

In Memory of Hannah Lynch (2006–2024)

A Tribute

Mosaics of muses

Hannah Lynch (2022)

Mosaics of muses,
memories, hidden words
Strung together to form
Saccharine breaths
Dripping honey over
The window of my world
You pushed love out of bed
Reminded the heart to rise
Again
On the third day.
Resurrection of connections,
People left with forlorn flowers
Scattered, smothering their lungs
Are gifted roots to pull the stems
Back to where they belong.
Petals pushing and urging and gently loving the heart
Nothing is aching for us to be apart

Editor's Note

From the Oxford Poetry Society

We never had the chance to meet Hannah Lynch. But if she had been here, we're almost certain she would have been the first to join us. Head full of brilliance and a heart full of poetry: the kind of presence that lights up a room without needing to announce itself.

Yet through her writing, and through the words of those who knew her, we have come to feel that presence as something unmistakable. Something thoughtful and luminous. We know her only in glimpses—a mother's extraordinary message, a teacher's tribute, a friend's remembrance—and it has been a privilege to hear her voice, and to feel across the page a glimmer of something rare. This tribute is not written in hindsight, as if summing up a life. It is written mid-sentence, honouring a voice that had only just begun to speak into the world. Hannah was due to join the University in October 2024, and while she never made it to Oxford, her words did.

The reflections of her English teacher Jon Mitropoulos-Monk, a touching bitter-sweet remembrance by her friend Fynn Hyde, and two of Hannah's own poems come together in this short compilation—not to conclude, but to continue. Her writing is vivid with questions that matter: about love, light, time, transience, and the small, radiant flickers of meaning that only poetry can catch.

Hannah may not be with us in person, but she is with us now in words. And that, perhaps, is one of the quiet miracles of poetry: to transcend the flicker of life's impermanence.

It is in that flicker that Hannah's light endures.

We begin with a moving reflection from Jon Mitropoulos-Monk, who knew her as both student and poet. His piece traces the arc of Hannah's writing—from her early engagement with Shelley's *Adonais* to her meditations on light, death, and doubt. It is a portrait not just of talent, but of philosophical depth and emotional courage.

"The heart is a heaven itself"

Transience in the Life & Writings of Hannah Lynch (2006-2024)

Hannah Lynch was due to matriculate at Oxford this year. Instead, four days after opening her A Level results (four A*s), she died in tragic circumstances, lost at sea off the coast of Italy.

I first met Hannah in 2020. She told me her favourite poet was Percy Shelley; her favourite poem, *Adonais*. Age 14, she'd already written a poetic response to *Adonais*, Shelley's lament composed upon the death of his friend and mentor, John Keats. Here is Hannah's opening stanza:

Deathly grey shores and weeping skies,
Not a laurel of victory for the mortal who dies
They bid farewell to pure beauty of the kind old sun
Words left unsaid and yet everything seems to be done.

Dead at 25, Keats's life and legacy was cut short by tuberculosis. What "unsaid" words Keats' full literary career might have contained is a thought that has tantalised generations of successive readers. A year later, Shelley would be dead too, lost in a storm on the Tyrrhenian Sea. When his body washed ashore 10 days later, the identification process was helped by the copy of Keats's *Lamia* found in his jacket pocket. Hannah's poem labels life a "limited eternity," a profound realisation for a 14-year-old: life feels open and endless, until the moment it closes shut.

Like Keats and Shelley, Hannah hoped to construct an artistic legacy. In a poem from 2023, she writes "I hope to write my name upon the strand". The Strand, that famous central London thoroughfare, runs east from Trafalgar Square to Fleet Street. Writing one's name on the Strand might be akin to an actor earning a star on Hollywood Boulevard. That is what I thought upon first reading, at least. Upon closer inspection, however, a different picture emerges. Hannah's notes to the poem indicate where she was referencing other writers. As well as Milton, Hannah indicates her "strand" line is from Edmund Spenser, taking us to his Sonnet 75, where "strand" is an archaic word for a shoreline. Spenser wrote centuries before paving stones ever covered the Strand, and the uncapitalised "strand" of Hannah's poem is telling. Spenser's sonnet is concerned with transience:

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away:
Again I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

Hannah's poem shares similar concerns. The lines before and after the strand reference our status as "mere flesh" and "mere meat," our bodies "ephemeral". Spenser's discussion of romantic transience extends to literature's potential for immortality, and the attempt for his words to transcend the limits of the flesh.

Whereas Spenser envisions the possibility of eternity (both in terms of literary immortality and heavenly resurrection), Hannah's writing remains more sceptical. In a poem from 2022, the speaker watches the stars, torn between a Christian and Atheist perspective:

urging my eyes to see this
As devotion
And not destruction

Do we see the stars as “devotion[al]” symbols, lighting the heavens with God’s grace? Or are they rather signals of epic “destruction,” nuclear fusion from millennia ago? This ambivalence is encapsulated by the poem’s pithy paradox, labelling the night sky a “bloody Heaven”. What vision wins out: devotion or destruction? Heaven or blood? The speaker concludes that they are left

Blinded by all this endless
Dripping light of illuminated paint.
Blinded by the flicker that holds us.

Hannah wrote this poem a few weeks into studying Conrad's proto-Modernist novella *Heart of Darkness*. One of her favourite lines was an early utterance from the narrator Marlow—"we live in the flicker"—and I think this can help illuminate Hannah's poem. Sitting on the Thames at dusk, Conrad's frame narrator speaks with the sort of imperial certainties one might expect many British citizens in 1899 to articulate. London is the "biggest" and "greatest" town on earth; the Thames is a source of "light", spreading the "spark" of empire across the globe. Marlow intervenes:

Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker.

Victorian colonial superiority is punctured by Marlow. There is nothing inherent nor long-lasting about the British Empire's moment in the spotlight: it is a "flicker," momentary success in the grand scheme of things, a "flash" that will go before you know it. Marlow soon reminds his audience that it wasn't too long ago that Britain was considered a miserable imperial backwater, subject to the Roman Empire. That same "flicker" figures in Hannah's

poem. Amidst life's inevitable transience, we are blinded by that flicker, blinded by a flicker that feels forever, until it's not.

If that all feels somewhat depressing, then I don't think it needs to be. If you have reached the conclusion that life is a momentary flicker, then what matters is what you do next. Do you conclude, therefore, that nothing matters or that everything matters? Finitude for Conrad brought with it a philosophical pessimism; for Hannah, finitude brought enormous energy and action and life. She's left behind over 25,000 words and well over 100 poems. Family, friendships, and travel filled a life well-lived, a life of thought and joy, a life that continues to touch and inspire even many months after her passing.

Hannah's school graduation yearbook page contains two quotations. Movingly, one is from Percy Shelley. Shelley, who never finished his studies at Oxford. Shelley, who died in the same body of water as Hannah. Hannah chose from Stanza 52 of *Adonais*: movingly, again, the same stanza surrounds the beautiful memorial statue of Shelley's drowned body at Univ College.

Life, like a dome of many-colour'd glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

Hannah's other yearbook quotation is not from Shelley, but Hannah: "The heart is a heaven itself." Shelley finds joy in the comfort of the eternal. Non-Christian Conrad found in humanity a heart of darkness. Hannah found heaven on earth.

Jon
Mitropoulos-Monk

Before Hannah's mother reached out to us—an unexpected and wonderful gesture—we had already encountered a trace of her story. At our Hilary Term town hall open mic, Fynn Hyde took the stage and read a handful of poems. The final one—*Grass*—brought the room to stillness. We did not know it was about Hannah. Only later, when her name returned to us in her mother's email, did the pieces begin to fall into place.

By pure and poignant coincidence, we had already met someone who had known her—if only briefly—and who had carried her memory in verse. The poem, like the person it honoured, left the room quieter than it had been before, and lit with something rare: the feeling that, just for a moment, she had been with us too.

We reached out to Fynn to ask if he might contribute to this tribute—and he graciously shared the piece you will read next.

6.00 p.m., May 15th, 2024, Hyde Park.

I remember passing a vendor selling magazines when I was fashionably late to meet Hannah on a May evening last year. I didn't buy a copy, even though the front cover had momentarily arrested my gaze, but instead carried on through the busy tides of evening's people. That red-brick part of London is always beautiful; it was then draped in a marigold light whose sun was still high enough in the dusty blue sky to give out some Spring heat. And there, beside the underground station, leant Hannah against a railing with a smile whose warmth could have melted the walls of Jericho.

We embraced and said our *bellos* and it was then that we turned towards Hyde Park, glimpses of which could be seen, golden in the setting sun, up little pathways between the taller buildings and over the cars, bikes, and buses that made their way along the Brompton Road. We found a spot, a patch of gilded daisies and dandelions, and sat and watched park life unfold around us like lilies in the heat.

Sitting as we were amongst the longer grasses, we seemed to cycle through conversation like old friends, and, while watching green-shadowed people kick footballs or step up to a makeshift crease, we came upon that often-divisive subject: music. Yet Hannah's immediate mention of Pulp settled my lightest of apprehensions, and we delved excitedly into the lyrical, and emphatically poetic, genius of Jarvis Cocker (*my favourite parks are car parks*, etc.). Having charted that musical territory, we'd then ventured into poetry and prose. She spoke with the passion and intelligence of a new Renaissance, listing books and poems and essays by writers and poets and essayists I'd not even heard of. The sun was sinking behind the Albert memorial in the hazy Spring distance, the sky a blinding orange.

Hannah made the largest impact. For the brief period of time that I knew her, she brought only the ineffable. When she received her A Levels and was confirmed to be starting at Trinity, I was just beginning *Vanity Fair*, she *Middlemarch*. She called these texts the beginning of our 'massive book journeys'. She'd been flitting deftly between *Lord Jim* and *Beowulf* and *Moby Dick* before I'd even read the preface of *Vanity Fair*, such was the extent of her unrivalled enthusiasm. When I eventually came to finish *Middlemarch* myself, I'd found it okay. She, appreciative of Literature's finest, said she'd loved it. It is hard to write on these pieces after all that has gone by; Eliot's line that 'it is always fatal to have music or poetry interrupted' reads very differently now.

I read a poem just the other day, written by Hannah, dated a year before her death when her concerns still lay exactly where they should: amongst 'dust and ice and light', 'dawns and dusks and hours'. I wish only that she would still have to suffer the burdens of metre and rhyme, of fitting uncomfortable words comfortably together.

In losing Hannah, we lost a future. We know not what would have come, what would have made its way through cloisters and down cobblestone lanes and under lighted chapel windows, though it would not be unreasonable to assume that it would have been the most wonderfully incredible, immeasurably immense, happiest of futures. Sometimes I sit in the library, my mind entirely vacuous, and wish for nothing more than to have the silence broken by Hannah's voice, directing me what to write next, what comparison to make, how to make the most of the life we are so privileged to possess.

Grass

We found a spot,
A patch of green the greenest we could see,
A patch of buttercups, some dandelion,
a daisy. We came together and were
happy—
Happy at how our palms
touched the warmth of
Earth,
Happy at how the longer grasses
wrapped like birthday ribbon
around our wrists;
At how the unanchored sun
swerved down to meet the
horizon
in a calamitous, purple kiss.

I wrote this in the days and weeks and months after Death came to Sicily and eventually made its way back to England. I wish the sun had never met the horizon, that Hannah's smile would grace Oxford where it belongs, and that forever, the heart would beat 'you are, you are, you are'.

Afterword

We end, as perhaps all tributes should, in the company of the poet herself.

After Fynn's remembrance, we return to Hannah's own voice—her clarity, her depth, her fire. In *Grass*, Fynn gave us a moment held gently in memory. Now, Hannah gives us a moment held gently in light. *Come get me when you are Done with this World*, written in response to Shelley's *Adonais*, pulses with grief, longing, myth, and cosmic dissolution. It is not a poem of resignation, but of reckoning—a reckoning with what it means to live, to lose, to remain.

Together, these final words remind us that death does not unwrite a life. That poetry, when it burns brightly enough, can outlive its speaker, and keep speaking.

Hers was a flicker—but it holds us still.

Come get me when you are Done with this World

Hannah Lynch (2020)

Deathly grey shores and weeping skies,
Not a laurel of victory for the mortal who dies
They bid farewell to pure beauty of the kind, old sun
Words left unsaid and yet everything seems to be done

Cry out for all those who have been taken
Hooded, stygian black figure for your souls to be left forsaken
Cry out to all those who are no longer here
Whose fragile, fleshly husks on this Earth will disappear

Heavy, turtledove washed skies
Watching over a crumbling rib cage that cries
For its leaking, rose heart
Has been pierced with arrow and dart

Unsaid words and unseen gleam of glittering eye,
Cry out for them before they bid you a goodbye
Of a thousand sorrows and a million regrets
Heads tuned(turned) with all that the individual endlessly forgets

Melting grey candlesticks of cloud,
Blueberry lips and pallid face wrapped in shroud
Pungency of too many dying flowers overpowering
Threat of close decay towering

The memories at the back of your mind seem to persist
First turn hazy and then engulfed by rolling and whirling mist
Until we are simply erased from a world that goes on and on and on,
Summer night laughter and hand holding gone

However, we course through the veins of existence
From those we love, a melting and dissolving distance
As our atoms become glittering nebulae and glowing moon,
Growing and intertwining and interlacing plants, howling wind; endless tune

We watch over the limited eternities of those who remain
The incessant tumble of time going over again and again
With the same transcendence as mighty Zeus,
Souls free to roam, let loose

**this poem was written in Response to 'Adonais' by Percy Shelley*