatrical adaptation. Her pamphlet *Brushed* (Mudfog, 2009) features 'Victorine or Naked Woman in Manet's 'Le Déjeuner sur L'herbe', awarded finalist for the Aesthetica Creative Works Competition 2009. Poems from Natalie's pamphlet *Frayed* (Indigo Dreams, 2016) were commissioned by Vivid Theatre for their production *Just Checking*. Her latest project *Rare Birds – Voices of Holloway Prison* was awarded a research and development grant from the Arts Council of England, and is due for completion in 2018. Natalie's poems have appeared in journals including *Ambit*, *Agenda*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *English in Education*, *Live Canon*, *Other Poetry*, *Poetry Scotland* and *South Magazine*.

In 2015 Natalie was awarded her Ph.D by the University of Sunderland. You can access it via the British Library. Its title:

**[Screams underwater: submerging the authorial voice. A polyphonic approach to retelling the known narrative in \*Berth - Voices of the Titanic\*: a poetry collection by Natalie Scott](http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.691254)**  
<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.691254>

**PenPower – Writing for Wellbeing**

**<http://www.penpower.org.uk/home/4591640580>**

**Francis Annett**

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